

## A SYNOPSIS OF THE FIRST THREE CHAPTERS

In the first chapter of the *Gītā*, the teacher, *Kṛṣṇa*, and the disciple, *Arjuna*, were introduced and the context, that led to *Arjuna* asking *Kṛṣṇa* for self-knowledge, was given. Previously, *Arjuna* had only been interested in regaining the kingdom and settling old accounts with *Duryodhana*. *Arjuna* had no desire for this knowledge, and even though he had known *Kṛṣṇa* for a long time, he did not regard him as a teacher.

*Arjuna* had lived a life of *dharma* and a life of *dharma* necessarily leads one to ask fundamental questions about life. It had given him the necessary *viveka* to ask *Kṛṣṇa*, ‘O *Bhagavān*, please teach me what is the ultimate good. I am your disciple.’

The first chapter described the battlefield, *Arjuna*’s despair, and his arguments concerning why he no longer wanted to fight. Early in the second chapter, *Kṛṣṇa* tried to arouse *Arjuna*’s enthusiasm so that he would do what had to be done. He addressed him as follows:

कुतस्त्वा कश्मलमिदं विषमे समुपस्थितम् ।

अनार्यजुष्टमस्वर्ग्यमकीर्तिकरमर्जुन ॥ २-२ ॥

*kutastvā kaśmalamidam viṣame samupasthitam*  
*anāryajuṣṭamasvargyamakīrtikaramarjuna*

In such crisis, from where has this despair come upon you, O *Arjuna*? It is not at all becoming of an upright man and does not add to your good name. Nor is it one, which leads one to heaven. (2-2)

क्लैब्यं मा स्म गमः पार्थ नैतत्त्वय्युपपद्यते ।

क्षुद्रं हृदयदौर्बल्यं त्यक्त्वोत्तिष्ठ परन्तप ॥ २-३ ॥

*klaibyaṃ mā sma gamaḥ pārtha naitattvayyupadyate*  
*kṣudraṃ hṛdayadaurbalyaṃ tyaktvottiṣṭha parantapa*

O *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. (2-3)

*Arjuna* continued to explain why he could not fight, saying that he would prefer to live the life of a *bhikṣu*, who lives on alms. This meant that he was thinking of a life of *sannyāsa*, that he wanted to renounce everything and seek *mokṣa*. He knew that a particular knowledge was necessary for *mokṣa* and that a *guru* was necessary for

gaining this knowledge. Thinking that there was no better *guru* than *Kṛṣṇa*, *Arjuna* asked him for the knowledge, declaring himself to be *Kṛṣṇa*'s disciple.

In response to *Arjuna*'s request, *Kṛṣṇa* did not simply say, 'Stop talking and fight!' Had he done so, and had *Arjuna* followed *Kṛṣṇa*'s advice, the *Mahābhārata* would have no *Gītā*. Instead, it looks as though *Kṛṣṇa* was waiting for just such an occasion as this, to teach *Arjuna*. Otherwise, he would not have started with, '*aśocyān anvaśocaḥ tvam; prajñāvādān ca bhaṣase* — You grieve for those who should not be grieved for, even though you speak words of wisdom.' Nor would he have followed this statement up with, '*nāsato vidyate bhāvaḥ; nābhāvo vidyate sataḥ* — The unreal never is and the real is never absent.' In fact, *Kṛṣṇa* covered the entire teaching in the second chapter, talking about knowledge and about *karma-yoga* — how one has to live one's life in a manner which helps one gain a certain freedom from the hold of likes and dislikes.

Then, towards the end of the chapter, *Arjuna* asked *Kṛṣṇa* to describe a person who is established in this knowledge:

अर्जुन उवाच ।

स्थितप्रज्ञस्य का भाषा समाधिस्थस्य केशव ।

स्थितधीः किं प्रभाषेत किमासीत ब्रजेत किम् ॥ २-५४ ॥

*arjuna uvāca*

*sthitaprajñasya kā bhāṣā samādhisthasya keśava*

*sthitadhīḥ kiṃ prabhāṣeta kimāsita vrajeta kim*

*Arjuna* said:

O *Keśava*, what is the description of a person of firm wisdom, one whose mind abides in the *ātmā*, the self? How does such a person, whose mind is not shaken by anything, speak, sit, and walk? (2-54)

In asking *Kṛṣṇa* to describe a *sthitaprajña*, a wise person, *Arjuna* indicated that the description should cover how the person walks, talks, and sits. *Kṛṣṇa* saw the spirit of *Arjuna*'s question and defined the *sthitaprajña* in these words:

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।

प्रजहाति यदा कामान् सर्वान् पार्थ मनोगतान् ।

आत्मन्येवात्मना तुष्टः स्थितप्रज्ञस्तदोच्यते ॥ २-५५ ॥

*śrībhagavān uvāca*

*prajahāti yadā kāmān sarvānpārtha manogatān*

*ātmanyevātmanā tuṣṭaḥ sthitaprajñastadocyate*

*Śrī Bhagavān* said:

O *Pārtha*, when a person gives up all the desires as they appear in the mind, and is happy in oneself, with oneself alone, that person is said to be one of ascertained knowledge. (2-55)

दुःखेष्वनुद्विग्नमनाः सुखेषु विगतस्पृहः ।

वीतरागभयक्रोधः स्थितधीर्मुनिरुच्यते ॥ २-५६ ॥

*duḥkheṣvanudvignamanāḥ sukheṣu vigatasprahaḥ  
vītarāgabhayakrodhaḥ sthitadhīrmunirucyate*

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. (2-56)

यः सर्वत्रानभिस्त्रेहस्तत्तत्प्राप्य शुभाशुभम् ।

नाभिनन्दति न द्वेष्टि तस्य प्रज्ञा प्रतिष्ठिता ॥ २-५७ ॥

*yaḥ sarvatrānabhisnehastattatprāpya śubhāśubham  
nābhinandati na dveṣṭi tasya prajñā pratiṣṭhitā*

For the one who is unattached in all situations, who neither rejoices on gaining the pleasant nor hates the unpleasant, his knowledge is well established. (2-57)

यदा संहरते चायं कूर्मोऽङ्गानीव सर्वशः ।

इन्द्रियाणीन्द्रियार्थेभ्यस्तस्य प्रज्ञा प्रतिष्ठिता ॥ २-५८ ॥

*yadā saṁharate cāyaṁ kūrmo'ṅgānīva sarvaśaḥ  
indriyāṇīndriyārthebhyastasya prajñā pratiṣṭhitā*

And when, like the turtle that withdraws its limbs, this person is able to withdraw completely, the sense organs from their objects, his knowledge is steady. (2-58)

We see here that *Kṛṣṇa*, appreciating the spirit of *Arjuna's* question, converted it into 'How does a wise person interact with the world?' A *sthitaprajña*, *Kṛṣṇa* said, is one whose knowledge is steady, meaning one whose knowledge leaves nothing to be desired. Such a person is happy with himself or herself and does not require anything other than himself or herself in order to be happy. The person is also not afraid of anything. When unpleasant situations occur, he or she faces them without being adversely affected in any way. Nor is such a person elated when pleasant situations occur.

The spontaneous expressions of the wisdom of a wise person become *sādhanas*, values or disciplines for the seeker, which is why *Arjuna* was interested in the qualities of a wise person. *Kṛṣṇa* described all these qualities to *Arjuna*. He also told *Arjuna* of certain obstacles to gaining this wisdom, such as, how by dwelling upon certain objects, — *viṣaya-dhyāna* — we give them subjective attributes in addition to those attributes that the objects already have.

For example, as long as you look upon money as simply buying power, there is no problem. However, when you look upon it as a source of security, you are creating a problem for yourself because your conclusion is not totally true. Money itself cannot make you secure. Anything that you hold on to, that is other than yourself only confirms your insecurity. As long as one wants crutches, one does not stand on one's own legs. A truly secure person requires nothing outside of oneself to make him or her feel secure.

Giving objects the attributes that they do not have, seeing certain qualities in them that are not there, and then dwelling upon them, creates attachment, *saṅga*, towards them. Within the flow of what he was teaching, *Kṛṣṇa* pointed out all this and what comes of this *saṅga*.

ध्यायतो विषयान्पुंसः सङ्गस्तेषूपजायते ।  
सङ्गात् सञ्जायते कामः कामात् क्रोधोऽभिजायते ॥ २-६२ ॥  
*dhyāyato viṣayānpuṃsaḥ saṅgasteṣūpajāyate*  
*saṅgāt sañjāyate kāmaḥ kāmāt krodho'bhijāyate*

क्रोधाद्भवति सम्मोहः सम्मोहात् स्मृतिविभ्रमः ।  
स्मृतिभ्रंशाद् बुद्धिनाशो बुद्धिनाशात् प्रणश्यति ॥ २-६३ ॥  
*krodhādbhavati sammohaḥ sammohāt smṛtivyibhramah*  
*smṛtibhramṣād buddhināśo buddhināśāt praṇaśyati*

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. (2-62,63)

Then, *Kṛṣṇa* said: '*Arjuna*, if you really want to know what a wise person is, you have to be wise yourself.' There is no other way of understanding such a person. Behaviour and so on, are not indications of a person's wisdom:

या निशा सर्वभूतानां तस्यां जागर्ति संयमी ।  
यस्यां जाग्रति भूतानि सा निशा पश्यतो मुनेः ॥ २-६९ ॥

*yā niśā sarvabhūtānāṃ tasyāṃ jāgarti saṃyamī  
yasyāṃ jāgrati bhūtāni sā niśā paśyato muneh*

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. (2-69)

The difference between those who are wise and those who are not wise is like night and day. What the wise people are awake to, the ignorant people are not awake to. Moreover, what the ignorant are awake to, the wise are not awake to, meaning that what the ignorant think of as reality, the wise do not see as real at all. Night and day, here are taken as ignorance and knowledge. In fact, there is no other difference save that between knowledge and ignorance. A wise person understands that everything is 'I,' the *ātmā*, whereas other people think, 'Everything is getting me!' Thus, one type of person thinks that the world is out to get him or her and the other type says that the world is himself or herself.

Therefore, having described a *sthitaprajñā* as best as he could, *Kṛṣṇa* had to say to *Arjuna*, 'How are you going to understand the wise, *Arjuna*, unless you are wise? Any kind of description is meaningless. To really know what a wise person is, you have to gain wisdom.'

To explain further, *Kṛṣṇa* used a more positive example:

आपूर्यमाणमचलप्रतिष्ठं समुद्रमापः प्रविशन्ति यद्वत् ।  
तद्वत्कामा यं प्रविशन्ति सर्वे स शान्तिमाप्नोति न कामकामी ॥ २-७० ॥  
*āpūryamāṇamacalapratiṣṭhaṃ  
samudramāpaḥ praviśanti yadvat  
tadvatkāmā yaṃ praviśanti sarve  
sa śāntimāpnoti na kāmakāmī*

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. (2-70)

The ocean is in no way affected by whether or not the rains happen or the rivers enter it. There is no increase or decrease, no gain or loss, for the ocean. No change affects its oceanness, its fullness, because it does not depend upon anything other than itself. In its own glory, without any external support, the ocean is full and complete.

Similarly, the fullness of one who is wise is centred on oneself. 'I am the whole' is a fact to which the wise people are awake; therefore, they require nothing in order to be full. No addition will bring about any change in the wise, nor will any subtraction take away or make any dent in his or her fullness. This, too, was pointed out.

In contrast to an ocean, however, a pond is something that will dry up without rain. And, if there is too much rain, the pond is nowhere to be seen! The *kāmakāmi*, one who has to fulfil certain desires in order to be happy, is like a pond. When something pleasant happens, the person hits the ceiling with elation, and when something unpleasant happens, he or she hits rock bottom and may even consider committing suicide.

*Kṛṣṇa* concluded the second chapter by saying:

विहाय कामान् यः सर्वान् पुमांश्चरति निःस्पृहः ।  
निर्ममो निरहंकारः स शान्तिमधिगच्छति ॥ २-७१ ॥  
*vihāya kāmān yaḥ sarvān pumāṃścarati niḥspṛhaḥ*  
*nirmamo nirahaṅkāraḥ sa śāntimadhigacchati*

Having given up all binding desires, the person who moves around, devoid of longing, without the sense of limited ‘I’ and ‘mine,’ gains peace. (2-71)

एषा ब्राह्मी स्थितिः पार्थ नैनां प्राप्य विमुह्यति ।  
स्थित्वास्यामन्तकालेऽपि ब्रह्मनिर्वाणमृच्छति ॥ २-७२ ॥  
*eṣā brāhmī sthitiḥ pārtha naināṃ prāpya vimuhyati*  
*sthitvāsyāmantakāle’pi brahmanirvāṇamṛcchati*

This is what is meant by being steady in *Brahman*. O *Pārtha*, Having gained this, one is not deluded. Remaining therein, even at the end of one’s life, one gains liberation. (2-72)

To be a *sthitaprajña*, *Kṛṣṇa* said, is the very ‘state’ of being *Brahman*. Being in the form of knowledge, this ‘state’ is not one that you will lose, like the waking state or a drug-induced state. It is something as true as you are. This is why, once this knowledge is gained, there is no question of losing it, because the gain is in terms of knowledge, not experience. The self is understood to be *Brahman*, the whole, and that understanding is final. Therefore, there can be no falling back into *saṃsāra*, even if you do not gain this knowledge until you are very old — *antakāle api enāṃ prāpya na vimuhyati*.

Even when you are in the last throes of your life, with one foot in the grave, if you come to understand that you are the whole, then you are a free person. And if the very elderly are able to gain this knowledge, then those whose eyes are still able to see, whose ears are still able to hear, and those who are able to sit for a length of time in quiet contemplation can surely come to know.

The third chapter began with *Arjuna*’s next question:

अर्जुन उवाच ।

ज्यायसी चेत्कर्मणस्ते मता बुद्धिर्जनार्दन ।

तत्किं कर्मणि घोरे मां नियोजयसि केशव ॥ ३-१ ॥

*arjuna uvāca*

*ḥyāyasī cetkarmaṇaste matā buddhirjanārdana*

*tatkiṃ karmaṇi ghore māṃ niyojayasi keśava*

*Arjuna* said:

If, O *Janārdana*, your contention is that knowledge is better than action, why then do you engage me in this gruesome action, O *Keśava*? (3-1)

व्यामिश्रेणेव वाक्येन बुद्धिं मोहयसीव मे ।

तदेकं वद निश्चित्य येन श्रेयोऽहमाप्नुयाम् ॥ ३-२ ॥

*vyāmiśreṇeva vākyaena buddhiṃ mohayasīva me*

*tadekaṃ vada niścitya yena śreyo'hamāpnuyām*

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. (3-2)

Here, *Arjuna* presented a problem, *Kṛṣṇa*, if I have understood you correctly, you seem to have your heart in knowledge alone. I asked for *śreyas*, *mokṣa*, from you, and you made it very clear that this can only be gained by knowledge, not by fulfilling desires. You even said that all desires are to be given up. Yet, you say I am to perform action. Therefore, I am confused.'

This is how *Arjuna* understood what *Kṛṣṇa* had said. In fact, *Kṛṣṇa* had not said that all one's desires have to be given up. He said that a wise person gives up desires, meaning that he or she has no desire to become secure and happy. The person may have a desire to do something or other, but by fulfilling this desire, he or she, is not going to become more secure — such delusion is no longer there for the wise. Although this was what *Kṛṣṇa* actually said, *Arjuna* took it as he did because he knew that every *karma*, every action, is preceded by desire. Without desire, there is no *karma* at all. So, he thought, 'If desire is to be given up, then why should I do *karma*? And how am I to gain knowledge? The only way seems to be to give up all *karmas*, along with the desires that initiate them, and seek knowledge.'

Since *Kṛṣṇa* had asked *Arjuna* to follow *karma-yoga*, to get up and fight, *Arjuna* was naturally confused. His thinking was, 'If knowledge will give me *śreyas*, that is what I should go for. And for the sake of knowledge, I need not do all these actions. All

that is needed is to renounce everything, go to a teacher, and gain the knowledge. Therefore, *sannyāsa* seems to be the answer to my problem.’

In an attempt to resolve the seeming contradiction, *Arjuna* asked *Kṛṣṇa* to tell him, once and for all, the one thing that would give him *śreyas*, to which *Kṛṣṇa* said:

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।

लोकेऽस्मिन् द्विविधा निष्ठा पुरा प्रोक्ता मयानघ ।

ज्ञानयोगेन साङ्ख्यानं कर्मयोगेन योगिनाम् ॥ ३-३ ॥

*śrībhagavānuvāca*

*loke'smin dvividhā niṣṭhā purā proktā mayānagha*

*jñānayogena sāṅkhyānāṃ karmayogena yoginām*

*Śrī Bhagavān* said:

O 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. (3-3)

From *Arjuna's* question, *Kṛṣṇa* could tell that *Arjuna* had not understood what he had been saying. It is true that *sannyāsa* is a life-style; but real *karma-sannyāsa* is giving up all actions by knowledge — *jñānena karma-sannyāsa*, while *karma-yoga* is a means, *upāya*, for gaining this knowledge. To clarify the distinction between *sannyāsa* as a life-style and renunciation of action through knowledge, *Kṛṣṇa* reminded *Arjuna* that no one can remain without performing any action at all, regardless of whether the person is a *sannyāsī* or not:

न हि कश्चित्क्षणमपि जातु तिष्ठत्यकर्मकृत् ।

कार्यते ह्यवशः कर्म सर्वः प्रकृतिजैर्गुणैः ॥ ३-५ ॥

*na hi kaścitkṣaṇamapi jātu tiṣṭhatyakarmakṛt*

*kāryate hyavaśaḥ karma sarvaḥ prakṛtijaigūṇaiḥ*

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*. (3-5)

A *sannyāsī* is a person who, having taken certain vows, has given up the obligatory duties prescribed in the Veda. Having become a non-competing person in the society, the *sannyāsī* pursues knowledge to the exclusion of all else. *Kṛṣṇa* acknowledged that such a pursuit is available, that *sannyāsa* is a life-style dedicated to this pursuit, but cautioned that it is not an easy one. He also explained that *karma-yoga* is another life-style and is a means for real *sannyāsa*, *sarva-karma-sannyāsa*, which can be achieved by both the *sannyāsī* and the *karma-yogī*.



To live a life of *sannyāsa* requires that you have a certain mind, a certain contemplativeness, which can be achieved through *karma-yoga*. When you live a life of *karma-yoga*, as a householder, for example, you do not lose anything; in fact, you gain. This is true for any *mumukṣu*, any seeker, who is in a stage of life other than *sannyāsa*. Each one gains the same end because knowledge is something that is to be pursued. Therefore, *Arjuna* could pursue the knowledge even as a *karma-yogī*. This was what *Kṛṣṇa* wanted him to understand.

We saw, in the second chapter, that one does not become a *karma-yogī* without the proper attitude with reference to *Īśvara* being the *karma-phala-dātā*, the giver of the fruits of action, and knowing that I am only the performer of action. When I have this attitude, the results of all actions are taken by me as *prasāda*. Also, every action that I perform is a *yajña*, a sacrifice or offering, to the Lord. This attitude was again highlighted and discussed in the third chapter:

देवान् भावयतानेन ते देवा भावयन्तु वः ।  
 परस्परं भावयन्तः श्रेयः परमवाप्स्यथ ॥ ३-११ ॥  
*devān bhāvayatānena te devā bhāvayantu vaḥ*  
*parasparaṃ bhāvayantaḥ śreyaḥ paramavāpsyatha*

Propitiate the deities with this (*yajña*). May those deities propitiate you. Propitiating one another, you shall gain the highest good (*mokṣa*). (3-11)

इष्टान् भोगान् हि वो देवा दास्यन्ते यज्ञभाविताः ।  
 तैर्दत्तानप्रदायैभ्यो यो भुङ्क्ते स्तेन एव सः ॥ ३-१२ ॥  
*iṣṭān bhogān hi vo devā dāsyante yajñabhāvitāḥ*  
*tairdattānapradāyaibhyo yo bhuṅkte stena eva saḥ*

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. (3-12)

यज्ञशिष्टाशिनः सन्तो मुच्यन्ते सर्वकिल्बिषैः ।  
 भुञ्जते ते त्वघं पापा ये पचन्त्यात्मकारणात् ॥ ३-१३ ॥  
*yajñāśiṣṭāśinaḥ santo mucyante sarvakilbiṣaiḥ*  
*bhuñjate te tvaghaṃ pāpā ye pacantyātmakāraṇāt*

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). (3-13)

In this detailed way, *Kṛṣṇa* explained how the attitude of *karma-yoga* can release you from the hold of your likes and dislikes when the action you perform is done as a worship or a sacrifice.

Then, *Kṛṣṇa* said:

सदृशं चेष्टते स्वस्याः प्रकृतेर्ज्ञानवानपि ।  
 प्रकृतिं यान्ति भूतानि निग्रहः किं करिष्यति ॥ ३-३३ ॥  
*sadr̥śaṃ ceṣṭate svasyāḥ prakṛterjñānavānapi*  
*prakṛtiṃ yānti bhūtāni nigrahaḥ kiṃ kariṣyati*

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? (3-33)

Each one thinks according to his or her own *prakṛti*. Likes and dislikes are something that you cannot stop; they just happen. All thoughts happen in your mind and you have no say over their occurrence. Collectively, they equal your own *prakṛti*, your own disposition.

Whatever you have done in previous lives (*prārabdha-karma*) and in this life also — all your *dharma-adharma-puṇya-pāpa-saṃskāras* — set up certain thoughts in your mind and there is no way of stopping this from happening. Even *Īśvara* cannot stop it. He, himself, has set it up like this and he cannot cross his own mandate. Nor can anyone else. Neither *Īśvara's* control nor anyone else's can change a person's *prakṛti*; the person will remain the same. Even if one were to control one's thoughts by negating them, one would have to continue this negation throughout one's entire lifetime.

Given the fact that one cannot control one's thoughts, is it not better to ask, why thoughts should be considered a problem in the first place? The person for whom thoughts are a problem has a permanent nightmare because thought is always there. Only a long sleep can help! In fact, thoughts themselves are not the problem.

Another question that arises is, if I cannot control my thoughts, what is the purpose of the *śāstra*? If everyone simply performs action according to his or her *prakṛti*, a person can commit murder and say, 'It is my nature, my disposition, to do such things. I cannot do otherwise.' To take care of any such conclusion, *Kṛṣṇa* also said that you are the one who goes along with or withdraws from the thought of committing murder, which is where your will comes in.

You cannot control your thoughts, but you can choose which thoughts you are going to identify with and which you are not going to identify with. This is the only freedom you have and this freedom is enough.

Thus, *Kṛṣṇa* said:

इन्द्रियस्येन्द्रियस्यार्थे रागद्वेषौ व्यवस्थितौ ।  
 तयोर्न वशमागच्छेत् तौ ह्यस्य परिपन्थिनौ ॥ ३-३४ ॥  
*indriyasyendriyasyārthe rāgadveṣau vyavasthitau*  
*tayorna vaśamāgacchet tau hyasya paripanthināu*

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. (3-34)

श्रेयान्स्वधर्मो विगुणः परधर्मात्स्वनुष्ठितात् ।  
 स्वधर्मे निधनं श्रेयः परधर्मो भयावहः ॥ ३-३५ ॥  
*śreyānsvadharmo viguṇaḥ paradharmātsvanuṣṭhitāt*  
*svadharme nidhanaṃ śreyaḥ paradharmo bhayāvahaḥ*

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. (3-35)

Here, *Kṛṣṇa* pointed out that even if your own *dharma*, what is to be done by you, is rather unpleasant, it is better to be with it than to be with someone else's *dharma*, a *dharma* that does not belong to you at all. A thing that is not to be done by you, even though it can be done by another person who is in another stage of life, is not your *dharma*.

For example, a *sannyāsī* does not perform the daily rituals enjoined in the Veda. Nevertheless, this is no reason for a *grhastha*, a householder, not to do them. Each person has to perform action according to his or her situation. It is better to die doing one's own action; because, to do otherwise, is fraught with fear. It does not benefit you; nor does it benefit the society in which you live. Therefore, *Kṛṣṇa* said, each person has to do his or her own *karma*; in other words, one's own *dharma* has to be followed.

*Arjuna* then raised a doubt:

अर्जुन उवाच ।  
 अथ केन प्रयुक्तोऽयं पापं चरति पूरुषः ।  
 अनिच्छन्नपि वाष्पेय बलादिव नियोजितः ॥ ३-३६ ॥  
*arjuna uvāca*  
*atha kena prayukto'yaṃ pāpaṃ carati pūruṣaḥ*  
*anicchannapi vārṣṇeya balādiva niyojitaḥ*

*Arjuna* said:

O *Vārṣṇeya*, impelled by what does a person commit sin, as though pushed by some force, even though not desiring to? (3-36)

*Arjuna* wanted to know why a person does things that he or she knows are wrong. Although the person is convinced that certain actions are not proper, still he or she does them. Why is that? Is there a force other than oneself, a devil, or something, a Satan, other than oneself? Is there, as some theologies maintain, a force other than the divine? Is there a demonic force called evil in this world, which is independent of the divine force? Is it that the divine force wants you to do right things and the demonic force comes along and impels you to do the wrong thing? If so, the demonic force certainly seems to be more powerful than the divine force.

In fact, *Kṛṣṇa* said, there is no such force. The only devil is the one within. You are it! This he expressed in the following way:

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।

काम एष क्रोध एष रजोगुणसमुद्भवः ।

महाशनो महापाप्मा विद्ध्येनमिह वैरिणम् ॥ ३-३७ ॥

*śrībhagavān uvāca*

*kāma eṣa krodha eṣa rajoguṇasamudbhavaḥ*

*mahāśano mahāpāpmā viddhyenamihā vairiṇam*

*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. (3-37)

‘*Arjuna*, it is nothing but your *kāma* alone,’ *Kṛṣṇa* said. *Kāma* does it; *krodha* does it. Once desire becomes a passion, priorities become confused. The power of *kāma* is such. The desire is so virulent, that you no longer care what means you adopt to fulfil the desire. You cut corners wherever you can, compromising the means, because the end has become so important. ‘This is the problem, *Arjuna*. This enemy in the form of *kāma* covers you just as the fire is covered by smoke, the mirror by a coat of dust, and the foetus by the womb,’ *Kṛṣṇa* explained.

This *kāma* is a permanent enemy for the *vivekī*. He or she must deal with it, first by knowing that it operates with reference to sense pursuits and is located in the mind and *buddhi* — *indriyāṇi mano buddhiḥ asya adhiṣṭhānam ucyate*.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Gītā* – 3-40

Having understood this, you then have to step outside the *kāma*, about which *Kṛṣṇa* said:

इन्द्रियाणि पराण्याहुरिन्द्रियेभ्यः परं मनः ।  
मनसस्तु परा बुद्धिर्यो बुद्धेः परतस्तु सः ॥ ३-४२ ॥  
*indriyāṇi parāṇyāhurindriyebhyaḥ paraṁ manaḥ*  
*manasastu parā buddhiryo buddheḥ paratastu saḥ*

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*). (3-42)

Here, *Kṛṣṇa* explained that the *indriyas*, the senses, are superior to the physical body because of their subtler, more pervasive nature. However, the senses themselves are absolutely harmless because the mind is superior to them even though the mind has doubts and so on. The senses are just so many reporters and do not harm anyone. They are simply instruments that have been given to you for a purpose and are not meant to take you for a ride. They are in the hands of the mind.

The mind itself is a problem because the *buddhi*, the intellect, does not function when the mind's fancies overpower it. The mind is in the hands of the *buddhi*, the mind and the *buddhi* being nothing but different types of thought belonging to the same *antaḥ-karāṇa* alone. Whichever is more powerful, a thought of the mind or a thought of the *buddhi*, is going to rule the day.

If the mind is more powerful, it will definitely rob your wisdom away, making you do what is not to be done and omit what is to be done. To keep these thoughts in their proper places, you have to step out of the mind and the *buddhi*. Only then will you understand a thought as a thought.

The nature of a human being is determined by one's thoughts and by one's conclusions about oneself. The sense that 'I am imperfect,' 'I am incomplete,' 'I am useless,' or 'I am worthless' is a conclusion. Such conclusions are the basis for your constant attempt to prove yourself to be somebody, to make yourself into someone who will be acceptable in your own eyes. In this way, life becomes a constant struggle. *Kṛṣṇa* concluded the third chapter by telling *Arjuna* that there is only one way to solve this problem; and that is to solve it fundamentally.

He said:

एवं बुद्धेः परं बुद्ध्वा संस्तभ्यात्मानमात्मना ।  
जहि शत्रुं महाबाहो कामरूपं दुरासदम् ॥ ३-४३ ॥

*evaṃ buddheḥ paraṃ buddhvā samstabhyātmānamātmanā  
jahi śatruṃ mahābāho kāmarūpaṃ durāsadam*

O mighty armed one, (*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. (3-43)

One must step out of one's *buddhi* by recognising that which is above the *buddhi*, the *ātmā* which is ever pure, *śuddha*, limitless, *ānanda*, full, *pūrṇa*, the only reality, *satya*. Knowing this *satyaṃ jñānam anantaṃ brahma*, this *brahmātmā*, you are free.

Once you have this knowledge, all your desires, all your thoughts, become privileges only. Your mind, your thoughts, your *buddhi* — all of them become so many adjuncts or *upādhis* for you. In themselves, these *upādhis* are limited, but the person is free from any sense of limitation. Hence, for such a person, the desires become a privilege.

*Kāma*, desire, is not something that can be easily understood because it comes in hundred different forms and in situations where you would never expect it. But *kāma* can be given up in the sense that you can step out of it. Then the desires are simply known to you; they cannot harm you. This is the only way to deal with *kāma* because there is no end to the desires that can arise. Thus, step out and be free, because, you are already free. You need only discover this fact.

## CHAPTER 4

### KNOWLEDGE AND THE RENUNCIATION OF ACTION

#### THE ORIGINS OF KARMA-YOGA

In the first three verses of the fourth chapter, *Kṛṣṇa* sums up the subject matter of *karma-yoga* by indicating to *Arjuna* that it is not something new. *Kṛṣṇa*, as the Lord, had initiated it in the beginning of creation and, since then, *karma-yoga* has been handed down from generation to generation, even though it has not always been well preserved.

To become a *sannyāsī* requires a mature and contemplative disposition. You cannot simply decide to be mature or contemplative. Either you are or you are not. What you can do, however, is to live your life in such a way that you can gain a contemplative disposition. This is *karma-yoga*.

In order to gain self-knowledge, which is *mokṣa* or liberation, you have to recognise your nature as being free from action, as that which is the very centre of the entire creation, the reality of everything. And, in order for this recognition to take place, you can live a life of *sannyāsa* or a life of *karma-yoga*. *Karma-yoga* is engaging yourself in activities with the proper attitude — *pravṛtti-lakṣaṇaḥ yogaḥ*. And *sannyāsa*, or *jñāna-yoga* is the renunciation of all activities — *nivṛtti-lakṣaṇaḥ sannyāsaḥ*. Thus, *nivṛtti-lakṣaṇa-jñāna-yoga* is for the *sannyāsīs* and *pravṛtti-lakṣaṇa-yoga*, *karma-yoga*, is for everyone else.

This two-fold *yoga* is all that is intended to be unfolded throughout the *Gītā*. In fact, *Kṛṣṇa* had already completed the teaching in the second and third chapters. Knowing that he had taught all that had to be taught, *Kṛṣṇa* now praises this *yoga*, telling *Arjuna* that what he had taught him was something very old, introduced by himself, as *Īśvara*, in the very beginning, meaning in the Veda.

#### FROM TEACHER TO STUDENT — SAMPRADĀYA

In order to convey that this knowledge is something that is to be gained from a teacher by a student, who in turn hands it down to another student, a story is told. In understanding realities, it really does not matter who told whom; nevertheless, certain names are mentioned. The flow downward, from one generation to another, is called *sampradāya*. This *sampradāya* is important because this teaching has to be handled by someone who knows what it is all about. Therefore, the *sampradāya* is always introduced, either in the beginning or at the end of the text.

Seeing the dialogue reaching a certain completeness, *Kṛṣṇa* presents the *sampradāya* and praises the knowledge:

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।

इमं विवस्वते योगं प्रोक्तवानहमव्ययम् ।

विवस्वान् मनवे प्राह मनुर्िक्ष्वाकवेऽब्रवीत् ॥ १ ॥

*śrībhagavān uvāca*

*imaṃ vivasvate yogam proktavānahamavyayam*

*vivasvān manave prāha manurikṣvākave'bravīt*

Verse 1

एवं परम्पराप्राप्तमिमं राजर्षयो विदुः ।

स कालेनेह महता योगो नष्टः परन्तप ॥ २ ॥

*evaṃ paramparāprāptamimaṃ rājarṣayo viduḥ*

*sa kāleneha mahatā yogo naṣṭaḥ parantapa*

Verse 2

श्रीभगवान् *śrībhagavān* — *Śrī Bhagavān*; उवाच *uvāca* — said;

अहम् *aham* — I; विवस्वते *vivasvate* — to *Vivasvān*; इमम् *imam* — this; अव्ययम् *avyayam* — imperishable; योगम् *yogam* — *yoga*; प्रोक्तवान् *proktavān* — told (taught);

विवस्वान् *vivasvān* — *Vivasvān*; मनवे *manave* — to *Manu*; प्राह *prāha* — told (taught);

मनुः *manuḥ* — *Manu*; इक्ष्वाकवे *ikṣvākave* — to *ikṣvāku*; अब्रवीत् *abravīt* — told

(taught); एवम् *evam* — in this manner; परम्पराप्राप्तम् *paramparāprāptam* — handed

down from generation to generation; इमम् *imam* — this; राजर्षयः *rājarṣayaḥ* — the

kings who were sages; विदुः *viduḥ* — knew; परन्तप *parantapa* — O Scorcher of

enemies! (*Arjuna*); इह *iha* — in this world; सः *saḥ* — that; योगः *yogaḥ* — *yoga*; महता

कालेन *mahatā kālena* — over a long time; नष्टः *naṣṭaḥ* — declined

*Śrī Bhagavān* said:

I taught this imperishable *yoga* to *Vivasvān*, *Vivasvān* taught it to

*Manu*, (and) *Manu* taught it to *ikṣvāku*. Handed down from generation

to generation in this way, the kings who were sages knew it. (But) with

the long lapse of time, O *Arjuna*, this *yoga* has declined in the world.

Here, *Kṛṣṇa* tells *Arjuna* that he was the one who had introduced this knowledge in the Vedas in the beginning itself, meaning along with the creation, through *Vivasvān*, the head of the solar clan — *sūrya-vaṃśa*.

There was also another clan — the lunar clan, *candra-vaṃśa*. The *Mahābhārata* was an epic about the lunar clan and the *Rāmāyaṇa* was about the solar clan. *Vivasvān* also is a name given to the sun as a deity, the Lord Sun.



*Kṛṣṇa* is saying here that this knowledge has come down from *Īśvara* alone, referring to himself as the Lord. It is not something that is created by a given intellect; nor is it mere speculation. It is the knowledge that comes down from *Īśvara*, along with the creation itself.

The difference between this knowledge and the other revealed bodies of knowledge is that it is something to be recognised. It is knowledge that I am the whole. Any other form of revelation requires you to believe something. Some kind of a promise is always given, if only with reference to an after-life. However, in the knowledge that ‘I am the whole,’ there is no promise involved.

The statement, ‘You are That — *tat tvam asi*,’ is not a promise. That you are *Brahman* is a simple statement of fact, just as the statement, ‘Water is H<sub>2</sub>O and it boils at 100° Centigrade at atmospheric pressure’ is a fact and not a promise. Because it is a statement of fact, ‘You are *Brahman*’ is something that is to be understood.

A statement of fact is verifiable knowledge; it is not something to be believed, as is the case in other forms of revealed bodies of knowledge. We must know, however, that these other revelations are also talking about the same reality. Thus, there is no problem; it is all the Lord’s knowledge. Because knowledge is not something that belongs to any one particular person or culture, we say that it is *Īśvara*’s knowledge.

This two-fold *yoga* — *sannyāsa* and *karma-yoga* — was initiated by *Kṛṣṇa* (*Īśvara*) in the beginning, through *Vivasvān*, the head of the solar clan. Therefore, he says, *vivasvate ahaṃ proktavān*. Lord Sun is introduced here to convey the idea that this particular knowledge comes from *Īśvara*. Then, by the grace of Lord Sun, it was handed over to his son, *Manu*, who was the first king, the lawgiver for humanity. *Manu* taught his own son, *Ikṣvāku*, in turn.

#### SELF-KNOWLEDGE DOES NOT GO AWAY

And what kind of *yoga* is it? This *yoga*, this knowledge, is *avyaya-yoga* because it gives you that which does not die, meaning *mokṣa*, liberation. *Mokṣa* is the only thing that does not go away because it is identical with the *ātmā*, which is eternal. It is knowledge of the *ātmā*. *Mokṣa* gained is gained forever.

In his commentary on this verse, *Śaṅkara* says that this *mokṣa*, the result of this *yoga*, is in the form of clear vision of the *ātmā* — *saṃyag-darśana-niṣṭhā* — for which there is no death, *vyaya*, at all. Once the knowledge is gained, it is gained. This *mokṣa* is not something from which you come back, like the experience of *nirvikalpa-samādhi*, because with this knowledge, the *jīvatva*, the notion of being a limited individual is destroyed. Once gained, there is no coming back, which is why the knowledge is called *avyaya*.

In the second verse, addressing *Arjuna* as *parantapa*, the destroyer of enemies, *Kṛṣṇa* says, ‘In this way, the knowledge has been coming down through the families of kings, as well as through the families of sages, *ṛṣis*.’ Thus, there are two types of flow through which this knowledge is transmitted from one generation to the other.

Because of this knowledge alone, *Śaṅkara* says that kings like *Janaka* were able to perform their duties well without abusing the royal powers entrusted to them. Power and understanding should go together, along with a certain contentment. The more powerful a person is, the more informed he or she should be. Otherwise, those who come within his or her realm have had it! Thus, this knowledge was introduced by *Īśvara* to give the kings the strength — *bala-ādhanāya* — needed to rule the world properly, there being no greater strength than the *ātma-bala* that is, the strength of understanding oneself.

Not only the heads of royal families had this knowledge and passed it down from father to son, but also the sages living in the forest also had it. They taught it to their students who, in turn, taught it to their students throughout the generations.

*Kṛṣṇa* could see the wonder in *Arjuna*’s eyes as he was unfolding this knowledge to him. It was as though *Arjuna* was asking: ‘How is it that I did not know this before? Why did I not receive this knowledge while I was growing up? I was taught archery. I was taught what is right and wrong, but this, I was not taught. Why?’

When a person hears this knowledge for the first time, he or she often expresses the same wonder: ‘How could I have missed something so obvious!’ Although great sages like *Vyāsa* and *Śuka* lived in *Arjuna*’s time, this knowledge that *Kṛṣṇa* had given to *Arjuna* was not readily available. Since only a few people knew of it, it was as though it was lost. Everyone else was busy with other things. In other words, the *Duryodhanas* of the world were too numerous and people had no time for the knowledge.

This is why *Kṛṣṇa* tells *Arjuna* that although this knowledge sounded new and strange to him, there was nothing new or strange about it. ‘It has been around since the beginning, the same good old wisdom, and I am merely presenting it to you today as it has always been. It seems strange to you only because you have not yet had the occasion to listen to it.’

*Kṛṣṇa* anticipates that *Arjuna*’s next question would be, ‘Why did you choose to teach me today and not before?’ Therefore, he says:

स एवायं मया तेऽद्य योगः प्रोक्तः पुरातनः ।

भक्तोऽसि मे सखा चेति रहस्यं ह्येतदुत्तमम् ॥ ३ ॥

*sa evāyaṃ mayā te’dya yogaḥ proktaḥ purātanah*  
*bhakto’si me sakhā ceti rahasyaṃ hyetaduttamam*

Verse 3

मे *me* — My; भक्तः *bhaktaḥ* — devotee; सखा *sakhā* — friend; च *ca* — and; असि *asi* — you are; इति *iti* — therefore; मया *mayā* — by Me; सः एव अयम् *saḥ eva ayam* — that same; पुरातनः *purātanaḥ* — ancient; योगः *yogaḥ* — *yoga*; अद्य *adya* — today; ते *te* — to you; प्रोक्तः *proktaḥ* — has been told; हि *hi* — indeed; एतत् *etat* — this; उत्तमम् *uttamam* — profound; रहस्यम् *rahasyam* — secret

Today, that same ancient *yoga* has been told to you by Me because you are My devotee and My friend. This is indeed a profound secret.

The vision of the Veda is that you are *paraṁ brahma* and you are the cause of the whole creation. You are not a created being. Because all of this is also said in the *Gītā*, the *Gītā* is said to be the essence of the Veda. Gaining this knowledge is the sole destiny of human life. Until one has this knowledge, one is bound to a life of *saṁsāra*, pleasure and pain, joy and sorrow, birth and death.

The Veda, true to its vision, gives you a two-fold way, *mārga*, to accomplish this destination. The destination is gaining the knowledge of the self, being *Brahman*, a knowledge that is unlike any other knowledge. All knowledge requires a certain preparedness. For the knowledge of oneself, one requires emotional maturity. Mere intellectual accomplishment is not enough for a person to be emotionally mature. For example, the greatest scientist in any discipline of knowledge can be emotionally immature. This person may feel that he or she is not at all respected, not recognised, by peers and other members of the society. Such a person can have a lot of regrets and become quite desperate.

On the other hand one may be mature and not be intellectually accomplished. When one is able to live with oneself happily, relatively happily, and when one is naturally contemplative, one's maturity has attained a certain completeness. For such a person, a life of *sannyāsa*, renunciation, is advocated by the Veda, wherein the person is formally and completely released from all previously enjoined duties. The Veda that enjoins various duties also releases you from all of them, providing you with the sanction to live a life of a renunciate, so that you can pursue knowledge of the self to the exclusion of every other thing.

Or, if you need to gain this inner maturity, you can live a life of *karma-yoga*, pursuing the same self-knowledge that the *sannyāsī* pursues. This is the essence of all the Vedas. When the word 'yoga' is used in the *Gītā*, it refers to *jñāna-yoga* for a *sannyāsī*, and *karma-yoga* for one who is not a *sannyāsī*. Both of these include the pursuit of self-knowledge.

Although this knowledge remains in the royal families and with the sages, the people do not necessarily receive it. This point is addressed by *Śaṅkara* in his introduction to this verse. He says that the knowledge is as though lost when it reaches

people whose minds are scattered — *durbalān ajitendriyān prāpya naṣṭam yogam*. Thus, it is lost, *naṣṭa*, due to the condition of the people, not because it is not available. It reaches people who have no inner strength, *durbalāḥ*, people who are not together, whose minds are scattered, *ajitendriyāḥ*. Reaching such people, this *yoga* also gets scattered, meaning that the knowledge has no hold on them. Therefore, it is as though lost.

In this verse, *Kṛṣṇa* acknowledges that this knowledge had always existed when he uses the expression ‘*sa eva*,’ meaning ‘that *yoga* alone — that knowledge alone,’ the two-fold knowledge that is never new, *purātana*. No knowledge is ever new; it is always ancient, perennially eternal. Whatever is discovered may seem new, but, in fact, it has always been there. It seems new because no one knew of it before. For example, we did not always know that the sun does not move relative to the earth. Even so, the earth has always travelled around the sun and the sun has always been stationary, relative to the earth. This is a fact that always remains a fact whether it is known or not.

In the same way, this knowledge is something that is *purātana*, never new, ancient. Knowledge is always as true as the object is. If the *ātmā* is eternal, then knowledge of *ātmā* is equally eternal. Nothing new is created here. The *yoga*, the knowledge, which was initiated by *Kṛṣṇa* in the beginning, is eternal — perennially eternal, *purātanaḥ*.

## TWO TYPES OF ETERNITY

There are two types of eternity — perennial eternity and absolute eternity. Absolute eternity is something that has nothing to do with time and is called *pāramārthika-nityatva*, whereas perennial eternity is that which keeps on coming with every creation, every *kalpa*, and is called *pravāha-nityatva*. The Veda has *pravāha-nityatva*, being not eternal in the sense of timelessness. Although the knowledge that is the Veda keeps on coming with every creation, it is still time-bound. Thus, the Veda is considered to be eternal in the perennial sense only.

Moreover, why had this perennially eternal knowledge not been given to *Arjuna* before? *Kṛṣṇa* had not held it back all along due to a lack of enthusiasm and only today became inspired to talk to *Arjuna* about it. The only reason *Kṛṣṇa* did not teach him earlier was that, until today, *Arjuna* had not asked for this knowledge. As soon as *Arjuna* asked for it, *Kṛṣṇa* teaches him — although they were in the middle of the battlefield!

Those who study the *Gītā*, usually take some months to study the second and third chapters in which *Kṛṣṇa* unfolded the knowledge; but *Kṛṣṇa* taught to *Arjuna* in one day according to *Vyāsa*’s presentation, as *Kṛṣṇa* himself says, ‘*te adya proktaḥ* — it was told to you today.’ After all, it takes only three hours to repeat the entire *Gītā*! We must remember, also, that it is not *Kṛṣṇa* who is actually talking in this particular verse

form; it is *Vyāsa*. There was no necessity for *Kṛṣṇa* to put this knowledge into verse form. *Vyāsa* put *Kṛṣṇa*'s message in the form of verses as part of the *Mahābhārata*.

Being informed enough about the Veda, *Vyāsa* was qualified to present its essence in the *Gītā*. He did not need to have *Kṛṣṇa* say anything. Even if *Kṛṣṇa* were not there, we would still read *Vyāsa's Gītā*, just as we read his *Brahmasūtras*. *Vyāsa*, himself, is good enough for us to read because we are reading the Veda, not *Kṛṣṇa* or some philosopher like Kant,<sup>1</sup> Schopenhauer,<sup>2</sup> or Hegel.<sup>3</sup> There is no *Kṛṣṇa* philosophy. There is only the Veda, the knowledge that comes down to us from the *ṛṣis*.

People often say, having been given some good advice, 'Why did you not tell me this before? I have spent so many sleepless nights over it!' In fact, one may not be capable of seeing the wisdom of the advice until sleepless nights have been spent! *Arjuna* may have felt like chastising *Kṛṣṇa* for not giving him this knowledge in the days when they were in the forest and had so much time to sit and talk. Instead, here they were, on the battlefield, caught, between the two forces and surrounded by all the noise, dust, and confusion of war-horses, chariots, elephants, infantry, conches, drums, and orders being bellowed everywhere, definitely not a very conducive time or place for talking about *Vedānta*, about the infinite.

You should talk about the infinite only when you have infinite time, when you can sit leisurely on the bank of a river with nothing else to do, or when you are retired and no longer have to go to the office. The *Pāṇḍavas* had just returned from thirteen years of exile, twelve of which had been spent in the forest. Surely, *Arjuna* must have thought that, that would have been the right time for *Kṛṣṇa* to teach him. He could have gained this knowledge in those twelve years.

Twelve years is a good period of time for any knowledge to take place. Even Jupiter, whose influence is said to be important in gaining knowledge, takes twelve years to come back to a given house in the zodiac. It is said that in order to master any discipline of knowledge, you must stay with it for twelve years. *Arjuna* had had just such a period of time handed to him on a platter; he had had a God-sent banishment.

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<sup>1</sup> *Kant, Immanuel* (1724-1804) — German idealist philosopher who argued that reason is the means by which the phenomena of experience are translated into understanding. His classic works include *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) and *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), in which he put forward his system of ethics based on the categorical imperative.

<sup>2</sup> *Schopenhauer, Arthur* (1788-1860) — German philosopher who believed that the will to live is the fundamental reality and that this will, being a constant striving, is insatiable and ultimately yields only suffering.

<sup>3</sup> *Hegel, George Wilhelm Friedrich* (1770-1831) — German philosopher who proposed that truth is reached by a continuing dialectic. His major works include *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (1817) and *The Philosophy of Right* (1821).

That was when *Kṛṣṇa* should have said to him, ‘Please sit down and listen to me! I have something to tell you. You grieve for those who should not be grieved for, *aśocyān anvaśocastvam*, and so on.’

### SELF-KNOWLEDGE IS THE GREATEST SECRET

In response to *Arjuna*’s unspoken question about why *Kṛṣṇa* did not teach him when the surroundings were more conducive, *Kṛṣṇa* says in this verse that this particular knowledge is a secret, *rahasya*, and not an ordinary secret at that. The word *Upaniṣad* also has taken on the meaning of ‘secret,’ self-knowledge being the ultimate secret among all secrets — *uttamaṃ rahasyam*. Even if you share it with someone a hundred times, that person may still ask the question, ‘What is *ātmā*?’

There are two types of secrets. One is a secret that is kept away from you, not because it is something that you cannot understand, but because it is kept away from your perception — from your ears and eyes. You are kept from coming to know of it by something other than yourself. The other type of secret is seen by you, it is available to be known by you, but still you do not understand. Therefore, it remains *rahasya*. The *Vedānta-rahasya* is both. For want of *Vedānta*, the truth of yourself remains a secret. But then, even when *Vedānta* is available, it remains a secret for want of preparedness on the part of the listener.

The reality revealed by *Vedānta* is not easy to understand by those who are conditioned into thinking that they are useless and limited, a conviction that is often confirmed by everyone around them. If a person, who thinks in this way, is told that he or she is *satya*, *jñāna*, *ananta*, *sarvakāraṇa*, *pūrṇa*, and so on, the person will become totally confused. He or she will have a new problem — ‘If I am *satya*, why do I feel so useless? I must be even more useless than I thought!’ This new problem is also brought about because the *ātmā* is not easy to understand.

This knowledge can be misunderstood as well, which is why it was generally kept away from the majority of people. Moreover, even if it is made available, it is not understood. For example, those who study the Veda, and are able to recite it, including the *Upaniṣads*, do not usually understand what they are reciting. For such people, the words revealing the truth are available, but not the knowledge thereof. Therefore, it is *uttama-rahasya*, the greatest secret. Thus, either due to its non-availability or due to non-understanding, the knowledge remains *uttama-rahasya*, the ultimate secret.

### THIS KNOWLEDGE SHOULD ONLY BE GIVEN TO ONE WHO WANTS TO KNOW

In *Arjuna*’s case, the knowledge was not given to him because *Kṛṣṇa* knew that *Arjuna* was not interested in it before. Even if he had taught him, the knowledge would not have meant anything to *Arjuna*. Such knowledge should only be given to someone who wants to know.

Unless a person recognises that there is a problem, it is useless to offer a solution. We can give the person a hint by saying that there is a fundamental problem that he or she does not recognise. However, only when the person recognises that there is a problem, is the solution of any interest to him or her.

*Arjuna* also had to recognise that there was a problem. He had been brought up in a certain way at a time when *Vyāsa* and *Śuka* were household names. Such people were always walking in and out of the palaces where *Arjuna*, his brothers, and their cousins were growing up. Naturally, then, *Arjuna* had had many opportunities to hear about this knowledge, but as a prince, he was concerned with acquiring the skills, accomplishments, and laurels of a prince — all of which were good and necessary also.

Even during his twelve-year exile, *Arjuna*'s main concern was the acquisition and maintenance of missiles and various skills in order to win back the kingdom. For *Arjuna*, this was a one-pointed commitment, *ekāgratā*, an obsession. Therefore, he had neither the time nor the interest to pursue this knowledge. Now, in the battlefield, all his other interests melted away. Even his accomplishments appeared useless to him because he saw they were all meant only for destruction.

*Arjuna* had lived a life of *dharma*; he had the necessary *viveka* to be able to distinguish between right and wrong. He also had compassion because of which, when he saw how destructive the battle would be, he no longer wanted to fight. He was like a boxer who trains himself for the world championship. For six months — every day, all day — he runs, eats the proper food, exercises, works out with punching bags, and wears out several sparring partners as well. He also spends half a million dollars to achieve his end. On the day when the bout is to take place, he climbs into the ring, applauded by the enthusiastic fans that have come to watch. Then, looking at his opponent, he suddenly becomes sympathetic and walks out!

This may be the proper thing to do, but his opponent is not going to see it this way. Instead, he will brag, 'The poor fellow took one look at me and ran away!' Everyone else, including his own manager, will say the same thing — and his opponent will become the champion by default.

This was *Arjuna*'s problem exactly. He did not want to fight, not out of fear but out of compassion. Naturally, then, he had to decide whether he should fight or not. He was cornered, so to speak, and had to make a decision.

#### **AN OBJECTIVE OPINION IS ALWAYS HELPFUL**

Whenever you have to make a decision that involves the consideration of several factors, it is always helpful to have the opinion of someone else who is not involved in the issue. The mind of such a person will very likely be more objective than yours with reference to the particular issue you are attempting to resolve.

*Kṛṣṇa* was someone *Arjuna* could talk to. Having seen the meaninglessness of all his previous pursuits and victories *Arjuna* wanted to know the meaning of life, not the meaning of victory. ‘What am I going to gain out of this victory? Why should I gain anything out of anything?’ is a question about life itself and was the essence of *Arjuna*’s question. And now that *Arjuna* had asked the question, *Kṛṣṇa* could give him the knowledge.

For the asking, this knowledge may be given, but it does have to be asked for. This was how it was kept away from the people. *Vedānta* was almost unheard of until recently. Only during the past one hundred years has it been more widely available. And many of the translations that are presently in circulation contain erroneous concepts resulting in further confusion about *Vedānta*.

*Vedānta* is not a common subject matter. It is kept away from people either because it is so easily misunderstood or because people are not interested in it. In fact, it is better to listen to *Vedānta* without any background whatsoever than to have already been initiated into it wrongly. Otherwise, you have to recast your understanding, which is not easy and can be very painful, as well.

### SHOULD VEDĀNTA BE TAUGHT TO EVERYONE?

Deliberately keeping *Vedānta* away from people can be a problem because it prevents them from knowing it is there. Still, a person who has this knowledge may have a conflict about talking publicly about *Vedānta* because the people who come to listen may not really want to know or even need to know. They may come to the talk thinking they are going to get something out of it without really knowing what is going to be taught. Moreover, if they already know what is being taught, they do not need to come. Whether it will help those who do not know is anyone’s guess.

Also, the teaching can be very easily misconstrued by those who are not ready, as evidenced by the kinds of questions that are asked and the comments made after the teaching has taken place. In such cases, it seems to be a waste, not only with reference to the people themselves, but also in terms of the erroneous notions they will pass on to those to whom they talk in turn. This is why many teachers talk only to those who come to them and not to the public.

However, if no one talks to the public, how are people going to know? There is a saying in Tamil that is very appropriate here. In India, the month before the northern solstice begins is considered to be a very important time for prayers and other religious activities. During this period, one person of a particular family is appointed to go to each house in several villages between four and five every morning and blow a conch. Then, during the following month, which is harvest time, he will go to everyone and collect enough rice to last him for the whole year.



Although this person is supposed to blow the conch at each house just before dawn, he has so many villages to cover that he must begin in the first village at eleven at night! He then has to walk to all the other villages, which are approximately one hour apart, so, he arrives at the other villages at twelve midnight, at one in the morning, and so on. In this way, he covers them all, reaching the last village at four-thirty or five in the morning. If you ask him, ‘Why did you start the night before?’ he will reply, ‘My job is to blow the conch and I blow it. The dawn will come when it comes.’

Because of this practice, ‘blowing the conch’ is a common expression in some South Indian districts. The practice itself is a kind of prayer, considered to be very important for keeping away all undesirable events such as drought, disease, and so on, so that the village will have plenty and prosperity.

Similarly, a teacher of *Vedānta* blows the conch! The dawn of knowledge will come when it comes. In some cases, the conch may have been blown a little earlier than necessary, perhaps. However, when a conflict arises in the teacher's mind, he or she has only to say, ‘Just blow the conch!’ Otherwise, a person who has this knowledge has to sit quietly in one place and talk only to those who come and ask to be taught. Really speaking, this is the thing to be done rather than giving this knowledge to anyone and everyone irrespective of the fact whether the person is ready or not. This is because this knowledge is not like any other knowledge. It is *uttama-rahasya*, and is best given to those who ask for it.

‘Therefore, *Arjuna*,’ *Kṛṣṇa* might have said, ‘I did keep this knowledge away from you. However, do not blame me. I kept it away from you only because you did not ask for it.’ Then *Arjuna*’s next question would have been, ‘Alright, but why did you choose to teach me today?’ In anticipation of such a question, *Kṛṣṇa* says here, ‘Because you said you were my student and you asked me to teach you.’

Once *Kṛṣṇa* recognised *Arjuna* as a student, as a devotee, *Arjuna* may have felt that he had lost a friend, although he had gained a teacher. This often happens in self-arranged and mutually consented marriages. A husband or wife is gained and a friend is lost. Until marriage, the other person is a good friend, but as soon as the marriage takes place, the friendship goes. This is a most unfortunate situation because friendship between husband and wife is to be maintained.

To reassure *Arjuna* that their friendship is not lost, *Kṛṣṇa* tells him, ‘Not only are you my devotee, *bhakta*, you are also my friend, *sakhā*.’ Thus, *Arjuna* was doubly blessed. He not only gained a teacher, but he could continue to talk to *Kṛṣṇa* as a friend. When *Kṛṣṇa* says, ‘You are my friend — *me sakhā asi*,’ he does so as *Mr. Kṛṣṇa*, not as *Īśvara*, the Lord. After all, their friendship was not an age old one; it could be counted in years. But, when *Kṛṣṇa* says, ‘You are my devotee — *bhakto’si me*,’ he is talking as *Īśvara* as well as *guru*.

On this point, *Arjuna* asks a question to clear up a doubt, one that is in the minds of many people. *Arjuna* had heard that *Kṛṣṇa* was *Bhagavān Viṣṇu*, himself. He certainly knew that *Kṛṣṇa* possessed great powers because he had seen *Kṛṣṇa* demonstrate his powers. Perhaps *Arjuna*, having been told that *Kṛṣṇa* was *Viṣṇu*, wanted to hear it straight from *Kṛṣṇa* himself. In his commentary, *Śaṅkara* says that *Arjuna's* question was simply to remove the doubts in the minds of those who do not recognise *Kṛṣṇa* as the Lord.

Thus, *Arjuna* asks:

अर्जुन उवाच ।

अपरं भवतो जन्म परं जन्म विवस्वतः ।

कथमेतद्विजानीयां त्वमादौ प्रोक्तवानिति ॥ ४ ॥

*arjuna uvāca*

*aparaṃ bhavato janma paraṃ janma vivasvataḥ*

*kathametadvijānīyāṃ tvamādau proktavāniti*

Verse 4

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

भवतः *bhavataḥ* — your; जन्म *janma* — birth; अपरम् *aparam* — not very long ago; विवस्वतः *vivasvataḥ* — of *Vivasvān*; जन्म *janma* — birth; परम् *param* — a long time ago; त्वम् *tvam* — you; आदौ *ādau* — in the beginning; प्रोक्तवान् *proktavān* — told; इति *iti* — thus; एतत् *etat* — this; कथम् *katham* — how; विजानीयाम् *vijānīyām* — am I to know

*Arjuna* said:

Your birth was not so long ago; (whereas) *Vivasvān's* birth was a long time ago. How am I to know that you told this (to *Vivasvān*) in the beginning?

In the first verse of the fourth chapter, *Kṛṣṇa* had said that he gave this knowledge to *Vivasvān*, which seems to be a contradiction since *Kṛṣṇa* lived at a much later time than *Vivasvān*. Therefore, *Arjuna* says, '*aparaṃ bhavataḥ janma* — your birth was later.' *Arjuna* knew the exact date of *Kṛṣṇa's* birth. They were contemporaries. There was no doubt in *Arjuna's* mind that *Kṛṣṇa* had been born at a given time and place — in the prison where his father, *Vasudeva*, and his mother, *Devakī*, were being held. All of this *Arjuna* knew very well. *Vivasvān*, on the other hand, was born long, long ago, at the time of the creation itself. Thus *Arjuna* said, '*paraṃ janma vivasvataḥ* — *Vivasvān's* birth was long before (your birth). How then, *Kṛṣṇa*, can you say that you taught *Vivasvān*?' This is *Arjuna's* question.

What a question! *Arjuna* is as much as saying, 'You could not have taught *Vivasvān*, *Kṛṣṇa*! You were not even there!' By asking this question, *Arjuna* seemed

not to know that *Kṛṣṇa* was *Īśvara*, the Lord. Therefore, in his commentary, *Śaṅkara* explains that when *Kṛṣṇa* says that he was the one, who taught *Vivasvān*, he is not talking as *Mr. Kṛṣṇa*, the person *Arjuna* knew as his contemporary. Rather, *Kṛṣṇa* is talking as the one who had initiated this knowledge, who can only be *Īśvara*.

Whether *Kṛṣṇa* is *Īśvara* or is only presented as *Īśvara* by *Vyāsa* does not really matter to us. All we need to know is that the entire dialogue that is the *Gītā* is between *Kṛṣṇa* as *Īśvara* and *Arjuna*, a *jīva*, an individual. Because the dialogue is between *Īśvara* and *jīva*, the *Gītā* is called as *īśvara-jīva-saṃvāda*. If *Kṛṣṇa* is an *avatāra*, an incarnation of the Lord himself, then *Kṛṣṇa* as *Īśvara* is literally true and the dialogue can be taken to be between *Kṛṣṇa* the *avatāra* and *Arjuna* the *jīva*. Otherwise, the *Gītā* can simply be taken as a story, *ākhyāyikā*, with the understanding that, what *Vyāsa* was presenting was the knowledge of the Veda in the form of a dialogue between the Lord and an individual.

Here, *Arjuna* wants to know how *Mr. Kṛṣṇa*, a person who was born at a given time, could say that he was the one who taught *Vivasvān*. *Śaṅkara* believes that *Arjuna* knew that *Kṛṣṇa* was *Īśvara*; otherwise, before the battle, when he was given the choice of having *Kṛṣṇa*'s army or *Kṛṣṇa* himself on his side, he would not have chosen *Kṛṣṇa*. 'Either you take me as one who is unarmed, as one who is not going to fight, or you take my entire army' was the choice *Kṛṣṇa* had given *Arjuna*. If *Arjuna* had known *Kṛṣṇa* only as *Mr. Kṛṣṇa*, he would not have chosen him, thinking that *Kṛṣṇa* would have been just one more mouth to feed in wartime.

But *Arjuna* did choose *Kṛṣṇa* and, because of this, *Śaṅkara* says that *Arjuna* knew all about *Kṛṣṇa*, but wanted to hear it from *Kṛṣṇa* himself, for his own satisfaction and for the sake of those who do not know. Thus, *Arjuna* asks the question that necessitated the commencement of the fourth chapter. Otherwise, the *Gītā* would have been over, the knowledge having already been given and the teaching concluded by *Kṛṣṇa* with a praise of this knowledge at the end of the third chapter.

*Kṛṣṇa* had completed the teaching once before, in the second chapter, but seems to have expected a question from *Arjuna*. If *Arjuna* had not asked his question then, *Kṛṣṇa*, being the excellent teacher he was, would have recognised the last verse of the second chapter as a good exit point.

However, *Arjuna* did ask a question. He asked, 'If knowledge is superior to action, why are you asking me to do this terrible action?'<sup>1</sup> And in response, *Kṛṣṇa* begins to teach again. Having concluded the teaching once again in the third chapter, *Kṛṣṇa* praises the knowledge as ancient. Then *Arjuna* asked this question and *Kṛṣṇa* begins to answer.

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<sup>1</sup> *Gītā* – 3-1

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।

बहूनि मे व्यतीतानि जन्मानि तव चार्जुन ।

तान्यहं वेद सर्वाणि न त्वं वेत्थ परन्तप ॥ ५ ॥

*śrībhagavān uvāca*

*bahūni me vyatītāni janmāni tava cārjuna*

*tānyahaṃ veda sarvāṇi na tvaṃ vettha parantapa*

Verse 5

श्रीभगवान् *śrībhagavān* — *Śrī Bhagavān*; उवाच *uvāca* — said;

अर्जुन *arjuna* — O *Arjuna*!; मे *me* — for me; तव च *tava ca* — and for you; बहूनि *bahūni* — many; जन्मानि *janmāni* — births; व्यतीतानि *vyatītāni* — have passed; अहम् *aham* — I; तानि *tāni* — them; सर्वाणि *sarvāṇi* — all; वेद *veda* — know; त्वम् *tvam* — you; न वेत्थ *na vettha* — do not know; परन्तप *parantapa* — O Scorcher of foes!

*Śrī Bhagavān* said:

Many births have passed for Me and you, O *Arjuna*! I know them all (whereas) you do not know O Scorcher of foes!

In the previous verse, *Arjuna* questioned how *Kṛṣṇa* could have taught *Vivasvān* in the beginning when *Kṛṣṇa* himself was not yet born. This verse is *Kṛṣṇa*'s response to *Arjuna*'s question. *Kṛṣṇa* says that both he and *Arjuna* had had many births before their present ones, the only difference being that *Kṛṣṇa* could remember all of his births and *Arjuna* could not. Here, *Bhagavān*, *Kṛṣṇa*, is talking as *Īśvara* alone. He says, 'As *Īśvara*, I have had many births and I can remember them all. And as a *jīva*, *Arjuna*, you also have had many births, but you do not remember them.'

*Arjuna* did not know his previous births because, being a *jīva*, he was naturally conditioned by an *antaḥ-karaṇa*, a mind, which itself was born out of past actions — *dharma-adharma*, *puṇya-pāpa*. His own *karma* brought his body into being along with a limited mind and senses. Naturally, then, *Arjuna*'s power to know, *jñāna-śakti*, was limited and, because of this, he could not understand what *Kṛṣṇa* means by saying that he had taught *Vivasvān*.

Thus, *Kṛṣṇa* explains that the only difference between them was that *Arjuna* was born of *karma* and he was not. Moreover, *Kṛṣṇa* was aware of this fact, while *Arjuna* was not.

What *Kṛṣṇa* says amounts to, 'I am ever enlightened, *nitya-buddha*, and therefore, I am never bound at any time in any way whatsoever, even when I assume a body. You are also *nitya-buddha*, *Arjuna*, but you do not know it because you have ignorance, *āvaraṇa*. I am always free from all bondage — *karma*, the body, birth, and so on — whereas you are a *jīva* for the time being; therefore, you do not know this fact about yourself. My power to know is not covered by ignorance, whereas yours is. All

this you must know and it is for the sake of gaining this knowledge that you have been given an *antaḥ-karaṇa*.’

In this way, *Kṛṣṇa* tells *Arjuna* that he knew everything he had done before taking this particular birth. This was why he could say that he had given the knowledge to *Vivasvān*. Then the question of *Kṛṣṇa*’s birth itself came up, even though the event called birth generally is for the *jīva* alone.

### THE CAUSE OF BIRTH FOR THE JĪVA

The nature of the *jīva* is to be born repeatedly. In other words, birth is continuous for the *jīva*. Because the *jīva* looks upon himself as a doer, a *kartā*, he is subject to *karma* and therefore, rebirth. The *jīva* does not recognise his true nature, his *svarūpa*, *ātmā*, and this non-recognition is the very basis for his status as a *jīva*, *jīvatva*. Thus, the status of *jīva* is superimposed upon the *ātmā*, the self.

The *jīva* is one who is the doer, *kartā*, and the enjoyer, *bhoktā*. Now you are a doer; now you are an enjoyer. And this goes on and on. *Jīvatva* implies a sense of limitation and, therefore, there is a desire to overcome the sense of limitation. Wherever there is desire or want, there is *karma* and its result, *karma-phala*. *Karma-phala* is two-fold — the seen result, *drṣṭa-phala*, and the unseen result, *adrṣṭa-phala*.

The *adrṣṭa-phala* can fructify either in this life or later. Because of the *adrṣṭa-karma-phala* that is accrued to the doer, the person is reborn. Again, the person performs *karma*, for which there will be unseen results, and again, the person will be born. This is what is meant by *samsāra* and it is only for the *jīva*.

*Īśvara*, on the other hand, has no doership, no *karṭṛtva*. Although *Īśvara* creates, sustains, and dissolves the creation, he has no doership because he has no ignorance. For him, the capacity to create is only a power, and wielding this power, he creates everything. Knowing that he is not a doer, and therefore, being free from doership, *Īśvara* does not have enjoyership, *phala-bhokṭṛtva*, either. Nor does he receive the results of action that cause him to be born again. Since *dharmā-adharma*, *puṇya-pāpa*, and *karma-phala* are not there for *Īśvara*, he cannot be born at all, in fact.

*Kṛṣṇa*’s response to *Arjuna*’s question could only have added to his confusion. If they both had previous births and *Kṛṣṇa* knew about his, then, he must be *Īśvara*. But, if he was *Īśvara*, how could he have been born since *Īśvara* can never be born? *Kṛṣṇa* explains all this to *Arjuna* in the next few verses.

अजोऽपि सन्नव्ययात्मा भूतानामीश्वरोऽपि सन् ।

प्रकृतिं स्वामधिष्ठाय सम्भवाम्यात्ममायया ॥ ६ ॥

*ajo’pi sannavyayātmā bhūtānāmīśvaro’pi san*

*prakṛtiṃ svāmadhiṣṭhāya sambhavāmyātmamāyayā*

Verse 6

अजः अपि सन् *ajah api san* — even though being one who is unborn; अव्यय-आत्मा (सन्) *avyaya-ātmā (san)* — (being) one whose knowledge does not wane; भूतानाम् *bhūtānām* — of all living beings; ईश्वरः अपि सन् *īśvaraḥ api san* — also being the Lord; स्वाम् *svām* — My own; प्रकृतिम् *prakṛtim* — *prakṛti* (the material cause for the creation); अधिष्ठाय *adhiṣṭhāya* — wielding; आत्म-मायया *ātma-māyayā* — by My own creative power; सम्भवामि *sambhavāmi* — I come into being

Even though, being one who is unborn, one whose knowledge does not wane, and also being the Lord of all living beings, still, wielding My own *prakṛti*, I, ‘as though’ come into being by My own creative power.

We see from this verse that *Kṛṣṇa*’s birth is a very peculiar birth indeed. Being one who is never born, he as though comes into being! Also, *Kṛṣṇa* describes himself here as one whose power to know does not wane or decline, as *avyayātmā*, meaning one for whom there is no state of ignorance or delusion. We can also say that, being one who is never born, he is not subject to death either.

Furthermore, he is the Lord of all beings, the one who made the entire creation for the enjoyment of all, and the one who introduced and wields all the laws and who is therefore, not bound by them. He is also the *karma-phala-dātā*, the giver of the fruits of all actions.

*Īśvara* is the cause for the entire creation — both the subtle world, *sūkṣma-prapañca* and the physical world, *sthūla-prapañca*. *Māya*, *prakṛti*, which is non-separate from *Īśvara* becomes the material cause for this creation. And wielding this *māyā*, his *śakti*, he ‘as though’ comes into being in the form of this creation. Since *Kṛṣṇa*, as *Īśvara*, is on one side of *māyā* and *Arjuna* was on the other side, *Arjuna* could not see him as he was. This is like a magician who always keeps the audience in front, so that they see only the magic, not the *māyā*, the trick. And of course, the magician never comes under the spell of his or her own magic. Otherwise, there would be no magician.

Because you, a *jīva*, are within *māyā* itself, you do not wield it, whereas *Īśvara* does. Therefore, the difference between the *jīva* and *Īśvara* is based solely on which side of *māyā* they are on. *Kṛṣṇa* wields the *māyā* because of which the entire world and its beings exist. And being deluded by this *māyā*, being under its spell, the spell of ignorance, people do not see the *ātmā* that is *Kṛṣṇa*, *Īśvara*. While the *jīva* does not see the *paramātmā*, *Īśvara* has no such problem because he has the *māyā* under his control. Therefore, the world itself, which is born of *māyā* is under his control.

The idea being conveyed here is that the *jīva* does not know his real nature, *svarūpa*. This not knowing one’s *svarūpa* is called *avidyā*, ignorance. Whereas, as

*Īśvara*, *Kṛṣṇa* can say, as he did here ‘Keeping My *māyā* under My control, I become one who as though has a body.’ This is the definition of an *avatāra* .

When it is said that an *avatāra* is one who comes down, what is meant is that he assumes a body. He ‘as though’ has a body, ‘as though’ because he is not lost in the body — in other words, he does not take himself to be the body. A *jīvanmukta*, one who is liberated, can also say, ‘I ‘as though’ have a body,’ because this person knows the real nature of ‘I,’ the *ātmā* . To be able to say this requires knowledge and, to acquire this knowledge one has to be living. This is why the person who has such knowledge is called *jīvanmukta* — living, he is liberated. And, before this knowledge takes place, the *jīva* comes into this world as a result of the past *karma* alone.

By the force of *karma*, meaning one's past actions and their results, a physical body, along with a mind and senses, is created with a parentage and a time and place, and we say the person is born. Such a person is called *jīva*. Only by acquiring the knowledge that he or she is *paraṃ brahma* can the *jīva* be free of the cycle of birth and death and all that goes with it. Knowing thus, the person is free, but the body continues to exist, because it is the creation of *Īśvara* — *īśvara-sṛṣṭi*.

#### OMNISCIENCE DOES NOT REQUIRE A MIND

Thus, *Kṛṣṇa* tells *Arjuna* here that, as *Īśvara*, he keeps the *māyā* under his control. His powers, the *jñāna-śakti*, the power to know, the *kriyā-śakti*, the power to do, and the *icchā-śakti*, the power to desire, are all under his control and are not limited in any way. Since his power to know is without limitation, he does not require an *antaḥ-karaṇa* , a mind, to know. Without the mind, he has all knowledge. All-knowledge, omniscience, cannot depend upon a given mind because any mind will have some limitation. Furthermore, the mind itself is a creation and, before creating it, the Lord must have knowledge. Therefore, no mind is required by *Īśvara*. The very *māyā* itself makes him omniscient. He is called *Parameśvara* and this *Parameśvara* alone becomes the world. This is the *māyā*, the trick of it all.

#### AN UNDERSTANDING OF AVATĀRA

In order to understand the Vedic and *Purāṇic* literature, one needs to have some understanding of the concept of *avatāra* . In the *Bhāgavata*, *Rāmāyaṇa*, and the *Mahābhārata*, *Rāma*, *Kṛṣṇa* and certain others are presented as *avatāras*. ‘*Avatāra*’ means ‘God incarnate.’ Because of its significance here, this concept will be analysed briefly in terms of orders of reality.

In general, we can divide the orders of reality into three. One is the absolute reality, *pāramārthika* , that which is *satya-jñāna-ananta-brahma*, free from all attributes, and upon which the entire world depends. Then there is the empirical reality, *vyāvahārika* , which accounts for the world and all that is in it, space, air, fire, water,

earth, the sun, moon, and stars, the natural laws, and so on. Included in this order of reality are the various situations that cause joy and sorrow, as well as your physical body, mind, and senses. All means and ends — *sādhana* and *sādhya*, also have an empirical reality, some of which are already known to you and others are revealed by the Veda. There are certain Vedic rituals, for example, that are prescribed for having a child or for going to heaven. The heaven mentioned by the *śāstra* is considered to be as empirically real as a material object here in this world. Thirdly, there is a purely subjective order of reality, *prātibhāsika*, such as that we experience in a dream.

### EMPIRICAL REALITY

A pot, for instance, is not something that you imagine; it actually holds water. But it cannot be considered to be independently real, absolutely real, because it is dependent on something else for its existence — the material out of which it is made. Therefore, you cannot say it is *pāramārthika-satya*. Nor can you dismiss it as non-existent because it holds water! If you say the pot is absolutely real or that it is absolutely non-existent, your very statement does not hold water. Only an existent pot can hold water, a non-existent pot cannot.

The existent pot is something that has a history. It was born at a given time and has lived in various homes. It has gone through a certain process of growth and old age, holes and repair work. It has seen ages and has passed through many hands. Now, having had its day, it is parked in some corner somewhere, an old useless pot. Thus, the pot definitely enjoys a certain reality, because of which we accept it as something that has a name and form, *nāma-rūpa*, and behaves within certain laws. This reality is what is meant by empirical reality, *vyāvahārika-satya*. And, for understanding the empirical reality, we have sense perception and other *pramāṇas* such as inference and presumption.

When the Veda talks about ends like heaven and the means for attaining them, it is talking only about empirical reality. If heaven is a place, it is something within the creation and, therefore, is included in this order of reality. The various rituals enjoined by Veda imply a doer, *kartā*, who must perform certain *karmas* in order to achieve the desired ends. Since the means and end are interconnected, the means also have an empiricity, whether they involve worldly action, *laukika-karma*, or scriptural injunction, *vaidika-karma*. Because means and ends are all dependent upon something else, they are not absolutely real. Therefore, they are not *pāramārthika*, but *vyāvahārika*, being totally within the empirical sphere.

The word ‘empirical’ is the closest English translation there is for *vyāvahārika*, which covers everything known and unknown within the sphere of the creation that is not created by a given mind. It includes everything that is understood at a given time. It also includes all that is not understood now but that may be understood later. This kind



of world and the mind itself — the mind stuff, brain cells, and so on — all belong to the empirical world. The physical body and its organs, the senses and their constituents, the capacity to remember, to love, to think, and to know, are all *vyāvahārika*, meaning that they have an empirical reality.

### SUBJECTIVE REALITY

The third order of reality is purely subjective and is called *prātibhāsika* in Sanskrit. The dream is an example of this order of reality. Something exists because you see it. Any mistaken notion, unknown fears, and all forms of projections are also *prātibhāsika*. When, for instance, you take a post for a man, (*sthāṇau puruṣa-darśana*) or imagine that some one does not like you, it is a projection — purely subjective and therefore, *prātibhāsika*. What you see is not there; but still you see it. The very seeing gives your projection a certain reality.

Everyone projects; everyone commits mistakes. *Prātibhāsika* reality is possible because the mind is limited; it is not omniscient. Also, the mind has a particular background that creates for itself certain prejudices, fears, anxieties, disappointments, sorrows, and perceptions. This is why everyone, at one time or another, sees what is not really there and does not see what is there.

For example, even though a person has some love for you, you may not recognise it, seeing instead some dislike, simply because you happen to notice the person frowning and you know not why! All projections, all mistakes, are possible because you have a mind. You think so and therefore, it is. And since this reality that exists only for you has no empiricity, it is called *prātibhāsika*.

Wherever there is *prātibhāsika* reality, there is error and, wherever there is error, the correction of error must be possible, that is, knowledge must be there. Suppose, for example, you are making pastry and mistake the salt for sugar. What you want is pastry, but what you get is something quite different. Both the sugar and the salt have an empirical reality because the senses are able to differentiate between them. At the same time, there is a mistake because sugar produces pastry and salt produces something else. If you use salt thinking it will make pastry, you are committing a mistake. Given this particular fact, this law, error is always possible.

This is all within our experience. *Ātmā* is the self-evident experience. Consciousness is experience. All experiences are strung into this consciousness by this consciousness, just as beads are held together by a string. Consciousness is there in all the three forms of experience — sleep, dream and waking. These three experiences, severally and totally, are held in one experience called consciousness, which is all-evident.

It is evident that we create our own subjective realities and it is also evident that we are dealing with a world which conforms to an order, which behaves in an orderly way. Thus, we have a cosmos which is empirical, a chaos which is subjective, and that which is constant, *sat-cit-ānanda-ātmā*. This *sat-cit-ānanda-ātmā* seems to exist in the form of a three-fold reality. For lack of a better term, we use this term, viz., the three-fold reality. In fact, there is only one reality, *satya-jñāna-ananta-brahma*.

### THE RELATIONSHIP AMONG THE THREE ORDERS OF REALITY

Between the empirical reality and the subjective reality, there is a difference. The entire creation, empirical reality, is called *īśvara-sṛṣṭi*, the Lord's creation, and the projection of one's own mind is called *jīva-sṛṣṭi*, the individual's subjective creation. At all times, we are confronting these two orders of reality, the empirical and the subjective, on the basis of the one absolute reality, *satya-jñāna-ananta-brahma*.

With this understanding of the orders of reality, let us return to the verse. *Kṛṣṇa* says, 'I am born wielding the *māyā*, the *prakṛti*, in My hands. In this way, I assume a body.' Because the Lord can create the whole world and also assume a body, there is no problem in seeing that *Kṛṣṇa*'s birth is referred to here as an incarnation of *īśvara* based on the concept of *avatāra*, *avatāra-vāda*. But the next question would be, 'To which order of reality does the physical body that the Lord assumes belong?'

When *Kṛṣṇa* points out that he is unborn, never born, he is pointing out the absolute reality, *pāramārthika-satya*. In fact, from the standpoint of absolute reality, no one is born. Thus, from this standpoint, *Kṛṣṇa* is not born and *Mr. Kṛṣṇa*, who is standing before *Arjuna*, cannot be that *pāramārthika-satya*. It must be kept in mind here that we are not talking about *Kṛṣṇa* who is *paramātmā*; but we are talking about *Mr. Kṛṣṇa* who was born in prison, who had a body, who wore a yellow piece of cloth, who played a flute, and who, seated in *Arjuna*'s chariot, was holding the reins of the horses in his hands. Is this *Kṛṣṇa*, who was teaching *Arjuna*, *pāramārthika*? No, he is not, because his body is not *pāramārthika*.

Surely, then, we can say that *Kṛṣṇa*'s body is empirically real, *vyāvahārika*. But if it were to be taken as empirically real, would *Kṛṣṇa* not have been born of his own *karma* and therefore, would he not also be a *saṃsārī* like *Arjuna*? And if he were born of his own *karma*, *puṇya* and *pāpa* would be there for him, along with *dharma* and *adharmā*, doership and enjoyership? If he were bound by *karma*, where would be the possibility of his wielding the *māyā*? In order for his birth to be considered empirical, *Kṛṣṇa* had to have been under the spell of *karma*, meaning that without his volition his birth would have been determined by the very laws. Only then can his birth be considered to be like empirical that of *Arjuna*.

## THE EMPIRICAL REALITY OF A JĪVA'S BIRTH

*Arjuna*, being a *jīva*, was born of *karma*. Even though he was born a prince, he had to go to the forest for twelve years and then live incognito for one year, all of which could be attributed to his past *karma*. The destiny of *Arjuna's* eldest brother, *Dharmaputra*, was also controlled by his own *puṇya* and *pāpa*. Because of his *pāpa*, he lost the kingdom; otherwise, the dice would have rolled out differently or he would not have thrown them at all! Some *prārabdha-karma* was there for him. The *śāstra* itself talks about this kind of *karma*.

*Arjuna* was a person, a *jīva*, born of *karma* and therefore, his birth, *janma*, was empirically real. He had a parentage and a physical body, mind, and senses, all of which have an empirical reality, as we have seen. *Kṛṣṇa*, on the other hand, said that, as *Īśvara*, keeping the *māyā* under his control, he is born. We will see later why he was born.

## THE REALITY OF KṚṢṆA'S BIRTH

The body of anyone who is born is available for our perception. But what is available for our perception is not always totally true — the blue sky, for example, or a magician's tricks. Therefore, perception itself cannot establish the empirical reality of *Kṛṣṇa's* birth.

If, as *Īśvara*, *Kṛṣṇa* is born, keeping the *māyā* under his control, his birth is definitely not subject to any *puṇya* or *pāpa*. Therefore, being not bound by *karma*, it has no empirical status. Birth itself, being what it is, cannot be *pāramāthika* either. Nor can *Kṛṣṇa's* birth be totally non-existent, *atyanta-asat*, since he was not a *vandhyā-putra*, the son of a barren woman! He was born of *Devakī* and *Vasudeva*. Thus, it was not a totally non-existent *Kṛṣṇa* who was talking to *Arjuna*.

Then, how are we to explain *Kṛṣṇa's* birth in terms of reality? With reference to his birth, *Kṛṣṇa* is *prātibhāsika* — you see him, therefore, he is. His birth is not due to *karma*; it is only apparent. *Prātibhāsika* means that there was a *Kṛṣṇa* whom everyone saw, but his birth and his body were purely *māyā*. Like everything else, they were born of *māyā* but without the force of the law of *karma*. This kind of birth means that *Īśvara* is not condemned to the state of *jīvatva*. He merely assumes a particular body due to a certain necessity alone.

## WHY DOES ĪŚVARA ASSUME A PHYSICAL BODY?

And what is it that makes it necessary for the Lord to assume a physical body? In the *purāṇas* it is said that before every incarnation there is a collective petition to the Lord in the form of prayers on the part of all the good people and even the *devas*: 'O Lord, please do something! Please come and remedy this situation. It is time. Time's up,

in fact! Why haven't you come? The tyranny of these people is too much for us to bear,' etc. These very prayers themselves become the material cause, the *upādāna-kāraṇa*, for the Lord to introduce himself in a particular form, meaning that he assumes a body.

The prayers of the *jīvas* become the *puṇya* because of which a particular body is born for a given purpose. This incarnation of the Lord is what is meant by *avatāra*. The purpose of the *avatāra*'s coming may be just to do one job, like *Narasimha-avatāra* or *Vāmana-avatāra*, or to do many, as was the case with *Rāma* and *Kṛṣṇa*. In addition to the many jobs they came to do, *Rāma* and *Kṛṣṇa* also served as examples with reference to how people should live their lives. *Rāma* exemplified how one can live a life of *dharma* in the face of all adversity and *Kṛṣṇa* was an embodiment of joy and wisdom.

It should be clearly understood that the concept of *avatāra* is not required at all in order to worship *Kṛṣṇa* as the Lord. A picture of *Kṛṣṇa* as *Īśvara* is all that is needed for invoking the Lord. In fact, we can invoke the Lord in anything, even a rock. Invoking the Lord in a particular form and the concept of *avatāra* are entirely different. We discuss it here only because the verse is referring to *Kṛṣṇa* as *avatāra*. *Kṛṣṇa* himself says, 'By my own powers of *māyā*, I "as though" assume a body.' *Śaṅkara* says in his commentary to this verse, while explaining how *Īśvara* assumes a body, '*dehavān iva, jātaḥ iva* — as though with a body, as though born.' The word, '*iva* — as though' in *Śaṅkara*'s commentary indicates that there can be no empiricity here because *Kṛṣṇa*'s birth was not out of *puṇya* and *pāpa*.

If there were *puṇya* and *pāpa* for *Īśvara*, then he would not be *Īśvara* at all! Therefore, when *Īśvara* assumes a body, he is only as though born. He has a body, but his body has no empiricity because it was not born out of *puṇya* and *pāpa*. If there were *puṇya* and *pāpa* for *Īśvara*, we would have the problem of an *Īśvara* with limitations with reference to the *antaḥ-kāraṇa*, which is not acceptable. And, as we have seen, that is not possible, because *Īśvara* is all-knowledge. Therefore, *Kṛṣṇa* tells *Arjuna* here, 'Without *puṇya* and *pāpa*, I am born,' which is the very concept of *avatāra*.

In the next verse, *Kṛṣṇa* explains why, as *Īśvara*, he assumes a body:

यदा यदा हि धर्मस्य ग्लानिर्भवति भारत ।

अभ्युत्थानमधर्मस्य तदात्मानं सृजाम्यहम् ॥ ७ ॥

*yadā yadā hi dharmasya glānirbhavati bhārata*

*abhyutthānamadharmasya tadātmānaṃ sṛjāmyaham*

Verse 7

भारत *bhārata* — O Descendent of the *Bharatas!* (*Arjuna*); यदा यदा *yadā yadā* — whenever; हि *hi* — indeed; धर्मस्य *dharmasya* — of right living; ग्लानिः *glāniḥ* — decline; अधर्मस्य *adharmasya* — of wrong living; अभ्युत्थानम् *abhyutthānam* — rise

everywhere; भवति *bhavati* — is ; तदा *tadā* — then; अहम् *aham* — I; आत्मानम् *ātmānam* — Myself; सृजामि *sr̥jāmi* — bring into being (assume a physical body)

O *Arjuna*, whenever there is a decline in right living and an increase in wrong living everywhere, I bring Myself into being (assume a physical body).

We saw in the previous verse that *Kṛṣṇa*'s birth represented the concept of *avatāra*. Even though he is unborn and therefore, not subject to death, there being no birth or death for *ātmā*, and even though he is *Īśvara*, the Lord of the entire creation, still, by the powers of his *māyā* alone *Kṛṣṇa* was as though born. Without being subject to his own *dharma* and *adharmā*, *puṇya* and *pāpa*, he was as though born in this particular form.

The creation is *Īśvara*'s form and, in that creation, *jīvas* are born. From the standpoint of consciousness, *caitanya*, there is only one, *paramātmā*. Thus, consciousness being one, each *jīva* is *paramātmā*, *Brahman*. From the standpoint of someone who is looking at the world, however, the one becomes the many and there is difference between the *jīva* and *Īśvara*, the Lord.

The *jīva* is a person who looks upon himself or herself as the physical body, mind, and senses, *kārya-karaṇa-saṅghāta*, due to ignorance, *avidyā*. And because of this ignorance, the *jīva* continues to be born as a *jīva*. Out of ignorance, the person continues to perform actions which produce *puṇya* and *pāpa* that result in yet another birth. This, of course, is from a particular point of view. As a *jīva*, you look at the world and at yourself, seeing differences where there is none. This is the standpoint from which all these discussions and arguments take place, the standpoint of *vyavahāra*, empirical reality, not *pāramārthika*, absolute reality.

We say that *jīva* is one who is born because of his own *karma*, whereas an *avatāra* is one who is not born because of *karma*. Otherwise, the *avatāra* would be a *kartā*, a doer and, being a doer, would have *avidyā*. If this were the case, the *avatāra* would be a *jīva*, not *Īśvara*. This, then, is the difference between a *jīva*'s birth and *Īśvara*'s birth.

The whole creation is *Īśvara* and when *Īśvara* assumes a particular form for a given purpose at a given time, we call that form an *avatāra*. The concept of *avatāra* is not mentioned in the Veda, although *devas* or gods are referred to. *Rāma* and *Kṛṣṇa*, for instance, are presented as *avatāras* in the *Purāṇas*. But, for our purposes here, it does not matter whether *Vyāsa* put the wisdom into *Kṛṣṇa*'s mouth when he wrote the *Mahābhārata* or if a historical *Kṛṣṇa* actually did the talking.

If we look upon *Mahābhārata* as historical, as is generally the case, then *Kṛṣṇa* himself talked. The word *itihāsa* — meaning, *iti ha āsa*, this is how it was — gives the

epic a certain historicity. However, it is also recognised that many of the stories found in the *Mahābhārata* have been spun around actual historical events.

The *Mahābhārata* is also considered to be poetry, just as the *Rāmāyaṇa* is both historical and poetic. This means that the poet has the poetic license to create the *rasas*, the aesthetic values, and all kinds of situations at will. Thus, in *Rāmāyaṇa*, we find *Rāvaṇa* with ten heads and *Hanumān*, who talks even though he was in the form of a monkey, along with many other situations not generally accepted as having happened or even imagined. Even so, the *Rāmāyaṇa*, like the *Mahābhārata*, is a story considered to have been based upon certain historical facts.

### AN AVATĀRA IS LIKE AN ACTOR

*Kṛṣṇa*, then, is presented as an *avatāra*, which is something like an actor who appears on a stage. The actor knows very well that he is not the role. Since *Kṛṣṇa* knew, he was playing a role, his birth can be considered neither *pāramārthika*, absolutely real, nor *vyāvahārika*, empirically real. Thus, in terms of orders of reality, there is only one possibility remaining to account for an *avatāra*, *prātibhāsika*, albeit a different type of *prātibhāsika* because the *avatāra* knows he is playing a role that it is not real, just play.

Similarly, a *jñānī* performing an action does not look upon himself or herself as a *kartā*. This means there is no real *vyāvahāra* for a *jñānī*. From his or her standpoint, meaning from the standpoint of *ātmā*, everything is *prātibhāsika*.

*Īśvara* appears as though he is a person with a given physical body. What he does, of course, is in the realm of *vyāvahārika*, but from his standpoint, from the vision of *Īśvara*, an *avatāra* is purely *prātibhāsika*, purely *māyā*. This is like a magician who makes things appear by his or her own powers. For those who are watching what the magician is doing, everything is real, but for the magician it is all *māyā*, magic.

Because this is the kind of birth being discussed, the questions, ‘When?’ and ‘Why?’ naturally arise. The questions about when and why such as — ‘When is *Īśvara* born? How often is he born? Is he born daily? Is he born every century? Or is he born every other day in different places? And how is he born? For what reason is he born?’ — are addressed in this verse and the next.

### WHEN DOES ĪŚVARA ASSUME A BODY?

Because human beings enjoy free will, there may be abuse, which can lead to the destruction of law and order, *dharma*. When this destruction occurs, a person can no longer follow legitimate means for achieving legitimate ends. Nor can the person follow the means for gaining *mokṣa* because the society is not at all conducive to such a pursuit. Even for a person to pursue prosperity legitimately, there must be an order, an infrastructure, a structure of law and order that the majority of people follow.

We can see this in a simple game of football. If no one follows the rules of the game, there is no game. Suppose the players dispose off the referees and blow their own whistles whenever they are not winning. How can there be any game? There is no football played; there is only a free-for-all. Similarly, the game of life cannot be played and enjoyed if there are no rules.

In the home itself certain rules are required so that daily life can proceed in an orderly way. And, if these rules are not followed, there will be no home, only a mess. Society is the same. It is true that there will always be some foul play, as there is in any game. But if the majority of players refuse to follow the rules, the problem becomes enormous and cannot be ignored. This kind of a problem is called *dharmasya glāniḥ* — the decline in right living.

The infrastructure for human behaviour is based upon one's free will and when this free will is abused at every turn, something drastic needs to be done. To put things in order requires a drastic action and this drastic action is done by *Īśvara*, although *Īśvara* himself does not really decide to do anything. Like all actions, this drastic action is a result, a *karma-phala*, of another action, a total action — everyone's prayers, a total prayer. When people who want to follow *dharma* suffer at the hands of others, they find it impossible to follow *dharma*. As a result, *mokṣa* is not possible. When such a situation occurs, everyone prays because they want something to be done.

#### ADHARMA IS THE REAL CAUSE FOR THE DESTRUCTION OF DHARMA

Strictly speaking, *dharma* is not something that can be destroyed. It is not something that can be burned up, for example. *Dharma* is not a thing; it is a value that people follow. Only in these terms, then, can *dharma* be destroyed. If people do not follow *dharma*, then *dharma* is said to be destroyed — *dharmasya glāniḥ bhavati*.

Also, the cause for the destruction of *dharma* is not merely the failure of people to follow it. All that really happens if people do not follow their *dharma* is that they do not get certain results.

The real problem here is that when there is any decline in *dharma*, there is always a corresponding increase in *adharma*. If a person is not following *dharma* and cannot remain quiet, what will that person do? Such a person has to do something and that something will be *adharma* since the person does not follow *dharma*. This, then, is what really brings about the destruction of *dharma*.

If the law and order are not followed and if values are not respected, an increase in *adharma*, *adharmasya abhyutthānam*<sup>1</sup>, will be the natural result. There will be

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<sup>1</sup> *abhi* – *abhitaḥ* – everywhere; *utthānam* – rise

rampant, flagrant *adharmā* everywhere. This means that people will be following *adharmā*, not *dharma*. What, then, can be done when such a situation occurs?

As a result of the prayers of all those who want to follow *dharma* but are not able to because they are suffering at the hands of those who follow *adharmā*, *Īśvara* assumes a particular form and that assumed form is called *avatāra*. This concept is not important in the understanding of *Vedānta*. However, with reference to this particular verse, one does need to know that there is such a thing as *avatāra*, just as one needs to know that *karma* can be in the form of rituals, prayers, and so on. What they are, how they are connected, and so on, are to be understood. *Vedānta* itself is nothing more than ‘*tat tvam asi.*’ The reality of the self being the whole is *Vedānta* and everything else is brought in to support one’s understanding of this fact.

*Kṛṣṇa* himself presents the concept of *avatāra* here by saying, ‘Then, I bring Myself into being in a particular form — *tadā ātmānam ahaṃ sṛjāmi.*’ This is where immaculate conception comes in. Even though it was known that *Kṛṣṇa* was born of *Devakī*, his statement indicates that he wilfully entered into this particular body. We find in the literature that *Kṛṣṇa* who was essentially none other than *Viṣṇu* was also born out of a pillar on another occasion — *Narasimha-avatāra*. Therefore, his births are definitely not the result of *prakṛti*. They are not the product of chromosomes inherited from the parents. *Kṛṣṇa* clearly states here that he brought this particular physical body into being by himself.

Having said that he assumes a body when there is decline in *dharma* and a rise in *adharmā*, *Kṛṣṇa* then goes on to explain why he does this:

परित्राणाय साधूनां विनाशाय च दुष्कृताम् ।

धर्मसंस्थापनार्थाय सम्भवामि युगे युगे ॥ ८ ॥

*paritrāṇāya sādḥūnāṃ vināśāya ca duṣkṛtām*

*dharmasamsthāpanārthāya sambhavāmi yuge yuge*

Verse 8

साधूनाम् *sādḥūnām* — of the people committed to *dharma*; परित्राणाय *paritrāṇāya* — for the protection; च *ca* —and; दुष्कृताम् *duṣkṛtām* — of those who follow *adharmā*; विनाशाय *vināśāya* — for the destruction (conversion); धर्मसंस्थापनार्थाय *dharmasamsthāpanārthāya* — for the establishment of *dharma*; युगे युगे *yuge yuge* — in every *yuga*; सम्भवामि *sambhavāmi* — I come into being

For the protection of those who are committed to *dharma* and the destruction (conversion) of those who follow *adharmā*, and for the establishment of *dharma*, I come into being in every *yuga*.

Why does an *avatāra* come? It is not to enjoy *puṇya-pāpa* — because these do not apply to an *avatāra*. Nor does an *avatāra* come to suffer the life of a *samsārī*. An



*avatāra* comes for a three-fold purpose. First, he protects the people who are committed to a life of *dharma* — *paritrāṇāya sādḥūnām*. If they are protected, then *dharma* is protected.

This protection is carried out in many ways, one of which is chastising those who do things that are not in keeping with *dharma* — *vināśāya duṣkṛtām*. The word, *vināśāya* means, for the sake of destruction of those who follow *adharma*. Here the word destruction is more in the sense of conversion of those who follow *adharma* to the path of *dharma*. This is the second reason for the *avatāra* to come. In either case, his real task is to establish, or perhaps more appropriately to re-establish *dharma* — *dharma-saṁsthāpanārthāya*. This is the third but real reason for the advent of an *avatāra*.

### HOW CAN DHARMA BE RE-ESTABLISHED?

And how can the order, *dharma*, be re-established? By making the people live in accordance with it. This is all that can be done. There is no other way of establishing *dharma*. Because this is not properly understood, people establish institutions of *dharma* — huge organisations, large buildings, and so on. But even if you create a building for *dharma* that is bigger than the largest building on earth, those who do not follow *dharma* will destroy the very building itself, and make sure that all efforts to restore it are also destroyed!

All religious organisations begin with the intention of establishing *dharma*, but eventually many of them become *adhārmika*. Institutions do not establish *dharma*; people do. How? Only by living a life of *dharma* can *dharma* be established and protected. How can *dharma* be protected any other way? To understand this better, let us look at scholarship and how it is protected.

Can scholarship be protected by protecting libraries? Libraries are protected only when there are scholars to use them. They are meant for scholars. Only when the scholars are encouraged is scholarship protected. Scholars can be encouraged by creating an atmosphere conducive for scholarship. Then there is an infrastructure, a value for scholarship.

For example, if teachers are the lowest paid people in society, as they frequently are, they will naturally be attracted to other vocations. Why should a professor who earns thirty thousand dollars a year stay at a university when he or she can make twice as much elsewhere and even more on the side? California's Silicon Valley has attracted many university professors this way.

If incomes in the universities were comparable to those elsewhere, those who have a value for study and teaching would stay in the universities. But this does not happen when the gap in earnings is too large. It is true that the people who have a real love for

study, and the leisure to do so, will stay, but it must also be recognised that many of those who remain may be doing so for little more than the extended holidays that the academic year permits!

When the atmosphere encourages scholars, everyone will become a scholar, or at least make the attempt, and scholarship will be protected. Similarly, *dharma* is protected when there is an infrastructure conducive to following it, meaning that the *dharmīs*, those who follow the *dharma*, are protected. To protect *dharma* nothing else can be done.

The protection of *dharma* comes through various forms — through music and the other performing arts, through the fine arts and various other human expressions. Therefore, you encourage only those institutions, meaning customs, culture, and so on, that are rooted in *dharma*. Cultural institutions, for example, have a certain bearing on *dharma* and therefore, are to be supported. All of these become the means for protecting *dharma*.

It is only when the people who follow *dharma* are not protected that you find everything goes punk, not just the music! Because all aspects of living are so intricately connected, *dharma* just goes if the people who follow it are not protected.

## PEOPLE ARE CULTURE AND RELIGION

Therefore, protection of *dharma* implies the protection of culture, religion, and so on. But there is no culture or religion apart from people. The people alone are religion. No institution is independent of people, especially those institutions connected to *dharma*. And if, within a given structure, there are those who do what is not to be done and do not do what is to be done, such people have to be taught, converted.

There was a time in Rishikesh, when only *sādhus* lived there. They spent all their time studying the *śāstra*. When other people came because they had become disenchanted with the world, they too would begin studying. A man may have decided to become a *sādhu* because he had lost his wife, his business, or whatever. The choice of becoming a *sādhu* has always been available in Indian society. And although this man had become a *sādhu*, he may not have been interested in studying. But, finding that everyone else was studying, he too would begin to study.

Today, the reverse happens all too often. A *sādhu* may go to Rishikesh and those he meets may not be studying. If he starts doing whatever everyone else is doing, he can end up running an ashram or studying the *viñā*! There is nothing wrong with learning music. Music can be used as a kind of *sādhana* sometimes; it can create devotion. But one should not become a *sannyāsī* to do this. To become a *sannyāsī* and then learn music is not right, but this is what is happening.

Other *sannyāsīs* learn a few *yoga-āsanas* and then go to America and open an ashram! Being able to stand on your head for five minutes is not a great accomplishment. There is a *sādhu* in Rishikesh who stands on his head for two hours on a rock! What happens to him by performing this *āsana* is not clear — except for the fact that he gets very hungry and eats an enormous number of rotis. This is not to say that *āsanas* are useless; they definitely have a purpose. But the point being made here is that we have heads and we do not use them for the purpose they were intended!

### IS IT TIME FOR ĪŚVARA TO COME AGAIN?

Someone may well ask, ‘Is it time for the Lord to come again in the form of an incarnation?’ No, the time is not right because this teaching still attracts people. If, however, a teacher of *Gītā* was being constantly stoned and people were being prevented from coming to the classes, then *Kṛṣṇa*, as *Īśvara*, would come. But as long as people are still able to listen to classes on the *Gītā*, he need not come. If, however, in a place of one hundred people, eighty people are given to a life of *adharma*, the other twenty cannot follow *dharma*. They can only pray. Then only does *Īśvara* come.

*Dharma* only needs to be protected when the *adharma* is rampant, when there is no law and order whatsoever, when there are no ethics, when no one cares about anyone else, when everyone is totally selfish. Under such circumstances, everyone goes for the convenient and does not bother about following *dharma* properly.

Only when there is rank selfishness, *adharma*, does the protection of *dharma* become a necessity. When more *dharmīs*, people who follow *dharma*, are created, the *duṣkṛtas*, the people who do wrong deeds, change; and *adharma* is destroyed. Whenever an *avatāra* comes, people are converted. They do change. They give up their life of *adharma*. This is what is meant by the destruction of *adharma* (*vināśāya ca duṣkṛtām*). The *adharmīs* themselves do not have to be destroyed; only the *adharma* has to be given up and *dharma* re-established.

Therefore, *Kṛṣṇa* says, ‘In every age, I am born — *sambhavāmi yuge yuge*.’ This is not to suggest that there is a rule whereby one incarnation occurs in every *yuga*. The only rule here is that, whenever *dharma* declines and *adharma* increases, whenever *adharma* is rampant everywhere, when there is no way that *dharma* can survive, then *Īśvara* assumes a particular form with the purpose of upholding *dharma*. This form is called an *avatāra*.

Having answered *Arjuna*’s question, *Kṛṣṇa* continues to talk about himself, his birth, and the truth:

जन्म कर्म च मे दिव्यमेवं यो वेत्ति तत्त्वतः ।

त्यक्त्वा देहं पुनर्जन्म नैति मामेति सोऽर्जुन ॥ ९ ॥

*janma karma ca me divyamevaṃ yo vetti tattvataḥ  
tyaktvā dehaṃ punarjanma naiti mām eti so'rjuna*

Verse 9

अर्जुन *arjuna* — O *Arjuna* !; मे *me* — My; दिव्यम् *divyam* — divine; जन्म *janma* — birth; च *ca* — and; कर्म *karma* — action; यः *yaḥ* — the one who; एवम् — thus; तत्त्वतः *tattvataḥ* — in reality; वेत्ति *vetti* — knows; सः *saḥ* — that person; देहम् *deham* — body; त्यक्त्वा *tyaktvā* — giving up; पुनः *punaḥ* — again; जन्म *janma* — birth; न एति *na eti* — does not gain; माम् एति *mām eti* — attains Me

The one who knows in reality My divine birth and action in this way, O *Arjuna*, giving up the body, that person is not born again. He attains Me.

*Divya* means heavenly in the sense of not worldly. *Kṛṣṇa*'s birth is referred to as *divyaṃ janma* in order to convey the idea that it is unlike any other birth, but extraordinary. By adding the word 'aiśvaram' here, *Śaṅkara* makes it clear in his commentary that *Kṛṣṇa*'s birth is the kind of birth that belongs to *Īśvara* and is not the same as the birth of a *jīva*.

Also, we are told here that *Kṛṣṇa*'s actions are not like any other *karma*. All other *karmas* are born out of personal want and produce *puṇya* and *pāpa*. Because this is not the case here, *Kṛṣṇa*'s actions are of a different type and are called *divyaṃ karma*, *aiśvaraṃ karma*.

The subject of the verse is the one who knows, *yaḥ vetti*, the truth about *Kṛṣṇa*'s peculiar birth and *karma*. This person knows them as they are in reality — *tattvataḥ vetti*. One who knows this truth very clearly does not look upon *Kṛṣṇa* as just another person, one who is born, who is different from the world, or who comes and goes. This person sees *Kṛṣṇa*'s birth and actions as they are, in reality.

In the second chapter, *Kṛṣṇa* had said that what is real, *sat*, is not going to change at any time and that which is not real, *asat*, *mithyā*, is not going to be there all the time. Thus, whether *Kṛṣṇa*'s body is *vyāvahārika*, empirically real, or *prātibhāsika*, a projection, either way, it is still *mithyā*, not absolutely real. The one who knows the body to be *mithyā* and *ātmā* to be *satya* is the one who knows clearly — *tattvataḥ vetti*. Such a person knows that there is no real birth happening and no real *karma* being done.

The one who knows in reality that *Kṛṣṇa*, *Īśvara*, is not other than oneself, and that 'I am that *Paramēśvara*,' is a *jñānī*. Such a person, knowing this, having given up the physical body, i. e., when the person dies, does not gain another birth. To know *Īśvara* is to know the *satya*, the reality, that which always is. *Sat* is *ātmā* and, therefore, to know *Paramēśvara* is to know oneself. In fact, to know oneself is the only way to know *Paramēśvara*, *Brahman*.

This, then, is how a person is liberated. While living, the person gains self-knowledge, which is *mokṣa* after which there is no future birth for the person. The *jīvatva* is gone and the person is called *jīvanmukta*, meaning, liberated while living. Knowing that one is not a *kartā*, the *jīvanmukta*, who is a *jñānī* has no *karma*, and therefore, no *puṇya* or *pāpa*, to initiate another birth. Only when one takes oneself to be a doer can there be action that leads to future births.

### WHAT HAPPENS TO THE JÑĀNĪ AFTER DEATH?

If the *jīvanmukta* does not take another birth, where does he or she go then? Does a *jñānī* become permanently lodged somewhere? This question is based, of course, on the assumption that if the *jīvanmukta* is not subject to rebirth, he or she must be somewhere else. Therefore, is there eternal imprisonment or internment of some kind after death? If not, what is it that happens to the *jñānī*?

In response to this question, *Kṛṣṇa* says, ‘That person becomes Myself — *saḥ mām eti*.’ The *jīva* is gone; all that remains is *Īśvara*. *Brahman* alone is there, *Brahman* being *Īśvara*, which is everything. Therefore, there is no *jīva* and when there is no *jīva*, there is only *Īśvara*. Only when the *jīva* cannot gain identity with *Īśvara*, in terms of knowing they are one and the same, are there two seemingly different entities, *Īśvara* and *jīva*.

Here, the use of the word ‘*eti* – gains’ must be clearly understood. If it is used in its usual sense, gaining identity with *Īśvara* would mean that the *jīva* is like an amoeba ingested by *Īśvara*. But if the *jīva* is really a false entity and one understands the nature of oneself, then there is no *jīva* at all, no individual separate from *Īśvara*, and all that is there is *Īśvara*.

The problem is one of separation; and there is no separation in fact! All that is there is *Īśvara*. It is not that *Īśvara* is someone who is located somewhere and the *jīvanmukta* joins him there. Gaining *Brahman* is strictly in terms of knowledge.

*Kṛṣṇa* makes use of *Arjuna*’s question, ‘How could you have given this knowledge to *Vivasvān* in the beginning?’ to reveal the nature of *ātmā*. The cause for grief and how one can cross over it is the subject matter of the *Gītā*. Although *Kṛṣṇa* discusses many topics, He unfolds the subject matter in one continuous flow. Here, having answered *Arjuna*’s most recent question, *Kṛṣṇa* once again picks up the thread, ‘You grieve for those who should not be grieved for — *aśocyān anvaśocastvam*<sup>1</sup> and continues:

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<sup>1</sup> *Gītā* – 2-11

वीतरागभयक्रोधा मन्मया मामुपाश्रिताः ।

बहवो ज्ञानतपसा पूता मद्भावमागताः ॥ १० ॥

*vītarāgabhayakrodhā manmayā māmupāśritāḥ*  
*bahavo jñānatapasā pūtā madbhāvamāgatāḥ*

Verse 10

वीत-राग-भय-क्रोधाः *vīta-rāga-bhaya-krodhāḥ* — free from craving, fear, and anger; मन्मयाः *manmayāḥ* — totally resolved in Me; माम् उपाश्रिताः *mām upāśritāḥ* — taking refuge in Me; ज्ञान-तपसा *jñāna-tapasā* — by the discipline of knowledge; पूताः *pūtāḥ* — purified; बहवः *bahavaḥ* — many; मद्भावम् *madbhāvam* — My nature; आगताः *āgatāḥ* — have come back

Free from craving, fear, and anger, totally resolved in Me, taking refuge in Me, purified by the discipline of knowledge, many have come back to My nature.

We have seen that the one who knows *Kṛṣṇa* in reality knows that there is no real birth, *janma*, or action, *karma*, for the person. And if there is no real *janma* or *karma*, then who is that person? Here, the person cannot be *Mr. Kṛṣṇa* who was born at a given time and place. So, too, for everyone; he or she can only be *paramātmā*. Thus, *Kṛṣṇa* says, ‘The one who knows this reaches Me.’

To know *Kṛṣṇa* in this way is to know oneself. *Īśvara* cannot be understood by one who is a *jīva*, an individual, who does not know the identity between oneself and *Īśvara*. The limited individual is not going to know that which is all-knowing, omniscient. Even to spell the word ‘omniscient’ is a problem! Therefore, the most that can be said is that *Īśvara*’s knowledge is not limited.

All-knowingness, *sarvajñatva*, can never be understood by an *alpajñā*, one with limited knowledge. But *sarvajñatva* is only in relation to *alpajñatva*. Both limited knowledge and all-knowledge are adjuncts, *upādhis* with reference to each other, the division between them being due to *upādhi* alone. *Kṛṣṇa*’s statement, ‘Only the one who knows the *paramātmā* reaches Me,’ is to be understood in terms of the *paramātmā* not being separate from oneself. *Kṛṣṇa* had said this before and is merely confirming it here, before picking up the topic of sorrow.

This knowledge had been around since the beginning, *Kṛṣṇa* tells *Arjuna*, and people had always been reaching him in this manner — by knowing. There was nothing new about it. Here, again, *Kṛṣṇa* says that any number of people have reached him — *bahavaḥ madbhāvam āgatāḥ*. And why is it that everyone does not reach him? There is no difficulty involved in reaching him, but first one has to recognise that he must be reached. And, having recognised this, how is one going to reach him if one is driven by one’s craving, fears, and anger?

In fact, there is nothing to reach because one is already *paramātmā*. The question, therefore, is how far one's discerning power extends and what is it that one is choosing. In this verse, the people for whom the craving, fears, and anger have gone away, *vīta-rāga-bhaya-krodhas*, are described as those who have reached him in terms of knowledge.

### THE NATURE OF FEAR

We have seen that *rāga* is the craving for objects and that, once *rāga* comes, *dveṣa* in the form of dislike and avoidance is also there. These two always go together and, being powerful, are binding in nature. Fear, *bhaya*, then becomes inevitable because there is always some apprehension with reference to one's *rāgas* and *dveṣas*. Every *rāga* is fraught with fear of the undesirable unknown. This is all that a binding desire or like is about.

When there is a binding *rāga-dveṣa*, such as 'this must happen for me (*rāga*),' 'this must not happen for me (*dveṣa*),' how can there be absence of fear? There is always the fear of things not happening according to one's expectations because *rāga* implies expectation. And whenever there is expectation, there is a possibility of it not being fulfilled and, when this happens, there is a sense of failure. Fear of failure will always be there because one is not omniscient. That things do not always go our way is very clear to us. What we need to understand, therefore, is that fear of the undesirable unknown will be there as long as we are driven by our *rāgas* and *dveṣas*.

### THE NATURE OF ANGER

Just as *rāga-dveṣas* are fraught with fear, they are also fraught with anger, *krodha*. If a *rāga* is not fulfilled, one's desire, *kāma*, turns into anger against whatever is preventing the desire from being fulfilled. If the obstacle is another person, someone who is standing between you and what you want to accomplish, then your *kāma* turns into *krodha*. If a binding *kāma* is not there, there is no *krodha*. But if you think a certain thing must happen and your life will be incomplete if it does not, you cannot avoid anger because your *rāga* is binding.

In the wake of the obstruction that is preventing you from fulfilling your *rāga*, there cannot but be anger when your *rāga* is binding. The *kāma* itself turns into anger. Thus, *krodha* is also there when one's life is controlled by *rāga-dveṣas*. Whereas, when one lives a life of *karma-yoga*, the *rāga-dveṣas* are neutralized. By paying attention to his or her *rāga-dveṣas*, with the right attitude, a person becomes *vīta-rāga-bhaya-krodha*, meaning one who is relatively free from desire, fear, and anger. These are the people *Kṛṣṇa* is discussing here when he says, 'They become one with Me — *manmayāḥ bhavanti*.' These are the people who have the vision of *Īśvara* as essentially non-separate from the *jīva*.

## THE VISION OF NON-DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ĪŚVARA AND JĪVA

There is no real difference between the *jīva* and *Īśvara*, any seeming difference being brought about by *upādhi* alone and therefore, *mithyā*. Since this difference is *mithyā*, non-difference is *satya*, which is all that counts. This vision of non-difference, *abheda-buddhi*, the vision of the identity of *jīveśvara* reflected in the statement, ‘You are That — *tat tvam asi*,’ is made clear by further analysis, *manana*, and contemplation, *nididhyāsana*. Those people in whom this vision is clear are referred to in this verse as *māmupāśritāḥ*, those who have totally resolved into *Parameśvara* alone. For them, there is no longer the mistaken notion that the *jīva* is separate from *Parameśvara*.

The self is *paramātmā*. The one who has no doubt whatsoever with reference to this particular vision is called *pūta*, meaning *śuddha*, absolutely pure. In such people there is not even a dash of impurity because the self, being *paramātmā* is always pure. The self is not rendered pure; it is pure. If the self were something that had to be rendered pure, some impurity would always be there.

And how do these people become pure? — by the purifying fire of knowledge, *jñāna-tapasā*. Knowledge is the means, the *sādhana*. *Tapasā* here means ‘by the fire of knowledge.’ By the discipline of knowledge, these people become pure. And how does one become pure by knowledge? The knowledge is that the self has never performed any action and, therefore, it is not guilty of any action. Nor is it subject to any hurt because it is not and never was an object of anyone else's action. Since the self, *ātmā* is neither the doer of action nor the object of action, it is always *nitya-śuddha*, eternally pure.

The people being discussed in this verse were already *vīta-rāga-bhaya-krodhas*; they already have the necessary preparedness of mind, the *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi* through *karma-yoga*. It should be noted however that this *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi* can never be absolute; there is always some *aśuddhi* in the form of *rāga-dveṣas*. This is to say, whatever *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi* that one gains through *karma-yoga* is always relative. Absolute *śuddhi* is never achieved but can only be understood, because *ātmā* is absolutely *śuddha* always. Whereas relative *śuddhi* — *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi* is something that is accomplished in the mind.

## RELATIVE AND ABSOLUTE ŚUDDHI

Relative *śuddhi* is a process of growth, a process of maturity, wherein a life of alertness, discipline, commitment, and prayer is involved. Such a life is a life of purification and, being a process, it takes a certain length of time. Absolute *śuddhi* cannot be a process of purification because the impure can never become pure by any



amount of purifying, no matter what the process is. The self, which is absolutely *śuddha*, is already pure.

Purity means freedom from *rāga-dveṣas*, *puṇya-pāpas* — freedom from everything, in fact. This purity is the nature of *ātmā*, *ātmā* being *nirguṇa*, free of all attributes, *akartā*, free from doership, and so on. And those who know this are also pure, *pūtas*, meaning that they have understood the fact that as *ātmā*, they are eternally pure. They are — *madbhāvam āgatāḥ* — as *Kṛṣṇa* puts it, meaning, ‘they have come back to be Me.’

This ‘coming back’ of *bahavaḥ*, so many, *jīvas*, is to be understood in terms of the identity between *jīva* and *Īśvara*. It is not that all these *jīvas* have come to *Īśvara* and are sitting upon him! Nor has he collected them all to him so that they have become an integral part of his heart or his being. This particular knowledge reveals the fact that the *jīva* is *Īśvara*. Those who know this fact are called *jñāna-niṣṭhas* because not only have they gained the knowledge, but they are well established in it. Reaching *Bhagavān*, is not dependent upon any *tapas* other than knowledge. Thus, to say, ‘purified by discipline — *tapasā pūtāḥ*,’ is not enough. The word, *jñāna*, has to be added because there are other forms of *tapas*.

#### THE PURSUIT OF KNOWLEDGE IS THE PRIMARY TAPAS

The word *tapas* refers to any spiritual or religious discipline. For example, a person who chants the *Gāyatrī-mantra* for six hours is said to be doing religious *tapas*. A person who observes silence for a length of time is also doing *tapas* providing, of course, he or she is doing it for religious purposes as a mental prayer, for example. However, to keep quiet purely out of consideration for others is entirely different; it is not *tapas*.

When a person is performing a spiritual discipline like contemplation or studying the *śāstra*, it is *tapas*. *Svādhyāya*, study of the *śāstra*, is considered to be a great *tapas*. Therefore, those who are committed to listening to the *śāstra*, *śravaṇa*, and to self-inquiry, *vicāra*, are doing *tapas*.

And, although there are many forms of *tapas*, to become established in this knowledge requires only *jñāna-tapas*. The pursuit of knowledge is the *tapas*. The word, *jñāna*, is prefixed to *tapas* to show that *jñāna-niṣṭhā* does not depend upon any other *tapas*. This is because *mokṣa* is not any thing other than being established in this knowledge. There is no other *mokṣa*. For *mokṣa* you require knowledge and for knowledge you do not require anything else except *vicāra*, inquiry. Thus, the pursuit of knowledge itself is the means.

Then what about all the other disciplines? They are all meant for preparing the mind so that this knowledge can take place. This is what is meant by purification of the

mind or *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*. Therefore, the other disciplines are all secondary means, whereas knowledge is the primary means.

To say that these other disciplines are secondary is not to say that they have no place. The distinction to be understood is that these other disciplines are indirect means for *mokṣa* in that they prepare or purify the *antaḥ-karaṇa*, while the pursuit of knowledge is the direct means for the knowledge that is *mokṣa*.

### DOES EVERYONE COME BACK TO ĪŚVARA?

Because *Kṛṣṇa* uses the word ‘*bahavaḥ* — many’ here, *Arjuna* could assume that only some people come back to *Īśvara* and others do not. The word, *bahavaḥ*, being plural, can refer to any number of *jīvas*, starting with three.<sup>1</sup> The point here is that, even if it is just three, a million or more, a finite number is implied. *Arjuna* may therefore, have asked *Kṛṣṇa* why does he not allow everyone to come to him. To such a question, *Kṛṣṇa* could have only answered, ‘I can only take them to Me if I am separate from them. But I am them! If we were separate, perhaps there might be something I could do about it. But since they are non-separate from Me, what can I do? It is not a case of my having to bring them to Me because I am already identical with them. There is nothing here that I have to do. As *Īśvara*, they can invoke Me and, in whatever form they invoke Me, I bless them. Whatever they desire, they get. Therefore, I am not to blame in this particular situation. I do not have any *rāga-dveṣas* to fulfil in this matter. Nor do I take names out of a hat every day to see that some people suffer and some remain happy and so on. I do not follow any such rule.’

In this way, *Kṛṣṇa* paves the way for the next section in which he explains how *Īśvara* is free from any kind of blame with reference to what happens in one's life. Otherwise, we would be left asking why *Īśvara* blesses one person and not another, and why he is so partial.

ये यथा मां प्रपद्यन्ते तांस्तथैव भजाम्यहम्।

मम वर्त्मानुवर्तन्ते मनुष्याः पार्थ सर्वशः ॥ ११ ॥

*ye yathā māṃ prapadyante tāṃstathaiva bhajāmyaham*

*mama vartmānuvartante manuṣyāḥ pārtha sarvaśaḥ*

Verse 11

ये *ye* — those who; यथा *yathā* — in whatever way; माम् *mām* — Me; प्रपद्यन्ते *prapadyante* — worship; तथा एव *tathā eva* — indeed in the same way; अहम् *aham* — I; तान् *tān* — them; भजामि *bhajāmi* — bless; पार्थ *pārtha* — O *Arjuna!*; मनुष्याः

<sup>1</sup> In Sanskrit, the there are three numbers, i.e., singular, dual and plural. And therefore, the plural indicates three and anything more than three.

*manuṣyāḥ* — people; सर्वशः *sarvaśaḥ* — in all ways; मम *mama* — My; वर्त्मा *vartmā* — path; अनुवर्तन्ते *anuvartante* — follow

Those who worship Me, in whatever way, I bless them in the same way.  
O *Arjuna*, people follow My path in all ways.

Again, *Kṛṣṇa* is talking as *Īśvara* here. The verse is a very important one because it answers the question about how the Lord is to be worshipped. With what degree of devotion, with what inner commitment, with what purpose, and in what form are the people to worship him?

According to *Kṛṣṇa*, it is all very simple: ‘I bless them in whatever form they invoke Me, according to their *karma*, according to their prayer. For example, those who want wealth and steal to get it are blessed with a prison sentence. It is as simple as that; so don’t blame Me.’

If a devotee worships the Lord in the form of *Kṛṣṇa*, that is the form in which the devotee will see the Lord. In other words, seeing the Lord as *Kṛṣṇa* is purely subjective, even though this vision is very real to the devotee. Devotees will sometimes say, ‘I saw *Kṛṣṇa* yesterday.’ For a devotee who has been worshipping the Lord in the form of *Kṛṣṇa* for a long time, it is possible to visualise the Lord in that form. But this kind of a Lord comes and goes, which means that the vision is bound by time, whereas the person who saw *Kṛṣṇa* remains. Does this not mean that the devotee is greater than the Lord who comes and goes? If so, what kind of a Lord is this!

And what if the Lord appears in some other form? What if he appears as a western Lord — coated, booted, and suited? The devotee will become confused. Thus, *Kṛṣṇa* says, ‘In whatever form I am worshipped, in that form alone I appear.’

### AS YOU SOW, SO SHALL YOU REAP

This statement can apply to the purpose as well as to the form: ‘For whatever purpose I am worshipped, that purpose I serve.’ People usually want only limited results. When they are in distress, for instance, they want relief from that distress. Although this particular verse is with reference to Vedic rituals and prayers, it can also be considered beyond its religious scope: ‘I am available to you as the various resources in the world, the various laws, powers, and possibilities. In whichever form you invoke Me, in that form I am going to appear.’

A person who goes to the gym daily and lifts weights, because he or she wants to develop biceps, is invoking the Lord in the form of biceps alone and will be blessed with biceps. In other words, the Lord will appear in the form of biceps alone! And if you develop only your left arm, the Lord will bulge out there only! This, then, is the Lord.

The *śruti* says that in whatever form people invoke, in that form the result will come. Therefore, if biceps are the goal you have dedicated yourself and your life to, then biceps will be what you invoke and biceps will be what you get. The goal, the end, is always *Bhagavān*, the Lord, even though the person who has no other goal than biceps may not recognise *Bhagavān* in this form of biceps.

Thus, you will find that in whatever form you invoke, in that form alone the result will come. As you sow, so shall you reap. In whatever form you invoke the Lord, in the same form the Lord, the result, will come.

### **THERE IS NO PAGAN'S PRAYER; THERE IS ONLY PRAYER**

Although different religions have their own forms of prayer, no one form is more efficacious than another. Regardless of the language used to invoke the Lord, the Lord is invoked. When tribal people perform a rain dance, for instance, the rain comes. Similarly, when a person performs a certain, very elaborate, sophisticated Vedic ritual, the rains do come.

When these rituals, be they Vedic or tribal, are performed with *śraddhā*, with faith and sincerity, there will be rain. Without *śraddhā*, the rains will not come. The mode can be different, but the result, the *phala*, is the same. Thus, any form of prayer is as efficacious as any other prayer. This must be understood well, not as tolerance for or accommodation of forms of worship other than one's own; but in terms of simple understanding alone. There is no pagan's prayer; there is only prayer.

When tribal people repeat a prayer in a dialect that does not have a structure, a script, or grammar, it may not be understood by us, but it is understood by *Bhagavān*. Language is there; the people think they have said something and they have. Thus, there is communication between themselves and the Lord, which is all that matters. Even in religions where the believers repeat words in a language unknown to them, it is understood that the Lord understands the language being used. Nothing more is required. Just as when you send telegram, the other person should be able to read it, when you talk to the Lord, he should be able to understand you. A prayer is a feeling expressed in a certain form, in a certain language, the meaning of which you may not even know. But the feeling, the intention, is definitely there, and this is what is conveyed to the Lord in prayer. As for the words of the prayer themselves, the Lord knows all languages! All you have to do is express what you have to express. This is not religious accommodation; it is the simple understanding of what prayer is, what *Īśvara* is. No expansiveness of heart is required here. Nor do you need to be a great *sādhu* or saint.

Understanding the nature of prayer is not to be confused with how each religion defines God, which is where all kinds of problems arise. When it comes to real issues, concepts and so on, there are real problems, but these have nothing to do with prayer. The real issues are: 'What is freedom?' 'Why exactly am I praying?' 'Is it for a limited

result or for some other reason?’ If *mokṣa* is what you want, then there is something to be understood. That you are the whole is a fact, not a belief, and is entirely different from what is being said by the various religions of the world. Because it is a fact, it is to be understood quietly, which has nothing to do with your commitment to religion as such or to one religion in particular.

#### **EVEN THOSE NOT CONNECTED TO RELIGION ARE BLESSED**

What *Bhagavān* says here is not only with reference to prayer, but applies beyond prayer also, i.e., even a person who has no connection to religion is blessed. This includes people who claim not to be religious and those who are critical of religion, also. For some people, religion is nothing more than money and power and, for a communist, religion is statism<sup>1</sup>. Whatever religion is for them, in that form alone they are blessed, meaning, they are not condemned.

In this verse, *Kṛṣṇa* tells *Arjuna*, ‘All human beings follow Me alone — *mama vartmā anuvartante manuṣyāḥpārtha sarvaśaḥ.*’ in other words, ‘Whether they know I am the one that is sought after or not, they are on my track alone. At the end of the track, I am always there. They may think a particular destination is their destination, but that is only a lap in their journey. If money or power is their destination, they are still on the road to Me because power and money are also Me. Remember, *Lakṣmī*, the Goddess of Wealth, is with Me. Power also is with Me alone.’

There are different types of wealth, *Lakṣmī*. Those who dedicate their entire lives to health, for example, may enjoy *Lakṣmī* in the form of health. And those who dedicate their lives to acquiring power may gain the power they seek, if everything goes well. If their prayers are appropriate and their previous *karma, prārabdha -karma*, is not totally against it, they will have power. Thus, *Kṛṣṇa* says, ‘Whether people ask for small ends or big ends, they are all on my track, whether they know it or not.’

#### **EVERYONE WANTS TO BE FREE FROM FEELING SMALL**

All people are really seeking identity with the *paramātmā*, whether they know it or not. They want to be free from being small, which is why they are seekers. Everyone is a seeker of this freedom. Seeking fullness is no different from seeking freedom from being small. They are one and the same. Furthermore, to say you are seeking fullness is not really true because you do not really know what fullness is, whereas you definitely know what smallness is. And you want to be free of this smallness.

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<sup>1</sup> Statism – The practice or doctrine of giving a centralised government control over economic planning and policy.

Freedom from being small is what is meant by fullness, *pūrṇatva*. Everyone wants to be full, to be happy, even those who drink. If drinking did not give a person some happiness, some *sukha*, no one would do it.

Fullness and happiness is the Lord's very nature; he is *pūrṇa-svarūpa* and *ānanda-svarūpa*. Because all people seek this fullness, happiness, they are on the Lord's track alone, although they may not know it. A person who does not know exactly what he or she is seeking keeps on seeking. Thus *Kṛṣṇa* might have said: 'They do not know they are seeking Me. Therefore, they spend their time seeking some small thing that is of Me.'

This is like wanting to marry someone and marrying his or her little finger nail or piece of hair! What kind of marriage is that? People do not know they are doing the same thing when they seek power, name and fame, quietude, or whatever. They do not know that these ends are nothing more than the nails and hairs of *Bhagavān*, *Kṛṣṇa* the infinite. Thinking themselves to be separate from him, they seek one aspect alone and exclude everything else.

Everything is *Bhagavān* and what is excluded, by pursuing one aspect alone, is also *Bhagavān*. When you seek power to the exclusion of all else, you are not seeking *Bhagavān*. 'They are on My track alone. But they do not seek Me because they do not know they are on My track. If they knew, then the small things would not hold them up along the way.'

### THE 'SPIRITUAL PATH' NEED NOT BE ARDUOUS

While travelling to a particular destination, people may enjoy a few things along the way, but they do not lose sight of their destination. Self-knowledge need be no different. The beauty of its pursuit is that, not only is the ultimate destination beautiful, but the to it is also beautiful. It is like driving through the Rockies or going on a pilgrimage in the Himalayas. There are four centres of pilgrimage in the Himalayas — Badrinath, Kedaranath, Gangotri, and Yamunotri — where a lot of devotees go, this being one of the things to be done in a Hindu's life. Badrinath, to take but one, is situated in a valley of great beauty, and the way to Badrinath is also beautiful.

It is often said that the spiritual path is extremely arduous. But, if you really understand what 'spiritual' is, you will find there is nothing arduous about it. What is arduous about constantly hearing that you are fullness, *ānanda*?

The spiritual path has also been likened to a razor's edge: 'Stop not; be very cautious! One wrong step and the fall is great. The higher you go, the farther you fall!' If you go to the pinnacle and lose your footing, not even a single bone will remain there to be picked up, it seems. Then how can the last rites be done for you? But such talk is all

based on an assumption that there is something to be achieved. In fact, there is only something to be understood.

If the goal is *ānanda*, fullness, happiness, how can the way to the goal be unpleasant? To the extent that you understand, the way is *ānanda*. The path is *ānanda* and both sides are *ānanda*. There is never a dull moment, just as when you go on a pilgrimage to a mountain. As you proceed along the steep paths, every one of their many turns opens up a new vista, a new valley, a new scene. At one moment, the Ganges will be travelling alongside of you and at another she will have left you far behind. Further along, you will again find her right beside you. Sometimes she is down below. Sometimes she is playing. Sometimes she is roaring. The mountains themselves present new vistas — sometimes bald, sometimes green, sometimes wearing snowy white caps.

Similarly, the path to self-knowledge is not an arduous one. The path itself is pleasant and the end is pleasantness itself. Nor, as one often hears, can the path be described as difficult in the beginning and pleasant later on or pleasant in the beginning and bitter later on. It is sometimes said that the spiritual path is bitter in the beginning and pleasant later on, while the material path is pleasant in the beginning and bitter later on. But is this really the case? Is not the material path always a problem, in the beginning, later, and in between?

#### ALL MATTER IS BHAGAVĀN ALONE

The material path does enable me to pick up some joy along the way. But that is only because *Bhagavān* is everywhere. He is not just in one place. In fact, upon analysis, we find that there is no such thing as material; all matter, all material, is nothing but *Bhagavān*. There is nothing separate from *Bhagavān*. How then can we say this is material and this is *Bhagavān*?

All these divisions are made by our *buddhi*, which is a dividing *buddhi*, a dualistic *buddhi*. Wherever it goes, the *buddhi* creates division — spiritual and temporal, profound and profane. Because it is basically a dualistic *buddhi*, it continuously attempts to create dualism. In fact, this divisive *buddhi* is the very nature of the *jīva*.

Thus, *Kṛṣṇa* says, ‘Whether the people know it or not, whenever they pick up a moment of joy, it is Me alone.’ The only problem is that they rest content scraping some small joys out of him when, in fact, he is the joy that is their very own nature. Not knowing themselves as *Īśvara*, the very column of joy, they settle for a small crumb that has somehow escaped from out of themselves.’ ‘This,’ *Kṛṣṇa* says, ‘is a tragedy.’ The tragedy is not that *Īśvara* denies the people anything but because they do not see their identity with him. ‘Still,’ *Kṛṣṇa* says, ‘they are on My track. There is nothing to worry about. They will come to Me eventually because until they become full, they will not

stop seeking. No one is going to settle for anything less than fullness. No one is away from Me.’

In the next verse, *Kṛṣṇa* explains that the reason people do not come to him is because of their fascination with quick results:

काङ्क्षन्तः कर्मणां सिद्धिं यजन्त इह देवताः ।

क्षिप्रं हि मानुषे लोके सिद्धिर्भवति कर्मजा ॥ १२ ॥

*kāṅkṣantaḥ karmaṇāṃ siddhiṃ yajanta iha devatāḥ*  
*kṣipraṃ hi mānuṣe loke siddhirbhavati karmajā*

Verse 12

कर्मणाम् *karmaṇām* — of actions; सिद्धिम् *siddhim* — the result; काङ्क्षन्तः *kāṅkṣantaḥ* — desiring; इह *iha* — here (in this world); देवताः *devatāḥ* — gods; यजन्ते *yajante* — they worship; हि *hi* — because; मानुषे लोके *mānuṣe loke* — in the human world; कर्मजा *karmajā* — born of action; सिद्धिः *siddhiḥ* — result; क्षिप्रम् *kṣipram* — quickly; भवति *bhavati* — comes

Desiring the result of actions here (in this world), they worship the gods.

For, in the human world, result born of action comes very quickly.

*Kṛṣṇa* had said earlier that many people had come to him, meaning that they had discovered their identity with him. But why do not all people come to him? Does he prefer only some people and leave the others out? Does the Lord have such *rāgas* and *dveṣas*? If he does, then he is no different than anyone else.

## HOW YOU INVOKE THE LORD IS YOUR CHOICE

*Kṛṣṇa* responds to this question by saying that he denies nothing to anyone. If, as a *jīva*, a person chooses to have only so much within *Īśvara*’s creation, only that much he or she will get. Even his greatest devotees are blessed by him in the form in which they invoke him, the Lord being impartial in every way.

This means that the form in which you invoke the Lord becomes the Lord for you. If you invoke the Lord as a deity, *Indra*, for example, then the Lord is *Indra*. If you invoke him as the giver of a particular result of action, then he becomes that *devatā*, that deity. He can even be invoked as Jupiter, Saturn, Mars, or any planet, which is done in relation to a person’s horoscope. Particular planets in particular locations have been found to indicate certain problems or situations for the person. Here *Īśvara* is invoked as the planet itself, the *prārabdha-karma-adhiṣṭhāna-devatā* — the presiding deity of the *prārabdha-karma*. All such invocations are possible only because the Lord is available in whatever purpose he is invoked, the purpose being served by the invocation itself.



Even people who have nothing to do with the Vedas get results. Rank materialists, for example, interested only in money and power, definitely get results. We also find that, without religion, Russia and China are surviving. Previously they survived with religion and, now, without religion, they are surviving — perhaps even better! Rituals and prayers have no meaning whatsoever to them. An ideal has become their religion. They are devotees of the state. For them, the state is God.

Communism is nothing but statism, i.e., the state is more important than the individual. Everything belongs to the state and nothing belongs to the person. Whatever is there is to be shared by all. The idea itself is good, no doubt. However, to enforce it, individual freedom is destroyed. Anyone who raises his or her voice against the system is either prevented from speaking altogether or is sent where he or she cannot be heard by other human beings. Thus, individuals do not count at all. For those who hold this particular ideology, the state becomes God. Of course, such people will not call it God, but this is what God is for them.

Why do people misplace God like this? Why do they not become *mumukṣus* and go after liberation, freedom? Because they are unable to see beyond the immediate results that they see here in the world. And to gain those results, they worship different deities, *devatāḥ yajante*, which can be anything — money, power, biceps, and so on.

Desiring the results of various forms of action, *kāṅkṣantaḥ karmaṇāṃ siddhim*, people invoke these various deities. They do not invoke *Parameśvara*, the total as such: ‘They don't seek Me. They don't go after Me. They don't want to know Me. They want only to have these small results that they can see. They are *bhaktas*, alright, but they worship Me as small deities alone,’ says *Kṛṣṇa*.

And why do they do this? Because, having doership, *karṭṛtva*, they think, ‘I am an independent person, capable of doing what is necessary to get certain results.’ Only human beings have this capacity to choose action based on this *karṭṛtva*, this sense of doership. Animals do not have this sense, nor do the *devas*; they have only enjoyership, *bhokṭṛtva*.

#### PEOPLE WANT IMMEDIATE RESULTS

The idea here is that people want immediate results. They do not want to wait. They see that here in this world the result or accomplishment born out of any *karma* takes place immediately. Many young people do not complete college because of the desire for a more immediate result even though they are encouraged by their parents and older members of the society to struggle for a few years so that they can enjoy a better life later.

Because a young man plays a guitar, he may think he is a musician. Seeing others who have become very popular and are making a lot of money, he wants to do the same.

Therefore, going to college does not interest him. He even draws his father's attention to those people who became successful and made a lot of money with very little or no formal schooling whatsoever. Of course, he fails to mention those who did not educate themselves and are rotting in the streets. Instead, he will point to a particular uncle who did not go to school, but who happened to be at the right place at the right time and made some money. He then married a woman who also had some money and bought a certain piece of property, which escalated in value merely because someone decided to build a shopping mall in that very location.

Young people do not want to study because they want quick results. Or, they may only pretend to be interested in music or electronics because, in fact, they are not interested in anything! Still other young people may want to do nothing more than travel to faraway places with a pack on their back. Those people who have interrupted their studies for quick results find it very difficult to resume studying later because they lack the necessary discipline.

In every university campus, there are people in their forties and fifties struggling to complete college degrees. Since these people obviously have gained a value for education, why do young people not want to study? Because, like these older people before them, they go for quick results, immediate success, without really knowing what they want in life.

This, then, is what is meant by people invoking small deities whether they are devotees or not — the deities of money, power, and so on. The desire for quick money is what makes a person deal in drugs and buy lottery tickets. If at all a person prays he or she does so at the time of buying a lottery tickets. 'O Lord! Please let this be the winning number!'

### IS THE LORD REALLY IMPARTIAL?

Therefore, *Kṛṣṇa* is saying here, 'Don't blame Me. Don't say that I am partial and that because of my likes and dislikes, all these things happen, to people.' But his statement can still be questioned based on the seemingly unjust differences we see among different types of people. If, as *Kṛṣṇa* says, he is the author of the world, *ṣṛṣṭi-kartā*, the one from whom everything has come, then ultimately he is the author of all the people in the world. Why, then, has he placed some people in elevated positions and others in lowly positions? Why, in the Vedic context, is one person called a *brāhmaṇa*, another a *kṣatriya*, yet another a *vaiśya*, and still another a *śūdra*? How is it that there are such differences in the world? The *brāhmaṇas* have their own position in society, as do each of the others. There is a certain order, a hierarchy, wherein one group of people seems to be superior to another and some people have no place in the system at all.

As the author of this world, is *Īśvara* not responsible for all these differences? And if he is responsible, he must certainly have a problem — the blemish of partiality. Why else would he put a silver spoon in the mouth of one person, a gold spoon in the mouth of another, a platinum spoon in the mouth of yet another, and no spoon at all, not even a plastic one, in the mouth of still others? And there are people born with no mouths at all! Why does *Īśvara* do these kinds of things?

If this question cannot be asked and answered, why bother about God at all? It is not enough to say, 'This simply means that God does whatever he does and, because he is God, no one can question him?' Well, he may be God, but I am the sufferer. First you tell me he made me and then you say he knows my problems better than I do. How? I am the one who was born crippled and cannot see or hear. God seems not to know that being crippled, blind, and deaf is not a pleasant life since he made me this way. But I know better! If God knew what I know, he would definitely have made me differently. And since he didn't, isn't he just another defective manufacturer?

If you buy a car in which even the slightest flaw is detected, there is such a furore made about it that the manufacturer calls back all the cars of that particular design, if only to change one bolt in the brake system. But, as a manufacturer, *Īśvara* cannot be questioned, it seems. Nor does he call back anything. He does not say, 'I am so sorry. That was a hurried job. Please send it back to Me and I will give you new legs or whatever.' Instead, the person has to suffer through life without legs, eyes, ears, and so on.

What kind of God is this, that sits above us somewhere, having a wonderful life, while some unfortunate person has to inch along the ground because he or she is lame? And if God must make a crippled person, the least he could do is to put the person in America where motorised wheelchairs are readily available. Even this much he does not do for the person! How can we look at such differences and say that God is justified in all that he does. What kind of justification is this?

You find some people born with parents and others who do not even know who or where their parents are. A child may be born in South Korea to one set of parents and be raised in Vancouver by another set of parents. Everyone thinks he is doing very well, but, in fact, he is not because he is painfully aware that he is noticeably different from his parents and his brothers and sisters. If he had been raised in Korea by his original parents, he would look the same as everyone else and would not have the problems he has growing up in Vancouver.

Even though a baby is a baby, adoptions do not really work. Even animals who have been adopted have problems adapting to a new habitat. Why would a baby have to be adopted in the first place? Whether in this country or elsewhere, why should the child not be with his or her own parents? Because we do not know where the father and

mother are, we say the child is an orphan. If everyone is created by God, can we say an orphan is created by people? No. Again, God seems to be some kind of a sadist.

### HAS GOD HIMSELF SAID WE MUST FOLLOW HIM?

Further, I am told that, not only has God made me, but he has also said that I must follow him. And how do I know this? Someone else tells me. The least God could do is to come and tell me himself. Then this would all mean something to me. In fact, God should tell everyone. Instead, someone else tells us that God told him and then asked him to tell us. If God wants me to know this, why does he not tell me himself? Also, another person sometimes comes along, saying that God told him that what he told the first person earlier is no longer current and what we are now going to hear is the latest word from God!

This kind of God is someone we would all be better off without, in fact. If God is something that is to be established, the concept should be a rational one, at least. What is unreasonable cannot be accepted. Thus, the issue being addressed here is valid: If God made all these divisions among people — *brāhmaṇas*, *kṣatriyas*, *vaiśyas*, and *śūdras*, to use the Vedic context — then he must definitely be partial because the *brāhmaṇas* seem to be better off.

To deal with this concern, *Kṛṣṇa* acknowledges that he made them all and, at the same time, says that he is not to blame:

चातुर्वर्ण्यं मया सृष्टं गुणकर्मविभागशः ।

तस्य कर्तारमपि मां विद्ध्यकर्तारमव्ययम् ॥ १३ ॥

*cāturvarṇyaṃ mayā sṛṣṭaṃ guṇakarmavibhāgaśaḥ*  
*tasya kartāramapi māṃ viddhyakartāramavyayam*

Verse 13

मया *mayā* — by Me; गुणकर्मविभागशः *guṇa-karma-vibhāgaśaḥ* — a division based on duties and qualities; चातुर्वर्ण्यम् *cāturvarṇyam* — four-fold grouping (of people); सृष्टम् *sṛṣṭam* — was created; तस्य *tasya* — its; कर्तारम् *kartāram* — author; अपि *api* — even; माम् *mām* — Me; अव्ययम् *avyayam* — changeless; अकर्तारम् *akartāram* — non-doer; विद्ध्य *viddhi* — know

The four-fold grouping (of people), a division based on duties and qualities, was created by Me. Even though I am its author, know Me to be a non-doer, ever changeless.

Here, *Kṛṣṇa* is referring to the Vedic system that divided people into four groups, saying that he has created both the people and the groups. As the creator of everything, *sṛṣṭi-kartā*, the Lord cannot deny his authorship, nor does he here, while talking to *Arjuna*.

Although this classification into four groups refers to the Indian context, what *Kṛṣṇa* says here is universally applicable. In other contexts, we see people divided in terms of royalty, nobility, wealth and poverty. Still others refer to groups of people as the upper class, upper-middle class, middle class, lower middle class, and so on. Wherever there are people, such classifications or groups are always to be found.

In the Vedic context, people are divided into four groups on the basis of their qualities, *guṇataḥ vibhāga*, and on the basis of what they have to do, *karmataḥ vibhāga*. This division was created by *Bhagavān*. About this, *Kṛṣṇa* says, ‘Understand Me to be the maker, the *kartā* of this four-fold division.’ At the same time, he also says, ‘Understand that I am not the *kartā*. I am the non-doer, *akartā*, because I am changeless, *avyaya*. I do not undergo any change whatsoever — I do not undergo the change to become the *kartā*.’

How can *Kṛṣṇa* say he has created all this and also say he is not the doer? In order to resolve this apparent contradiction, we will first look at the division of people based on *guṇa* and *karma*. Then, we will look at how *Īśvara* can be their *kartā* and, at the same time, be a non-doer.

## THE NATURE OF THE GUṆAS

The division of people according to qualities, *guṇa-vibhāga*, is found all over the world, not just in India. The qualities upon which this division is based are psychological, meaning that they refer to the composition and disposition of the mind. The division based upon the quality of the mind, *manoguṇa* is four-fold, as we shall see a little later.

The *guṇas* or qualities themselves are three in number — *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*, the meanings of which we shall also see. Everyone has these three qualities and, from certain combinations of these three qualities, four groups are derived.

One possible composition of the three *guṇas* is *sattva-rajas-tamas*, wherein *sattva* is predominant, *rajas* is less predominant, and *tamas* is the least predominant. A second composition in the order of predominance is *rajas-sattva-tamas*. Similarly, the third composition is *rajas-tamas-sattva* and the fourth is *tamas-rajas-sattva*. These four combinations are the only four compositions possible. There can be shades of each of these four, but a fifth composition is not possible.

Why, you may ask, can *tamas-sattva-rajas* or *sattva-tamas-rajas* not be a fifth and sixth composition? By looking at each of the three *guṇas* involved, we shall see why only four *varṇas* or groups of people are possible when the division is based on their *guṇas*.

*Sattva* stands for any type of thinking; *rajas* stands for activity; and *tamas* stands for dullness, inactivity. Contemplativeness, inquiry, silence (*śānti*), and the disciplines,

*śama* and *dama*, are all *sattva*. Discipline is also found in a person in whom *rajas* is predominant; but there will also be a lot of ambition, energy, and enthusiasm along with it — the go-getter, for example. *Tamas* is a certain dullness, lethargy, and laziness.

Everyone is a combination of these three and, as we have seen, the combinations can vary. Babies, for example, are *tamas-rajas-sattva*. *Tamas* being predominant, they sleep most of the time. As they get older, *rajas* predominates, and they become very active. Finally, when they are grown, we expect them to be *sāttvikas*.

### THE FOUR GROUPS OF PEOPLE ACCORDING TO GUṆA

The *sattva-rajas-tamas* composition is a very beautiful description of a person's inner composition. A person can be predominantly contemplative, a thinking person, because of which certain things are very evident to him or her. Any emotionally mature person, any inquirer or philosopher, anyone who thinks predominantly about fundamental values, the ends in life, and so on, is naturally a combination of *sattva-rajas-tamas* in that order. In such a person, *sattva* is predominant, backed by *rajas* in second place, *tamas* taking third place. This, then, is one type of person.

The second type will naturally have *rajas* predominant. When *rajas* is predominant, the second can be either *sattva* or *tamas*. When *rajas* is predominant, the person is very active, fired by a certain ambition. When this ambition is directed to the welfare of others and to certain ideals, there is a lot of thinking involved. Therefore, *sattva* is in second place, the person's enthusiasm and actions being backed up by thinking. Such people generally become good leaders. The world needs such leaders.

Then we have the third group of people, those who are always active, having *rajas* predominant, but who have *tamas* rather than *sattva* in second place. This means there is ambition rather than thinking behind their actions. An example of ambition without thinking is when someone goes after money, power, or whatever, without any consideration for others. Because such a person also has some *sattva*, some thinking capacity, he or she will not only be very active but may also be very clever, very intelligent. But, because *tamas* is predominant over *sattva*, there will be a lot of scheming, manipulation, and exploitation of others.

If, on the other hand, *sattva* is backing up the *rajas*, there will be consideration for other people. There will be a respect for life and for wealth and for the freedom of others. Whereas, when *tamas* backs up *rajas*, there is only disrespect for *dharma*, meaning there will be no regard for others. For such a person, individual ambition is most important and he or she becomes a despot. *Rajas* being predominant, such people also become world leaders. If they do not become leaders, only their families and perhaps their neighbours suffer, whereas if they assume world leadership roles, the results can be devastating.

The fourth type of person, wherein *tamas* predominates, presents no such problem. At worst, these people are small-time criminals and, at best, simple employees — not out of any real contentment or anything but simply because of dullness. Such people have no ambition whatsoever, not even to make money. In fact, they have already decided that they cannot make money. ‘If I could make money, I would have made it long ago,’ they will say. And then, to justify their laziness, they add, ‘Who needs money anyway?’ And if such a person has a little ambition for something, he or she will not work to make it happen and will compromise at every turn. This, then, is what is meant by dullness, *tamas*.

If a *tamas-rajās-sattva* person wants to become *sattva-rajās-tamas*, he or she has to become *rajās-tamas-sattva* first, then *rajās-sattva-tamas*, and only then, *sattva-rajās-tamas*. There is no jumping possible here. It is a process involving growth and this is what maturity is all about. This is also what we mean by *karma-yoga* whereby one becomes mature by doing *karma* with a *karma-yoga* attitude.

Up to *rajās-tamas-sattva* growth is simply a matter of performing *karma*, pursuing one's own ends according to *dharma*. Only when one performs *karma* with the attitude of *karma-yoga* does the person become *sattva-rajās-tamas*. This is the person who can become a *sannyāsī*.

Shades of difference exist within each of these four groups. For example, *rajās-tamas-sattva* can be a criminal or just an ambitious sales person. When the latter invites you into his or her place of business with a smile, you may end up paying for the smile too! There is a rank selfishness in this type of person that makes him or her convert every action into dollars and cents. *Rajās-tamas-sattva* people can follow either *dharma* or *adharmā*, shades of difference being there. Once you reach *rajās-sattva-tamas*, you automatically follow *dharma*.

#### THE UNIVERSALITY OF THE FOUR-FOLD DIVISION

These are the three qualities which cause the differences in groups of people, not only in India but all over the world. *Sattva*, *rajās*, and *tamas* belong to *prakṛti*, to nature, which belongs to *Bhagavān* alone. On the basis of this *prakṛti*, then, this division of people according to qualities, this *guṇa-vibhāga*, is done.

All people come under the four groups formed by the possible combinations of the three *guṇas* because everyone has to work his or her way through the four compositions in order to mature. In the Vedic context, the people having the first combination, *sattva-rajās-tamas*, are called *brāhmaṇas*, those having the second combination, *rajās-sattva-tamas*, are called *kṣatriyas*, those having the third, *rajās-tamas-sattva*, are called *vaiśyas*, and those having the fourth combination, *tamas-rajās-sattva*, are called *śūdras*. This, then, is the *guṇa-vibhāga*, the four-fold division based on qualities, referred to in this verse.

**DUTY-BASED DIVISION AMONG PEOPLE**

There is another kind of division inherent in this system, also four-fold, the people of each division being called by the same names. This division is based on duty — *karma-vibhāga*. The duty of a *brāhmaṇa*, for example, is to teach and to officiate at rituals. His life is one of prayer for the welfare of the society and he lives very simply with no more than the barest essentials. He must practise *śama* and gain *dama*. He studies the Veda, teaches, and serves as an officiating priest, undertaking all those liturgical activities that are the duties of a priest. The society requires that certain religious activities be conducted and the *brāhmaṇa* is responsible for them. He is a priestly person.

Thus, there is a *guṇa*-wise *brāhmaṇa* and a duty-wise *brāhmaṇa*. Similarly, there is a *guṇa*-wise *kṣatriya* and a duty-wise *kṣatriya*, whose duty is to protect *dharma*, be committed to knowledge and protect the Vedas. As a *kṣatriya*, *Arjuna's* duty was to rule and protect the people, in terms of administration, judiciary, law enforcement, and defence. All these functions fall under *kṣatriya-dharma* and are duties to be done in every society.

A *vaiśya* is a person who deals in commerce, wealth, farms, agriculture, and so on. Commerce involves bringing things from the place where they are produced and selling them in other places where they are needed. Thus a *vaiśya* is the one whose duty is to make things available to people.

The people in the fourth division, *śūdra*, provide the hands and legs, eyes and ears, for the others. Their duty is to serve and, without such people, nothing could be accomplished. The activities they perform are found in all societies in the world and must be done if the society is to function.

In the Vedic religion, the activities of each of the four groups of people are converted into duties and are enjoined according to family. We do not know when all this started, but whoever was doing the duties of a *śūdra* or a *vaiśya* or a *kṣatriya* or a *brāhmaṇa* kept passing these same duties down to his or her children.

Strictly speaking, anyone who does the work of a particular group should be known by the name of that group regardless of which group he or she is born into. A person who is born in a *brāhmaṇa* family, but does *vaiśya-karma*, is a *vaiśya*. A true *brāhmaṇa*, on the other hand, is one who, having been born into a *brāhmaṇa* family, lives a simple life so as not to exploit the society, studies and teaches the Veda, and performs the obligatory rituals for the welfare of the people, just as his father, grandfather, and great-grandfather did before him.

Duties being there, we have these four groups of people. Of course, duties can be transgressed, but that is not the point here. The duties themselves, the *karma*, are the



basis for the division of people, each group having its respective duties. Thus, there are *brāhmaṇa*-duties, *kṣatriya*-duties, *vaiśya*-duties, and *śūdra*-duties.

A man who is a *brāhmaṇa* in terms of *karma*, duty, may chant the Veda, officiate at rituals, and so on, but *guṇa*-wise, he may be ambitious and may want recognition. Such a person is not *sattva-rajas-tamas*. If, however, he carries out his duties with the attitude of *karma-yoga*, he is *sattva-rajas-tamas*. Then his attitude is, 'This is my *karma*, my duty. These duties are to be done by me. They are my offering to the Lord.'

### KARMA-YOGA AND A DUTY-BASED SOCIETY

*Karma-yoga* is relatively easy for a person who is born into a structure where the concept of duty is so clearly defined. When the spirit behind the structure is understood, all the person has to do is what has to be done. The person need not choose a vocation in life. He or she knows exactly what is to be done based on which family he or she is born into. One's duty is written all over one's forehead at birth, so to speak.

For a person who believes in the law of *karma*, there is no other reason for him or her to have been born into a particular family. Some *karma* is the governing factor and what is now to be done is clear. For example, a man who is born into a *brāhmaṇa* family knows that he has to study, perform *yajñas* and so on — and he does so, happily. While performing his duties, he does not mutter, 'if only I were an administrator, I would have earned a lot of money by now. Instead, I have nothing!'

If earning money is the main criterion, a system based on duty cannot work. Everyone will look to see which vocation produces the most money and do only that. If medicine produces money, you will become a doctor. And when a glut develops in the field of medicine, you will turn to another field where there is more opportunity, more money. If money and power are the main criteria, there will be no structure, really speaking. The money and the power will set up the structure for one's education, profession, marriage, and so on.

But here, in the Vedic vision, *mokṣa*, liberation, is the main aim. The Veda says that you are perfect and that you have to achieve this knowledge, which is *mokṣa*. To do this, you must have a mature mind and this kind of a mind can only be gained by living a life of *karma-yoga*. For *karma-yoga*, you must necessarily have a certain duty and be clear about what you are to do. When you are clear about what your duty is, then you can perform all *karma*, all activity, as duty.

We have seen how the duties of a *brāhmaṇa* are very evident to the person. Similarly, the duties of *kṣatriya* are very clear to him and he performs his *karma* as a duty, cheerfully. A *vaiśya* also knows exactly what is to be done by him. His father is engaged in either commerce or cultivation, or he may have a cattle farm. The son chooses one of the three or involves himself in all of them. Whatever he chooses to do is

done as his duty and for a reasonable profit. A *vaiśya* also is not supposed to exploit the society in any way. For example, he must not create a scarcity by buying all available stock, storing it somewhere, and then releasing it in small amounts at large profits when the people begin clamouring for it. Such practices are definitely not in conformity with *dharma* nor are they *vaiśya-dharma*. Thus, when a *vaiśya* performs his duties happily, according to his own *dharma*, it can be *yoga* for him. The duties of a *śūdra*, *śūdra-karma*, are the same. They are not lowly or demeaning *karma*; they are simply duties to be done.

### **SUPERIORITY IS DETERMINED BY ONE'S MATURITY, NOT DUTY**

No duty is superior to another. Each duty is as good, as necessary, as every other duty. Therefore, one group of people is not superior or inferior to another group of people. The people themselves are nothing but *Parameśvara*, irrespective of which group they belong to. In every society, there are certain activities to be performed and these activities or duties fall into four general groups. Thus, the groups that people belong to differ from each other only in terms of the duties attached to them.

When a person belonging to any group performs his or her duty with an attitude of *karma-yoga*, that person becomes, *guṇa*-wise, *sattva-rajās-tamas*. A *brāhmaṇa* who chants the Veda for the sake of personal glory becomes *rajās-sattva-tamas*; if he does it for money alone, with no other ambition, he becomes *rajās-tamas-sattva*. And if he performs a ritual in the temple with an attitude of dullness, for no other reason than to feed himself, he is *tamas-rajās-sattva*.

There is another kind of *brāhmaṇa* who enjoys what he does and does it well but, at the same time, wants everyone to listen to him. He is always looking around to see who is coming! There are also those who, seeing someone who has a lot of money coming, will stop right in the middle of performing a *pūjā* and fawn all over the person. God has to wait, it seems! Thus, there are several varieties of *brāhmaṇas* — *brāhmaṇa-brāhmaṇas*, meaning *brāhmaṇas*, both duty-wise and *guṇa*-wise; *kṣatriya-brāhmaṇas*, those who are *brāhmaṇa* duty-wise and *kṣatriyas guṇa*-wise; *vaiśya-brāhmaṇas*, those who are *brāhmaṇas* duty-wise and *vaiśyas guṇa*-wise; and *śūdra-brāhmaṇas*, those who are *brāhmaṇas* duty-wise and *śūdras guṇa*-wise.

In the same way, there are *brāhmaṇa-kṣatriyas*, *kṣatriya-kṣatriyas*, *vaiśya-kṣatriyas*, *śūdra-kṣatriyas*; *brāhmaṇa-vaiśyas*, *kṣatriya-vaiśyas*, *vaiśya-vaiśyas*, *śūdra-vaiśyas*; *brāhmaṇa-śūdras*, *kṣatriya-śūdras*, *vaiśya-śūdras*, and *śūdra-śūdras*. Who is superior in all of this? A *brāhmaṇa-brāhmaṇa*, *brāhmaṇa-kṣatriya*, *brāhmaṇa-vaiśya*, and *brāhmaṇa-śūdra* are all equal. So the *brāhmaṇa* is superior. This statement must not be misunderstood. When we refer to a *brāhmaṇa* as superior, we are not talking about a person who performs the duties of a *brāhmaṇa*. We are talking about the quality, the maturity, of the person's mind. There is a lot of

confusion around this very point that has given rise to the prevalence of caste-related problems.

If a man who performs *brāhmaṇa* duties says that he is superior, he is definitely demonstrating a lack of the qualities of a *brāhmaṇa* and is therefore, not a *brāhmaṇa-brāhmaṇa*. You will find many great historical saints who were not *brāhmaṇas* by birth being worshipped in temples in India. Some were *śūdras* and others were *harijans*, meaning those who do not belong to any of the four groups. Most of these saints were duty-wise *śūdras*, but they have places in the temple because they were *brāhmaṇa-śūdras*. Therefore, *guṇa*-wise, people can be *brāhmaṇas* while belonging to any of the four duty-based divisions.

#### DUTIES MAY CHANGE, BUT QUALITIES DO NOT

This classification of duties and people can apply anywhere, not just in India. Here, the only difference in the four-fold division is that it was reflected within the family structure itself, each family belonging to one of the four groups. Probably less than one percent of the people still follow this system, but amongst those who do, the son of a *brāhmaṇa* still studies and teaches the Veda, performs the prescribed rituals, prays for the society, and lives a simple life. The system is almost gone because it requires a certain protection that it no longer enjoys.

No system can survive unless it is protected. Prior to the Mogul invasions, the four-fold classification structure in India was protected by the royal families. However, during the eight hundred years of Muslim rule, it was destroyed. Later, in the interests of survival, people concerned themselves only with doing what had to be done to look after themselves and their families. Because a man no longer bothered about what his fathers *karma* was, the whole structure changed in terms of duty.

However, in terms of quality, *guṇa-vibhāga*, the division of people does not change. This is where *karma-yoga* as an attitude becomes clearer. A *karma-yogī* is one who does what has to be done with the proper attitude. Such a person is also a *brāhmaṇa*, *sattva-rajās-tamas*, with reference to the quality of his or her mind. Only this *brāhmaṇa* can be a *sannyāsī*. The mandate that only a *brāhmaṇa* can be a *sannyāsī* is based on quality of the mind alone and has nothing to do with which group a person is born into in terms of duty.

#### KṚṢṆA AS DOER AND NON-DOER

The Vedic culture, then, divides people into four groups, *catvāraḥ varṇāḥ*, according to their duty, *karma* — the system itself being possible because of the three *guṇas*, *sattva*, *rajās*, and *tamas*, found in everyone. And *Kṛṣṇa*, as *Īśvara*, could say, 'I created them all, but don't blame me. I am not the doer. Because of their own *karma*, they are born differently.' To blame *Īśvara* is like putting your finger in the fire and,

when the fire burns it, asking the fire, ‘Did you burn my finger?’ Then the fire replies, ‘Yes, I burned your finger.’ And when you ask, ‘Why did you burn my finger?’ the fire says, ‘I didn’t burn your finger.’

‘But,’ you continue, ‘you told me you were the *kartā*. You were the one who burned. You said you did it. ‘‘Yes, I said it,’ the fire replies. Then you say to the fire, ‘But you also said you are not the *kartā*. You said you are *akartā*. Why?’ ‘That is because I didn’t burn,’ the fire says. ‘But you burned!’ you say. ‘Yes, I burned,’ says the fire, Then, again, you say, ‘But you said you didn’t burn.’ ‘Yes,’ agreed the fire, ‘because I didn’t burn.’

What is all this? The fire says it is the *kartā* and it also says it is *akartā*. Then the fire explains, ‘I did it because I burned the finger. Nobody else burned the finger. It was me. But I didn’t do it because I didn’t go after your finger, did I? You stuck your finger into me. You asked for it and you got it. After all, I am fire, Lord *Agni*. In whichever form you invoke me, in that form I will bless you. You can try again. I can boil water for you. I can warm up your room or your hands. And I can burn your fingers, too. What do you want from me? Tell me, and I will give it to you. But don’t blame me. From my own standpoint, I am not the *kartā*. From the standpoint of what you receive from me, I am the *kartā* because you get whatever your *karma* deserves. I am the law and I cannot transgress the law that I am.’

Similarly, as *Īśvara*, *Kṛṣṇa* says that he had created the particular structure reflected by the four groups of people as a part of this creation. Therefore, we are to know *Īśvara* as the *kartā*, the maker or creator of this four-fold division. At the same time, he is also to be understood as *akartā* because he says, ‘I have not done this at all. I am a non-doer.’ How can this be?

Only from the standpoint of the world and the four groups of people in it can we take *Kṛṣṇa* to be the doer, the *kartā*. Whereas, from his own standpoint, from *Parameśvara’s* standpoint, in reality, he is not the *kartā* of anything. Therefore, he is not subject to blame. A person has a particular *karma* that determines whether he is a *brāhmaṇa*, *kṣatriya*, *vaiśya*, or *śūdra*. Which group a *jīva* is born into is the *jīva’s* own doing and has nothing whatsoever to do with *Īśvara*.

This four-fold division is in the creation. Those who have *sattva* as a predominant quality become *brāhmaṇas* and those who have *rajas* as predominant become *kṣatriyas* or *vaiśyas*. It all depends on one’s composition. Everyone has the capacity to change his or her composition because everyone has a free will. One’s composition has nothing to do with *Īśvara*; he is only the giver of the results of actions, *karma-phala-dātā*, and is completely impartial in this regard.

*Īśvara* is *kartā* from the standpoint of what is created and *akartā* from the standpoint of his own knowledge about himself, meaning that for him, there is no notion

that 'I am the doer.' That is, he has no *karṣṭva-buddhi*. *Kṛṣṇa* said earlier that this was not only true for him but for everyone. Anyone who looks upon *Īśvara* as oneself, *ātmā*, as the *akartā*, is also *akartā*.

Further *Kṛṣṇa* says:

न मां कर्माणि लिम्पन्ति न मे कर्मफले स्पृहा ।

इति मां योऽभिजानाति कर्मभिर्न स बध्यते ॥ १४ ॥

*na māṃ karmāṇi limpanti na me karmaphale sprhā*

*iti māṃ yo'bhijānāti karmabhirna sa badhyate*

Verse 14

कर्माणि *karmāṇi* — actions; माम् *mām* — Me; न लिम्पन्ति *na limpanti* — do not affect; कर्मफले *karma-phale* — with reference to the result of action; मे *me* — for Me; न स्पृहा *na sprhā* — there is no longing; इति *iti* — thus; यः *yaḥ* — the one who; माम् *mām* — Me; अभिजानाति *abhijānāti* — knows clearly; सः *saḥ* — that person; कर्मभिः *karmabhiḥ* — by actions; न बध्यते *na badhyate* — is not bound

Actions do not affect Me. There is no longing with reference to the result of action for Me. The one who knows Me clearly in this way is not bound by actions.

In this verse, *Kṛṣṇa* reveals a fact about himself as *Bhagavān* and extends it to the individual also. Even though *Bhagavān* has created the world and everything in it, and performs various actions to keep it going, all these actions, whatever be their nature, do not affect him. Hence he says, '*na māṃ karmāṇi limpanti* — the actions do not touch Me' They do not bind him, meaning that they do not create *sukha* and *duḥkha* for him because they do not create *puṇya-pāpa* for him as they do for a *jīva*. And why do his actions not affect him? Because, the notion, 'I am the doer,' is not there for him.

The *jīva*, on the other hand, superimposes the notion of doership upon the *ātmā* and then thinks that the self is doing all the actions. And once you have doership, *karṣṭva*, you also have enjoyership, called *bhokṣṭva*. A person who looks upon himself or herself as a doer has to answer for all the actions he or she does. But, in fact, the self is not a *kartā*. When a person knows this particular fact, he or she no longer looks upon himself or herself as a *kartā* and is, therefore, unaffected by *karma*.

The question here may then become, if *Kṛṣṇa* knew he was not a doer, why did he do *karma*? Was it because of a desire to accomplish something? 'No,' he says. With reference to the result of action, there was no longing, no craving, no want, whatsoever in him — *na me karma-phale sprhā*. Therefore, when he performed *karma*, it was not for gaining a result for himself. He did not look upon himself as one who was going to be better by performing a certain action.

## KNOW YOURSELF TO BE A NON-DOER

‘While this may be true for *Īśvara*, what about me?’ you may ask. What about the *jīva*, the individual, who is affected by all his or her actions and who also longs for certain results? This state of affairs is only for the ignorant, the verse tells us. The one who knows him clearly — *yaḥ mām abhijānāti* — *Kṛṣṇa* says, can also say: ‘Actions do not affect me. I do not long for their results — *na māṇi karmāṇi limpanti na me karma-phale sprhā.*’ Actions do not bind such people. Nor do they crave for the results of action to make themselves better.

The word, *jānāti* means ‘knows’ and *abhijānāti* means ‘knows clearly.’ The one who knows *Īśvara* clearly as oneself is being talked about here. There is no other way of knowing the *paramātmā*, the non-doer. The *ātmā* that is common here is the one who does not do, the one who is free from all attributes. This is the *ātmā* that *Kṛṣṇa* is talking about. For *ātmā*, then, there is no doership, no enjoyership.

As long as the notion of doership is there, there is a distinct entity. And when this notion of doership is gone, enjoyership also goes, leaving only the *ātmā* that has no distinguishing features whatsoever — the *ātmā* that is non-doer, non-enjoyer, performs no action whatsoever.

If *ātmā* has no distinguishing feature of its own, how many *ātmās* can there be? Absence of distinguishing features means that there is only one *ātmā*. There is no *Īśvara-ātmā* and *jīva-ātmā*. No difference, *bheda*, exists between the two. There is only one *ātmā* who is *Īśvara*, who is *jīva*. Why then the seeming difference? It is all due to *upādhi* alone. One *upādhi* is total, *samaṣṭi-upādhi*, called *Īśvara*, and the other is individual, *vyāṣṭi-upādhi*, called *jīva*.

A person who knows *ātmā* as neither a doer nor an enjoyer knows *Īśvara* as oneself. Like *Kṛṣṇa*, this person is not bound by the various *karmas* that he or she may do — *sa karmabhiḥ na bhadyate* — whether these actions be scripturally enjoined or worldly, *vaidika-karma* or *lauki ka-karma*.

This particular verse is said to be a *mahā-vākya* because *jīva* and *Īśvara* are equated. *Kṛṣṇa*’s words, ‘I am not bound and anyone who knows Me is also not bound,’ reveal the identity between *Īśvara* and the *jīva*, an identity that must be understood. This understanding is liberation, *mokṣa*.

In the next verse, *Kṛṣṇa* again tells *Arjuna* how to gain this knowledge:

एवं ज्ञात्वा कृतं कर्म पूर्वैरपि मुमुक्षुभिः ।

कुरु कर्मैव तस्मात्त्वं पूर्वं: पूर्वतरं कृतम् ॥ १५ ॥

*evaṃ jñātvā kṛtaṃ karma pūrvairapi mumukṣubhiḥ*

*kuru karmaiva tasmāttvaṃ pūrvaiḥ pūrvataraṃ kṛtam*

एवम् *evam* — in this manner; ज्ञात्वा *jñātvā* — knowing; पूर्वैः मुमुक्षुभिः *pūrvaiḥ mumukṣubhiḥ* — by seekers of ancient times; अपि *api* — even; कर्म *karma* — action; कृतम् *kṛtam* — was performed; तस्मात् *tasmāt* — therefore,; त्वम् *tvam* —you; पूर्वैः *pūrvaiḥ* — by those who came before; पूर्वतरम् *pūrvataram* — in the ancient past; कृतम् *kṛtam* — was done; कर्म *karma* — action; एव *eva* — indeed; कुरु *kuru* — do

Knowing (Me) in this manner, even seekers of ancient times performed action. Therefore, indeed, perform action (just as it) was done by those who came before in the ancient past.

Knowing *Kṛṣṇa*, the Lord, ‘in this manner, *evam*,’ refers back to what was said in the previous verse, ‘Actions do not affect me — *na māṃ karmāṇi limpanti*.’ There, *Kṛṣṇa* said that he had no craving for the results of any action because *ātmā* is *pūrṇa*, complete, and therefore, *asaṅga*, free of all attachment.

*Ātmā* is free from all actions; it has no doership whatsoever. *Ātmā*’s nature is pure consciousness, free from any kind of volition. Volition is always dependent upon the *ātmā* but *ātmā* is independent of all volition, all doership. Therefore, with reference to the result of action, *karma-phala*, there is no longing, no *trṣṇā*, in *ātmā*. Because there is no doership for the *ātmā*, actions do not affect *Kṛṣṇa* or the person who knows that the self, *ātmā*, and *Īśvara* are one.

And who gains this knowledge? *Kṛṣṇa* pointed out earlier in the chapter, in the tenth verse, that many people had already reached him in this way. He did not mean everyone, only those who were seekers, *mumukṣus*, those who wanted liberation. And once they had the knowledge, what did they get? Actions no longer affected them and they no longer yearned for results. This is what *mokṣa* is all about; there is no other *mokṣa*, in fact.

#### HAVING THE KNOWLEDGE DOES NOT PRECLUDE ACTION

And what did the seekers, who had gone before, do once they had the knowledge? They performed action — *pūrvaiḥ karma kṛtam*. Therefore, *Kṛṣṇa* tells *Arjuna* that he should do the same — *tasmāt tvam karmaiva kuru* — which meant that *Arjuna* should not take to *sannyāsa*. He should do only what was to be done by him. *Śaṅkara* makes it very clear in his commentary of this verse that *Arjuna* was not simply to sit quietly nor was he to take *sannyāsa* — *na tūṣṇīm āsanaṃ nāpi sannyāsaḥ kartavyaḥ*. He was to do the *karma* that was his to do, just as earlier seekers had done, even those who already had this knowledge.

*Kṛṣṇa* is telling *Arjuna* that if he is a *mumukṣu*, then he should perform action because, previously, those people who were *mumukṣus* did *karma* and reached him.

*Arjuna* should do what other seekers before him had done — *pūrvaiḥ pūrvataraṃ kṛtam*, not what people in general had done.

The use of the word *mumukṣu*, is very relevant here, a *mumukṣu* being a person who wants to gain liberation. Those who are still ignorant and want liberation have to gain the knowledge that will liberate them. Having said that others acquired the knowledge in this way, *Kṛṣṇa* says, ‘Therefore, with *śraddhā*, with faith, that you too will gain liberation, please do *karma* and gain this knowledge.’ *Śaṅkara* adds here that a *mumukṣu* who is not yet a *jñānī*, and therefore, not totally clear about this knowledge, should perform action in order to cleanse the mind of all its *rāga-dveṣas*.

Even if one knows the *ātmā* completely, that person should also perform action, not for *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi* but for the sake of others — *loka-saṅgrahārtham*. Because of the *jñānī*’s *prārabdha*, there is something to be done, meaning that whatever presents itself for him or her to do is to be done for the good of the people. This action does not affect the *jñānī* in any way because the person does not take himself or herself to be the doer.

The word *mumukṣu* can indicate either a seeker or one who is already liberated, *jīvanmukta*. ‘In either case, *karma* is to be done,’ *Kṛṣṇa* says. *Arjuna* himself could decide whether he was an *ajñānī* or a *jñānī*, but still he was to perform action. Either way, he would not lose anything by doing what was to be done.

## INACTION NEVER LEADS TO LIBERATION

*Kṛṣṇa* wants to make sure that *Arjuna* did not think he would be liberated by not doing *karma*. But, at the same time, it must be clearly understood that doing *karma* is not going to liberate a person either. It can only bring about *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*, as we have already seen. Doing *karma* is not a direct means of liberation, but it is an indirect means because it helps prepare your mind so that the knowledge can take place. The point here is that not doing *karma* will not help in any way!

An undone *karma* never helps you because something that is not done cannot produce a result of any kind. On the other hand, a *karma* that is done, *kṛtam karma*, always produces some result — either an ordinary *karma-phala* or *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*, or both.

*Naiṣkarmya*, the state of actionlessness that is *mokṣa*, is not gained by not doing *karma*. Not doing action does not amount to total actionlessness because you will always be doing one thing or the other. Non-doership is to be understood as the very nature, *svarūpa*, of oneself. Therefore, *Kṛṣṇa* says to *Arjuna* here, ‘All these *karmas* you see me doing do not affect me in any way. I am totally unaffected by all of them.’

Because he is totally unaffected by action and their results, *Kṛṣṇa* as *Īṣvara* has no partiality either. If *Kṛṣṇa* wanted certain results, that is, if he had *phala-sprhā*, he would



be doing one thing for one person and another for another, based on what he wanted from these people. There would also be those for whom he would do nothing because there was nothing to be gained from them. He would help only those people who, day after day, flatter him with the same words, ‘O *Bhagavān*! You are so wonderful, so great. You are everything.’ And about the others he would say, ‘Since they don’t care for me, I am not going to care for them.’ This would mean that *Bhagavān* also wants to be cared for and loved — and not just by one person but by everyone!

God does not have such problems because he has no longing for the result of any action — *na me karmaphale spr̥hā*. He does not get anything out of people loving him. He is completely detached from all of this — and so are you just by knowing *Īśvara*. Hence, *Kṛṣṇa* says, ‘The one who knows me clearly — *yaḥ mām abhijānāti* — is also out of all this *karma* and is not bound by it at all.’

By telling *Arjuna* that a number of people from ancient times onwards had achieved him by doing *karma*, *Kṛṣṇa* is saying that *Arjuna* should also do *karma*. He did not want *Arjuna* to become confused, thinking that by not doing *karma* he would gain *mokṣa*, actionlessness. Since there can be so much confusion around the concept of actionlessness, *Kṛṣṇa* begins a new section here in which he explains the true meaning of action and inaction.

किं कर्म किमकर्मेति कवयोऽप्यत्र मोहिताः ।

तत्ते कर्म प्रवक्ष्यामि यज्ज्ञात्वा मोक्ष्यसेऽशुभात् ॥ १६ ॥

*kiṃ karma kimakarmeti kavayo'pyatra mohitāḥ*

*tatte karma pravakṣyāmi yajñātvā mokṣyase'śubhāt*

Verse 16

किम् *kim* — what; कर्म *karma* — action; किम् *kim* — what; अकर्म *akarma* — actionlessness; इति *iti* — thus; अत्र *atra* — here (with reference to this subject matter); कवयः *kavayaḥ* — seers (scholars); अपि *api* — even; मोहिताः *mohitāḥ* — confused; यत् *yat* — which; ज्ञात्वा *gnātvā* — knowing; अशुभात् *aśubhāt* — from that which is inauspicious (*saṃsāra*); मोक्ष्यसे *mokṣyase* — you will be released; तत् *tat* — that; ते *te* — to you; कर्म *karma* — action; प्रवक्ष्यामि *pravakṣyāmi* — I shall tell

Even the seers (scholars) are confused with reference to what is action (and) what is actionlessness. I shall tell you about action, knowing which you will be released from what is inauspicious (*saṃsāra*).

The subject matter under discussion is *karma*, action. *Kavayaḥ* is the plural of *kavi*, which can mean a poet, a seer, or the Lord. *Kavi* can also refer to an informed person, one who is intellectually highly accomplished, a *medhāvī*. A person who simply stores information in his or her memory and blurts it out on command, just like a floppy

disk does, is not a *medhāvī*. A *medhāvī* is one who understands a subject thoroughly and retains it, complete with all the details.

There are still others who can understand a subject matter and not retain the details. Such a person is also blessed. In this verse, *kavayaḥ* refers to those who are able to understand the subject matter and can also retain the details. Even such people, *Kṛṣṇa* says, are confused, *mohita*, about *karma* and *akarma*, action and actionlessness.

What is action — *kiṃ karma*? What is actionlessness — *kim akarma*? Since even informed people are not very clear about this subject matter, it cannot be assumed that *karma* refers only to action done and *akarma* to action not done. Obviously, such an approach is too simplistic. Therefore, *Kṛṣṇa* says to *Arjuna*, ‘I will tell you what *karma* is — *te karma pravakṣyāmi*,’ *karma* meaning both *karma* and *akarma*.

*Śaṅkara* confirms, in his commentary on this verse that *karma* here stands for both *karma* and *akarma* (*karma ca akarma ca*). To understand *karma*, *akarma* must also be understood, knowing which you will be liberated, *yajñātīvā mokṣyase*, from the inauspicious, *aśubhāt*, meaning from *saṃsāra*. *Śubha* is a very beautiful word to refer to something that ends well. It is often found at the end of books, in the same way that we find the word, ‘finis.’ While ‘finis’ merely means the book has ended, *śubha* means that it has ended well.

Anything auspicious, anything good, is called *śubha* and *aśubha* means the opposite, that which is inauspicious or not very good. Here, we can take it, as *Śaṅkara* does, to mean *saṃsāra*. *Saṃsāra* is *aśubha* and it ends in *mokṣa*. Therefore, *mokṣa* alone is *śubha*. When *saṃsāra* ends, there is *mokṣa*, which is called *śubha*. Until then, it is all *aśubha*, all *saṃsāra*. The grand finale of *saṃsāra*, the auspicious end, is called *śubha*. From this inauspicious *saṃsāra*, you will be relieved, liberated, freed. This, then, is one way to take the word *aśubha* in this verse.

There is another way of looking at *aśubha* here. As long as you have any doubts in your head, they gnaw away at you and create problems. They are like bugs with their many wings and legs bustling around in your ears and creating a disturbance. Doubts, therefore, are called *aśubha*. They have to come to an end and do so only when everything is understood clearly. What has to be understood here is the nature of *karma* and *akarma*.

## ALL UNDERSTANDING ENDS UP IN ĀTMĀ

We shall see that the understanding of *karma* itself is the understanding of *ātmā* and *anātmā*. In fact, the thorough understanding of any topic will always end up in *ātmā* only. If you take any one thing — *śānti*, *sukha*, *duḥkha*, *jagat*, a name or form, mind and its nature, and so on — and analyse it, it will resolve into *ātmā*. This is why we can begin anywhere. Everything is connected; nothing is unconnected.

If you remove the doubts with reference to *karma*, you will remove *saṃsāra* for good. You are released from the doubts themselves and this release is the gain of *mokṣa*. When ignorance, the knot of the heart, is resolved, all doubts fall apart. All the *karmanas* standing in one's account are destroyed when that *Brahman*, the *paramātmā*, that is *Īśvara* and *jīva*, is understood. And this happens in one stroke! 'In one stroke' should not be misunderstood to imply action. This all happens in terms of knowledge alone — the stroke of knowledge.

In the next verse, *Kṛṣṇa* explains further why this *karma* and *akarma* have to be known:

कर्मणो ह्यपि बोद्धव्यं बोद्धव्यं च विकर्मणः ।

अकर्मणश्च बोद्धव्यं गहना कर्मणो गतिः ॥ १७ ॥

*karmaṇo hyapi boddhavyaṃ boddhavyaṃ ca vikarmaṇaḥ*  
*akarmanāśca boddhavyaṃ gahanā karmaṇo gatiḥ*

Verse 17

कर्मणः *karmaṇaḥ* — of actions; अपि *api* — also; बोद्धव्यम् *boddhavyam* — is to be known; विकर्मणः *vikarmaṇaḥ* — of the forbidden action; च *ca* — and; बोद्धव्यम् *boddhavyam* — is to be known; अकर्मणः *akarmanāḥ* — of actionlessness; च *ca* — and; बोद्धव्यम् *boddhavyam* — is to be known; हि *hi* — because; कर्मणः *karmaṇaḥ* — of *karma*; गतिः *gatiḥ* — nature; गहना *gahanā* — (is) difficult (to understand)

Action (enjoined by the scriptures) is also to be known. Forbidden action and actionlessness must also be known. (This is) because the nature of *karma* is difficult (to understand).

Here *Kṛṣṇa* first divides *karma*, meaning action in general, into two types — action that is to be done, *karma*, and action that is not to be done, *vikarma*. What is to be done must of course be known and what is not to be done must also be known. Furthermore, if you think that actionlessness, *akarma* is not doing *karma*, then *akarma* also has to be known. You must know what is meant by not doing *karma*. Is it the non-performance of action or is it the absence of doership? This you have to know. If *akarma* is the absence of doership, then the non-performance of a given action does not amount to *akarma*, as *Kṛṣṇa* himself would clarify later.

Why is all this analysis needed? Because one should not take *karma* in a simplistic way. Nor is it easy to understand. People sometimes tell me, 'Swamiji, I have heard enough about *karma*. I want *jñāna*.' If *karma* were known by these people, they would have the knowledge, *jñāna*, too! *Karma* has to be known, but it is difficult to know — *gahanā*. The simple do's and don'ts are not what is to be known. What must be known is the very nature of *karma* itself.

*Gahanā* means that the subject matter of *karma* and *akarma* is shrouded in confusion. Because you do not see it clearly, you need to clear away the mist. And to do this, you have to bring in light. *Karma* is not as simple as you think. If you understand the nature of *karma*, you will understand reality, *Brahman*, everything being connected as it is. To say that *karma* is to be known is to say that everything else connected with it has to be known also.

Thus, *Kṛṣṇa* introduces the subject matter of *karma* and *akarma* in this verse and the preceding one. The answer to the question, what is *karma* and what is *akarma*, is given in the next verse, along with some words in praise of the person who understands action and actionlessness clearly.

कर्मण्यकर्म यः पश्येदकर्मणि च कर्म यः ।

स बुद्धिमान् मनुष्येषु स युक्तः कृत्स्नकर्मकृत् ॥ १८ ॥

*karmanyakarma yaḥ paśyedakarmani ca karma yaḥ*

*sa buddhimān manuṣyeṣu sa yuktaḥ kṛtsnakarmakṛt*

Verse 18

यः *yaḥ* — the one who; कर्मणि *karmani* — in action; अकर्म *akarma* — actionlessness; पश्येत् *paśyet* — would see; च *ca* — and; यः *yaḥ* — the one who; अकर्मणि *akarmani* — in actionlessness; कर्म *karma* — action; (पश्येत् *paśyet* — would see); सः *saḥ* — that person; मनुष्येषु *manuṣyeṣu* — among human beings; बुद्धिमान् *buddhimān* — wise; सः *saḥ* — that person; युक्तः *yuktaḥ* — (is a) *yogī*; कृत्स्न-कर्म-कृत् *kṛtsna-karmakṛt* — who has done everything that is to be done

The one who sees actionlessness in action and action in actionlessness is wise among human beings. That person is a *yogī*, who has done everything that is to be done.

*Śaṅkara* writes an extensive commentary, *bhāṣya* on this verse, setting out the various arguments that are relevant to this important topic. In order to gain, a clear understanding of *karma* and *akarma*, we will look into this particular *bhāṣya* in some detail.

It was said that even the informed are deluded with reference to the nature of action and inaction. *Karma* here means action in general and is not restricted to scripturally enjoined rituals, as it is elsewhere in the *Gītā*. Because even the learned are confused, *Kṛṣṇa* says he would reveal to *Arjuna* the nature of *karma*, which implies *akarma* also, knowing which he would be liberated from doubt, from *saṃsāra*.

What is to be done and what is not to be done are both considered to be *karma*, action. Killing, for example, and helping someone are two different actions. Killing is a prohibited action, *niṣiddhakarma*, and helping another person is an enjoined action, *vihita-karma*.

A command, *vidhi*, is always with reference to an action, either to do it or not to do it. Because one may hurt another, the *śruti* enjoins us not to hurt anyone. ‘May one not drink alcohol’ and ‘May one not eat meat’ are also scriptural injunctions or ‘don’ts’ with reference to the actions one performs. Similarly, there are a number of commands concerning the ‘do’s,’ the actions that are to be done. Thus, there is a list of ‘do’s’ and ‘don’ts’ for people to follow, all of which are *karma*.

*Akarma* is also to be understood in terms of *karma*. Is *akarma* simply not doing action or is it something more? The very nature of action, its *svarūpa*, is what we are trying to understand here. Only when action is properly understood can one understand what non-action or the absence of action is.

People generally understand the absence of action as not doing action. If you do not do something, this non-performance is the absence of action. When a man who is walking stops walking, the action of walking has stopped. There is a standstill, no action. But standing still is also an action. Try standing still and you will understand how difficult an action it is! Similarly, sitting still is an action, which is why you cannot do it for very long. To think that you are going to gain inaction by sitting still is to be deluded. There is no such inaction in fact.

To think that not performing action is inaction is no different than thinking that printing more currency will resolve a country's tight money situation. Such a simplistic approach cannot solve the problem and will create additional problems because it is not that easy. Similarly, to understand inaction is not as easy as it seems. What *Kṛṣṇa* says in this verse is in keeping with what he had said earlier in the second, third, and fourth chapters. Although the present verse is very cryptic, it can be understood by keeping in mind what has gone before.

#### ANOTHER DESCRIPTION OF A WISE PERSON

Here, *Kṛṣṇa* describes a person who could see inaction in action and action in inaction. What kind of a person is this? If he or she sees a man walking, does the person see him as standing still? And if he is standing still, does the person see him as walking? This is like watching someone eating and having the person tell you he or she is not eating at all. Usually, we would think that such a person was mentally deranged in some way. But here *Kṛṣṇa* says that one who sees action in inaction and inaction in action is a wise person, *buddhimān*!

Then, to top off the confusion, *Kṛṣṇa* goes on to say that such a person is a *kṛtsna-karmakṛt*, someone who has done everything that is to be done! This means that there is nothing more for this person to do. He or she is free, whereas for others there remains a long list of ‘to-be-dones’ and ‘not-to-be-dones.’

This list, as long as it exists, is unending because the items to be done and not to be done are difficult to fulfil. What you ought to do is not always possible to do. Nor can you always avoid doing or saying what is not to be done or said. Also, the to-be-dones and not-to-be-dones go on increasing. With reference to the food one eats or personal ambitions, for example, there are a number of things to be done and not to be done. Like this, everyone has a long list and even if some of the items are fulfilled, so many others pop up in their place. Some items on the list are very clear to you, while others may be vague. Still, they are there below the surface and will become clearer in time, like a Polaroid film. This, then, is the situation for everyone.

Here, *Kṛṣṇa* describes the person who has managed to fulfil all the items on the list as being one able to see action in inaction and inaction in action. He praises such a person and refers to him or her as being wise, *buddhimān!* If seeing is all that one has to do to be wise, the seeing itself must be very difficult. The words themselves reveal the difficulty. How can I see action in inaction and inaction in action?

### INACTION IN ACTION

The usual locative case meaning for the word ‘in’ in the expressions, ‘inaction in action’ and ‘action in inaction,’ does not apply here. When we say, ‘Where is he sitting?’ the response, ‘on the ground,’ denotes a location where the action of sitting is taking place. Similarly is the case with the statement, ‘The book is in my hand.’ However, here, *Śaṅkara* dismisses any sense of location with reference to action and inaction, saying that action cannot become the location or the basis for inaction. Inaction being the absence of action, it is not there to be located upon action.

Inaction does not exist. We cannot say that a non-existent inaction sits upon action, just as we cannot talk about the horns that sit on our heads. Horns do not exist for us and what does not exist cannot be said to be sitting anywhere. Similarly, we cannot say that the son of a woman who never gave birth to a child, *vandhyā-putra* is sitting on the ground because there is no such person.

In the same way, inaction being the absence of action does not exist for it to have any location. Therefore, action cannot be the basis for inaction. Nor can that which does not exist, inaction, be the basis for action. Therefore, the use of the locative case here is not to be taken in its usual sense. Rather, it means ‘with reference to.’ With reference to action, this person is able to see inaction and with reference to inaction, he or she can see action.

In the absence of action, *karma-abhāva*, the wise see action and in the so-called action they see no action at all. When you perform an action, there is the notion, ‘I perform an action — *ahaṃ karomi*’ What is involved in this ‘I perform an action’? What is this action that you are doing? When you say, ‘I am talking’ or ‘I am walking,’ the talking and the walking are actions centred on what? This, then, is the question.

When you say, ‘I walk,’ your legs and feet are involved in the action of walking. The mind is also involved, there having been a decision, a *saṅkalpa*, to perform the action of walking. Without a *saṅkalpa*, you do not perform a deliberate action. There is always a thought, a desire, involved. So, in the action of walking, the mind is involved, the legs and feet are involved, and even the eyes are involved. And, when you say, ‘I perform an action — *ahaṃ karomi*,’ I, *aham*, is also involved.

In this process, the mind, senses, and the physical body are all involved. The physical body is called *kārya* in Sanskrit, meaning ‘product,’ and the mind and senses are called *karaṇa*, meaning ‘instrument.’ This assemblage of *kārya* and *karaṇa* is involved in the action that belongs to me. That is why I say, ‘I perform this action.’ The ‘I’ is also implied in action, ‘I’ meaning *ātmā*.

### THE RESULTS OF ACTION BELONG TO THE DOER

And why do I perform this action? I perform an action for a certain result. And when the result comes, to whom does it go? Whom does it affect? It comes to me, the one who is the *kartā*, the doer. Therefore, as the doer, I am the enjoyer. I perform this action for the sake of getting the desired result — *karma-phala-bhogāya ahaṃ idaṃ karomi*. In this way we see that action involves the *kārya-karaṇa-saṅghāta*, the physical body-mind-sense complex, and also *aham*, I, the *ātmā*.

When I say, ‘I am the doer,’ ‘I am the enjoyer,’ etc., on whom is the doership and enjoyership centred? It is centred on myself. The question, that arises then is, ‘Is the I, the *ātmā*, a doer or a non-doer — a *kartā* or an *akartā*?’ If *ātmā* is a *kartā*, then I definitely perform action, *karma*, which produces a result for me. This is real *karma*, binding *karma*.

No action is possible without there being an agent, doer, of the action, a *kartā*. For example, when we say, ‘*Rāma* goes — *rāmaḥ gacchati*,’ the going is done by *Rāma*, the agent of the action of going. And, although action is dependent on its agent, the agent is not dependent on action. This means that the agent, the doer, has a choice in terms of action — he or she can perform an action, need not perform the action, or can perform the action differently. This independent doer, the *kartā*, who enjoys such freedom in terms of action, is what is reflected by the first or nominative case in Sanskrit — *prathama-kāraka*.

There are a number of factors, other than agency, that are also connected to action. Whatever is connected to an action, because of which the action is made possible, is called *kāraka*. There are six kinds of *kārakas*, the agent of the action being the first or *prathama-kāraka*, as we saw above. Then there is the object of an action. When *Rāma* goes, *rāmaḥ gacchati*, where does he go? He goes to the forest — *vanaṃ gacchati*, forest being the object of the action of *Rāma*’s going. Thus, we have a doer and an object of doing, *kartā* and *karma*, referred to grammatically as the nominative and

accusative, first and second cases. Then, how does *Rāma* go to the forest? Does he go on foot or does he go in a chariot? What is the means of his going? The means by which he goes, on foot, is the third *kāraka* or instrumental case. And why does he go? What is the purpose of his going? *Rāma* went to the forest to fulfil the words of his father — *pitṛ-vākya-paripālanāya*, giving us the fourth *kāraka* or dative case. From where does he go, from which place? From the city of *Ayodhyā* — *ayodhyā-nagarāt*, he went to the forest. This gives us the fifth *kāraka* or ablative case, since it is also connected to the verb, the action of going. The final *kāraka* is the locative case, as in ‘*Rāma* lived in the forest — *rāmaḥ vane avasat.*’ Here forest is in the seventh case expressing location.

### NOT DOING KARMA ALSO REQUIRES A DOER

Returning now to the first *kāraka*, the *kartā*, *Śaṅkara* says that whether you say, ‘I did this action’ or ‘I did not do this action,’ the I, the *ahaṅkāra*, is involved. Both the doing, *pravṛtti*, and the not doing, *nivṛtti* are centred on *ahaṅkāra*, the *kartā*. Therefore, if I am the *kartā*, I am the *kartā* in both action as well as inaction.

But, if I am not the *kartā*, then there is no action at all for me because all action depends upon the *kartā*. If I am someone who is not an actor, then I perform no action — *na kiñcit karma karomi*. The ‘I’ is always free from action; it does not do any action. *Ātmā* neither does an action nor impels or prompts anything to act — *na karoti, na kārayati*.

### MISTAKING ACTION FOR INACTION AND INACTION FOR ACTION

If *ātmā* is neither of these, neither a simple *kartā* nor a *kārayitā*, one who causes action to be done, how can there be any *karma*? And if there is no *karma*, why does *Kṛṣṇa* simply not say so? Why does he talk about seeing inaction in action — *karmaṇi akarma yaḥ paśyet?* The problem here, *Śaṅkara* says, is that, we superimpose *kartrva* on the *ātmā*, which is really *akartā* and say ‘I do this action or that action,’ when really the action belongs to the *kārya-karaṇa-saṅghāta*. To illustrate this problem, *Śaṅkara* gives an example that everyone can relate to.

When you are in a boat moving in a river, you see the trees on the river's bank moving in the opposite direction. Even though you are moving in one direction, the trees seem to be moving in the other and you seem to be constant. What does this mean? The trees are not really moving at all. They are not performing any action. But, in these trees that are really standing still, you see an action — *akarmaṇi karma-darśanam*. This kind of seeing is called *viparīta-darśana*, erroneous sight.

Secondly, as long as there is this notion, ‘I am the *kartā*,’ merely not doing any action does not make one an *akartā*. Therefore, whenever one says ‘I am sitting quietly, I am not doing any action — *ahaṃ tūṣṇīm āsam, na kiñcit karomi,*’ this person considers himself to be a *kartā*. Therefore, he is doing the action of ‘not doing any



action.’ To illustrate this, Śaṅkara gives the following example. Suppose you are standing on the riverbank and looking at the boat, which is moving away from you. Having reached a certain distance, the boat seems not to be moving at all. To you it appears stationary. Thus an object can also appear to be constant when it is actually moving very fast. An example of this, one not available to Śaṅkara in his time, is a movie on a screen. Although it is a movie, a succession of rapidly moving frames, things like trees, mountains, and so on appear to us to be stationary. Here, then, you see inaction in action — *karmaṇi akarma-darśanam*.

Thus, in the world, we see *karma* in *akarma* and *akarma* in *karma*. Similarly, with reference to *karma* and *akarma* themselves, there is *viparīta-darśana*, seeing what is not there. *Darśana* means sight, seeing, and *viparīta* means other than what is. The self does not perform any action and therefore, there is no action. The action you see is really inaction. In other words, there is no action in action because *ātmā* is *akartā*.

Knowing this, the wise person performs action but, at the same time knows he does not perform it at all. Doing, the person does not do — *kurvan na karoti*; seeing, the person does not see — *paśyan na paśyati*; hearing, the person does not hear — *śṛṇvan śṛṇoti*. Similarly, smelling, one does not smell; tasting, one does not taste; walking, one does not walk; talking, one does not talk; thinking, one does not think.

Even being confused, the person is not confused. A wise person can be confused in that his or her mind can become confused with reference to a particular thing. For example, there may be confusion about the direction to be taken in order to reach a certain place. Thus, ‘Being confused, the person is not confused,’ does not mean that the wise do not get confused. What does all this mean? For the wise the ‘I,’ the *ātmā*, in the statement, ‘I am confused,’ remains untouched by any action because it does not perform any action.

If a man is acting, we say he is acting and if he is not, we say he is keeping quiet. But is there really a time when he is not doing action? Keeping quiet simply means the person does not have a job. And he may not even keep quiet! He may talk a lot, eat a lot, hang around a lot, and, at the same time, he says he is keeping quiet!

Therefore, not doing anything is definitely an action and for that action there is an agent, a doer, a *kartā*. Because people think they do action, they also think they do not do action. This is because both the action — *pravṛtti*, and the non-action — *nivṛtti*, are attributed to *ātmā* instead of to the *kartā*, which is superimposed, *āropita*, upon the *ātmā*. In this way, *ātmā* is taken to be the *kartā*, and the doing or not doing of an action which is centred on that *kartā*, is mistakenly attributed to *ātmā*.

## ACTION IS DEPENDENT UPON ĀTMĀ

At the same time, no action is totally independent of *ātmā*. And, in *ātmā*, there is no action whatsoever. Because people do not know this, they are under the spell of delusion, ignorance, seeing action in inaction and inaction in action.

One who is able to see *ātmā* as *akartā* never performs any action, even when he does an action, *karma*. Such a person will see *akarma* in *karma* because he knows that *ātmā* does not perform any action whatsoever.

## THE NATURE OF ĀTMĀ

The nature of *ātmā*, the self, is in the form of pure consciousness. The very word, self, implies that, which does not need to be revealed to you, the self, by anything else. You require no means of knowledge, no *pramāṇa*, to prove your existence. That which requires no *pramāṇa*, no means of knowledge, that which is self-evident, is the self, *ātmā*. And what is its nature? It is in the form of pure consciousness, knowledge as such. Because *ātmā* is unqualified knowledge, there can be particular knowledge which is nothing but consciousness plus some qualification that appears in the form of knowledge of this or that.

Knowledge as such must be there before it can be qualified. For example, for there to be pot knowledge – *ghaṭa-jñāna*, cloth knowledge – *paṭa-jñāna*, man knowledge – *puruṣa-jñāna* or woman knowledge – *strī-jñāna*, there must be knowledge as such, unqualified by anything. This unqualified knowledge is the nature of the *ātmā*. Knowledge as such gets seemingly qualified in the form of thought, *vṛtti*. With *vṛtti*, knowledge seems to be qualified and without *vṛtti*, it is unqualified. This unqualified knowledge is consciousness, the nature of *ātmā* that performs no action.

Why do we say that *ātmā* performs no action? One reason is that action implies motion or some change. Try to think of an action without motion, without change? Any motion, any change from one condition to another, from one form to another, is action. Even a chemical reaction is an action. But can we say that *ātmā*, whose nature is consciousness, is subject to action?

Consciousness is not subject to motion because being all pervasive, it is not located at one point for it to move to another point. Consciousness does not move within itself either. Nor does it have any part to undergo any change, consciousness not being an assemblage of things. Only that which is put together can undergo change. Things that are put together will naturally fall apart without anything being done. It is their nature to fall apart, which is also an action. Even a car that is kept unused for twenty-five years will undergo some change and a Rolls Royce is no exception. Whether the car is running or not running, it is subject to change, simply because it was put together, *saṃhatatvāt*. There is always entropy for things that are put together.

A good way to understand entropy is to leave your room as it is for some time without doing anything about it. Just live in it; don't sweep the floor, don't clean, don't put anything back in its own place. What will you have? Entropy.<sup>1</sup> Anything that is put together tends to dissipate, to fall into disorder. This movement from order to disorder is entropy, which is also action. Only the self is not subject to this entropy.

Consciousness, the nature of 'I,' the self, does not tend towards disorder because there is no order, *ātmā* not being made up of parts. Only when there is creation is there an order and therefore, disorder. *Ātmā* is one whole, limitless in nature. *Ātmā* being not limited in any way, what can it do? It cannot go anywhere because it is not limited place-wise. It cannot change or modify itself into anything. It cannot grow into something or dissolve into something. No action is possible for *ātmā*.

There is not even *saṅkalpa*, decision, in *ātmā*. Nor is there any kind of thought, which is also action. To say, 'I remain quiet,' means that there are certain other times when I am not able to be quiet. Consciousness does not say this because consciousness is always quiet, *nirvikalpa*, and undergoes no modification, *vikalpa*, whatsoever. Because there is nothing that is separate from consciousness, *vikalpa* is not possible. There is no such thing as the self going into something or reaching out to the world. It has already reached out to the infinite. It is one whole, free from all limitation, in the form of pure, simple consciousness. *Ātmā* performs no action nor does it prompt something else to perform action — and, in its presence alone, all activities take place.

#### THE DOER IS "I," BUT "I" IS NOT THE DOER

When there is an action in the mind, senses, or body, there is the presence of *ātmā*, the *kartā* being nothing but *ātmā*. *Ātmā* is not the *kartā*, but when the *kartā* is there, *ātmā* is there. 'I am not the *kartā*' is a fact that is not known. I know myself only as the *kartā* — I am the seer, the hearer, the thinker, the doubter, and the walker. I know that I am the doer of all these actions. But I do not know that I am *akartā*, a non-doer. Not knowing that I am *akartā* the *kartā* naturally becomes 'I' for me and 'I' becomes the *kartā*. In fact, the *kartā* is, 'I,' but 'I' is not the *kartā*. The problem occurs when the *kartā* is 'I' and 'I' also is the *kartā*. This happens when the 'I' is not known.

A person who knows the self sees inaction in action and action in inaction, which is other than that what we generally understand by *akarma*, and *karma*. Because doership, *kartṛtva*, is there, *akarma* is reduced to *karma*, there being a *kartā*, an agent, for *akarma* also. The person who says, 'I do not do any action,' is doing action because there is doership and the person takes himself or herself to be a doer of 'no action.' As long as the *kartā* is there, *karma* is also there for the person, be it *pravṛtti* or *nivṛtti*, action or inaction. Both belong to the *kartā* alone.

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<sup>1</sup> *Inevitable and steady deterioration of a system or society.*

### THE ONE WHO SEES THINGS AS THEY ARE HAS WISDOM

If the person knows I am not the *kartā*, he sees *akarma* in both *karma* and the so called *akarma*. And this person, the one who sees *ātmā*, the self, as one that is free from *kartr̥tva*, doership, he alone sees, says *Kṛṣṇa*. Therefore, the person is called *buddhimān*.

The literal meaning of *buddhimān* is one who has an intellect, *buddhi*, just as *dehavān* refers to one who has a physical body, *deha*. But everyone has a *buddhi*. Why, then, does *Kṛṣṇa* call this person a *buddhimān*? *Buddhi* has to be understood here as wisdom in the form of self-knowledge. Thus, the one who has *buddhi* has the knowledge of the self and is therefore, wise, *buddhimān*.

Wisdom is seeing things as they are. One who sees things as they are, in terms of reality, has wisdom and is therefore, wise. Wisdom does not mean that the person has generated a new line of thinking. Here, *Kṛṣṇa* refers to a person who is able to see *karma* and *akarma* as they really are as a *buddhimān*, a wise person among human beings — *sah buddhimān manuṣyeṣu*.

*Kṛṣṇa* also calls this person a *yogī* — *sah yuktaḥ*, meaning that he or she has lived a life of *yoga* which has paid off in terms of wisdom. *Yoga* being meant for gaining this knowledge, such a person living a life of *karma-yoga*, has gained what it had to offer him. He is a real *karma-yogī*, an accomplished *yogī*. Understanding what is to be understood, he or she is a person of fulfilment — *kṛtsna-karmakṛt*.

### SAMŚĀRA IS CENTRED ON DOERSHIP

To know oneself as *akartā* is to know oneself as *abhoktā*, one who is not an enjoyer. If you are not the enjoyer of the results of any action, then there is no *puṇya* or *pāpa* for you. And when there is no *puṇya* or *pāpa*, there is no *sukha* or *duḥkha*, meaning that you are above *sukha* and *duḥkha*. *Sukha* and *duḥkha*, being the net result of *karma-phala*, are also *karma-phala*, the result of action. You may have performed a certain *karma* and received some money. Because of that money you have a big house and are very comfortable. Because of all this you are very happy. Being comfortable, being happy, is a *karma-phala* for you.

*Duḥkha* is also a *karma-phala*. The house you bought turned out to be in a bad neighbourhood. You were happy with the house until it was broken into and you were robbed. No matter how many new alarm systems you install, the results are the same — frequent robberies and vandalism. So the same house that made you *sukhī* for some time has now made you *duḥkhī*, unhappy. Either way it is all *karma-phala*, *puṇya* and *pāpa*. You asked for it and you got it!

Because all unseen results, *puṇya* and *pāpa*, fructify in the form of *sukha* and *duḥkha*, all *karmas* are capable of producing *sukha* and *duḥkha* for the *kartā*. As long

as I take myself to be the *kartā*, I am subject to *sukha* and *duḥkha*. To be subject to *sukha* and *duḥkha* is what is called *saṃsāra*. *Sukha* and *duḥkha* themselves are not *saṃsāra*. The notion that I am subject to them is *saṃsāra* and makes me a *saṃsārī*.

### SAMŚĀRA IS A NOTION

That the physical body is subject to pain is a fact. But if I say that I am subject to pain there is *saṃsāra*. 'I am subject to pain' is different from 'the physical body is subject to pain.' If you say the body is subject to pain, it is a simple truth because it states a fact about the empirical world. The creation is like that. The body endowed with the sensation of pain as a means of protection. Otherwise, one would not pay attention to it. Pain indicates that something is wrong and needs attending to. Therefore, physical pain is an important part of the creation.

That the body is subject to pain is true. That I am subject to pain is an opinion, a notion, called *saṃsāra*. It is not true because *ātmā* is not the enjoyer of the results of action — *karma-phala-bhoktā*. *Ātmā* is not the enjoyer because it is not the *kartā*, the doer. One who knows that he or she is not the enjoyer is called *kṛtsna-karmakṛt* here. When one is able to recognise oneself as free from doership, he or she becomes free from enjoyership also.

Being free from enjoyership means that the *puṇya* and *pāpa* standing in one's account are all taken care of. Such a person who is free from a sense of doership and enjoyership is called a *kṛtsna-karmakṛt*. For him, everything that has to be done now or later, has been done. No new incarnation has to be taken by the person. No *karma* remains to prompt another birth. In this life also, whatever the person thought he or she would do is gone because the person is *ānanda*, *pūrṇa*, fullness itself. He or she is above *sukha* and *duḥkha*, liberated from the subjugation of *karma*, and therefore, *kṛtsna-karmakṛt*.

### INACTION IS NOT THE ABSENCE OF ACTION

One who is *kṛtsna-karmakṛt* sees very clearly that there is no action whatsoever in action — *karmaṇi akarma-darśanam*, and that there is action in inaction — *akarmaṇi karma darśanam*. In his understanding, inaction, *akarma*, the so-called absence of action, is converted into action because of the presence of the *kartā*. The one who says, 'I perform this action,' is the same one who says, 'I do not perform this action.' To say, 'I do not perform this action,' does not mean there is no action because this particular inactivity is dependent upon or is centred on the *kartā*, the doer.

*Karṭṛtva* is the notion that 'I am the doer — *ahaṃ kartā*.' Because this notion is there, the person says, 'I do not perform this action now,' which does not mean that he or she does not perform any action at all. While the person may not perform certain actions, he or she continues to perform some action or the other. No one can remain, even for a

second, performing no action whatsoever, as we saw in the third chapter.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, it is impossible for anyone to say, ‘I am not doing any action.’

Even making such a statement is acting because speaking is an action. A person who says, ‘I perform no action at all. I am keeping quiet,’ is performing the action of speaking. There is no such thing as inaction in the sense of a total absence of activity. When *Kṛṣṇa* says that the wise person is able to see action in inaction, he means that the person does not see inaction as an absence of action. What the person is able to see in action is freedom from action, not the absence of action. In the absence of action, there is action and even in that action, the wise person, called *buddhimān*, is able to see a freedom from action.

The *buddhimān* has the wisdom, the *buddhi*, that enables him or her to see inaction in action because the person sees the *ātmā* as *akartā*. Thus, there is the recognition of the fact that the self is not an actor in any way whatsoever. The self does not perform any action — and in its presence all activities take place.

## THE ORIGINAL SIN IS IGNORANCE

The problem here is that all actions are centred on the *kartā*, the actor. Only when the *kartā* is there, there is the possibility of action. Therefore, all actions emanate from the *kartā*, which is not separate from *aham*, I, the *ātmā*. The problem comes because the person thinks that he or she is the *kartā*. This thinking, this particular notion, is the only evil there is. If there is such a thing as original sin, it is only in thinking that oneself is the *kartā*, because from this all problems arise.

‘I am the *kartā*’ is a notion and it is this notion that binds a person to *karma*. Why? Because the one who is the enjoyer of the result of action is the one who performed the action — *kartā eva bhoktā bhavati*. When I perform an action, a result accrues. And this result accrues to me, the *kartā* alone. In this way, I am bound by the results of my actions and thus by the actions themselves. Even a person who makes money and distributes it all to others, leaving none for himself or herself accrues the result of a good action. People rightly exalt such a person, which is a *karma-phala* that belongs only to the person who distributed the money. But the person is still a *kartā* to whom *karma-phala* accrues because of which he or she is also an enjoyer.

## SAṂSĀRA: THE ORBIT OF ACTION AND RESULT

*Karma* and its results, *karma-phala*, are the cause for *saṁsāra*. They account for all of one's problems. The results of *karma*, in the form of *puṇya* and *pāpa* according to this particular model, account for one's incarnation also. We have seen that *karma* is born out of desire, *kāma*, and is therefore, nothing but an expression of desire in the

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<sup>1</sup> ????

form of likes and dislikes, *rāga-dveṣas*. Although *saṃsāra* is accounted for by *karma-phala*, *karma-phala* itself is only possible because there is *karma*, which in turn is possible because there is *kāma*, desire. And for whom is the *kāma*? The *kartā*. Therefore, *kartā* is the cause for all the *karmas* and *karma-phalas*. And because of ignorance, one takes oneself to be the *kartā*.

The problem here is that if you are really a *kartā*, you have no way of getting out of *saṃsāra*. You are in its orbit, the orbit of action and its results, *karma-cakra*. Because of *karma-phala*, there is birth, *janma*, and because of birth there is *karma* to perform, if one is able to gain a human body or its equivalent. Then you perform new *karmas* and gather more *karma-phalas*, thereby perpetuating the cycle. Because of *karma* there is *karma-phala*, because of *karma-phala* there is *janma*, because of *janma* there is *karma*, and because of *karma* there is *karma-phala* — an orbit you will continue to be in as long as you take yourself to be the *kartā*.

There is no way of getting out of this wheel of *saṃsāra*, this *saṃsāra-cakra*, unless you get out of the orbit of *karma – karma-phala – janma – karma*. And how do you get out? The only way is to nullify the *kartṛtva*, doership. If the doership is real, you will not be able to nullify it because anything real cannot be nullified. By the same reasoning, if doership can be nullified, it is not real.

#### HOW TO GET OUT OF THE ORBIT OF SAṂSĀRA?

There is an argument that suggests that by performing only good *karmas*, a person will be liberated from *saṃsāra*. This cannot be true. To perform only good *karmas* means that all the actions done by a person have to be good. There would be no wrong actions at all. This is not possible at all as we shall see later. A person doing only good actions will gain only *puṇya*. But gaining any amount of *puṇya* will not release the person from this cycle. *Puṇya* being *karma-phala*, the person with a lot of *puṇya* will have a lot of births and maybe a lot of what we call comforts. And the tendency of a person who has more and more comforts, in the form of money and power for example, is eventually towards wrong actions.

The more money a person gathers, the more power he or she may have and power tends to corrupt the person who has it. And, if by having gathered so much *puṇya*, a person could conceivably gain absolute power, then the person may become absolutely corrupt. This absolute corruption will then result in the accrual of *pāpa*, for which more births are gained.

Furthermore, it is impossible for a person to perform only good actions, *puṇya-karma*. No one can avoid doing *pāpa-karma* at some time or the other. All it takes is one unconscious swatting of a mosquito! Unknowingly, you are destroying millions of bacteria everyday. Nor are all the varieties of *pāpa-karma* known to you; some are unknown also. Therefore, you cannot avoid doing *pāpa-karma* altogether.

Even if you could do nothing but *puṇya-karma*, you would not get out of the orbit of *saṃsāra*. *Karma* itself keeps the *saṃsāra* going. Only when the *kartā* is not there, will there be the absence of *karma* for you. And, if the *kartā* is a reality, *karma* will definitely be there.

But the *kartā* is not absolutely real; it is only a superimposition upon the *ātmā*, which is absolutely real. This means that while the *kartā*, the doer, is *aham*, ‘I,’ ‘I,’ *ātmā* is not the doer. This being so, *kartṛtva*, doership, becomes *mithyā*, something that has no independent existence, because it depends upon ‘I’ whereas, ‘I,’ the *ātmā*, does not depend on doership. It is *satya*.

### THE DEFINITION OF MITHYĀ AND SATYA

Anything that does not exist on its own, anything that depends for its existence upon something else, anything that draws flesh and blood from something else for it to exist, is called *mithyā*. That which does not depend upon anything else in order to exist, is *satya*.

In terms of reality, then, a shirt becomes *mithyā* and the cloth it is made of becomes *satya*. The cloth itself becomes *mithyā* and the yarn that makes up the cloth becomes *satya*. The yarn becomes *mithyā* and its fibres become *satya*. The fibres become *mithyā* and the particles that make up the fibres become *satya*. The particles become *mithyā* and the concept becomes *satya*. The concept becomes *mithyā* and *ātmā* becomes *satya*. And at this point, a question may arise — if *ātmā* becomes *mithyā*? This question is not valid because this entire inquiry is possible only because there is an *ātmā*, which is *satya* — that which is not negatable.

### I AM NEITHER THE DOER NOR THE ENJOYER

Consciousness that is self-evident, which does not need to be revealed by anything else, is *ātmā*, the self. The self alone is self-evident and everything else is evident to the self, *ātmā* that is not the *kartā*. The *kartā* is something that comes and goes. For instance, there is no *kartṛtva*, no doership, in deep sleep. Since I am always there, self-evident, if I am the *kartā*, the *kartā* should not come and go. I should always be the *kartā*. And if I am an enjoyer, *bhoktā*, I should always be *bhoktā*. But, this is not so. Sometimes I am *kartā* and sometimes I am *bhoktā*. This means that I am neither *kartā* nor *bhoktā*.

*Kartā* appears when the mind, *antaḥ-karāṇa*, is there. Doership, *kartṛtva*, means the status of being the subject with reference to any type of activity, whether it is mental activity like perception, inference, and thinking, or physical activity. For any type of activity, a subject is always necessary and this subject is called the ego or *ahaṅkāra* or *kartā*. The word ‘ego’ must be understood well because there are a number of problems associated with its general use.



## DEFINITION OF EGO

Ego is that which owns up to any type of activity. For example, when I see, I say ‘This is my sight.’ The one who owns up to the activity of seeing, the one who is the subject behind the seeing or behind hearing, tasting, smelling, thinking, or doing anything, is what is meant by the *kartā* or the ego or *ahaṅkāra*.

To say that one should surrender one's ego to the Lord is a very common statement that is much too simplistic in terms of understanding what is meant by surrender. First of all, I do not know who or what the Lord is. And why should I surrender the only ego that I have to this Lord? As it is, I have only a few things and these things are owned by this ego. If I surrender it to the Lord, what will I get in return? ‘Everything,’ I am told.

The question that would arise would be, ‘If the ego is already surrendered, who will get everything?’ Once I have surrendered my ego, I become totally decimated. Then who is there to get anything out of that surrender? Nobody. Therefore, that type of surrender is useless. Also, the next question is ‘Who is surrendering the ego?’ Somebody has to do the surrendering. It is the ego that has to surrender itself. And that is not possible. Again, if I am wearing a coat, I can surrender the coat. I can hang it somewhere or put it on someone's shoulders. Also, when I am the owner of the coat, it is easy to surrender it. If I am not the owner of the coat, I can ask you to take it, but I cannot surrender it because it does not belong to me.

Similarly, I am told that the *ahaṅkāra*, the ego, belongs to the Lord and that I must surrender it. How can I surrender what does not belong to me? I can only surrender what belongs to me. And if it belongs to the Lord, how is it that I do not know this? In fact, I think that everything belongs to me, including the Lord. Why else would I address him as ‘My Lord’? To address the Lord, I must be there; because I am here, he is the Lord. If I am not here, where is the Lord? He is the Lord because I call him ‘Lord’!

And if there is a Lord, and this Lord includes everything, then I have nothing to surrender. I have only to know. Furthermore, if I have to surrender to a Lord who is separate from me, then I am the ego. Who, then, is to surrender this ego? The ego alone has to surrender. How can the ego surrender? The one who surrenders is the ego. And being the one who surrenders, the ego can only surrender what it owns. The owner cannot be surrendered. If the ego has to surrender to the Lord, something else must be there to surrender it, which can only be another ego because whoever owns up to the act of surrender is the ego. The ego requires an ego which requires yet another ego! Thus, we find ourselves in infinite regression. How, then, are we going to surrender our ego to the Lord?

**SURRENDER IS AN ATTITUDE**

Surrender is an attitude, a mature attitude. There is no other surrender than this. Surrender as such is not possible for the ego because it cannot surrender itself. But, with an attitude of surrender, I can deflate the ego. I can appreciate that there is nothing in this creation that is authored by me, that everything is given to me, including my physical body, mind, and senses. What is given to me is not mine. When I say, 'I am just a trustee, O Lord, and you are the giver,' the ego is what tells me all this. Thus, surrender can be only in terms of attitude.

Then how does one get rid of *saṃsāra*? Only by getting rid of the ego, the *kartā*. And, if surrender is not possible, how does one get rid of the ego? In the name of getting rid of everything else, the ego remains in one form or the other because it cannot get rid of itself. It remains to say things like, 'I am the most charitable person around.' Even a person who does not talk about his or her good actions, may think of himself or herself as a humble person and say, 'I never mention all of the charities I have done. I don't boast about them. Ask anyone and they will tell you that this is so.' The ego knows very well how to sustain and perpetuate itself in so many ways.

Because the ego, the *kartā*, is always there in one form or the other, it cannot be defeated — except by the one who undertakes an inquiry into 'Who am I.' A person can study every philosophy there is and the ego will remain, saying, 'I am a philosopher.' Only when the question, 'Who am I,' is asked, is the ego in trouble. Why? Because the ego, the *kartā*, is really an impostor, a super imposition. There is no *kartr̥tva*, no doership, in fact, because it is *mithyā*, dependent on *ātmā*.

**NEGATION BY KNOWLEDGE**

When the truth of oneself is recognised, the ego does not go, strictly speaking. Rather, this recognition is what makes one see the ego as *mithyā*. The 'going' of the ego, then, is purely in terms of negation, *bādhā*, or destruction, *nāśa*, by knowledge. The word 'destruction' is generally used in a physical sense, such as destroying an object so that it no longer exists in that form. Here, destruction of the ego is purely in terms of negation, *bādhā*.

Negation by knowledge occurs when an object is there, but its reality is taken away. For example, you can enjoy the blue sky and, at the same time, knowing that the sky is not really blue, dismiss its blueness. Or, enjoying a movie, you can dismiss its reality. A child, on the other hand, cannot dismiss the movie as unreal because, for the child, the elephants, tigers, and everything in the movie are real. The child may even cry, not knowing that the objects and situations in the movie are only appearances and therefore, *mithyā*. Until the child knows the movie is *mithyā*, the movie will remain

real. This knowing comes by negation, *bādhā*, understanding an object or situation and removing the reality of it.

Similarly, the ego is not removed, but the fact that it has no independent existence is understood. And what does the ego that everyone has, depend upon? What is it that exists independently without depending on the ego upon which everything else depends? The ego depends for its existence on the self, which is not the ego. Therefore, the self is the truth of every ego.

There is one truth for every ego and everything that is done by the ego, and that truth, *satya*, is called *ātmā* or the self. The self is the very content of the ego, without which there is no ego. This one *satya*, *ātmā*, is not the ego and is *akartā*. Then who is the *kartā*? The ego alone is the *kartā*.

To be a *kartā*, you must have thought and this thought has its being in 'I,' consciousness. Therefore, you say, 'I am the doer.' Doership itself is a thought centred on 'I.' What is to be understood here is that while thought is centred on 'I,' 'I' itself is not centred on thought. Recognition of this fact is not the elimination or removal of thought. It is understanding — understanding the truth of 'I.'

#### HOW DOES ONE KNOW ĀTMĀ?

'How does the ego know the *ātmā*?' you may ask. The ego generally knows everything else, but how can it know *ātmā*, *ātmā* not being an object of the ego? In response to this question, there are those who will say, 'The *ātmā* will transcend the ego and you will know.' But what does transcending the ego mean? Does the ego go away? Does it come back?

If the ego goes away, there is no one there. And, if having transcended the ego, the ego does not come back, who will be there to know the *ātmā*? If such were the case, gaining this knowledge would amount to becoming a vegetable! If the ego is transcended in order to know *ātmā*, it is definitely not going to come back. Therefore, this explanation is not acceptable.

And if you transcend the ego, understand the *ātmā*, and the ego comes back, who is it that who understood the *ātmā*? It is the ego that has to understand the *ātmā*. These kinds of statements about surrendering the ego and transcending the ego in order to understand the *ātmā* are very confusing to people. Unfortunately, they are too often to be found in the modern books on *Vedānta* and must, therefore, be seen for what they are.

#### THE MEANS OF KNOWLEDGE ARE FOR THE EGO ALONE

In fact, the ego alone uses the *pramāṇa*, the means of knowledge, available — perception, inference, and so on. The ego, *ahaṅkāra*, uses perception and, analysing the

data gathered by perception, gains inferential understanding also. Thus, perception and inference are in the hands of *ahaṅkāra*, the ego, the *kartā*, the subject who, wielding these two instruments of knowledge, perceives and infers.

A means of knowledge is always employed by a subject who is the *kartā*. Therefore, in the employment of any means of knowledge there is a subject – *kartā*, an instrument – *karaṇa*, action – *kriyā*, and the result of action – *karma-phala*. Whether a piece of knowledge or an action produces a result or not, there is always a *kartā* behind it.

Perception and inference, wielded by the ego, are not going to help you know *ātmā* because *ātmā* is the very essence of the ego. *Ātmā* is that which is behind the ego, meaning it is the truth of the ego. How, then, is the *ātmā* to be known?

This is where *āgama-pramāṇa*, revelation in the form of words, *śabda*, comes in. When *śabda* is the *pramāṇa*, the means of knowledge, the ego does not do anything. What happens is that *śabda* creates a thought, a *vṛtti*, showing you that you are the *ātmā* that is *Brahman*, and not the ego. The consciousness that is *ātmā*, which is limitless, is you. This is the teaching, the *upadeśa*, and it removes your ignorance of yourself.

## THE DESTRUCTION OF SELF-IGNORANCE

A person who takes himself or herself to be the ego thinks, ‘I am only this much.’ Nothing more is known about oneself than this, This ignorance, because of which the ego is there, is destroyed by the *vṛtti*, ‘I am *Brahman*,’ which is born out of the teaching. With the destruction of this ignorance, the notion that ‘I am the ego,’ disappears. Nothing more is necessary.

What happens to the ego in the wake of self-knowledge? When the ego comes, it comes and when it goes, it goes. But you are no longer the ego because ignorance about the *ātmā* has already been destroyed. You know that the ego is *ātmā*, whereas *ātmā* is not the ego. Knowing this, you do not get lost in or caught up by the ego and its activities.

This knowledge of *ātmā*, once gained, is never lost because you have no more ignorance about *ātmā*. Even if the ego comes, *ātmā* cannot be mistaken as the ego anymore. Ego is *ātmā*, but *ātmā* does not become the ego just because the ego came. Just because a perception comes or an inference is made, just because an action is done or a result is gained, just because something happens, *ātmā* does not become the ego. Everything is *ātmā* — *ātmā eva idaṃ sarvam* — and *ātmā* is not any of them.

When any action is done, the ego is there, but *ātmā* is free from all action because it is not the ego. Similarly, the means of doing an action or its result is also *ātmā*, whereas *ātmā* is neither the means, the doing, nor the result. This truth being known, the person sees actionlessness in action — *karmaṇi akarma darśanam*.

Knowledge is the only way to destroy ignorance about *ātmā*. *Āgama* alone, knowledge in the form of words alone, destroys the ego because you are not really wielding a *pramāṇa* here. Rather, you are exposing yourself to the *pramāṇa*, to the words. In fact, you are so exposed that you get shot by the spear of *Brahman*, called *Brahmāstra*. In the *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Rāma* used the *Brahmāstra* to kill *Rāvaṇa*. *Astra* means a weapon that leaves your hand and *śastra* is that which remains in your hand. The various forms of practice, such as prayers, rituals, and so on, are called *śāstra*, whereas the statement, '*tat tvam asi* — you are that,' is called *astra*. It comes from a teacher and hits you. It is intended to hit you, in fact. The statement comes out like a bullet and hits the exposed ego, causing it to die.

When the ego gets exposed to the teaching, *tat tvam asi*, it naturally dies, just as the many-headed demon, *Rāvaṇa*, did when he was shot by the *Brahmāstra*. '*Tat tvam asi*,' the *Brahmāstra*, destroys the ego called *Rāvaṇa* once and for all. *Rāma* tried various methods to destroy his enemy *Rāvaṇa*; but nothing happened. He would remove one head, but by the time he destroyed the second head, the first one was back again. This is like trying to remove all our desires. Just when we think one is gone, we find that another one has popped up in its place. Finally, *Rāma* was told to use the *Brahmāstra*. Only then did *Rāvaṇa* die; only then did *Rāma* get back his joy, *Sītā*.

When the weapon '*tat tvam asi*' is used against the exposed ego, it is destroyed. Thus, you need not do anything except expose yourself to the teaching. This difference between employing perception and inference and exposing yourself to the teaching is what distinguishes this particular means of knowledge from all others. Exposing oneself to the teaching is lending oneself to an entirely different type of *pramāṇa* operation. It comes from outside and destroys the ego by saying that you are *Brahman*. For this, no action is performed. You just expose yourself, to the *pramāṇa* with *śraddhā*, the faith that the *pramāṇa* will give you self-knowledge.

#### KNOWLEDGE AND ERROR CANNOT CO-EXIST

*Śraddhā* is not doing anything and, at the same time, being totally alive to the *pramāṇa*, having abandoned prejudices about you, the world, and God. In fact, it is *śraddhā* that grants you this type of exposure. It is the attitude behind the exposure that brings one the knowledge. And against this knowledge, the ego is helpless because it is an error that has been corrected by the knowledge. No error is capable of standing as a co-existent partner to knowledge because knowledge and error cannot co-exist. Nor can the error come back once knowledge has taken place. An object of error cannot return to the same locus where knowledge already is.

You may question this statement using the rope-snake example. You may mistake a piece of rope for a snake and remove the error by seeing that the snake is actually a rope. But the very next day, you may again make the same error. This is possible

because the existence of both the rope and the snake depends on a means of knowledge, your perception. And because the defect in your perception can occur again, the error can also occur again. Whereas the existence of *ātmā* does not depend on any *pramāṇa*. The self is not first seen by you and then recognised, as is the case with the rope-snake. The self always is. Once the ignorance about the nature of the self is removed, there is no question of ignorance coming back.

With reference to objects, out of sight can be out of mind. But *ātmā* is never out of sight or out of mind. You may be out of mind, but you can never be out of *ātmā*, the self. This self is not what is meant when people talk about the psychological self, biological self, anatomical self, familial self, or genetic self. These are subject to defects of every kind — genetic, pathological, physiological, and mental. Therefore, such a self is always unacceptable to you. Even anatomically you cannot accept yourself. Your nose is not of the right shape, your hair is not of the right colour, and so on. But this is not what we are discussing here. The self is different from all of this.

Everything is the self and, therefore, there is no way of being out of oneself. When the ignorance goes, the ego also goes — in terms of knowing ‘I am not the ego.’ The ego that comes after this knowledge has taken place is not the same ego that was there before. It has become an enlightened ego. Because there is knowledge that there is no real, self-existent ego, you refer to it as enlightened, *jīvanmukta*, one who is liberated while living. This is the person that *Kṛṣṇa* refers to as a *buddhimān* in this verse.

### KNOWING I AM NOT THE DOER HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH ACTION

*Buddhimān*, the wise person, is one who sees that even the so-called *akarma*, inaction, is nothing but *karma* — *yaḥ akarmaṇi karma paśyēt saḥ buddhimān*. And *ātmā* being *akartā*, and because one understands this fact about *ātmā*, he or she sees *akarma* in *karma* itself; and because of that, he is a *buddhimān* — *yaḥ karmaṇi akarma paśyēt saḥ buddhimān*. The person recognises the fact of *ātmā* being actionless and that recognition, if it really is a recognition, is not altered whether *karma* is done or not done. This recognition has nothing to do with *karma*; it is the recognition of the *svarūpa*, the nature, of *ātmā*.

### YOU DO NOT BECOME A NON-DOER; YOU ARE ALREADY A NON-DOER

When we talk about the *svarūpa* of *ātmā*, we say that *ātmā* is essentially *akartā*. This statement is made with reference to *kartrtva*, doership, that is superimposed on the *ātmā* due to ignorance. Generally one has the mistaken notion, ‘I am a doer — *ahaṃ kartā*.’ And the correction of this mistake makes you see that you are *akartā*. That you are *akartā* is a fact to be recognised. Therefore, you cannot ask, ‘When will I be able to become *akartā*?’ Nowhere is it said that you have to become an *akartā*, a non-doer; only that you must see *akarma* in *karma* itself.

There is no question of your becoming *akartā*. You are *akartā*. *Ātmā* is *akartā* and, to be *akartā*, you only have to see the fact. Then you are a *buddhimān*, a wise person, among all people who have *buddhis* but do not use them.

#### UNDERSTANDING REALITY REQUIRES THINKING

The meaning of *buddhimān* is something like that of *dhanavān*, a rich person, as we said before. To have money does not mean that you are a rich person. Only if you have money to give are you a rich person. A man who has money to spend on himself, and on others when necessary, is a rich man. Whereas, a man with money who does not think he has enough to spend on himself or for a cause is simply a moneyed man; he is not a rich man. The difference between a moneyed person and a rich person is important to understand. The rich person is one who feels rich.

A man who has only a rupee in his pocket and gives it to someone who has not eaten for two days is a rich man because, although he had so little, he had money to spare. He has no money, but he is rich; he is ready to spend. Whereas another man may have millions of rupees and may not be able to spend it on himself or on others. Such a person is moneyed but not rich — in other words, a miser, *kṛpaṇa*.

Similarly, in the *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad*, *Yājñavalkya* tells *Gārgī*,<sup>1</sup> ‘The one who dies not knowing *Brahman* is a miser.’ Why is he or she considered a miser? Because the person had an intellect that he or she never used. Just as money is of no use to a person who will not spend it, what is the use of having an intellect if you cannot or will not use it?

One who has a *buddhi* and does not spend it is also a miser. Such a person uses as little intellect as possible, keeping it as it is. A man may exercise his intellect just a little to learn something in order to please his parents. He may even get a job. But that is the maximum he is willing to use his intellect for. He does not read anything, not even the newspaper. He sits staring at the TV, without using his intellect at all. Why should he use it? For this kind of life, he need not use it at all. No real thinking is ever done by such a person.

Real thinking is thinking about realities. Because you are dealing with reality, there must be thinking; otherwise, you are dealing only with shadows. If the realities are not known, you may be fighting in areas where no fighting is required. One who thinks about the fundamental reality of himself, the world and God, who knows what it is all about, is a *buddhimān*. This person is rich — he or she has an intellect to use and to spare. The *buddhimān* has used the *buddhi* for himself or herself and shares the knowledge gained with others.

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<sup>1</sup> Refer to page 164, Vol. 1

Thus, in this verse, *Kṛṣṇa* is saying that among the people, all of whom have *buddhis*, this person is the only one who is wise — *saḥ buddhimān manuṣyeṣu*. Just as some people have money without being rich, some people have *buddhis* without being wise. The *buddhimān*, however, is a *yogī*, a *kṛtsna-karmakṛt*, one who has done all that is to be done.

By discovering the *ātmā* to be *akartā*, the wise person has completely destroyed all the *karmas*. The self being full, *pūrṇa*, there is nothing more for this person to do at any time. The self as *akartā* is not a sometime affair. Once the self is known to be *akartā*, it will never become *kartā* again.

When we say *ātmā* is *asaṅga*, we mean that it is free from being a *kartā* and *bhoktā* which means it is free from *sukha* and *duḥkha*, *saṃsāra*. When it is said that *ātmā* is always *ānanda*, it means that *ātmā* is *pūrṇa*, full, limitless. This knowledge makes a person a *kṛtsna-karmakṛt*. Everything that is to be done has been done in one stroke. Nothing needs to be done for the person to be happy. Whatever *karmas* the person had to fulfil by taking many births have all been fulfilled. All *karma* has been completely taken care of. Any activity he or she undertakes later is born of joy — not for gaining some security and happiness. The person may continue to do the same thing he or she did before. What one does, does not alter the fact that one is *akartā*.

As long as there is a doer, a *kartā*, there is action even in so-called inaction. A wise person, a *buddhimān*, is able to see this. Because ‘I am not doing anything’ also implies a *kartā*, both *karma* and *akarma* become *karma* in the vision of the wise. Wherever there is doership, there is always some action or the other. Therefore, everything becomes action, be it action or inaction.

The *buddhimān* is also able to see *akarma* in both *karma* and *akarma* because, for such a person, there is no doership in the self — *ātmani kartṛtva-abhāva*. He or she knows that while *kartā*, the doer, is non-separate from the self, the self is not the doer. Because the person has this knowledge, he or she is said to be wise among human beings and is described as one who has done everything that is to be done, without exception — *saḥ buddhimān manuṣyeṣu saḥ kṛtsna-karmakṛt*.

## WHEN THERE IS NO DOER, THERE IS NO ACTION

When there is no *kartṛtva* in the *ātmā*, what *karma* is there for the person to do? If I am not the *kartā*, how can I perform action even if all four Vedas enjoin me? If they say, ‘O *kartā*, please do this ritual,’ I can only respond if I am the *kartā*. When someone says, ‘John, please come here,’ only John will come, no one else. Just as an individual is being addressed here, so too the Vedas also address the individual, ‘O person, please do these *karmas* — *karma kuru*.’



And who is the person the Vedas are addressing? Is it the *sat-cit-ānanda-ātmā* or the *kartā*? They are definitely addressing the *kartā*. And what happens if there is no *kartā*? There is no response. A wise person does not respond because he is not a *kartā*. Only when there is a *kartā*, a doer, does the addressing of the Vedas have an effect. Otherwise, it is useless. The enjoined *karmas* are also useless because they are all ‘as well done’ for the *kṛtsna-karmakṛt*. Even *karma-yoga* no longer applies to the wise person.

### THERE IS NO KARMA-YOGA FOR THE JÑĀNĪ

A *karma-yogī* is one who takes care of his or her *rāga-dveṣas*, likes and dislikes, by doing what is to be done with a proper attitude towards the actions and also towards their results. The Vedas address both the *karma-yogī* and the person who performs action strictly to accomplish certain desirable ends because both of them have *kartṛtva*, doership. Only the *jñānī*, the one who sees inaction, is not addressed by the Vedas because such a person sees *ātmā* as *akartā*, the non-performer of action.

If I am the non-performer of action, any enjoining done by the Vedas or anything else does not come to me at all. Therefore, whatever was to be done before is all over; I am a *kṛtsna-karmakṛt*. There is nothing more for me to do. And anything that was to be done later is also taken care of.

Before knowledge, all actions are meant for me — for my *sukha*, my happiness. I want some cheerfulness, some tranquillity, *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*. Then, with such a mind, I can achieve self-knowledge, which is seeing non-action in action — *karmaṇi akarma-darśanam*. To see non-action in action is to understand that I am *akartā*, a non-doer. Thus, for the sake of self-knowledge alone, I perform all the *karmas* that are to be done by me.

Even a *kāmī*, one who is not interested in self-knowledge but just wants to fulfil certain desires, has to perform certain actions, which are meant for the *kāmī*, the one who has desires. Because the person feels inadequate, he or she has certain desires that necessitate the performance of action. Suppose, however, you understand that the self is not inadequate, that it is adequate or more than adequate, then there is no desire for action. In fact, because the self is full, words like adequate and inadequate do not even come into the picture. Therefore, for the person who knows this, there is nothing to be done — *kāryaṃ karma na vidyate*.

When the mind, meaning the *ahaṅkāra* or the ego, is resolved in the *ātmā*, there is nothing for the person to do. In the wake of knowledge, *ahaṅkāra*, the I-notion, the *kartā*, is resolved in the *ātmā* and there is no longer any question of *ātmā* being the *kartā*. When there is no *kartā*, there is nothing to be done, which is why the person is called *kṛtsna-karmakṛt*. He or she has done everything that is to be done — in the past as well as in the future.

**THE WISE PERSON'S WILL HAS SERVED ITS PURPOSE**

This person for whom there is nothing-to-be-done is a *jñānī*, a wise person. Because there is nothing to be done for such a person, he or she is free to do a lot of things. When there is nothing to be done, what is there that is not to be done? There is no mandate for a *jñānī* enjoining him to do any particular action or prohibiting him from doing any particular action. His or her job is over. Hereafter, the person's will has no place at all. Whatever will the person had before the knowledge took place has been successfully used up, having served its purpose.

This is why *sannyāsīs* do not leave wills when they die. They have no will to leave a will. Only when will is there can there be a will! Sometimes, if the *sannyāsī* has many disciples, not leaving a will can cause problems as to who is to succeed him or her and so on. Whereas, if he or she is a traditional *sannyāsī*, a *paramparā-sannyāsī*, and the disciples have been taught well, there will be no problem. There will be no vying for the *sannyāsī's* seat because there is no seat. There is no organisation for a seat to be there. Each disciple is the seat, in fact.

In the Hindu tradition, *vaidika-dharma*, there is no organisation or hierarchical structure — no papacy, diocese, parish, or congregation. *Dharma*, of course, has no organisation and in that *dharma*, there is a person, a *sannyāsī*, who also has no organisation. The very word *sannyāsī* means that the person just lives with only the sky above him or her. The person is the only organisation that is there. And if he has any disciples, every disciple there may be, is an organisation. This is how the *paramparā*, the tradition, is. The *sannyāsī* does not even need the text of the *Upaniṣads* or the *Gītā*. Everything is in the form of understanding within the person's head. There is no organisational head other than this head and there is no organisation other than this.

**MOKṢA MEANS THE JĪVA IS GONE**

Once self-knowledge is gained, the job of the wise person is over and there is no will left. It has all been used up. The will is useful only until *mokṣa*, just as one's cheque book is useful only as long as one's account is not closed. Once the account is closed, what is the use of the cheques that you still have? They are useless. You can fill them out and give them to people, but they have no meaning. Similarly, when *mokṣa* is gained, the will is useless. The account is closed. The accountant has struck out the person's name with a red pen and has removed the file. One more *jīva* is gone, finished, and with this *jīva* goes everything else, meaning that all the *karma* term deposits simply evaporate. There is no longer anyone to claim them. Just as when a person dies, his or her file is marked, 'Deceased,' so too the *jīva's* file is closed and dispensed with because there will be no further transactions or complications. No one else is going to claim the *jīva's karma*; it is all over. The file is shredded and burnt with no trace left behind.

Therefore, the person is *kṛtsna-karmakṛt*. Having gained *mokṣa*, the person has nothing more to do.

## HOW OBJECTIONS ARE PRESENTED IN VEDĀNTA

Here, there is one small, but highly technical, objection raised by *Śaṅkara*. This objection is based on a somewhat different interpretation that is sometimes given to this verse.

Objections are raised in various ways in *Vedānta*. Certain philosophies are presented as sparring partners for us, like the *Sāṅkhya* and *Vaiśeṣika* schools of thought. There is also a person referred to as *pūrva-mīmāṃsaka* who is a little more than a sparring partner. *Mīmāṃsā* is the analysis of the sentences of the Vedas. The analysis of the sentences in the *pūrvabhāga*, the earlier portion or *karma-kāṇḍa* is called *pūrva-mīmāṃsā* while the analysis of the sentences of the *uttara-bhāga*, the later portion which is *Vedānta* is called *uttara-mīmāṃsā*.

Then, there are those who are not really sparring partners at all; they are opponents, like the *bauddhas* and *jainas* who have their own philosophies and have to be answered. To understand what *Vedānta* is saying, we use all of these as sparring partners by analysing their particular arguments. Some are permanent sparring partners, others are by invitation only, and with still others we do shadow fighting.

The philosophy of the *pūrva-mīmāṃsaka* is very simple; the Veda is eternal and is the final word in everything. According to the *pūrva-mīmāṃsaka*, the Veda enjoins you to do *karma* alone. For this person, knowledge is not *mokṣa*; performing *karma* is the only way to gain *mokṣa*. Because the *pūrva-mīmāṃsaka* analyses the *pramāṇa* so well, we make use of his method of analysis in *Vedānta*.

## THE PŪRVA-MĪMĀṂSAKA'S ARGUMENT

According to the *pūrva-mīmāṃsaka*, all sentences of the Veda deal primarily with action and therefore, do not really convey anything that is already there. It should be clearly understood that the sentences throughout the entire Veda can be taken as commands in terms of what is to be done, *vidhi-vākya*, or what is not to be done, *niṣedha-vākya*. Any sentence that reveals the nature of an object is connected to or subserves either a *vidhi-vākya* or a *niṣedha-vākya*.

This analysis of *karma*, *karma-mīmāṃsā* is very important because the orientation of any human mind, even the minds of those who are lazy, is towards *karma*, action. A person who is lazy is bothered because of the action that he or she does not perform. Thus, both the active and the lazy are oriented towards *karma* alone. That there is something to be done is the truth about everyone. For the *pūrva-mīmāṃsaka*, then, *mokṣa* can only be gained by performing *nitya-naimittika-karma*.

*Nitya-karmas* are the daily rituals that one has to perform and certain other enjoined duties that are to be done. *Naimittika-karmas* are those *karmas* that have to be done on certain occasions, as at the time of an eclipse. And these *nitya-naimittika-karmas* are to be done by everyone.

*Mokṣa*, according to the *pūrva-mīmāṃsaka*, also involves not doing any *kāmya-karma*, the actions done for a specific desirable result. One must do only those actions which are duties. The idea here is to avoid both *puṇya* and *pāpa*. By not planning or performing any *kāmya-karmas*, *puṇya* is avoided and by not doing what is not to be done, *pāpa* is avoided. In this way, the *prārabdha-karma* that brought this body into being will exhaust itself without your needing to do anything about it. The capital will be lost and the body will die. Having avoided all *puṇya* and *pāpa*, there will be no new *karmas* for you and therefore, no cause for a new birth. All you have to do is keep eating daily and do your *nitya-naimittika-karma*. This, then, is one argument for gaining *mokṣa*, through *karma* — the simple argument of the *pūrva-mīmāṃsaka*.

The two sets of *karma* — *nitya-karma* and *naimittika-karma* — are called duties. The *pūrva-mīmāṃsaka* argues that because they are duties, there is no result for you when you do them. In other words, they do not produce *puṇya*. And when you do not do these *karmas*, the omission attracts *pāpa* to you. This is the crux of the *pūrva-mīmāṃsaka*'s argument.

How can one attract sin by not doing an action? An example is given. When a person bathes, no one notices. Because it is a common activity, no one says, 'Oh!, you seem to have taken a bath today.' But suppose the person does not bathe? This omission is definitely noticed — if not by all, definitely by some! Thus, the *pūrva-mīmāṃsaka*'s argument is that there are actions to be done and if these are not done there is a result. *Nitya-naimittika-karmas* do not attract any result when they are done. Only when they are not done, do they attract results, *pāpa*.

This verse can, therefore, be seen from this standpoint. For the *pūrva-mīmāṃsaka*, the word *karmaṇi* in the expression — *karmaṇi akarma yaḥ paśyet* — means *nitya-naimittika-karmaṇi* — in the actions that are to be done daily or occasionally. And *akarma* refers to the absence of any result, *phala-abhāva*. Thus, the expression is taken to mean that one who sees *akarma*, the absence of result, in *nitya-naimittika-karma* is wise.

But if there is no result to be gained, *nitya-naimittika-karma* cannot be called a *karma* at all because there is no doer. To this, the *pūrva-mīmāṃsaka* says, 'No! There is a doer. *Ātmā* is the *kartā*; therefore, you cannot nullify the doer. The result alone is not there. And because there is no result, the *karma* becomes as good as *akarma*.

### IF THERE IS NO RESULT, WHY PERFORM ACTION?

At this point in the argument, any practical person is going to ask, ‘If there is no result, why should I perform the action? After all, is it not more pleasant to do nothing? To do all these *nitya-naimittika-karmas* takes a lot of time. If there is no result, surely I need not do them. ‘No!’ comes the reply; because if you do not do them, you will bring trouble upon yourself. There are many people who choose to go to heaven only because they are mortally afraid of hell, not because they are interested in heaven. Hell has been painted so vividly in their minds that naturally they cannot stand to think of having to go there. Even to hear about it makes their blood pressure go up. Therefore, they want to avoid hell by going to heaven. This kind of heaven-hell discussion is what pushes people into religion, in fact. If the heaven and hell aspects were removed, these religions would topple. No one would even look into them.

When the *karma* that is to be done by you is not done, you attract *pāpa* and, therefore, it is to be done, according to how some people interpret the ‘*karmaṇi akarma*’ portion of this verse. And the expression, ‘*akarmaṇi karma*,’ is interpreted as not doing an action that is to be done. According to this argument, if the to-be-done action is not done, a result, *phala*, is produced, and it becomes *karma*. Therefore, *karma* is *akarma* and *akarma* is *karma*. *Akarma* produces *phala* and *karma* does not. The one who sees all of this in this way is wise among human beings and has done all that is to be done — *saḥ buddhimān manuṣyeṣu saḥ yuktaḥ kṛtsna-karmakṛt*. This is the *pūrva-mīmāṃsaka*’s argument to which, *Śaṅkara* responds as follows.

### ŚAṅKARA'S RESPONSE

If what you do does not produce a result, and what you do not do, produces a result, why do any *karma* at all? Thus, *Śaṅkara* argues that, what is not done does not produce unseen result, *adr̥ṣṭa-phala*, in the form of *puṇya* and *pāpa*, although there can be *dr̥ṣṭa-phala*, seen results.

The omission of a to-be-done action can produce conflict or worry, which is a *dr̥ṣṭa-phala*. For example, when you have to write a letter and you do not do it, there may be some conflict. In this way, there can be *dr̥ṣṭa-phala*, but no *adr̥ṣṭa-phala*, which is *puṇya* and *pāpa*, the invisible results that accrue to the person who performs the action.

We are talking only about *puṇya* and *pāpa* here. For a *karma* that is not done, there can be no *pāpa* or *puṇya* and for a *karma* that is done, results cannot be avoided. *Karma-phala* will always be there as long as the *karma* is there. Even *nitya-naimittika-karma* produces results in the form of *puṇya*. Any to-be-done action, when it is performed, produces a result and not doing it produces only *dr̥ṣṭa-phala*, seen results and not *pāpa*.

When what is to be done is not done, there is always some inner irritation, some sense that you have missed out. Daily meditation, for instance, definitely produces *puṇya* — if you do it, of course. If, however, out of laziness or for some other reason, you do not perform this action, your omission will not produce *pāpa*, although it may produce some irritation. You may feel badly that you did not do it and, if you did not do it the day before either, you may become even sadder, but this is *dr̥ṣṭa-phala* only, not *adr̥ṣṭa-phala*.

For an action that is not done, no result can accrue. Only for action that is done can there be *adr̥ṣṭa-phala*, either *puṇya* or *pāpa*. If the action is proper, it will attract *puṇya* and if it is improper, it will attract *pāpa*.

*Śaṅkara* argues that if an action that is not done can produce results, then that which does not exist, *asat*, can produce that which exists, *sat*. To say that a nonexistent thing can produce an existent thing is like saying that a non-existent mother can bear a son. This contradicts all means of knowledge — *sarva-pramāṇa-virodha*. It is equally contradictory to say that *karmas* that are done do not produce results. You cannot throw a stone and expect that there will be no result. There will be a result — especially if it hits someone! Something must take place; some kind of reaction will be there. Therefore, action without reaction makes no sense at all.

And again, how can one become a *kṛtsna-karmakṛt* by the mere knowledge that performing the *nitya-naimittika-karma* is equivalent to *akarma* and non-performance of the *nitya-naimittika-karma* is equivalent to *karma*? Thus *Śaṅkara* raises yet another objection to the *Pūrva-mīmāṃsaka*'s argument.

*Jñāna* is what is being talked about here — knowledge of *karma* and *akarma*. But mere knowledge does not produce results; doing something produces results. How then can you say that the person is *kṛtsna-karmakṛt*? You cannot; you can only say he or she is the one who knows all the *karmas* that are to be done and not to be done — *kṛtsna-karmavit bhavati na tu kṛtsna-karmakṛt bhavati*.

### **THERE IS NOTHING TO BE DONE, ONLY TO BE SEEN**

*Kṛtsna-karmakṛt* refers to a person of fulfilment, one who has achieved everything, a liberated person, a *mukta-puruṣa*. *Kṛṣṇa* makes this point clear not only here, but before also, when he said that he would tell *Arjuna* about action and inaction, knowing which one is liberated — *tat te karma pravakṣyāmi yajñātvā mokṣyase'subhāt*.<sup>1</sup> Had there been anything to be done, *Kṛṣṇa* would have used the expression 'yat kṛtvā – doing which,' and not 'yat jñātvā – knowing which.'

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<sup>1</sup> *Gītā* – 4-16

In analysis, *mīmāṃsā*, what has been said before must always be kept in mind. Otherwise, there would be no analysis. When *Kṛṣṇa* says, ‘knowing which,’ he meant knowing what *karma* is and what *akarma* is, which is not as easy as you may think. *Karma* is not to be taken as merely performing action; nor is *akarma* to be taken as not doing action. The real nature of *karma* and *akarma* is something that has to be understood by you, knowing which you will be released from all *puṇya* and *pāpa* that is inauspicious.

The *pūrva-mīmāṃsaka* says that you have to do *karma*, but what is said here is that by knowing the nature of *karma* and *akarma*, you are released from all *puṇya* and *pāpa*. This is what is meant by *vākyārtha-vicāra* — inquiry into the sentence. The inquiry is done to find out what the sentence means and whether it has any other meaning. If there is another meaning possible, it will reveal a philosophy, a stand. Here, a particular stand is analysed by *Śaṅkara* and then dismissed as not being what was intended, as not being the meaning of the sentence.

In this verse, *Kṛṣṇa* is referring to knowledge alone. His description of one who has this knowledge continues in the next verse:

यस्य सर्वे समारम्भाः कामस ?ल्पवर्जिताः ।

ज्ञानाग्निदग्धकर्माणं तमाहुः पण्डितं बुधाः ॥ १९ ॥

*yasya sarve samārambhāḥ kāmasaṅkalpavarjitāḥ*

*jñānāgnidagdhakarmāṇaṃ tamāhuḥ paṇḍitaṃ budhāḥ* Verse 19

यस्य *yasya* — for whom; सर्वे *sarve* —all; समारम्भाः *samārambhāḥ* — undertakings; कामस ?ल्पवर्जिताः *kāma-saṅkalpa-varjitāḥ* — free from desire (for results) and will; ज्ञान-अग्नि-दग्ध-कर्माणम् *jñāna-agni-dagdha-karmāṇam* —whose actions are burned up by the fire of knowledge; तम् *tam* — him; बुधाः *budhāḥ* — the sages; पण्डितम् *paṇḍitam* — wise; आहुः *āhuḥ* — call

The one for whom all undertakings are free from desire (for results) and will, whose actions are burned up by the fire of knowledge, the sages call that person wise.

The person who was earlier described as being able to see inaction in action and action in inaction is again praised here. This person understands the nature of *karma* and *akarma*. He or she knows that *akarma* does not mean not doing an action; rather, it is seeing oneself, in the very action itself, as *akartā*, a non-doer. This is self-knowledge, the knowledge that makes you free, that makes you a *sarva-karmakṛt*, one who has done everything that is to be done.

There is a difference between action and activities that is to be noted here. An activity is an undertaking that implies a number of actions, various steps that you take.

Behind each activity there is a plan and, based on this plan, the activity is undertaken for achieving a given purpose. Any given activity meant to produce a given result has a certain beginning, whether the activity is building a house, cooking, or doing business. All such undertakings are called *samārambhas*.

When a wise person undertakes any activity, he or she does so without *kāma*, desire, and *sañkalpa*, will. *Kāma*, desire, is wanting to achieve something, for which there is a will, a *sañkalpa*. A *sañkalpa* is saying, 'By doing this, I will achieve that.' What happens and for whom does it happen when a wise person undertakes activities free of *kāma* and *sañkalpa*? Is there such a thing as activity for the wise?

### IS THERE ACTIVITY FOR THE WISE PERSON?

It has already been said that a wise person is *kṛtsna-karmakṛt*. Since *kṛtsna-karmakṛt* means the one for whom everything that has to be done has been done, there is nothing to be done by the person. The person has the vision of *ātmā*, the self, as *sat-cit-ānanda* and knows that he or she is *akartā*. This vision being there, the person is limitless, full, *pūrṇa*. How, then, can there be any activity for a person who has this knowledge? How can he or she talk, walk, see, hear, or think? For such a person, everything is over. The will has been all used up; it has been fulfilled. And if the will is not there, desire is not there. How then, is activity possible for the person?

Further, if activity is not possible for the wise person, then anyone who talks does not know the *ātmā*. In fact, this is another contention. Some people think that as long as a person talks about *ātmā*, he or she does not know. And once the person knows, he or she does not talk about it. This means that before knowing *ātmā*, you can talk about it and after knowing *ātmā* you cannot talk at all! A very common contention, prevalent in certain circles, is that one who sees does not talk and one who talks does not see. This is why in India there are so many *maunī bābās, sādhus* who do not talk.

According to this contention, if you become a *jñānī*, you perform no activity whatsoever; you do not even breathe. Since not breathing means dying, who would want knowledge, *jñāna*, under such circumstances? If I tell you I am going to give you *jñāna*, but the moment you get it, you will die, you will naturally ask when you will be getting this *jñāna*. I can only tell you that you may get it tomorrow or today, or even at this very moment. After all, being knowledge, it can happen at any time. This also means that at any time you can die — today, tomorrow, or right now! If having heard my response, you ask, 'Swamiji, where will you be in twelve years?' I will know that you have decided to live twelve more years. The period of time will vary depending on how old you are now and how much you still want to do. But, definitely, you will postpone gaining this knowledge. In fact, no one will ever be interested in a *mokṣa* that amounts to death because no one wants to be mortal. Everyone is interested only in being



immortal. Even if I say, 'You will die and become immortal,' no one will go for it. Everyone wants to live and be immortal at the same time.

In fact, if this contention were correct, there would be no teacher. We would have a situation where only those who do not know can perform the activity of teaching and those who know cannot because they are *kṛtsna-karmakṛt*. Since the person who does not know cannot teach and the *kṛtsna-karmakṛt* also cannot teach because teaching is an activity, who would teach? Therefore, this meaning of the word *kṛtsna-karmakṛt* is not what is being conveyed here.

Although *kṛtsna-karmakṛt* means there is nothing for the person to do, it does not mean that he or she does nothing. *Kṛṣṇa* drove the chariot and was teaching *Arjuna*. *Śaṅkara* wrote a number of commentaries and *Vyāsa* wrote any number of books. Assuming they knew what they were teaching, they were definitely engaged in activities. Even in terms of talking alone, they were very active. How, then, can you say a teacher is *kṛtsna-karmakṛt*?

#### WHY DO THE WISE TEACH?

For the teacher also, there is something to do. He or she has to teach. And why does the teacher teach? Does the person teach because he or she is going to get something out of it? If so, then the person does not know. Only when a teacher teaches, knowing, 'The teacher is me, but 'I,' the *ātmā*, is not the teacher,' does the person really know what he or she is teaching. And if this is clear, why should a person not teach?

If you ask why the person should teach, I will ask why should he or she not teach? By teaching, the person does not come out of himself or herself. In *karma*, he or she sees *akarma*. Whatever you may know about yourself, that self is always there. No one ever comes out of this self, in fact. Whatever you know, you are. Therefore, if a person knows, 'I am *sat-cit-ānanda* and I perform no action,' there is no question of any mistake being made. The person always sees *akarma* in any *karma*. Why, then, should he or she not teach or do anything else? Such a person teaches because there is no reason why he or she should not teach. This is the only reason, in fact. If there is someone who wants to listen, to learn, why should the person not teach? There should be no other reason for teaching. Someone wants to learn and, therefore, someone teaches. There should be nothing more to it than that.

If a person thinks action is bondage, then action becomes *satya* for that person. To think that certain actions are bondage and certain other actions are not bondage is all confusion. And to remove such confusion, *karma* must be understood. Because people do not understand *karma* and *akarma*, they say that *vedānta-śāstra* is a theory and that

it is *karma* alone that produces *mokṣa*. *Kṛṣṇa*, himself, said that even sages are confused about *karma* and *akarma*<sup>1</sup>.

*Karma* is not an ordinary topic and is not easy to understand. Many people, even those who are very serious, have lost themselves in it because they do not understand. Organisations and many social services have been born out of the non-understanding of this topic. Therefore, *karma* is something that is to be understood.

For one who understands *karma* and *akarma*, teaching is not an action, even though there is action, because the person sees inaction in action, knowing himself or herself to be *akartā*.

For such a person, there is no *karma*, *akarma*, or anything else — no desire or will. There is not even the desire to teach. If a teacher who knows what it is all about does not have an opportunity to teach, he or she does not lose anything. The person will not become lonely or be at a loss for something to do. Nor is anything lost if the person teaches.

#### TO TEACH IN ORDER TO SAVE THE WORLD IS NOTHING BUT DELUSION

Anyone who thinks that he or she teaches in order to save the world is under the spell of a great delusion. In fact, the person is in need of being saved and, in the meantime, the world should be saved from such a person. Self-appointed saviours definitely create problems. If the person thinks that God appointed him or her to save the world, the question can be asked, ‘Why should God have appointed you to do this? He can save the world himself.’ What God is he who would appoint someone to save the world when he himself is almighty? Why should an almighty God want an intermediary?

That I am going to save the world is the greatest delusion. How can you save the world when you yourself need an entire society to keep you going? Your food, clothing, and shelter, all come to you because so many people work to grow the food, sew the clothes, and build the houses. Who are you to save anyone? You are as helpless as anyone else. And what is it or who is the one that you can save?

On the other hand, if you have something that you can spare and still survive, and there is someone who needs it and can be helped by it, there is no problem. It is a simple human thing. There is no question of anyone saving the world, in fact. Such thinking is nothing but delusion, *ahaṅkāra* or the ego.

The world has survived for so many years without you. Even now, in spite of you, it continues to survive. So, how many people are you going to save? Whereas, if you say that you have something and can share it with another who needs it, you are a mature human being. What everyone has is to be shared. Whether you have enough to give to

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<sup>1</sup> *Gītā* – 4-16

one person or to one thousand people makes no difference. If you do not have money to share, you may have some time to share and you share it. Or you have some good words to share with those who need them and you do so.

Good words are not words that place one's hopes somewhere. Nor are they good news. Good words are the words that speak of your accepting the person without judging. As he or she is, you accept the person totally. Such words boost the morale of the person, and are not promises in terms of the future, after death, and so on. Who wants or needs such things? They only postpone resolving the problem. No practical person wants to hear that there is no hope here, but only later in heaven, and that they should ensure that they go to heaven and not to damnation. What kind of philosophy is this? Who wants these kinds of words? What a person needs are simple words that make him or her feel acceptable.

### TO SAVE YOURSELF IS ENOUGH

Words that tell me that there is one person who understands me as I am and that I am acceptable to that person, are very beautiful words indeed. They create an atmosphere wherein I am accepted. This is all anyone wants. No one saves anyone. We do not learn *Vedānta* to save people, much less the world. To think that if you enlighten the majority of people, society will be transformed is the greatest delusion. To save yourself from condemning yourself is enough. By doing so, there will be one problem less for the world to deal with.

Also, by being a cheerful person, you are not radiating your sorrow to others. Sorrow is a very contagious disease. Doors and windows cannot stop it. Even though you keep your doors and windows locked, somehow the sorrow of others manages to creep in. It has its own ways of travelling and does not even need keyholes. Thus, if there is one person on earth who is happy with himself or herself, that person is doing a great service to the world because he or she has no sadness to radiate to others.

You may say that you keep your sadness to yourself so that it does not radiate to others. Doing this just creates additional problems because eventually the build-up will result in outbursts of anger and frustration. Therefore, you had better not keep your sadness to yourself. Talking about your sorrow to someone is definitely better than holding on to it.

All that you can do, then, is save yourself from your own persecutions. The world does not persecute you; you persecute yourself with your own self-condemnation. This is why it is said that you are both your own best friend and your own worst enemy. You can be cruel to yourself and you can be kind to yourself. To save yourself from your own persecutions is freedom. And when that freedom is there, any discerning pair of eyes with a mind that has some leisure will recognise it. People will ask you how you became

so free. ‘You seem to have something,’ they will say, ‘What is it that you have? Please tell me.’

### WISDOM HAS NO NAME

*Vedānta* is a name, but wisdom, *jñāna*, has no name. It is just knowledge. Others will see that you seem to be free and will naturally want to know what you know. Your word may ring true to them and they will want to know more provided, of course, they know you as someone they can trust, someone they can meet without being judged. If there is such a person in the world, who will not go to that person and become his or her student naturally?

This, then, is how the wise become teachers — not because they want to teach but because there are people who want to learn. Such a person has no *kāma* or *saṅkalpa* even though he or she performs certain activities.

In this verse, the person is further described as *jñāna-agni-dagdha-karmā*, one whose actions are burned up by the fire of knowledge. For the one who has this knowledge, all the *karmas* standing in his or her account are totally wiped out. This is the person the sages call wise.

Only the wise can call another person wise. If one who is not wise calls someone wise, there is a problem because the person is doing so based on his or her own concept of wisdom. Here, it is said that the sages, *budhāḥ*, call the same person wise who was described earlier as *kṛtsna-karmakṛt*. Such a person is able to see the actionlessness as the nature of *ātmā*. Because he or she sees actionlessness as the nature of the self, the person recognises himself or herself as *akartā*, a non-doer, action being impossible for *ātmā*.

### BOTH THE DOER AND THE ACTIVITIES ARE ĀTMĀ

Even when activities take place, the *kartā*, the doer, is *ātmā*. The activities themselves are also *ātmā*, along with the *karaṇas*, instruments of action. Because everything is *ātmā*, there are no such differences such as *kartā*, *karma*, and *karaṇa*. If the self is *akartā*, all three are the same. In fact, the subject-object distinction is not there. Only when the self is mistaken for a *kartā*, a doer, does everything else naturally become different from that doer.

Who is the *kartā* then? The self as the doer has to be recognised as the physical body-mind-sense complex. That alone will be the self for one who sees the self as a doer. If this is the conclusion, then, there are differences — in the form of *kriyā*, the action coming from the *kartā*, the person; *karma*, an object of action; and *karma-phala*, the result of action that accrues to the person. This is exactly what is meant by the expression *saṁsāra-cakra*, the wheel of *karma*.

If a person who looks upon himself or herself as a *kartā* is able to recognise that the nature of the self is always actionlessness, that 'I am that actionlessness, free from any *karma*,' then action becomes purely apparent, *mithyā*, for the person. And when action is *mithyā*, the actor also becomes *mithyā*, as does the result of action and everything else. Because the person sees the self in this way, there is no real action on his or her part at any time. This is what is meant by the statement in the previous verse, — *karmaṇi akarma yaḥ paśyēt*. The wise person is one who, even when performing an action, is able to see the actionlessness in it.

There is no particular state involved here; it is recognition, knowledge of the self free from doership. This is why the person was described as *kṛtsna-karmakṛt*. Seeing himself or herself free from doership, the person has done all the actions that are to be done. The *kṛtsna-karmakṛt* is also free of desire and will — *kāma-saṅkalpa-varjita*, as we have seen. Being free of *kāma* and *saṅkalpa* means that the person is not controlled in any way by whatever desire or will he or she may have. Therefore, the desire is not a binding desire and whatever *saṅkalpa* that may be there is also non-binding.

#### KARMA FOR A WISE PERSON IS DESTROYED BY KNOWLEDGE

The desire and will of a wise person is like a seed that has been roasted — *dagdha-bījavat* — and therefore, cannot germinate and bear fruit. *Dagdha-bīja*, a roasted seed, is a particular expression used here for the purpose of analysis. If seeds are sown, they are capable of producing results, whereas if they are roasted, they are good only for the enjoyment of those who eat them. They cannot be used for cultivation because they are no longer capable of germinating.

Similarly, all the *karmanas* of a wise person are only for enjoyment, *bhogārtha*, in the sense of *karma-phala-bhoga*, enjoying the results of action. The *prārabdha-karma*, the person came with, has to run its course and therefore, any *karma* he or she does, knowing the *ātmā* is *akartā*, is only *bhoga*, experience, the exhaustion of *prārabdha-karma* alone. The person's actions cannot produce anything because he or she is *akartā*. Such a person is called a *pañḍita*, wise, and a *jñāna-agni-dagdha-karmā*.

*Jñāna-agni-dagdha-karmā* is therefore, another compound, describing the wise person. *Jñāna*, knowledge, is referred to as fire, *agni*, and this fire of knowledge, *jñāna-agni*, burns up all the person's *karmanas*. Therefore, the person is called *jñāna-agni-dagdha-karmā*, one whose *karmanas* have been destroyed by knowledge.

#### KARMA NEVER RETURNS FOR THE WISE PERSON

But, you may ask, will the *karmanas* return? The destruction of *karma* referred to here is not like what happens when a tree is cut down and grows back again from the

roots. The *karmas* are destroyed totally. They have no more existence whatsoever; they are burned to ashes as it were.

As long as a person has not understood that *ātmā* is *akartā*, then there is a *jīva* who is a *kartā*. And, ignorance being its cause, the *jīva* has no beginning. In other words, because ignorance is not something that was created, the *jīva* is also not created at a given time. Anything that is not created cannot have a beginning. All creation is only in terms of one's body-mind-sense complex and the world in which one lives.

### THE UNCREATED SELF AND THE CREATION

Consciousness is also not something that is created. Therefore, consciousness being *ātmā*, the Lord did not create *ātmā*, the self. He created only those objects that we call bodies, along with various other forms, and this he did according to laws. What we call the creation is for the *jīva*, whereas the *jīva*, who in reality is none other than *ātmā*, is not created. In the creation, there is one thing that is not created — the consciousness that is *ātmā*. Everything else, which we call creation, has been created due to the *jīva's karma* alone.

And why this *karma*? Because the *jīva* is a *kartā*. Why is the *jīva* a *kartā*? Because of *ajñāna*, ignorance. When did this ignorance begin? Ignorance is *anādi*, meaning that it has no beginning whatsoever. From the standpoint of *jīva*, there is an account, a *karma-phala* or *puṇya-pāpa* account.

This *karma-phala* has been gathered by the *jīva* over countless number of births whose beginning cannot be established. Therefore, these births can also be considered to be infinite in number. And in this infinite number of births, in different periods of time, an infinite number of *karmas* have been collected. Being so numerous, these *karmas* cannot fulfil themselves in one physical body at a given time and place. Only one set of *karmas* can be exhausted in a given incarnation. Thus, in this particular incarnation, I can exhaust a certain set of *karmas* and the rest remain in my account for future incarnations. Some of the *karmas* in this set can be exhausted only when you are born in India and others can be exhausted only when you happen to be in the U.S.A.

### 'TERM DEPOSIT' KARMAS

Even though this particular set of *karmas* is being exhausted in a given incarnation, there are still infinite *karmas* in your account waiting to be exhausted. These 'term deposit' *karmas* are called *sañcita-karmas*, the *karmas* that cannot be exhausted in this particular body. Also, while exhausting *karmas* in this incarnation, I gather new *karmas* as long as I enjoy the status of doership, *kartṛtva*. These are called *kriyamāṇa-karma* or *āgāmi-karma*, *karma* that is being gathered now, in this lifetime. *Āgāmi-karma* means futuristic *karma*. You gather new *puṇya* and *pāpa* because you

enjoy a free will and these new *karmas* join all the others that have accumulated in your account.

Because all the *puṇya-pāpa* that you have gathered is lodged in one general account, you cannot say that this life is due to your immediate past. The most you can say is that it is due to the past. The *puṇya-pāpa* is all credited to this general account from which certain *karmas* precipitate and from there again another set of *karmas* precipitate. Therefore, a particular incarnation can be the result of *karmas* collected in the previous birth plus those you collected from a thousand births previously. Since all types of *karmas* can join together and create a new birth, the choices are plenty. In this way, then, any of them can join together, giving you another lease.

The set of *karmas* that began to fructify from the moment this physical body was conceived is called *prārabdha-karma*, *karma* that has already begun, *ārabdha*. These, then, are the three types of *karma* — *sañcita*, *āgāmi*, and *prārabdha* generally referred to as *karma*.

#### KNOWLEDGE DESTROYS ALL KARMAS

For the person who is able to recognise the self as *akartā*, there is no longer any doership, *kartr̥tva*. And, since there is no *kartr̥tva* all the *karmas* standing in his or her name are burned up, *dagdha*, by the fire of knowledge, *jñāna-agni*. Whereas, if this knowledge is not there, there is no end to the number of births and the gathering of *karmas*. This is why *saṃsāra* is said to be endless.

Thus, there is only one way out — by the fire of knowledge that destroys all the *karmas*. They are all destroyed because there is no *kartā*. All the *sañcita-karmas* standing in the general account, any *āgāmi-karma* that he or she reaps in this life are all totally destroyed. *Puṇya* and *pāpa* will no longer come to the person because there is no *kartr̥tva* in terms of knowledge. Therefore, he or she is called *jñāna-agni-dagdha-karmā* here.

From the standpoint of *ātmā* one is free of *prārabdha-karma* also. *Prārabdha* is only from the point of view of the physical body, mind, and senses. Because the person is still here, still seen, we say there is *prārabdha-karma*, but we cannot say that *ātmā* is suffering due to *prārabdha*. The person has destroyed all *karmas* by the fire of knowledge and is therefore, wise, *pañḍita*. He or she is now a free person called *jīvanmukta*. The word *jīvan* means ‘while living’ and the word *mukta* means ‘liberated.’ This person is liberated right now while living and not later after death. Therefore, he or she is called a called *jīvanmukta*.

## THE JÑĀNĪ AND KARMA

Given this understanding, then, can a *jñānī* be defined in terms of whether or not he or she performs *karma*? It all depends on the person's *prārabdha*. Based on his or her *prārabdha*, the *jñānī* has to undergo certain experiences. This is why you will find varieties of *jñānīs*. They may be *grhasthas*, married people with children. They may also be doing business or ruling a country, like King *Janaka*. A *jñānī* can be doing anything or give up everything and take to the life-style of *sannyāsa*.

As long as a *jñānī* is a *grhastha* there are *karmas* to be done. He cannot simply say, 'I am a *jñānī*,' and avoid what he has to do. He has to continue to do the rituals that *grhasthas* are enjoined to do. But even though the *jñānī* performs these rituals, it is not *karma* because the person knows the *ātmā* to be *akartā*. At the same time, a *jñānī* does not want to set a wrong example for the people and so, as a *grhastha*, he or she will perform *karma*. Nor does the person lose anything by doing it. Thus, a *jñānī* performing action is not a problem.

For the *jñānī*, there is no *kāma* or *sañkalpa* in action. He or she does not say, 'I am going to accomplish this so that I can be that.' Therefore, the person may do anything. He or she may act out the drama, play the role, and play it well. Or the person may see the drama and its roles as useless — naturally so because there is uselessness there — and take to *sannyāsa*.

Even as a *sannyāsī* the person may or may not do *karma*. He or she may or may not teach. The *sannyāsī* may be a *maunī bābā* and not teach or he or she may teach. If a *sannyāsī* teaches, the teaching may be done in a simple manner or in a highly organised manner. It all depends upon the *prārabdha* of the *sannyāsī*.

And those *sannyāsīs* who have taken *sannyāsa* as a life-style, for the sake of gaining the knowledge, have only one role to play. They are completely freed from all obligations except those attached to their role as a student. Then, when a *mumuksu* gains *jñāna*, he or she will continue to live a life of *sannyāsa*.

*Ātmā* is one and the same, but, because of *prārabdha*, there are many kinds of *jñānīs*, more of which we shall see in the next few verses:

त्यक्त्वा कर्मफलासङ्गं नित्यतृप्तो निराश्रयः ।

कर्मण्यभिप्रवृत्तोऽपि नैव किञ्चित्करोति सः ॥ २० ॥

*tyaktvā karmaphalāsaṅgaṃ nityatrpto nirāśrayaḥ*  
*karmaṇyabhipravṛtto'pi naiva kiñcītkaroti saḥ*

Verse 20

सः *saḥ* — he; कर्म-फल-आसङ्गम् *karma-phala-āsaṅgam* — deep attachment to the results of action; त्यक्त्वा *tyaktvā* — giving up; नित्यतृप्तः *nityatrptaḥ* — always contented; निराश्रयः *nirāśrayaḥ* — being not dependent on anything; कर्मणि *karmaṇi* —



in action; अभिप्रवृत्तः *abhipravṛttaḥ* — fully engaged; अपि *api* — even though; किञ्चित् *kiñcit* — anything; एव *eva* —indeed; न करोति *na karoti* — does not do

Giving up the deep attachment to the results of action, always contented, being not dependent on anything, he (or she) does not do anything even though fully engaged in action.

*Saṅga* is attachment and *āsaṅga* is deep, fast attachment towards the results of action, *karma-phala*. The wise person has no fast attachment towards the *karma-phala*, the result. Because no one performs action without expecting results, the word *āsaṅga* is used in this verse. The point to be understood here is that a *jñānī* does not get anything out of a result. The person's welfare is not bettered or his or her happiness increased, no matter what the action or its result. This is because the wise person has given up all dependence on and attachment to the results of action.

#### ALL THAT IS GIVEN UP IS ONE'S ATTACHMENT

It is not the *karma* or the *karma-phala* that is given up by the *jñānī*, only the deep attachment that one has to the results of action. This is made very clear here because the possibility of giving up *karma-phala* is often questioned. The only reason a person performs action is because he or she has an eye on the result of action. Even while walking, the place you want to reach is kept in view. You turn here and go straight there because that is what you have to do to arrive at where you are going.

Without keeping the end in view, you cannot undertake any type of action. How, then, can this attachment be given up? If I am not able to reach my destination, why should I not become upset? In fact, this is exactly what happens to people and is what we call *āsaṅga* or *āsaṅga*. If you are unable to accomplish something and it affects you, then you have *karma-phala-āsaṅga*, *karma-phala-āsaṅga*.

Suppose, there is someone who is always contented, *nitya-trṛptaḥ*. For such a person, there is nothing to accomplish, the self being what it is and known to the person also. There is no dependence whatsoever upon any particular *karma-phala* for his or her contentment. From this description of a wise person, we understand that other people do things for satisfaction, *trṛpti*, for achieving something out of the action done. If you are dissatisfied with yourself, you undertake something or other in order to get some kind of satisfaction, some self-approval.

#### THE ALWAYS-CONTENTED, ALWAYS-SECURE PERSON

Because there is some satisfaction in self-approval, you want to prove yourself to be somebody, either in your own eyes or in the eyes of another. The problem here is that you do not accept yourself as you are. This is the only reason someone else's opinion can

be so important to you and is, in fact, the problem of any *saṃsārī*. Only when the self is clear, when there is self-knowledge, can one be happy by oneself with oneself, as we saw in the third chapter. This happiness does not depend on anything else; it is in oneself alone. For such a person, there is nothing to be done and even when he or she does something, it does not affect the person's happiness in any manner. This always-contented person, then, is one who has given up all attachment to the results of action.

Such a person is also described as *nirāśraya*, free from all dependence. He or she does not depend upon anything for security or happiness, knowing that there is nothing more secure than the self. In fact, everything exists because of this self. In the self everything has its being. Even the mind has its being in the self alone, as does everything that is reported to the mind by the thoughts.

### EVERYTHING DEPENDS ON ĀTMĀ FOR ITS EXISTENCE

Existence itself is the nature, *svarūpa*, of *ātmā*. Therefore, everything has its *āśraya*, dependence or basis, in *ātmā*, just as the pot depends upon the clay for its existence. A better example would be the situation of seeing a snake on a rope. When you take the rope to be a snake, the snake has its existence, *sattā*, in the rope. The rope-snake has no existence except the existence of the rope. Similarly, the world, *jagat*, has no existence except the existence of the self.

The person who is aware of this fact is *nirāśraya*, one who depends on nothing for his or her fullness or satisfaction, because the self as the whole is already full. The person knows, 'I am the whole. I am the *āśraya* of everything. In fact, everything is me.' This person has given up all attachments to the fruits of action — not as an attitude, not by *karma-yoga*, but by knowledge.

A *karma-yogī* also gives up attachment to *karma-phala*, but by attitude, accepting *Īśvara* as the giver of the results, *karma-phala-dātā*. This person takes everything as *prasāda*, without reacting; but this is *yoga*, not *jñāna*, which is entirely different. *Yoga* is relative and, therefore, the person's tranquillity is also relative. While this kind of mind is definitely useful for gaining the knowledge, the distinction between *yoga*, which is an attitude implying an understanding of *Īśvara*, and *vidyā*, knowledge, must be very clear.

Because the *karma-yogī* accepts *Īśvara* as the *karma-phala-dātā*, he or she has an attitude of taking things as they come and leaving them as they go. This means the person has a mind that does not react and, is, therefore, not under the spell of *rāga-dveṣas*. Here, in these verses, the same *karma-yogī* has the knowledge of the self as *akartā*. Therefore, even though this wise person may be engaged in an enormous number of activities, the self is not taken to be the doer.

King *Janaka* was said to be such a person. Even though he was a *jñānī*, he ruled a kingdom and he ruled it well. He had a handle on everything and always knew what was going on. The kingdom was prosperous and everyone was happy. Thus, a *jñānī* can enthusiastically engage himself or herself in a number of activities and still perform no action — *naiva kiñcit karoti saḥ* — in terms of knowing that he or she is not the doer.

### THE SELF IS NOT THE ROLE

An actor who plays the role of a killer does not take himself to be a killer — even before he removes the makeup! He sees himself as not doing anything. And if, while playing a role, he kicks someone, he knows he does not kick. When he goes backstage later, he does not say to the person, ‘I am sorry I kicked you.’ Nor does he need to excuse himself in this way. He may however, ask whether it was a good kick, to which the other person may reply, ‘Yes, it was a good kick. It didn’t hurt me at all. You kicked very well.’ Because they know they are playing roles, they can talk only about the nature of the action. But they cannot talk about it as though one person did something to the other and needs to apologise. The actor who kicked is not to blame. Nor is there any action involved because there is no doership — there is *kartṛtva-abhāva*. And there is no *kartā* either.

### KARMA AND JÑĀNA ARE IN OPPOSITION

*Kartṛtva*, doership, is the whole problem. In fact, *saṃsāra* is centred on doership alone. *Ātma-jñāna* the subject matter of *Vedānta* is opposed to *karma* in that *jñāna* and *karma* are entirely distinct. Most of the Veda is *karma-kāṇḍa*. *Jñāna*, *Vedānta*, comes at the end. The end of the Veda, the last chapter, is *Vedānta*. Even though it is the last chapter, *Vedānta* is mentioned separately because there are two different topics involved — *karma* and *jñāna*. One being entirely different from the other, the two are in opposition.

*Karma* means *saṃsāra*; *jñāna*, is *mokṣa*. *Karma* implies *kartā*; *jñāna* destroys the *kartā*. *Karma* implies ignorance; *Jñāna* destroys ignorance. Therefore, *jñāna* implies *akartṛtva* and *karma* implies *kartṛtva*. Keeping the *kartā*, that is already there, in view, the Veda tells you to do *karma*. This is where *karma* can be converted into *yoga*. The *kartā* is retained and the *karma* is converted into *yoga* to gain the maturity that prepares the mind for *jñāna*, the discovery that you are *akartā*.

There is no shortcut to maturity and one does have to be mature for gaining knowledge. Maturity takes its own time. Therefore, it is not a question of doing it in five years, ten years, or twenty years. When one may have had numerous births before, twenty years or ten years or five years means nothing. A man may have been studying *Vedānta* for eighty years before he begins seeing clearly. When he is 99 he may say, ‘Now I have understood.’ What does it matter that he has only one more year to live?

Even if a person does not start until he is eighty years old and understands when he is 98, what does it matter? After knowledge, all that remains is *prārabdha*. Whether he lives another year, two years, or three years means nothing whatsoever.

### MATURITY TAKES TIME

That it takes a person so many years to understand does not mean anything. The maturity required for the knowledge to take place, *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*, has to be gained and there is no hurry. Hurrying it does not work, in fact it is like waiting for a banana to ripen. You cannot sit beside the banana tree and say to a green banana, ‘Come on, hurry up and mature. Ripen, so that I can eat you!’ You have to let it ripen; only then will it be soft and tasty. It takes its own time and there is nothing you can do about it.

All processes of ripening and growth are the same, including the maturity of the mind. *Yoga* is meant for this purpose, for *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*. In this sense, then, *karma* is useful. And once the mind is ready, *jñāna* takes place. Therefore, while *jñāna* is opposed to *karma*, *karma* contributes to *jñāna*, which is why *karma* comes first in the Veda and *jñāna* comes afterwards. *Karma* has to come first because it is due to *ajñāna*, ignorance. If a person takes himself or herself to be a *kartā*, a doer, the person is ignorant. Therefore, as *kartā*, retaining the *kartr̥tva*, the person has to mature. Then only can *jñāna* come.

Maturity implies two levels — the subjective and the empirical. Subjectively, we gather a lot of problems, all of which have to be accounted for and taken care of. Then, empirically, there are wrong conclusions in terms of values, relationships, and so on, which also have to be taken care of. It is with reference to these levels of maturity that *karma-yoga* comes in. *Karma-yoga* leads to *jñāna*, the knowledge, that ‘I am a non-doer, *aham akartā*.’ Once this knowledge is gained, the person performs no action.

Thus, the Veda has two entirely different subject matters, *karma* and *jñāna*. The first portion of the Veda which deals with *karma* is called *karma-kāṇḍa*. The second portion which deals with *jñāna* is called *jñāna-kāṇḍa*, *Vedānta*. An analysis of the *karma-kāṇḍa* in terms of what *karma* is to be done, how it is to be done and so on is called *karma-mīmāṃsā*<sup>1</sup> or *pūrva-mīmāṃsā*. This is in the form of *karma-mīmāṃsā-sūtras* written by *Jaimini* a disciple of *Vyāsa*. Similarly an analysis of *jñāna-kāṇḍa* is called *uttara-mīmāṃsā*. This is in the form of *Brahma-sūtras* written by *Vyāsa* himself. In the *Brahma-sūtras* the sentences of the *Upaniṣads* are fully analysed. The subject matter is further analysed in the light of various schools of thoughts. This analysis is called *manana*. Finally what *Vedānta* itself says is established.

*Vedānta* is separate because *karma* and *jñāna* are two different topics, neither of which is ordinary. This is the entire subject matter of *Kṛṣṇa*’s teaching in the *Gītā*.

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<sup>1</sup> *Mīmāṃsā* – analysis

When you understand *karma* and *jñāna* properly, you are free. This knowledge implies understanding the nature of *ātmā* as being *akartā*. Given the importance of continuing in the same vein, *Kṛṣṇa* continues.

निराशीर्यतचित्तात्मा त्यक्तसर्वपरिग्रहः ।

शारीरं केवलं कर्म कुर्वन्नाप्नोति किल्बिषम् ॥ २१ ॥

*nirāśīryatacittātmā tyaktasarvaparigrahaḥ*

*śārīraṃ kevalaṃ karma kurvannāpnoti kilbiṣam*

Verse 21

नीराशीः *nirāśīḥ* — free of expectations; यत-चित्त-आत्मा *yata-citta-ātmā* — one whose body, mind, and senses have been mastered; त्यक्त-सर्व-परिग्रहः *tyakta-sarva-parigrahaḥ* — one who has given up all possessions; केवलम् *kevalam* — mere; शारीरम् *śārīram* — for the sustenance of the body; कर्म *karma* — action; कुर्वन् *kurvan* — doing; किल्बिषम् *kilbiṣam* — sin; न आप्नोति *na āpnoti* — does not incur

The person who is free of expectations, whose body, mind, and senses have been mastered, who has given up all possessions, doing only action that sustains the body, does not incur sin.

While describing a wise person, a *jñānī*, *Kṛṣṇa* presents different kinds of people in terms of *karma*. We saw the *jñānī* who engages in numerous activities knowing he or she is not doing anything — *karmaṇi abhipravṛtto'pi naiva kiñcit karoti saḥ*. In this verse, while still describing the *jñānī*, *Kṛṣṇa* introduces a different type of person who knows that *ātmā* is *akartā*.

As in the previous verse, here also the first line describes the *jñāna* and the second line describes the life-style of the person. In this verse, the one who knows the self is said to be *nirāśīḥ*, one who is free from expectations, *āśis*. *Āśis* also means hope but here, the negative prefix 'ni' in *nirāśīḥ* does not mean that the person is hopeless. It means he or she is free from hope, free from expectations. Thus, *jñānī* is one from whom all expectations have dropped away. And how does this happen?

The hopeless person has expectations — expectations that are hopeless for him or her, in that there is no way of fulfilling them. Because the person has given up all hope of fulfilling his or her expectations, he or she is desperate. This means that the person has not grown out of them. Such a person is frustrated and is different from the *jñānī*, one from whom all expectations have dropped away because of discovering the self to be free from everything.

## HOW DOES ONE BECOME FREE FROM EXPECTATION?

A person who lives maturely before gaining knowledge is almost free. Because of *yoga*, the person is not under the spell of likes and dislikes and is, therefore, already

relatively free. Once such a person discovers the self, he or she is totally free and does not have to fulfil desires in order to be full and happy. Thus, the person is described as *nirāśīḥ*, free from expectation.

This freedom is in part due to prior accomplishment in terms of mastery over the body-mind-sense complex. Thus, the *jñānī* is also described in this verse as *yatacittātmā*, one who has mastery over the physical body, mind, and senses. *Citta* stands for the entire mind — memory, knowledge, and all forms of thinking. *Ātmā*, in this particular compound, *yatacittātmā*, refers to the physical body, which, along with the mind, is mastered.

Mastery here means that the body, mind, and senses are with the person. They are in their proper places; they are as they are. And the one in whose hands the body, mind and senses are, the one by whom they are mastered, is called *yatacittātmā*. Before knowledge, the person had this qualification relatively and now, with the knowledge, he or she has it absolutely.

*Kṛṣṇa* also says here that this particular *jñānī* is *tyakta-sarva-parigraha*, one who has given up all his or her possessions, meaning that the person being described is a typical *sannyāsī*. Either the person had already taken to the life-style of a *sannyāsī* before gaining knowledge or was a *gṛhastha* who, having gained the knowledge, decided to give up everything.

Having a variety of possessions can be a problem. For example, a person may have a large house and find that it takes up too much time and money to maintain it properly. He or she may, therefore, consider selling the house, investing the money, and moving into a comfortable apartment. But then there is the problem of what to do with all the furniture and other things collected over a period of time. All of them will definitely not fit in an apartment. Look at this: first you buy a house and then embellish it with a lot of things. Now, because you have a lot of things, you want a house! This is all confusion. Why don't you sell the things when you sell the house? 'No, no,' you may say, 'These are all valuable pieces.' This means that you are attached to the pieces and, to hang on to them, you require a house! This is a very typical problem.

The wise person discussed in this verse does not have the problem of attachment to possessions. He or she has given up all possessions. The *tyakta-sarva-parigraha* has nothing — no house, no furniture, no job. This person is a *sannyāsī*, one who can walk out at any time from any place — a holy hobo, not an ordinary person at all. He or she has nothing else to do except to sustain the body — *śārīraṃ kevalaṃ karma*. Such a person eats, bathes, and does whatever else is necessary to maintain a reasonable degree of health in the body.

## IDENTIFICATION WITH THE BODY

The orientation of a *jñānī* towards the body is important to note here. Whatever the person has to do to maintain a fairly healthy condition, he or she does. This is quite a different orientation from that which overemphasises the body and uses *yoga* to give the body a certain form or an inordinate amount of energy. This is focusing only on the body and its health and can become an obsession. It must be kept in mind that even a healthy body dies one day. Also, an apparently unhealthy body has been known to drag on until it is 92! Either way, healthy or unhealthy, the body will suddenly pop off. This is something we see happening in the world all the time.

Therefore, maintaining one's health should not become a hang-up or the main focus of attention. In terms of maintaining the body alone, health is something to be kept in view, nothing more. If one's attention is on the body and what it eats or does not eat, for example, it will not be on *ātmā*. Overemphasising on such things is just a waste of time.

For the wise person, there is no identification with the body. Such an orientation is not there, as *Śaṅkara* makes it very clear here in his commentary. The *jñānī* does not want the body to be like this or like that. He or she maintains a certain sense of proportion with reference to diet, exercise, and life-style. If the body pops off sooner or later, what does it matter? If you have not gained the knowledge in forty years and the body goes, you can come back, perhaps with a better one. You either have the knowledge or you do not. To think that you have something to complete before the body goes is silly. There is no question of completion here. You are already complete and need only understand this fact. If the body goes before this understanding takes place, then you simply pick up the thread and continue. Therefore, why should you care unnecessarily about this particular body? This should be the attitude.

And what happens to the *jñānī* when, being free of expectation and having relinquished all possessions, he or she performs only those actions that maintain the physical body? The person gains no *puṇya* and *pāpa*. In other words, he or she does not gain any *karma-phala*.

## GOOD ACTIONS ALSO BIND A PERSON

From the standpoint of *mokṣa*, *puṇya* is also a cause of bondage, *saṃsāra*. Whether a shackle is made of iron or gold, it is still a shackle. A prince who has committed a felony may be bound with a golden shackle and an ordinary person with an iron shackle. While the material the shackle is made of can be different, there is no difference whatsoever in terms of being bound. Neither can remove their hands from the shackle that binds them. If the penalty for the felony is death, both will be executed. Here again, the prince may be executed with a golden sword and the ordinary person

with a steel sword, but what satisfaction is this to the prince? He will be as dead as the ordinary person!

Similarly, with reference to *karma*, *puṇya* is the golden shackle. But, as long as the *puṇya* is helpful in gaining what I want, I want *puṇya*. If I want *puṇya* to take me to this knowledge, to give me the circumstances that are conducive for my gaining this knowledge, then until I gain this knowledge, *puṇya* will be helpful to me. Afterwards, I no longer want *puṇya*. Therefore, from the ultimate standpoint, *puṇya* and *pāpa* are considered bondage.

Once the knowledge has been gained, the person no longer gains either *puṇya* or *pāpa* because there is no doership. All that can be achieved by *karma* has been achieved by the person. Knowing that he or she is not the doer, is what makes the wise person a *kṛtsna-karmakṛt*, one who has done everything that is to be done.

All that *karma* can achieve is *karma-phala*, nothing else, and this *karma-phala* is for one's own sake only, not for the sake of *karma* or for the sake of result. Nor is *karma-phala* for the sake of desire; it is for the one who has the desire for the *karma-phala*. And if all the *karma-phalas* are for my sake, should they not add something to me? This conclusion is valid only if such addition is possible and it is only possible if I am inadequate. If *ātmā* is inadequate, then I definitely require some addition so that I can feel better and so on.

## NOTHING IS TO BE DONE TO ENHANCE ONE'S HAPPINESS

On the other hand, if the self is already full, *pūrṇa-ātmā*, and everything is *ātmā* alone, then there is nothing other than *ātmā*. Where, then, is the question of my doing anything that is going to enhance my security and happiness? The person who knows *ātmā* to be this fullness becomes *sarva-karmakṛt* or *kṛtsna-karmakṛt* in one stroke, as we have seen. Such a person does nothing even though he or she performs action — *karmaṇi abhipravṛtto'pi naiva kiñcit karoti saḥ*.

## ANOTHER POSSIBLE MEANING?

*Śaṅkara* raises a doubt here regarding the possibility of an alternate meaning for the expression, *śārīraṃ kevalaṃ karma* — action performed only to sustain the body. It should be noted that the *sannyāsī* alone is being discussed here, the *tyakta-sarva-parigraha*, one who has given up all possessions.

Anything that is done with the body, any physical action, is called *śārīraṃ karma*. If we take this to be the meaning here, then the expression, *śārīraṃ kevalaṃ karma*, will mean 'only the *karma* that is done physically,' because the word *kevala* means 'only.' Thus, the only *karma* that will not attract *puṇya* or *pāpa* will be that which is done with the physical body. If this is indeed the meaning, then whatever is



done by word or by the mind will attract these results. Since the *śāstra* talks about physical, verbal, and mental *karmas*, this interpretation cannot work and, on these grounds, *Śaṅkara* dismisses it.

To understand this verse correctly, one must understand the spirit of *sannyāsa* and how a *sannyāsī* lives his or her life. A person who lives according to this life-style does only that which is necessary to maintain the physical body, without any identification with it. The *sannyāsī* does not grow his or her own food or work to earn money to buy it. Instead, he or she lives on alms, *bhikṣā*, which is not the same as begging. To live on *bhikṣā* means that the person eats whatever comes along without any planning or scheming about how to acquire the food. Whatever chance brings is food enough for the *sannyāsī*, an attitude described further by *Kṛṣṇa* in the next verse.

यदृच्छालाभसन्तुष्टो द्वन्द्वातीतो विमत्सरः ।

समः सिद्धावसिद्धौ च कृत्वापि न निबध्यते ॥ २२ ॥

*yadṛcchālābhasantuṣṭo dvandvātīto vimatsaraḥ*

*samaḥ siddhāvasiddhau ca kṛtvāpi na nibadhyate*

Verse 22

यदृच्छालाभसन्तुष्टः *yadṛcchā-lābha-santuṣṭaḥ* — one who is happy with whatever comes by chance; द्वन्द्वातीतः *dvandvātītaḥ* — one who is unaffected by the opposites; विमत्सरः *vimatsaraḥ* — one who is free from jealousy; सिद्धौ *siddhau* — with reference to success; असिद्धौ च *asiddhau ca* — and with reference to failure; समः *samaḥ* — one who is even-minded; कृत्वा अपि *kṛtvā api* — even though performing action; न निबध्यते *na nibadhyate* — is not bound

The one who is happy with whatever comes by chance, who is unaffected by the opposites, free from jealousy, and even-minded with reference to success and failure, is not bound even though performing action.

*Lābha*, in the compound *yadṛcchā-lābha-santuṣṭa*, refers to something that you gain *yadṛcchayā*, by chance, without any planning or scheming. In other words, whatever chance brings is *yadṛcchā-lābha*. A wise person is called a *yadṛcchā-lābha-santuṣṭa* in this verse because he or she is totally happy with whatever comes by chance, even in terms of basic necessities.

This same person is also called *dvandva-atīta*, one who is above all the opposites, who is not caught on either side of these opposites or in between. People tend to swing from one extreme to the other and can therefore, get caught at either end or in between. And what are these opposites, *dvandvas*?

Cold and hot, *śīta* and *uṣṇa*, are one set of opposites, either of which can make a person unhappy. In the winter, the person complains of cold and in the summer he or she finds it too hot. And the two months in between — one month of spring and one month

of autumn — are spent saying, ‘Oh!, the summer is coming soon and it will be so hot,’ and then, ‘Oh!, the winter is coming soon and it will be so cold.’ In this way, the entire year is spent complaining about either the heat or the cold — and every year is the same!

Thus, for those who get caught in the extremes or in between, everything is a matter for complaint. This is in fact, the lot of all *saṃsārīs*. When there is some *sukha*, something comfortable, the person is up and when there is anything uncomfortable, *duḥkha*, the person is down. The *dvandva-atīta*, is one who is *sama*, who has an inner composure with respect to all the opposites. Such composure is natural in one who can see *akarma* in *karma* because the person who knows *ātmā* is not a doer. And because this composure, *ānanda*, is the person's nature, it never goes away.

Success and failure, victory and defeat, and so on, are all varieties of opposites upon which the *dvandvātīta* does not depend for his or her security and happiness. Whereas other people are always caught by these opposites. Because one makes you happy, the other, its opposite, makes you unhappy. The wise person, however, is above these opposites, meaning that he or she can be objective towards them and do whatever is to be done without coming under their spell. This person is therefore, called *dvandvātīta*.

### THE MIDDLE WAY IS A MEANS

To be above the opposites is different from the middle path, which is only a *sādhana*, a means. A person who lives according to the middle path, sometimes called the ‘Middle Way’ or the ‘Golden Way,’ is between the opposites and not at either extreme. Extremes are always a problem because they become fads. To avoid faddism, which is not a very happy situation, some people do not veer to either side, but remain in the middle in everything.

As a *sādhana*, a means, the middle path is considered to be the golden path. Then afterwards, you find that you are above the opposites, meaning that they are in your hands in the sense that they do not upset you at all. A person who is above the opposites no longer needs to take care about being in the middle; he or she is a *dvandvātīta*, one who is naturally above the opposites.

*Kṛṣṇa* further explains a *dvandvātīta* in the verse as *siddhau asiddhau ca samah*, as one whose attitude towards success, *siddhi*, and failure, *asiddhi*, is the same. Because the person is *dvandvātīta*, he or she is not affected by any of the opposites, including success and failure. We must remember that the person being discussed in this verse is a *sannyāsī* for whom success may mean nothing more than receiving some food or being able to go to a quiet place. To be unsuccessful, then, simply means that the person does not receive any food or is not able to go to a quiet place. Thus, there are certain successes and failures even for a *sannyāsī*, but, in either case, the person is always the same.

The *jñānī* is also described here as *vimatsara*, *matsara* meaning jealousy. To say that a person who is content with whatever comes by chance and who is free from the opposites is also free from jealousy seems to be somewhat out of place. Why then would *Kṛṣṇa* have said this?

*Matsara* means jealousy, and it is one of the six-fold problems — *kāma*, *krodha*, *lobha*, *moha*, *mada*, and *matsara*.<sup>1</sup> Here, *Kṛṣṇa* takes jealousy to represent all six. Thus *matsara*, jealousy, is an *upalakṣaṇa* for all of them. ‘*Upalakṣaṇa*’ means using one member of a group to represent all the members of a group. Therefore, here, the person who is described as *vimatsara* is free of all these six-fold problems. If this practice of taking one to cover all items in the group is not understood, the mention of *vimatsara*, one who is free from jealousy here, will disturb the even flow of thought.

We have seen the meaning of *matsara* before. When someone is happy or seems to be happy, you become sad. You may think the person is happy because he or she has what you want, but the person may not be happy at all. Perhaps this person bought the house you wanted to buy, married the person you wanted to marry, or got the promotion you were after. If another person has anything that you value, it can create jealousy, *matsara*, in you. Seeing someone's achievement, someone's success, you can be afflicted with a particular type of thinking, *matsara*, an emotion that makes you sad.

## THE SIX -FOLD AFFLICTIONS

*Kṛṣṇa* singles out jealousy here because it is the worst affliction among the six cited above. All six, in fact, are common to everyone. Because a person feels incomplete, he or she has likes and dislikes, called *kāma*, that have to be fulfilled in order to be happy and secure.

And wherever there is *kāma*, *krodha*, anger, is possible. When someone or something stands between you and what you want, this obstruction turns your *kāma* back to yourself. This reflected beam of desire is *krodha*, anger. *Kāma* itself turns into *krodha*. When your desire, your expectation, is not fulfilled, there is anguish which turns into anger and the obstruction becomes the target of your anger, even if the obstruction is yourself. Or, not knowing who is responsible, you take your anger out on anyone or anything — even God!

Then, there is greed, *lobha*. *Lobha* is a problem for those who are so insecure that, even if they have more than enough money, they cannot spend it on themselves or on others and they think that they have to accumulate more. Like *kāma* and *krodha*, *lobha* is to be expected in one who is insecure, who is immature.

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<sup>1</sup> *The six-fold problems are: kāma – desire, krodha – anger, lobha – greed, moha – delusion or false values, mada – vanity, and finally jealousy – matsara.*

Having false values is also a problem, called *moha*. A person has false values because the society in which he or she grows up has false values. To think that the colour of one's hair determines how much fun you will have, exemplified by the well-known expression, 'Blondes have more fun,' is a false value. In the same way, a man may think he has made it only when he has a big boat, an apartment in Manhattan, and a cabin at Lake Tahoe! Since the society itself has these false values, *moha* is also to be expected.

Every society has false values and these false values are taught; they grow upon you. When, for instance, the society thinks that to be single means to be lonely, this particular thinking seeps into everyone's psyche. In fact, being single has nothing whatsoever to do with being lonely. A person is lonely when he or she is not understood by another person. Thus, if you want to be understood, you will be lonely. You can be lonely in the midst of million people. You can live in a house with twenty people and still be lonely, especially if you sit in a corner thinking that no one likes or understands you.

#### **SOCIETY'S FALSE VALUES ARE IMBIBED BY THE PERSON**

When you grow up in a society that has such values, naturally you are going to imbibe these values. This imbibing is natural and whatever is imbibed can remain with you throughout your life. False values are very difficult to remove by *vicāra*, inquiry, because they have rooted themselves so firmly. To shake them loose requires a lot of understanding. To think that money, power, or anything else will save you or make you somebody is all *moha*, delusion. However, given the false values of the society the person is brought up in, *moha* is understandable.

Vanity, *mada*, occurs when a person does not believe in his or her own capacity. Most people have an underlying sense that they are useless based on the humiliation they have experienced from the time when they were three years old. In the second year of life, you think you are the only ego around; you are an absolute ego, in fact! And then you discover your mother's ego, your father's ego, your sister's ego, and your brother's ego. You also discover that all these other egos are different from yours and that yours is only one among the many. This discovery is the first humiliation, followed by many more — not being first in the class, not winning the race, not coming even close, and so on. In the face of all this, how will the child look at himself or herself? And who is going to escape such humiliation? You will definitely look at yourself as incompetent in some ways, if not in all.

#### **THAT 'I AM INCOMPETENT' IS THE ORIGINAL PROBLEM**

That 'I am incompetent' is the original problem of everyone. No one need even tell you so. And if someone compliments you, you are very happy, taking it to be some grace you have received, because you think of yourself as incompetent. Even if you are

competent in certain ways, this conclusion that ‘I am incompetent’ is unavoidable. And when a person who thinks this way happens to accomplish something, vanity, *mada*, may be the result, which is nothing but another form of inferiority complex. Because I cannot stand my incompetence, I have to pump myself up with a certain type of thinking or boasting, ‘Oh!, I am so wonderful’ and so on. This vanity, *mada*, is also understandable given that people take themselves to be generally incompetent.

### JEALOUSY — THE LEAST LEGITIMATE AFFLICTION OF ALL

*Kāma*, *krodha*, *lobha*, *moha*, and *mada* are all legitimate problems in that they are understandable. But, why does a person become unhappy when someone else is happy? When someone is happy, can I not at least be happy that someone, thank God, is happy? This kind of happiness is surely a very simple thing. To see that someone is happy because he or she has got something and to be happy for the person costs me nothing. I can work for the same thing and also get it. Instead, however, there can be unhappiness, called jealousy, which is the most illegitimate of the six-fold problems.

Therefore, of the six, *Kṛṣṇa* singles out jealousy by saying that the wise person is free from jealousy, he is called a *vimatsara*. To be free from jealousy, *matsara*, is also to be free from desire, anger, greed, false values, and vanity. Together, these are the six-fold afflictions or enemies, the *ṣaḍripus*.

The verse goes on to say that even though this wise person performs action, he or she is not bound — *kṛtvā api na nibadhyate* — by the results of the action. Why? For the same reason given earlier — there being no doership, *kartṛtva-abhāvāt* in terms of knowledge. The person knows that he or she is not the doer and therefore, is not bound by action or its results.

Now, *Kṛṣṇa* returns to the other person, the one who is not a *sannyāsī*, in terms of life-style, but who is a *jñānī*. The *jñānī* who is engaged in activity, who has duties to do because he or she does not happen to be a *sannyāsī*, continues to play the roles. With each role there is a script and this person fulfils the script. In the next verse, *Kṛṣṇa* describes what happens when this type of *jñānī* performs action.

गतसङ्गस्य मुक्तस्य ज्ञानावस्थितचेतसः ।

यज्ञायाचरतः कर्म समग्रं प्रविलीयते ॥ २३ ॥

*gatasāṅgasya muktasya jñānāvasthitacetasaḥ*

*yajñāyācarataḥ karma samagraṃ pravilīyate*

Verse 23

गतसङ्गस्य *gatasāṅgasya* — of the one who is free from attachment; मुक्तस्य *muktasya* — of one who is liberated; ज्ञान-अवस्थित-चेतसः *jñāna-avasthita-cetasaḥ* — of one whose mind is rooted in knowledge; यज्ञाय *yajñāya* — for the sake of daily *yajña*; आचरतः

*ācarataḥ* — of the one who performs; समग्रम् *samagram* — totally; कर्म *karma* — action; प्रविलीयते *pravilīyate* — resolves

The *karma* of one who is free from attachment, who is liberated, whose mind is rooted in self-knowledge, who performs for the sake of daily *yajña*, resolves totally.

Although the *jñānī* may be in the midst of various activities, he or she is not attached to anything. All attachment, *saṅga*, has gone, *gata*, for the person because of self-knowledge. Thus, the *jñānī* is described here as *gata-saṅga*.

This person is also *mukta*, one who is liberated from ignorance, *ajñāna*, doership, *kartr̥tva*, and therefore, from *dharma* and *adharma*, right and wrong, *puṇya* and *pāpa*. To be free from right and wrong means there is no longer any good *karma* or bad *karma* for the person because there is no doer. Doership is not there. Therefore, whatever *karma* the *jñānī* does is naturally good because he or she is freed from both right and wrong.

And why is the person free? Because the mind, *cetas*, of such a person is rooted in knowledge, *jñāne avasthita*. It is rooted in the sense that for this person the knowledge is clear; there is no vagueness or doubt. It is much more than simple insight. The *jñānī*'s knowledge is well-rooted and, therefore, he or she is described as *jñāna-avasthita-cetas*, one whose mind is rooted in knowledge of the self as a non-doer.

Any *karma* to be done by such a person, any daily duty or ritual, *yajña*, is done without any result whatsoever being accrued to the person. The *karma* done may be a prayer or an elaborate ritual; it may be a duty attached to his role as a member of a particular family or society, as an employee or an employer, or any of a variety of roles that he or she plays.

*Samagraṃ karma* means all action, action in its entirety, meaning, action along with its result. 'All' can also be taken to mean all *karma*. For the *jñānī*, then, all *karma* and its results are resolved totally, *pravilīyate*, because there is no doership for the person.

It should be noted here that it is the *jñānī* who is being described, not the *karma-yogī*, for whom there is still doership. Thus, there are two levels involved, one level being an attitude and the other being well-ascertained knowledge. The cheerfulness that a *karma-yogī* gains by a proper attitude towards what is to be done is what turns into *pūrṇatva*, fullness, by knowledge, thereby giving the person freedom from any sense of limitation. Because doership is removed by knowledge, everything else that was imposed upon *ātmā* is also removed and the person is free.

The connection between *karma-yoga* and *jñāna* is to be clearly understood. The *Gītā* teaches both *yoga-śāstra* and *brahma-vidyā*. *Karma-yoga* is right attitude and

includes values, disciplines, right living, prayer, and so on. Whatever is relatively gained by all these is gained in full measure, absolute measure, through knowledge. There is tranquillity in *yoga* and tranquillity in knowledge. There is cheerfulness in *yoga* and cheerfulness in knowledge. In *karma-yoga*, the tranquillity and cheerfulness are in varying degrees, whereas in *jñāna* they are abiding and natural.

You will hear it said that a *karma-yogī* also is not bound by *karma*. This means that he or she is not affected by *karma-phala* in the sense that the person is not depressed by failure and elated by success because of a mature attitude towards these opposites. A *jñānī*, on the other hand, is not touched by *karma-phala* at all. To say that a *jñānī* is not bound by *karma* means that he or she is completely untouched by *karma-phala* because the self is not a doer. For such a person, everything is *Brahman*.

### BRAHMAN AND THE SELF ARE IDENTICAL

To understand that I am *akartā* means 'I am *Brahman*.' The mind is also *Brahman*. The mind is 'I,' but I am not the mind. The *buddhi* is 'I,' but I am not the *buddhi*. The body is 'I,' but I am not the body. The world is 'I,' but I am not the world. Thus, everything is *Brahman*, but *Brahman* is not any one thing. The self and *Brahman* are identical. Knowing this is self-knowledge.

Whatever *karma* you do, you will find it is all the same. What is done is *Brahman*, the one who does it is *Brahman*, where it is done is *Brahman*, by what it is done is *Brahman*, and what is to be achieved is also *Brahman*. This means there is nothing to achieve.

When a fire ritual is performed, there is a person who performs the ritual, an altar of fire where a fire has been kindled in a particular way, and something that is offered into the fire. There is also a ladle with which the oblation is offered, a particular *mantra* or chant, and a purpose for which the ritual is being done. The person performing the ritual may want a son or the *punya* necessary to go to heaven or may be doing the *karma* for *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*. For this person, who wants any of the above rituals, all these factors are distinct and separate from himself and are separate amongst themselves. But for a *jñānī* they are all nothing but *Brahman* which is himself.

The ritual performed by a *jñānī* is described in the next verse:

ब्रह्मार्पणं ब्रह्महविर्ब्रह्माग्नौ ब्रह्मणा हुतम्।

ब्रह्मैव तेन गन्तव्यं ब्रह्मकर्मसमाधिना ॥ २४ ॥

*brahmārpaṇaṃ brahmahavirbrahmāgnau brahmaṇā hutam*

*brahmaiva tena gantavyaṃ brahmakamasamādhinā*

Verse 24

ब्रह्म *brahma* — *Brahman*; अर्पणम् *arpaṇam* — (is) the means of offering; ब्रह्म *brahma* — *Brahman*; हविः *haviḥ* — (is) the oblation; ब्रह्म-अग्नौ *brahma-agnau* — in the fire which is *Brahman*; ब्रह्मणा *brahmaṇā* — by *Brahman*; हुतम् *hutam* — is offered; ब्रह्म-कर्म-समाधिना *brahma-karma-samādhinā* — by the one who sees everything as *Brahman*; तेन *tena* — by him; ब्रह्म *brahma* — *Brahman*; एव *eva* — indeed; गन्तव्यम् *gantavyam* — is to be reached

The means of offering is *Brahman*. The oblation is *Brahman*, offered by *Brahman* into the fire, which is *Brahman*. *Brahman* indeed is to be reached by him who sees everything as *Brahman*.

In the preceding section, the nature of *ātmā* was described as *akartā*, meaning that the self performs no action. Action takes place based on desire and will, types of thoughts that belong to the *buddhi*. The physical body, *kāya*, organ of speech, *vāk*, and the mind, *manas*, are the three means of action, *karaṇas*. Here, the physical body refers to the hands and legs, the limbs that are used to perform action. Any action that is done can be grouped under any or all these three. For example, when you offer a prayer, it can be either a mental or a verbal action or a ritual involving physical limbs. All three involve the mind.

If *ātmā* is the body-mind-sense assemblage, which is the basis for all actions to take place, then I become the actor. Whereas, if this assemblage is not *ātmā*, then *ātmā* is free from the body, mind, and senses. It is in the form of pure consciousness, *śuddha-caitanya-svarūpa*, and, performs no action whatsoever. Thus, it was said that even while performing action, the wise person does no action whatsoever because doership is not there for the person.<sup>1</sup>

## HOW ACTIVE A JÑĀNĪ IS, MEANS NOTHING

Also, if the *jñānī* performs only those actions that are necessary to sustain the physical body, no results will accrue because, again, there is no doership.<sup>2</sup> In this way, two types of *jñānīs* were pointed out. One type is in the thick and thin of various activities, totally engaged in action, and the second type is not. But, even for the *jñānī* who performs activities, it was said that no action is performed. Why? Because the person sees *akarma* in all *karmas*, meaning that he sees *ātmā* as actionless in the very activity itself. How much or how little activity you do means nothing. What is important is whether or not you see *ātmā* as *akartā*.

There is no rule about how a wise person should be. One person may be very active and another may be a *sannyāsī*. A *sannyāsī* can also be active or not very active.

<sup>1</sup> *Gītā* – 4-20

<sup>2</sup> *Gītā* – 4-21



He may perform only those activities necessary to sustain the body or may be involved in the world because of his *prārabdha*. Either way, there is no *karma* for the person and no results accrue to him because there is no doership.

In the present verse, we see that, for the wise person, all *karma* and everything connected to the *karma* is *Brahman*. In fact, this is what self-knowledge is all about. There is nothing separate from *ātmā*, which is *Brahman*. This is the knowledge that makes the person wise. *Ātmā* is equated to *Brahman*, *Brahman* is *jñāna*, pure consciousness, and therefore, not subject to time, space, or any attributes. It is *satya*, pure existence, and *ananta*, limitless, which is the basis, the truth, of everything. In terms of time, *ātmā* is limitless, and in terms of space also, it is limitless. There is nothing that is independent of this *satya* — *ātmā*. Being dependent on *satya*, which is *paraṃ brahma*, everything else is nothing but *paraṃ brahma*, which is *ātmā*, oneself.

One who sees *ātmā* as free from action sees *ātmā* as *Brahman*, and this is *jñāna*. Therefore, we have to understand *ātmā* as a non-doer, as *paraṃ brahma*. With this knowledge, all actions and everything connected to them, including the results, are nullified, negated.

The statement made earlier, *karmaṇi akarma yaḥ paśyet*, was made clearer when it was said, in the last verse, that all the *karmas* of the wise person are totally resolved — *samagraṃ karma pravilīyate*. To say that a wise person sees *akarma* in *karma* implies that there are actions being done. For example, speaking is an action done for which there is someone who speaks, a subject matter, a way of speaking, a reason for speaking, and so on — all of which the *jñāni* understands as being non-separate from *paraṃ brahma*.

The *kartā* or the agent of action is *Brahman*. The *karma* or the object of action is *Brahman*. The *karaṇa* or the instrument of action is *Brahman* and the place where the action is done is *Brahman*. This vision that everything is *Brahman* is unfolded in the present verse by using a Vedic ritual as an example. *Kṛṣṇa* is not pointing out the ritual itself here; he is pointing out the wisdom, the vision that is *Vedānta*.

#### KṚṢṆA USES A VEDIC RITUAL TO UNFOLD THE KNOWLEDGE

A Vedic ritual is as good as a prayer. It is an action in which a purpose and a result are involved. There is a person who wants a particular result and there is a method of offering a particular oblation. All the *kāraṅkas*, all the factors involved in an action, are presented in this verse — an agent of action, an object, a means, a purpose, a place from where the action is coming, and a place into which the action is going.

What *Kṛṣṇa* is conveying here is that every *kāraṅka* is *Brahman*. The means of offering is *Brahman* — *brahma arpaṇam*. Here *arpaṇa* means that by which

something is offered — *arpyate anena iti arpaṇam*.<sup>1</sup> What is the oblation? *Havis*, the oblation which is offered, is also *Brahman* — *brahma haviḥ*. Where is the offering made? *Brahma agnau* — into the fire of *Brahman*, the fire that is *Brahman*. By whom is the offering made? The offering is made by *Brahman* — *brahmaṇā hutam*. The *kartā*, the doer, is *Brahman*. For what purpose is the offering made? The offering is made for the purpose of gaining *Brahman* alone — *brahma eva tena gantavyam*. By whom is this *Brahman* to be gained? By one who sees everything as *Brahman* — *brahma -karma -samādhinā*.

*Arpaṇa* is that by which something is offered, a wooden ladle, for example or a *mantra* with which an offering is made. And while offering, a particular *mantra* is chanted to indicate exactly to which *devatā* or deity the oblation is being offered. For example, the words, ‘*indrāya svāhā, indrāya idaṃ na mama*,’ are to invoke the *devatā* called *Indra* and they mean, ‘This is being offered to *Indra*; (this) does not belong to me any more.’ Similarly, ‘*agnaye svāhā, agnaye idaṃ na mama*,’ means, ‘This is for *Agni*; (this) is no longer mine.’ In this way, you are not making the *devatā* indebted to you. You offer the oblation to the chosen *devatā*, saying, ‘This is for you alone. I am giving it to you. It is no longer mine.’ This, then, is the meaning of *arpaṇa*.

Whether a ladle or a *mantra*, how is this *arpaṇa* separate from *Brahman*? Nothing is separate from *Brahman*. Therefore, sound is *Brahman*, word is *Brahman*, knowledge is *Brahman*, *Indra* is *Brahman*. Everything is non-separate from *Brahman*. Because of the wise person's *brahma-buddhi*, he or she performs the ritual seeing *Brahman* in everything, just as when you see a clay pot, the clay is not missed. Or when you see a golden ornament, the gold is not missed. When you see a shirt, the cloth is not missed.

## THE SATYA AND MITHYĀ OF THE RITUAL

Similarly, when a *jñānī* sees anything, *Brahman* is not missed, *Brahman* being the cause of everything. *Brahman* being the truth, the *satya*, of everything, everything is dependent upon *satya-brahma* and is therefore, *mithyā*. This means that *arpaṇa*, the ladle, the *mantra*, and so on, are all *mithyā*. Thus, *arpaṇa* is *Brahman* — *brahma arpaṇam*.

The object offered is *havis*, clarified butter or any other thing that is offered as the oblation. This is also *Brahman*. And it is offered by *Brahman*, *brahmaṇā hutam*. That is, the person who offers the oblation is also *Brahman* — a fact known to the wise person. *Hutam* means, ‘is offered.’ This word refers to the act of offering, the *kriyā*. The

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<sup>1</sup> *anena* – by means of this; *arpyate* – is offered; *arpaṇam* — the means, the instrument with which the oblation is offered into the fire during a ritual and this could mean both the wooden ladle and the mantra with which the offering is made.

oblation, *havis*, is offered unto the fire, *agni*, the location in which the act of offering takes place. Here, too, *agni* is nothing but *Brahman*, born of *Brahman*, and therefore, non-separate from *Brahman*.

We see, then, that all the *kāraṅkas* are covered here. The first *kāraṅka*, the *kartā*, the one who offers, is *Brahman*; the second *kāraṅka*, the *karma* or object, is *Brahman*; the third *kāraṅka*, the *karaṇa* or instrument, is *Brahman*; the purpose that takes the fourth case is *Brahman*; and the fifth *kāraṅka*, from where the action comes, is *Brahman*. Because the sixth *kāraṅka*, the possessive or genitive case, generally does not relate to an action, it does not generally represent one of the six *kāraṅkas*. The sixth *kāraṅka*, which takes the locative case is also here in the verse. Here, it is said, ‘in the fire of *Brahman*, *brahmāgnau*.’ Therefore, the fire into which the offering is made is also *Brahman*.

#### PERFORMING A RITUAL AS A DOER

If a person performs a ritual for the sake of heaven, he or she is a *kartā*. Because I am a *kartā*, I want to go to heaven and this heaven is separate from me. Therefore, if I do this particular *karma*, the *karma-phala* will be *puṇya* and this *puṇya* I can later encash for a ticket to heaven. This is the meaning of a ritual if I am a *kartā*, whereas if I know that I am *Brahman*, it is altogether different.

*Brahman* is everything, including heaven. This being the case, what is to be gained by the person of knowledge? *Brahman* alone is to be gained by the wise person — *brahmaiva tena gantavyam*. This is to say that nothing is to be gained because the *jñānī* is *Brahman*.

*Gantavyam* means ‘that which is to be reached’ or ‘that which is to be accomplished.’ Because the person is already *Brahman*, there is nothing to be gained. Everything being *Brahman*, there is nothing away from *Brahman* and, therefore, nothing to be gained that is not *Brahman*. But, while this may indeed be a fact, one has to know the fact. Otherwise, the person is a *kartā*. Then, looking at everything in a ritual as *Brahman* becomes a form of meditation, *upāsana*. Wherever you deliberately superimpose something exalted on something ordinary, there is *upāsana*, just as you deliberately superimpose the United States on a piece of cloth with so many stars and stripes.

Superimposition need not be deliberate always, like when you mistake an object for something else. Without any deliberation, you may superimpose a snake on a piece of rope, for example. This is a mistake. But, to take a wooden or stone statue of *Viṣṇu* for the Lord is not a mistake, unless of course, you take the given form alone as *Viṣṇu*. This is *upāsana*.

**KNOWLEDGE ALONE, IS INVOLVED HERE**

Whereas when a person realises the fact, ‘I am *Brahman*,’ it is knowledge, not *upāsana*. Here, in this verse, knowledge alone is involved, the ritual being performed by one who sees *Brahman* in all actions, *brahma-karma-samādhi*. Seeing *Brahman* everywhere is called *brahma-karma-samādhi*.

How can one see *Brahman* everywhere? If one goes around with eyes wide open will *Brahman* be seen in everything? When a chair is seen, do you go beyond the chair and see *Brahman*? Seeing *Brahman* is not like looking at a shirt and seeing the cloth. When you see a shirt, you see only the shirt. Obviously, then, you do not see *Brahman* in this way. In fact, you will not see *Brahman* because you are *Brahman*! The thought that objectifies the chair is *Brahman*. The space in which the chair is sitting is also *Brahman*. And the chair itself, every particle of it, is nothing but *Brahman*.

The object of any thought is non-separate from the consciousness that is *Brahman* and the knowledge of the object, the thought itself, is also non-separate from this consciousness. The one who knows, who has the knowledge of the object, is also nothing but consciousness. Therefore, the knower, the knowledge, and the object of knowledge are all *Brahman*, consciousness, which is *satya*.

Thus, the statement, ‘I am *Brahman*,’ means *ātmā* is *Brahman* which is *nirvikalpa* — that which does not have the knower-knowledge-known distinction *jñātṛ-jñāna-jñeya-bheda*. *Nirvikalpa*, does not mean the absence of thought but points to the non-difference between the knower, knowledge, and known. Because knowledge is myself, the knower is myself, and the object of knowledge is myself, these three are only apparently different. Thus, to say, ‘I am *nirvikalpa*,’ is to refer to the fact that there is no real difference between the knower, knowledge, and known. This knowledge is always *nirvikalpa*, there being no second thing. Whether you know it or not, this knowledge is always there. Similarly, when you see, the seer, the sight, and the seen are all *Brahman*. And when you hear, the hearer, the hearing, and the heard are also *Brahman*.

Thus, being in any situation is seeing *Brahman* everywhere — *sarvatra brahma-darśanam*. It is not a matter of opening one's eyes and trying to see *Brahman*. *Brahman* is not an object to be seen with the eyes. To see *Brahman* everywhere is to recognise the fact that the knower, *jñātā*, is *Brahman*, the knowledge, *jñāna*, is *Brahman*, and what is known, *jñeya*, is *Brahman*. All three are *Brahman*, but *Brahman* is independent of all of them.

**SEEING BRAHMAN EVERYWHERE IS KNOWLEDGE**

In fact, all three — knower, knowledge, and known — can be shaken off; they can be removed. And they can return to be removed again. You have them, you remove them, you have them, you remove them — and all the while *Brahman* always is. And

the one who has this knowledge, who sees *Brahman* everywhere, is called *brahma-karma-samādhi*.

*Brahma-karma-samādhi* here refers to a person who has a *buddhi* that appreciates that everything is *Brahman* — *brahma eva karma – brahma-karma; brahma-karmaṇi samādhiḥ (samāhitā buddhiḥ) yasya*.<sup>1</sup> And what is to be gained by the *brahmakarma-samādhi*, one who sees *Brahman* in all action? What is to be gained when everything is *Brahman*? Nothing, except *Brahman* — *brahmaiva gantavyam*. If everything is *Brahman*, what result can there be? If the doer is *Brahman*, the done is *Brahman*, the doing is *Brahman*, and the reason for doing it is *Brahman*, where is the result? For whom is the result? And for what purpose is the result?

Knowing that everything is *Brahman*, the *jñānī* who is engaged in activity performs action for the sake of the people — *loka-saṅgrahārtham*. Even though there is nothing for the wise person to accomplish, his time is available for helping people. The *jñānī* requires nothing to be secure or happy and therefore, his time is no longer required for himself. Whatever time is left in the person's life can therefore, be given to the people for them to make use of as best as they can.

Even if the *jñānī* does not talk, people can go and sit with him, as they did with Ramana Maharshi. He did not talk much and would speak only a few words, now and then. This also is a type of teaching, a quiet teaching. When you sit with someone who sits quietly, happily, you also become quiet. Your mind becomes quiet because you have to come back to yourself. What else can you do when the person you are sitting with does not talk?

When there is no interaction, you come back to yourself. And what kind of self do you come back to? Not the historical self, because the person you are sitting with is all silence; he does not even blink! The situation naturally takes you back to yourself. This is not enlightenment; it is only experiential.

There is some *śānti*, some peace and contentment. People like this experience and therefore, they seek it out. But, afterwards, the *śānti* is gone. It is only something they can remember and talk about, just like when they come out of a movie and talk about how enjoyable it was. This 'was' aspect of experience is there because there is no enlightenment. The experience itself is something you can only recall and interpret in your own way. Still, the person who gives some *śānti* to people is helping them and it is certainly better than giving them excitement!

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<sup>1</sup> ????????

### COMING BACK TO YOURSELF IS BETTER THAN EXCITEMENT

The rock musician gives people excitement for which they pay money. You sit with the *jñānī* and you are happy. At least, here, the *śānti* is free. Excitement may provide some release for pent-up emotions, but coming back to yourself is even better. And it is beautiful, as well. Thus, the *jñānī* who can give you some *śānti* is performing action for the sake of the people by not talking.

This is exactly what Ramana did. Hundreds of people used to go and sit with him. A few, of course, were disappointed when they realised that he would not talk, but a lot of other people enjoyed the peace and silence. Therefore, a *jñānī* may be performing a variety of activities for the sake of the people or he may just sit quietly, an activity that also helps people. In reality, however, whatever is done or not done is still *akarma*. It is not an action or an activity at all because all actions, all *karmas*, have been nullified by the knowledge of *Brahman*.

Whatever an actor does on stage, he knows that he is not the role and that the role is himself. He sees this very clearly because of his knowledge that the action he performs is *mithyā*. So, too, the wise person knows, 'I am not the role. I am *satya* and the role is *mithyā*.' While all actions come only from the person, he knows that his nature is *mithyā*. This being understood, he performs no action in reality.

In this verse, which is unfolding this vision through a ritual, *karma* is converted into *akarma*, all the *kāraṅkas* being nothing but *Brahman*. In this way, the *kāraṅkas* are nullified, *bādhita*. They no longer exist.

When one knows that everything is *Brahman*, doership is gone. When the doership is gone, there is no real *karma* anymore. Therefore, in answer to the question, — how can one see *akarma* in *karma* — *karma* is completely negated here and only *Brahman* remains.

For there to be *karma*, there must be a *kartā*, a doer, who is different from the *kriyā* the action, one who performs the *kriyā* through the *karaṇa*, the means of action, for a given purpose. There will also be a *karma-phala*, a result. And the person is bound by that *karma*. However, when the *ahaṅkāra* itself, the one who performs the action, is resolved, that *ahaṅkāra* becomes identical with *Brahman*. But *Brahman* is free from the *ahaṅkāra*.

Here one could get confused in the following manner and think that if the *ahaṅkāra* is *Brahman* and *Brahman* is not *ahaṅkāra*, all that has happened is that the *ahaṅkāra* has gained a new name. *Ahaṅkāra* becomes a synonym for *Brahman*. I thought of myself as an ego, *ahaṅkāra*, the doer. Now I have come to know the doer is also called *Brahman*. Since the doer is *Brahman* and *Brahman* is not the doer, the doer gains a new name. There is nothing more to it than that. But this is not so.

Here, the doer is *Brahman*, doing is *Brahman*, everything is *Brahman*, whereas *Brahman* is free from all of them. From this we understand that there is *akarma* in the *karma* itself and *karma* itself is *bādhita*, negated. Thus, this verse unfolds the vision of *ātmā*. Giving up *karma* by knowledge, negating it, is called *jñāna-karma-sannyāsa*. This is also the title of this chapter.

#### IS THIS VERSE MEANT AS A FORM OF MEDITATION?

Here, *Śaṅkara* raises an objection and answers it. Why not interpret the verse as a kind of meditation by looking upon the *arpaṇa*, the offering, as *Brahman*, just as the Lord is invoked in an idol? But if it were intended to be a meditation, why was it said that the person would gain *Brahman*, *brahmaiva tena gantavyam*? To take the verse in this way would also be ignoring the knowledge previously stated that, one sees *akarma* in *karma*.

The vision of *ātmā* as *akartā* is the knowledge. Because everyone takes himself or herself to be a *kartā*, there is *saṃsāra*. *Kartṛtva* is indeed *saṃsāritva* and nothing else. When you look upon yourself as a *kartā*, you are taking yourself to be the physical body-mind-sense complex, *kārya-karaṇa-saṅghāta*. The body, mind, and senses become the 'I,' the *ātmā*, for you. This is the only way you become a *kartā*. And, if you take the body, mind, and senses as *ātmā*, then you are a *saṃsāri*. This is why *kartṛtva* means *saṃsāritva*. When the *kartṛtva*, doership, is there, *saṃsāritva* is there, meaning that there is an enjoyer of the results of action, *karma-phala-bhoktā*. Where there is *kartṛtva*, doership, there is *bhokṛtva*, enjoyership and this is what we call *saṃsāra*.

The main problem of *saṃsāra*, *kartṛtva*, is negated in this verse by unfolding the vision of *ātmā* as *akartā*. Therefore, to take it as meditation, for which there can be only a limited result, is not correct. Moreover, the verse also says that *Brahman* is to be gained, *brahmaiva tena gantavyam*. *Brahman*, being limitless, is not a limited result. Besides, because the person is non-different from *Brahman*, there is nothing to be accomplished for one who can appreciate this vision. Thus, the verse is an unfoldment of this vision and, as such, cannot be a meditation.

By presenting a *karma*, a ritual, *Kṛṣṇa* unfolds the knowledge of *ātmā* as *Brahman*, free from any doership and enjoyership. This is how *akarma* can be seen in *karma*. You do the *karma* and, at the same time, you see the *akarma*. You see the *karma* and you negate it, just as you see a movie and then negate the reality of it by knowing that the scenes you see are all projected on a plain surface by means of light and shadows. *Ātmā* itself is always detached, *asaṅga*. It remains clean, just like the screen upon which a movie is seen. This is the nature of a *jñāni*. *Ātmā* performs no action, *naiva kiñcit karma karoti*, and does not enjoy the fruit of action, *na karma-phalaṃ bhukte*.

Because the verse presents the clear vision of *ātmā* as *Brahman* and *karma* as *akarma*, no other meaning is possible here. To show that *karma* is *akarma*, the vision had to be presented in the form of a *karma* and here it is presented in the form of a *yajña*. The vision is that all *karmas* are *Brahman* and, to praise this vision, *Kṛṣṇa* presents other *yajñas* in subsequent verses.

In order to praise something or to understand something, a background is always necessary. For example, to bring out colour or shape of a precious stone, a particular background is provided. A frame for a painting is also selected in keeping with the colours on the canvas and those of the surroundings in which it will hang. Here, too, the Vedic background of various rituals and disciplines are provided for the knowledge of *Brahman* unfolded by the Vedas.

### YAJÑAS INCLUDE VARIOUS FORMS OF DISCIPLINE

In the following section, a discipline is called a *yajña*, and it refers to anything that is to be done or offered by someone for the purpose of self-purification and steadiness of mind. The Lord presents the pursuit of knowledge itself as *yajña*, *jñāna-yajña* against the background of various other *yajñas* that are helpful for preparing the mind to gain the knowledge.

दैवमेवापरे यज्ञं योगिनः पर्युपासते ।

ब्रह्माग्रावपरे यज्ञं यज्ञेनैवोपजुह्वति ॥ २५ ॥

*daivamevāpare yajñam yoginaḥ paryupāsate*

*brahmāgnāvapare yajñam yajñenaivopajuhvati*

Verse 25

अपरे योगिनः *apare yoginaḥ* — some *yogīs* (*karma-yogīs*); दैवम् यज्ञम् *daivam yajñam* — ritual invoking deities; एव *eva* — alone; पर्युपासते *paryupāsate* — perform; अपरे *apare* — others (*sannyāsīs*); ब्रह्माग्नौ *brahmāgnau* — unto the fire (knowledge) of *Brahman*; यज्ञम् *yajñam* — the self (*ahaṅkāra*); यज्ञेन एव *yajñena eva* — by the self (*ahaṅkāra*) itself; उपजुह्वति *upajuhvati* — offer

*Karma-yogīs* perform only those rituals that invoke the deities, while others (*sannyāsīs*) offer themselves by themselves unto the fire (knowledge) of *Brahman*.

At the beginning of the third chapter, *Kṛṣṇa* told *Arjuna* that he had given the world two committed life-styles.<sup>1</sup> One life-style is *sannyāsa* wherein the commitment, *niṣṭhā*, is pursuit of knowledge alone. The other life-style is *karma-yoga*, a life of

<sup>1</sup> *Gītā* – 3-3



activity wherein the pursuit of knowledge is coupled with *karma*. *Kṛṣṇa* also made it clear that both life-styles are for the sake of *mokṣa*, liberation.

Here in the verse under discussion, both the *karma-yogī* and the *sannyāsī* are discussed. For *karma-yogīs*, *apare yoginaḥ*, the enjoined *karma* is only for *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*, not for any other end. It is for preparing their minds for the knowledge that is *mokṣa*, all of which we have seen in the previous discussions on *karma-yoga*.

When the *karma-yogīs* perform rituals, *yajñam paryupāsate*, the Lord or the Lord in the form of a deity is always kept in view. Anything that is done with the Lord or a deity, a *deva*, in view is called *daiva*. *Indra* is a *deva*, as is *Agni*, fire, and *Āditya*, the sun. Thus any action done invoking their grace is *daivaṃ karma*. *Karma-yogīs* worship in this way and do not see everything as *Brahman* as the *sannyāsī* does. They are simply performing rituals invoking the *devatās*, invoking the Lord's grace, for gaining *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*.

We know the verse is not referring to those who perform rituals for ends other than *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*, like heaven etc., *svargādi-loka*, because the people performing the action here are called *yogīs*. Those who are not *yogīs* may perform rituals for the sake of gaining children, wealth, heaven, and so on. There are many rituals in the Vedas that can produce these types of results and the people who perform them are called *kāmya-karmīs*. Because the word *yoginaḥ* is used in this verse, we know that the people under discussion perform rituals for *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi* alone.

These rituals are performed meticulously, meaning that they are performed with *śraddhā*, with faith, alertness, and in careful adherence to the rules. The prefix *pari* with the verb *upāsate* conveys the sense of the meticulousness with which the *yajñas* are performed to invoke the grace of the *devatās*.

*Apare*, which usually means 'others,' is used here to distinguish between the *karma-yogīs* and the *sannyāsīs* discussed in this verse.

#### OFFERING ONESELF TO THE FIRE OF KNOWLEDGE

In the expression *brahmāgnau*, fire of *Brahman*, fire stands for knowledge, the knowledge of *Brahman*. The word *yajña*, besides meaning ritual and discipline, means *ātmā*, the self. Because there is a sacrifice involved for one who pursues knowledge, knowledge also can be looked upon as *yajña* and is therefore, called *jñāna-yajña*.

In any *yajña* there must be a performer of the *yajña*. Here, the performer of this *jñāna-yajña* is the seeker, a *mumukṣu*, a *jijñāsu*, one who wants to know. The verse points out that the seeker offers himself or herself. Since the seeker alone is offered, who is it that does the offering? If the seeker were offered unto the fire by someone else, it would be a simple case of homicide, but here, because the seeker offers himself or

herself, it seems to be suicide, not homicide, and a willing suicide at that! One offers oneself — *yajñam yajñena upajuhvati*. Here *yajña* means the self.

Unto the fire of *Brahman* is offered the *ahaṅkāra*. The ignorant person looks upon himself or herself as one who has doership and enjoyership because he or she takes the body, mind, and senses to be the self. It is this small person, the seeker, who is offered unto the fire of *Brahman*, the knowledge of *Brahman*.

To offer the *ahaṅkāra* unto the knowledge of *Brahman* is the best form of 'hara-kiri'<sup>1</sup> there is. The seekers, the *sannyāsīs*, offer themselves by themselves into the fire (knowledge) of *Brahman*. This means they are both the *kartā* and the *karma*, the performer of the action of offering and the object offered. The doer of the *jñāna-yajña* is myself, the one who knows is myself, what is known is myself, and what is offered unto the fire of *Brahman* is also myself. This means that I am *Brahman*.

This knowledge that I am *Brahman* is called *samyag-darśana*, clear vision, and, being clear vision, it is opposed to the *deva-yajña* performed by *karma-yogīs*. As *Kṛṣṇa* told *Arjuna* in the third chapter, when *sannyāsīs* follow pure *jñāna*, it is *jñāna-yoga*, which is the *jñāna-yajña* mentioned in this verse. The two types of people are not being compared here but the two types of *yajña*, *deva-yajña* and *jñāna-yajña*, are being compared.

Having said this much, *Kṛṣṇa* goes on to describe other *yajñas*, after which he would again praise *jñāna-yajña*. The *yajñas*, mentioned in the next few verses are not rituals at all; but, because they are disciplines whose purpose is to accomplish *mokṣa* by *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*, they are considered to be *yajñas*. Such disciplines can accomplish two ends. One is a certain composure, a certain tranquillity, and steadiness of mind. The second end that can be accomplished is maturity, a freedom from the thralldom of one's *rāga-dveṣas*, likes and dislikes, that hold one hostage. You can release yourself from their hands by prayers and rituals, which help you gain certain attitudes. These disciplines can also help you gain alertness and are performed by *sannyāsīs* and *karma-yogīs* alike. They may be practised in order to gain *mokṣa* or for lesser results, such as a certain degree of composure or discipline in one's life so that the other disciplines may be practised.

There is no rule governing which disciplines are to be performed by whom. You may choose one or another, depending upon what you need. Thus, a few disciplines performed as *yajñas* are mentioned by *Kṛṣṇa*.

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<sup>1</sup> *hara-kiri*, [Jap., = belly-cutting], traditional Japanese form of suicide, performed in cases of disloyalty to the emperor. Obligatory *hara-kiri* was abolished in 1868, but voluntary forms have persisted.

श्रोत्रादीनीन्द्रियाण्यन्ये संयमाग्निषु जुह्वति ।

शब्दादीन् विषयानन्य इन्द्रियाग्निषु जुह्वति ॥ २६ ॥

*śrotrādīnīndriyāṅyanye saṃyamāgniṣu juhvati*

*śabdādīn viṣayānanya indriyāgniṣu juhvati*

Verse 26

अन्ये *anye* — others; संयम-अग्निषु *saṃyama-agniṣu* — into the fire of self-mastery; श्रोत्रादीनि *śrotrādīni* — organs of hearing, etc.; इन्द्रियाणि *indriyāṇi* — senses; जुह्वति *juhvati* — offer; अन्ये *anye* — others; शब्दादीन् *śabdādīn* — sound, etc.; विषयान् *viṣayān* — sense objects; इन्द्रियाग्निषु *indriyāgniṣu* — into the fire of the senses; जुह्वति *juhvati* — offer

Others offer (their) organs of hearing and other senses into the fire of self-mastery, (while still) others offer sound and other sense objects into the fire of the senses.

The first *yajña* described in this verse relates to the sense organs, the ears and so on, *śrotrādīni indriyāṇi*. *Śrotra* means ear and the suffix *ādi*, meaning ‘etc.’ refers to the eyes, nose, tongue, and skin – sense of touch. These five are the organs through which sense perceptions such as, hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting, and touching, respectively, take place. Here, the organs of sense perception and the organs of action are all offered unto the fire of self-mastery.

Does this mean that the organs themselves are offered? Does one pluck off the ears and nose or pull out the eyes and tongue to offer them unto the fire? Of course not. In fact, the person does not do anything. The discipline described here is control of the senses or inner mastery, *saṃyama*. People who follow this discipline are practising *saṃyama*, meaning that they do not go by their fancies. In other words, they practise alertness with reference to the senses.

#### A DISCIPLINE IS NOT AN END IN ITSELF

We see this alertness or deliberateness in Buddhistic meditation. Those who practise this discipline remain aware of everything that they do, even the opening and closing of their eyes. This practice definitely has its benefits, but it can create tension also and should be followed up with inquiry. Inquiry should be the main emphasis, whereas the practice itself is a discipline, meaning that it is not an end in itself. This discipline is a means for gaining a certain composure.

Thus, the first *yajña* mentioned in this verse is a discipline wherein the sensory activities, dictated by fancies, are offered unto the fires of self-mastery *saṃyama-agniṣu*. The sense organs being many, fire appears in its plural form here. It should be noted that it is the activities that are offered, not the senses. All fanciful and mechanical

activities are offered unto the fire of deliberation, meaning that all one's activities are conscious and deliberate. This is what is meant by control.

The other *yajña* described here is the offering of the sense objects, sound and so on — *śabdādiviṣayān*, which include touch, form, taste and smell. These sense objects are offered unto the fires of the sense organs, *indriya-agniṣu*. But then, this seems to be no different than what is happening everywhere in the world today. People are lining up to see all kinds of movies and are listening to all kinds of music, feeding their sense organs with whatever sense objects they want. This, of course, is not what is being said here.

*Śaṅkara* explains the compound *indriya-agniṣu* as, *indriyāṇi eva agnayaḥ*, meaning that the senses alone are the fires. Unto the fires of sense organs the sense objects are offered. Taken literally, it would seem that sounds are offered unto the ears, forms are offered unto the eyes, smells are offered unto the nose, tastes are offered unto the tongue, and touch is offered unto the sense of touch. This is what we commonly do throughout our entire lifetime. Where, then, is the discipline here? We are talking about *yajña*, which means discipline.

## DISCIPLINE IN ACTIVITY

To clarify this point, *Śaṅkara* says that for the people discussed in this verse, there is a discipline in all this. Just as a mother decides what her child should eat, how much and when, and this becomes a discipline for the child until he can decide these things for himself, so too, *yogīs* follow certain disciplines. Some follow *śama*, which is mentioned in the first line of this verse, and others follow *dama*, mentioned in the second line.

The senses are offered with a certain discipline: how much to see, how much to hear, how much to talk, how much to walk, and so on. Knowing how much to eat, for example, the person eats no more, even though there may be a desire for another helping. These are all disciplines, which are the practice of *dama*. Initially, *yogīs* practise mainly *dama* so that they can come to *śama* later. In this way they live their lives with discipline.

With reference to every sense organ, there is a sense object. The *yogī* offers the sense objects to the sense organs, but he or she holds the trump card as it were. The sense objects do not carry the person away. Even though he or she lets the sense organs go out into the world, the person practises restraint, *dama*, by ensuring that only *dharma* is followed, not *adharmā*. The *yogī* feeds the sense organs with whatever is proper, *aviruddha*. *Aviruddha* means that which is unopposed to one's pursuit or conducive to one's welfare. This point is crucial in understanding the meaning of *yajña* here. Without harming his pursuit, without hurting the *dharma*, the *yogī* perceives and

enjoys the sense objects, feeding the sense organs in a manner that is conducive to his pursuit of knowledge.

The word *juhvati*, in this verse, is also important. It does not simply mean to feed the sense organs or to sacrifice something. It means that you are doing the offering, you hold the trump card and are not letting the senses feed themselves. The senses want more; your fancies always demand more; but you say, ‘No!’ This is like a child wanting the chocolates that he had collected on Halloween, but the mother says, ‘No!’ ‘Why not,’ the child says, ‘they are my chocolates. I went around and collected all of them. Why should I not eat all of them?’ ‘Yes,’ the mother explains, ‘they are your chocolates all right, but I will keep them for you. You may have one today and another one tomorrow.’ Even though the child may cry, the mother remains firm. Here, you do the same for yourself. You mother yourself by disciplining the demands of your fancies, which is the practice of *dama*.

Further *Kṛṣṇa* says:

सर्वाणीन्द्रियकर्माणि प्राणकर्माणि चापरे ।  
 आत्मसंयमयोगाग्नौ जुह्वति ज्ञानदीपिते ॥ २७ ॥  
*sarvāṇīndriyakarmāṇi prāṇakarmāṇi cāpare*  
*ātmasaṁyamayogāgnau juhvati jñānadīpīte*

Verse 27

अपरे *apare* — others; ज्ञान-दीपिते *jñāna-dīpīte* — lighted by knowledge; आत्म-संयम-योग-अग्नौ *ātma-saṁyama-yoga-agnau* — in the fire of self-mastery; सर्वाणि *sarvāṇi* — all; इन्द्रियकर्माणि *indriyakarmāṇi* — activities of the senses; प्राणकर्माणि *prāṇakarmāṇi* — activities of the organs of action and the actions of the *prāṇas*; च *ca* — and; जुह्वति *juhvati* — offer

Others offer all the activities of the senses and the organs of action unto the fire of self-mastery lighted by knowledge.

The seekers discussed in this verse are *sannyāsīs* but not *jñānīs*. Because they are *sannyāsīs* with no obligatory duties to perform, they offer all activities, except those required to maintain the body, unto the fire of self-mastery — *ātma-saṁyama-yoga-agnau juhvati*. Such people live a life of meditation and contemplation, called *ātma-saṁyama-yoga*. Unto this fire of meditation that is helpful in self-knowledge, those who are given to meditation offer all sensory and other activities.

For the people discussed here, the usual activities of life resolve into one life of meditation. Thus, they do nothing but meditation and whatever that is necessary to maintain the body so that the knowledge can be gained. The previous verse talked about seekers who live in the world, but the seekers in this verse are renunciates. They remain where they have to remain, live a life of meditation, and pursue knowledge. Here, then,

meditation is being emphasised. These seekers are *sannyāsīs* as well as *yogīs*. For them there is *viveka*, their discipline being lighted by knowledge — *jñāna-dīpita*. In other words, they know exactly that they want the knowledge that is *mokṣa*.

### SELF-MASTERY LEADS TO KNOWLEDGE

Here, *jñāna-dīpita* means lighted by knowledge, a knowledge of what is right and wrong, what is *nitya* and *anitya*, real and unreal. Thus, both *variāgya* and *viveka* are there, but *dama* and *śama* are still to be gained. In order to gain this self mastery, these seekers have given up all activities and have taken to a life of meditation. Such *sannyāsīs* are many.

In the next verse, *Kṛṣṇa* describes more *yajñas*:

द्रव्ययज्ञस्तपोयज्ञा योगयज्ञास्तथापरे ।

स्वाध्यायज्ञानयज्ञाश्च यतयः संशितव्रताः ॥ २८ ॥

*dravyayajñāstapoyajñā yogayajñāsthāpare*

*svādhyāyajñānayaajñāśca yatayaḥ saṁśitavratāḥ*

Verse 28

तथा *tathā* — so too; अपरे *apare* — (are the) others; द्रव्य-यज्ञाः *dravya-yajñāḥ* — those who distribute wealth; तपोयज्ञाः *tapoyajñāḥ* — those who follow prayerful disciplines; योग-यज्ञाः *yoga-yajñāḥ* — those who practise *yoga*; च *ca* — and; स्वाध्याय-ज्ञान-यज्ञाः *svādhyāya-jñāna-yajñāḥ* — those who pursue knowledge; संशितव्रताः *saṁśita-vratāḥ* — those of firm vows; यतयः *yatayaḥ* — those who make efforts

So too, there are those who distribute wealth, those who follow prayerful disciplines, those who practise *yoga*, and those of firm vows and efforts who pursue knowledge.

Here, *Kṛṣṇa* points out various other disciplines or *yajñas* that different types of seekers are engaged in. Those who distribute wealth in the form of money or whatever else that may be given as charity are called *dravya-yajñas*. To distribute one's wealth, *dravya*, can be purely charity or it can be given as a *yajña*, as an offering, to the Lord, as a means of invoking the Lord in the form of this sacrifice. A person who does this is called a *dravya-yajña*<sup>1</sup> here in this verse.

For example, in India, a good part of the wealth, in the form of cows, land, gold, clothing, vessels, or grain, that a man leaves behind when he dies is distributed to the people. In fact, this distribution is the main part of the ritual performed after death.

<sup>1</sup> *द्रव्ययज्ञस्तपोयज्ञा योगयज्ञास्तथापरे । स्वाध्यायज्ञानयज्ञाश्च यतयः संशितव्रताः ॥ २८ ॥*

*Those who perform dravya-yajñas, i.e., distribute money as a yajña are called a dravya-yajñas.*

Before the cremation, the distribution takes place. To distribute one's wealth as a *yajña*, while living, helps one gain *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi* because there is giving involved.

Another set of seekers described in this verse are the *tapoyajñas*. Those who practise various types of *tapas* are called as *tapoyajñas*.<sup>1</sup> *Tapas* refers to any kind of prayerful discipline undertaken for the sake of atonement or discipline. The vows that one takes are also *tapas*. Some people, for example, take a vow of not eating on *ekādaśī*, the eleventh day of the moon, each month and spend the day in prayer. Such people are called *tapoyajñas*. *Tapas* is not just any discipline; it is prayerful discipline. Otherwise, even jogging and aerobics would become *yajñas*! Here, the attitude is religious and therefore, is again for *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*.

Those seekers who follow *aṣṭāṅga-yoga*, eight-limbed *yoga*, are called *yoga-yajñas*. *Aṣṭāṅga-yoga* is a prayerful discipline wherein the Lord is worshipped. *Īśvara-praṇidhānam* is one of its prescribed observances, *niyamas*. Still others who are *yatayaḥ saṃśitavratāḥ*, people of effort and people whose vows are very clear, are *svādhyāya-jñāna-yajñas*, those who follow the discipline of study and knowledge.

*Svādhyāya-yajña* refers to those who learn to chant or recite their own Veda. There are some people who, having learned the Veda in this way, do nothing but recite a portion of it daily. Such people are called *svādhyāya-yajñas* — those who perform the *yajña* of *svādhyāya*. And those who study *Vedānta*, who inquire into the *Vedānta-śāstra* are called *jñāna-yajñas* — those who perform the *yajña* of pursuing knowledge, *jñāna*. Here the *svādhyāya-jñāna-yajñas* are the people of great effort, *yatayaḥ*, whose commitment to the knowledge is complete, *saṃśitavratāḥ*. And these people do both these *yajñas* and are therefore, referred to as *svādhyāya-jñāna-yajñas* in this verse.

Other seekers follow the discipline of *prāṇāyāma* or breath control, one of the eight limbs of *aṣṭāṅga-yoga*, which is also looked upon as a *yajña*, as we shall see in the next verse.

अपाने जुह्वति प्राणं प्राणेऽपानं तथापरे ।

प्राणापानगती रुद्ध्वा प्राणायामपरायणाः ॥ २९ ॥

*apāne juhvati prāṇam prāṇe'pānaṃ tathāpare*  
*prāṇāpānagatī ruddhvā prāṇāyāmaparāyaṇāḥ*

Verse 29

तथा *tathā* — so too; अपरे *apare* — others; प्राणायाम-परायणाः *prāṇāyāma-parāyaṇāḥ* — those who are committed to the practice of *prāṇāyāma* (breath control); प्राण-अपान-गती

<sup>1</sup> ????? ? ? ? ????—??? ? ?????? ? ? ? ? ? ?

*tapaḥ yajñāḥ yeṣāṃ te – tapoyajñāḥ — bahuvrīḥsamāsaḥ.*

*Those who practise the various types of disciplines as a yajña are called as tapoyajñas.*

रुद्ध्वा *prāṇa-apāna-gatī ruddhvā* — stopping the flow of inhalation and exhalation; अपाने *apāne* — into the incoming breath; प्राणम् *prāṇam* — the outgoing breath; प्राणे *prāṇe* — into the outgoing breath; अपानम् *apānam* — the incoming breath; जुहति *juhvati* — offer

So too, others, those who are committed to the practice of *prāṇāyāma* (breath control), stopping the flow of inhalation and exhalation, offer the outgoing breath into the incoming breath (and) the incoming breath into the outgoing breath.

Those who practise breath control as a *yajña* are called ‘*prāṇāyāma-parāyaṇās.*’ These are people for whom *prāṇāyāma* is the *param ayanam*, the ultimate end. The primary end for such people is the practice of *prāṇāyāma*. In other words, they are committed to this practice for the time being. In the word *prāṇāyāma*, *prāṇa* means breath and *āyāma* means discipline. Thus, the discipline of breath control is called *prāṇāyāma*.

*Prāṇa* has several meanings, all of which imply living or breathing in one sense or another. Life itself is called *prāṇa*. Sometimes, *prāṇa* is used to refer to metabolic activity or to the entire physiological activity. Digestion, circulation, and so on, are each referred to as different *prāṇas*.

In addition to these general meanings, *prāṇa* also has a more specific meaning. The outgoing breath or exhalation is called *prāṇa* and the incoming breath or inhalation is called *apāna*.<sup>1</sup> *Apāna* also has a more general meaning, referring to the system responsible for elimination of anything that is thrown out of the body. In this verse, the more specific meaning of *prāṇa* and *apāna*, exhalation and inhalation, is implied wherein the act of respiration is presented as a discipline performed as a *yajña*.

## INHALATION AND EXHALATION AS A DISCIPLINE

Filling the lungs by inhaling the breath is called *pūraka* and emptying the lungs by exhaling is called *recaaka*. One can pause between inhalation and exhalation and again between the exhalation and the next inhalation. During these pauses, the air is retained inside the lungs and this is called *kumbhaka*. Each of these activities is a discipline that can be followed consciously. And when they are followed deliberately and consciously varying the duration of each according to the type of *prāṇāyāma*, the *prāṇāyāma* itself becomes a *yajña*.

<sup>1</sup> ?????????????? ?????????????? ???????

The air that goes out, that goes out in front of the person, is called *prāṇa*. The air that goes down, that goes in, is called *apāna*.



In this verse *Kṛṣṇa* mentions three types of *prāṇāyāmas*, the very practice of which become *yajñas*. The first is the one in which the *prāṇa*, exhalation, is offered unto inhalation, *apāna*. This is a kind of *pūraṅka-prāṇāyāma* in which the inhalation is given predominance over exhalation — *apāne juhvati prāṇam*. The second is the one in which *apāna*, inhalation is offered unto *prāṇa*, exhalation. This is a kind of *recaka-prāṇāyāma* in which the *prāṇa*, exhalation, is given predominance over *apāna*, inhalation — *prāṇe juhvati apānam*. The third is the one in which both the flow of both exhalation, and inhalation, are stopped and the air is retained either inside the lungs or outside the lungs. This is the kind of *prāṇāyāma* called *kumbhaka-prāṇāyāma*. Here the inhalation and exhalation are offered unto the retention — *prāṇa-apāna-gatī-ruddhvā*.

### BREATH RETENTION — KUMBHAKA

The exhaling flow of breath is called *prāṇa-gati* and the inhaling flow is called *apāna-gati*. Both the *prāṇa-gati* and the *apāna-gati* are stopped by the person; meaning that the breath is retained in the lungs for a certain length of time. This retention is called *kumbhaka*, *kumbha* meaning a ‘pot.’ Just as water is retained in a pot, so too, breath is retained in the lungs.

During *kumbhaka*, the person does neither *prāṇa* or *apāna*. Stopping both the flow of *prāṇa* and the flow of *apāna*, *prāṇa-apāna-gatī ruddhvā*, the person offers one into the other. The exhaling breath, *prāṇa*, and the inhaling breath *apāna* are each offered in breath retention, called *kumbhaka-prāṇāyāma*.

This *kumbhaka* is two-fold — the retention that takes place after inhalation, called inside retention, *antaḥkumbhaka*, and the retention that takes place after exhalation, called outside retention, *bahiṣkumbhaka*. The duration of each of these *kumbhakas* depends on the relative duration of inhalation and exhalation.

Because the person practising *prāṇāyāma* is carefully measuring the breath, he or she does not cut short any of the three disciplines involved — inhalation, retention, or exhalation. Any impulse to do so is not followed by the person. He or she maintains the stipulated time. Therefore, there is *yajña* in the discipline. Into the outgoing breath, the incoming breath is offered and into the incoming breath, the outgoing breath is offered. This, then, is what we call the practice of breath control, *prāṇāyāma-abhyāsa*, performed as a *yajña*, *prāṇāyāma-yajña* for gaining a certain tranquillity, alertness, and steadiness of the mind.

### PRĀṆĀYĀMA AND A STEADY MIND

The logic here is very simple. By converting the involuntary action of breathing into a voluntary action, you come back to yourself. All you do is breathe, but by breathing deliberately, there is a certain discipline involved, a discipline which helps you

gain a steady mind. When this is the end in view, the discipline becomes a *yajñā* and, because there is a prayer involved, there is *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi* as well.

Nothing purifies the mind like prayer. Thus, the seekers here gain *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi* and also steadiness of mind because of the discipline. Having presented the discipline of breath control in this way, *Kṛṣṇa* then mentions in the verse the discipline in eating as a *yajñā*:

अपरे नियताहाराः प्राणान् प्राणेषु जुह्वति ।  
 सर्वेऽप्येते यज्ञविदो यज्ञक्षपितकल्मषाः ॥ ३० ॥  
*apare niyatāhārāḥ prāṇān prāṇeṣu juhvati*  
*sarve'pyete yajñavidō yajñakṣapitakalmaṣāḥ*

Verse 30

अपरे *apare* — others; नियत-आहाराः *niyata-āhārāḥ* — who regulate their food intake; प्राणान् *prāṇān* — their desires to eat (more); प्राणेषु *prāṇeṣu* — unto the digestive fires; जुह्वति *juhvati* — offer; सर्वे *sarve* — all; अपि *api* — without exception; एते *ete* — these; यज्ञविदः *yajña-vidāḥ* — who observe religious disciplines; यज्ञ-क्षपित-कल्मषाः *yajña-kṣapita-kalmaṣāḥ* — (become) those for whom the impurities of the mind have been destroyed by the *yajñā*

Others, who regulate their food intake, offer their desire to eat (more) unto the digestive fires. All these (people) who observe religious disciplines (become), without exception, those for whom the impurities of the mind have been destroyed by the *yajñā*.

Those who regulate or measure their food are called *niyata-āhāras*. 'Only this much will I eat and no more,' they say. While *āhāra* refers to anything that goes inside of oneself — *āhriyate iti āhārāḥ* — including the sense objects enjoyed by the senses, generally it means food, drink, and whatever else that goes into one's stomach. There is a rule governing the quantities to be taken in, which says half of the stomach is to be filled with solids, one quarter with liquids, and one quarter is to be left empty for the movement of air. In other words, the fourth quarter is to be left alone! Nothing is to be put into it. This, then, is how the quantity of food is to be measured by those who practise this form of discipline.<sup>1</sup>

## DISCIPLINED EATING AS AN OFFERING

In this particular discipline, there is a *yajñā* because there is always the desire to eat more or not to eat at all if the food that is available is not very tasty. Therefore, not

<sup>1</sup> ??? ???? ???? ???? ????  
 ??? ?

responding to the desire to eat or not to eat becomes a *yajña* by observing measured eating, which is why such people are called *niyata-āhāras*. They offer their desires with reference to eating unto the digestive system, which creates the hunger and thirst — *prāṇān prāṇeṣu juhvati*. Even though the person may still feel hungry, he or she stops after the appropriate quantities have been consumed.

And, if eating between meals is what is to be avoided, then the person does not take even the smallest snack, regardless of his or her hunger. Such desires for eating are offered unto the *prāṇa* of digestion, unto the fires of digestion, unto the fire of hunger that causes digestion.

Those who follow this discipline as a *yajña* also live a life of prayer, in common with the other types of seekers mentioned in these verses. A life of prayer enables the seekers to gain a certain control over themselves, a certain self-mastery. Here, those who offer their desires for food into the fires of digestion also offer their prayers, thereby making this particular discipline another kind of *yajña*.

There are various *yajñas* practised in terms of food, none being superior or inferior to another. Everyone practises his or her own discipline and all such people are called *yajña-vids* in this verse, meaning those who follow various *yajña* or disciplines in terms of eating — what to eat, when to eat, how much to eat, and so on. Such practices may be based on religious or cultural traditions or may be purely individual.

Any type of discipline is considered a *yajña* if it is a religious discipline. If a discipline is practised for the sake of health alone, for example, it is not considered a *yajña*. A diet is also a discipline with reference to eating, but it is not a *yajña* because there is no prayer involved in it. Only when there is prayer involved is a discipline considered to be religious and therefore, a *yajña*.

## THE RESULTS OF PERFORMING YAJÑA

The word *kalmaṣas* in this verse means ‘impurities’ and can refer to any type of defect, including any impurity in the mind, *antaḥ-karaṇa-aśuddhi*. One's *rāga-dveṣas*, likes and dislikes, and any unsteadiness that may be in the mind because of the pressures of the *rāga-dveṣas* are all *kalmaṣas*. These *kalmaṣas* are destroyed, *kṣapita*, for those who practise *yajña*.

From the standpoint of the result gained and the means employed, a name is given to these people — *yajña-kṣapita-kalmaṣāḥ*, those whose impurities of the mind have been destroyed by *yajña*.

All religious disciplines are efficacious for achieving this purpose. A certain integration, *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*, is gained whatever be the discipline followed. No one discipline is superior to another. Which one to practise depends on what one wants,

what one needs. This alone must be kept in view when practising any religious discipline.

The difference between a religious discipline and any other discipline has to be properly understood. Religious disciplines are not mere disciplines, which is why we do not call aerobics or following a special diet a *yajña*. For any discipline to be considered a *yajña*, it must be religious.

Further *Kṛṣṇa* says:

यज्ञशिष्टामृतभुजो यान्ति ब्रह्म सनातनम् ।

नायं लोकोस्त्ययज्ञस्य कुतोऽन्यः कुरुसत्तम ॥ ३१ ॥

*yajñāśiṣṭāmṛtabhujo yānti brahma sanātanam*  
*nāyaṃ lokostyayajñasya kuto'nyaḥ kurusatta ma*

Verse 31

कुरुसत्तम *kuru-sattama* — O Best among the *Kurus!* (*Arjuna*); यज्ञ-शिष्ट-अमृतभुजः *yajña-śiṣṭa-amṛtabhujaḥ* — those who partake of the nectar (the result) that is left over after the *yajña*; सनातनम् ब्रह्म *sanātanam brahma* — eternal *Brahman*; यान्ति *yānti* — reach; अयज्ञस्य *ayajñasya* — for the one who does not perform *yajña*; अयम् *ayam* — this; लोकः *lokaḥ* — world; न अस्ति *na asti* — is not; अन्यः *anyaḥ* — another; कुतः *kutaḥ* — how

O Best among the *Kurus*, those who partake of the nectar (the result) that is left over after the *yajña*, reach the eternal *Brahman*. For the one who does not perform *yajña*, nothing (is gained) in this world. How, then, (can anything be gained) in any other (world)?

Any *yajña* that is performed has a result. *Amṛta*, nectar, here means the *prasāda*, the result, whatever is *śiṣṭa*, left over, after the offering is made in the *yajña*. And those who enjoy or partake of the results of these various *yajñas* are called *yajña-śiṣṭa-amṛtabhujas* in this verse.

And what do they gain by performing these religious disciplines? They gain steadiness and purity of mind, which enables them to enjoy a certain composure and tranquillity. And, if they are seekers, *mumukṣus*, this kind of mind will help them gain the self-knowledge they are pursuing. Whether or not the person is a *mumukṣu*, there is always a result in the form of *punya* when a *yajña* is performed. Whatever this *punya* can give them, either in this life or future ones, it will give them. But *mokṣa* can only be gained if the person is a *mumukṣu*, a seeker.

Since we are talking about *karma-yogīs* here, the word *yoginaḥ* having been used previously, the people referred to in this verse will naturally be *mumukṣus*. Being desirous of *mokṣa*, such people will gain the kind of mind that can inquire productively;

in other words, their inquiry will bear fruit. They will gain eternal *Brahman* — *yānti brahma sanātanam*.

### INQUIRY IMPLIES TIME

The word *yānti* here means they go to or they reach *Brahman*, both going and reaching indicating time, *kāla*. Even though *Brahman* is the very nature of oneself, to say that *Brahman* will be reached implies that an inquiry must be conducted, for which some time is required. Enjoying the result of the *yajñā* — a purified or steady mind — they inquire and gain the knowledge of *Brahman*. This is the only way people can ‘go to’ or ‘reach’ *Brahman*. The knower of *Brahman* being non-separate from *Brahman*, *ātmā* already being *Brahman*, knowledge of this fact alone makes seekers gain *Brahman*.

The knower of a thing does not usually become that thing. For example, the knower of microbiology does not become the microbes that he knows. Nor does the knower of history become history. In such instances, the knower is always different from what he knows. Whereas, in the famous story of the tenth man, the knower of the tenth man is the tenth man. If I am the tenth man and I am also seeking the tenth man, then as the knower of the tenth man I become the tenth man. I am the tenth man and, because I left myself out of the counting, I found the tenth man missing. When someone tells me, ‘Hey, you are the tenth man,’ I gain the knowledge of the tenth man as myself alone. Thus, the knower of the tenth man is indeed the tenth man.

### THE KNOWER OF BRAHMAN BECOMES BRAHMAN

In certain instances, then, where the knower and the object known are identical, the knower of the object is the very object known. Whereas, where the object is separate, the knower of the object is different from the object. Here, *Brahman* is myself, *ātmā*. Therefore, the knower of *Brahman* becomes *Brahman*, which is the peculiarity of this particular knowledge.

The word *yajñā* is used because knowing has to take place. The seekers have to know *Brahman*. *Mokṣa* cannot be gained simply by performing *yajñā*; knowledge of *Brahman* has to be gained, the gaining of which is *mokṣa*. *Śaṅkara* makes it very clear in his commentary that the verb ‘gains’ is used here to indicate that an inquiry has to be conducted, which involves time, and that through this inquiry, those who are *mumukṣus* will gain eternal *Brahman* — *sanātanam brahma yānti*.

### THE USE OF PRAISE AND CRITICISM IN THE GĪTĀ

A common method of presenting the teaching, found throughout the *Gītā*, is demonstrated in this verse — the use of *stuti*, praise, followed by the use of *nindā* or

criticism. Praise is of the knowledge or the *śāstra*. The teacher and the student are also praised. Even the result is praised. To praise the *jñānī* is, in fact, to praise the result, *mokṣa*.

*Nindā* or criticism is done for no other reason than to create *vairāgya* in the student to what is inimical to the vision and to create a proper interest in this vision and therefore, a stronger commitment to it. People may come to the study with lukewarm enthusiasm. To stoke this mild enthusiasm into a burning desire to know, the *Gītā* employs both criticism and praise, *nindā* and *stuti* — *stuti* always coming first. Thus, wherever you find *stuti*, you will find *nindā* later.

Here, in this verse, then, the result, the *phala*, is stated first — they gain eternal *Brahman*. This means that the performance of such disciplines, sacrifices, and prayers is productive in that it will indirectly help you gain the knowledge of *Brahman*. Whatever taste you already have for them, whatever degree of commitment you have towards performing them, is further increased by presenting them against the background of what your lot will be if you do not perform them. This is done in the second line of this verse.

Only when contrasted against *stuti* – praise, can *nindā* – criticism, be properly understood. A child, for example, should be praised or congratulated when he or she deserves it and judiciously chided when necessary. When you tell a child what he or she has done right, then when you point out what is wrong, the child will understand. This psychology is seen uniformly throughout the *Gītā*. First, there is praise and then, immediately afterwards, comes *nindā*.

In this verse, the importance of the *yajña* is easily understood because of this method of *stuti* and *nindā*. Those who perform the various *yajñas* already presented, and a few others found in the Veda and other *śāstras* that back up the Veda, gain *Brahman*. And those who perform none of these prayerful disciplines do not gain anything. Such a person is called *ayajña* — one who performs no *yajña*.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF A PROPER ATTITUDE AND DISCIPLINE

This world that is commonly shared by everyone has certain things to give, from simple pleasure to the joy of maturity. But, if there is no discipline, the world has nothing for you — *ayaṃ lokaḥ nāsti*. If you do not have a prayerful attitude and discipline, the world can give you only bumps and potholes, nothing else. When your back is in trouble, even a small bump becomes excruciatingly painful.

Without having a certain attitude, there are a lot of bumps in life, a lot of situations and events, that you find you cannot swallow and that are not very pleasant. Without a proper attitude, how are you going to face them? And what are you going to accomplish without discipline? Even material success is not possible. Thus, it is said here that even this world, *ayaṃ lokaḥ*, which holds out certain joys to everyone, cannot be had by the

*ayajñā*. Even small joys are not available for such a person. Where, then, is the possibility of any other world, *anyaḥ lokaḥ*, for you? No other world is possible. And where is the guarantee that you will be born again as a human being? All you can do is wait for another set of *karmas* to give you a human body and another chance to make better use of it.

If you cannot gain what this world has to offer, how can you hope to gain another world — *kutaḥ anyah?* Any other world, a better life, a better world of experience, like heaven and so on requires *punya* and therefore, *sādhana*, meaning rituals and prayer, special meditations, and good acts all of which are possible only when you have discipline. Therefore, there is no other *loka* available for you without prayerful discipline in some form or the other.

Eternal *Brahman*, *sanātanaṃ brahma* is what is to be gained in life and, for the person without discipline, it is very far away indeed. Thus, if even this world is not there for him, then what to talk of eternal *Brahman*?

#### **EVEN ENJOYMENT REQUIRES A CERTAIN ATTITUDE AND DISCIPLINE**

One may make money but, to enjoy what one has, there must be a certain attitude, for which some education is required. The person who does not have a proper attitude always postpones the enjoyment of what he or she has, thinking, ‘When I get such and such, it will be wonderful. Then I will enjoy.’ But when such and such is gained, the person does not feel wonderful at all — and the postponement begins all over again. Something else has to be gained, over and over again!

If the discipline is not there, if the prayerful attitude is not there, if the values are not there, you cannot really get anything. Whereas, if you have discipline — even if you have no money — you can gain a lot. It costs nothing to enjoy the stars, for instance. Like this, there are a lot of things to be enjoyed that do not require money. All kinds of books are available from public libraries. You need never buy a book, in fact. Without money, you can always borrow a book, read on any topic, and enjoy.

Whereas with money, but without the proper mind, what can you enjoy? All enjoyments require a mind, after all. If the mind is always concerned with the future and has no glad acceptance of what is, where is the question of any enjoyment for the person? All go-getters are futuristic people who do not enjoy what they have. This futuristic attitude motivates them to do all kinds of things and then they rationalise their behaviour by saying they are success-oriented people. But what value does such success have when they cannot enjoy what they have?

Success should necessarily be viewed from two standpoints. What one gets out of this life is one type of success and what one accomplishes is another. The first one, that is, what one gets out of life is the one that really counts. For one who has no discipline,

life will not even yield small gains and, as for eternal *Brahman*, it will be very far away indeed. From this verse, then, we understand that *yajña* is definitely to be done.

*Kṛṣṇa* then concludes this section by saying:

एवं बहुविधा यज्ञा वितता ब्रह्मणो मुखे ।

कर्मजान् विद्धि तान् सर्वान् एवं ज्ञात्वा विमोक्ष्यसे ॥ ३२ ॥

*evaṃ bahuvīdhā yajñā vitatā brahmaṇo mukhe*

*karmajān viddhi tān sarvān evaṃ jñātvā vimokṣyase*

Verse 32

ब्रह्मणः *brahmaṇaḥ* — of the Veda; मुखे *mukhe* — in the mouth (words); एवम् *evam* — in this manner; बहुविधाः *bahuvīdhāḥ* — many and varied; यज्ञाः *yajñāḥ* — religious disciplines; वितताः *vitatāḥ* — are very elaborately mentioned; तान् *tān* — them; सर्वान् *sarvān* — all; कर्मजान् *karmajān* — born of *karma*; विद्धि *viddhi* — understand; एवम् *evam* — thus; ज्ञात्वा *jñātvā* — knowing; विमोक्ष्यसे *vimokṣyase* — you will be liberated

In this manner, many and varied *yajñas*, religious disciplines, are very elaborately mentioned in the words of the Veda. Understand them all to be born of *karma* (and therefore, *anātmā*). Knowing thus, you will be liberated.

Here, *Kṛṣṇa* sums up this section on the various religious disciplines — all of which are *karma*. In *karma*, he had said, the wise person sees only *akarma*. Then he talked about rituals and other forms of *yajña* in order to present the knowledge that *ātmā*, the self, is *akartā*, a non-doer.

He also mentioned these disciplines because they are useful in the form of disciplines themselves in addition to bringing about *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*. At the same time, what is ultimately to be gained through all of them is the knowledge of *ātmā* as *akartā*, as *Brahman*. The word *brahma* in the present verse refers to the Veda in whose pages or words the various types of religious practices already discussed are very elaborately detailed.

Now, *Kṛṣṇa* says, ‘Understand all these religious disciplines to be born of *karma* — *tān sarvān karmajān viddhi*.’ Whether they are physical actions, *kāyika-karmas*, oral, *vācika-karmas*, or mental, *mānasa-karmas*, they are all born of a certain activity on the part of the doer, *kartā*. For this reason, they are called *karmajas*. Born of this three-fold *karma*, they are *anitya* and therefore, are only *anātmā*.

### CAN ĀTMĀ BE A DOER?

And who is the doer, the *kartā*, here? The disciplines are *karmajas*, born of *karma*, not *ātmajas*, that is, not born of *ātmā*. This means they are born out of the



instruments, *karaṇas*, alone — born of the *antaḥ-karaṇa*, the mind, the *vāgindriya*, the organ of speech, and the *karmendriyas*, the organs of action. They are either born purely of the mind or of the mind with the help of the senses and organs of action. Therefore, the *kartā* can only be the body-mind-sense complex — the *kārya-karaṇa-saṅghāta*.

This verse is a very interesting one. It has confused a lot of people, as we see by some of the interpretations, English translations, and commentaries that have been written on it. Having said that the religious disciplines are presented in the Veda and that they are all born of action, *Kṛṣṇa* then says that, knowing this, you will be liberated. How can this be? How can you be liberated by understanding that these *karmas* are born of various activities performed by the physical limbs, organ of speech, or the mind?

The point to be clearly understood here is that these disciplines are not born of *ātmā*. One has to go back to the statement, ‘*karmaṇi akarma yaḥ paśyēt,*’<sup>1</sup> and remember that *Kṛṣṇa* is summing up here. To make this point clear, *Śaṅkara* glosses the word *karmajān* as *anātmajān* and says that, ‘Understand that all of these are born of *anātmā* — *tān sarvān anātmajān viddhi.*’ The physical body, *deha*, is *anātmā* as are the mind and all the *indriyas*, the organs of perception and the organs of action, which include the organ of speech. This is why *Śaṅkara* uses the word *anātmajān*. *Karmajān* means *anātmajān*, born of *anātmā* alone. They are all *anātmā* because they are *karmas*,<sup>2</sup> objects, for you, the *ātmā*.

The physical body is not the *kartā*; it is only *karma*, itself being an object. The *karma* is an object for the subject, the *ātmā*. And the subject, *ātmā*, is not subject to objectification. Being a *karma*, the physical body is *anātmā*; it is not *ātmā*. It is an object, not the subject. The disciplines are born out of the physical body, the organ of speech, and the mind, all of which are objects, *anātmā*, for you, *ātmā*, the subject. Therefore, *karmajān* means *anātmajān*. And *Śaṅkara* makes it very clear that this fact is to be well understood.

Once you understand that these disciplines are born out of *anātmā* and not out of *ātmā*, you know that *ātmā*, the self, is *akartā*, free of any type of activity, *nirvyāpāra*, free from any action. We need only to see that the disciplines are born of *anātmā* for it to become evident that they are not born of *ātmā*.

All the *karmas* elaborately detailed in the pages of the Veda, some of which are mentioned here, are *anātmajas*, born of *anātmā* alone. They are born out of *kārya-karaṇa-saṅghāta*, the body-mind-sense complex. And since they are *anātmajas*, we

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<sup>1</sup> *Gītā* – 4-18

<sup>2</sup> Here in this statement and the following paragraph, *Swamiji* uses the word *karma* to mean the *karma-kāraka*, the object of a transitive verb as used in grammar and does not mean action as it has been used all along.

understand that *ātmā* is not the *kartā*. This vision is called *karmaṇi-akarma-darśanam* — seeing *akarma* even when a *karma* is performed.

#### WHEN THE DOER IS NEGATED, ACTION AND ITS RESULTS ARE ALSO NEGATED

We have seen earlier in this chapter how, even as one performs *karma*, the *kartā* is negated, everything being *Brahman* — *brahmārpaṇaṃ brahmahaviṣṭ brahmāgnau brahmaṇā hutam*.<sup>1</sup> The other *kāraṅkas*, the object of action, the means of action, the purpose of action, from whence the action comes, and the location in which the action takes place, are all nullified along with the *kartā*. Even though the *kāraṅkas* are seemingly there, their reality is nullified by negating the contention that there are divisions between them and *Brahman*. This negation is called sublation — sublating the reality of division as such, seeing that there is no division whatsoever.

Knowing *ātmā* as *akartā*, knowing the *kārya-karaṇa-saṅghāta* to be the doer, knowing that the doer is *ātmā* but *ātmā* is not the doer, one is liberated from all *karma* and *karma-phala* (*aśubha*). *Aśubha* means that which is not auspicious, that which is not good for you. Thus, as *Śaṅkara* says in his commentary on this verse, you are liberated from inauspicious *karma-phala*, which includes both *puṇya* and *pāpa* — *aśubhākhyāt karma phalāt vimokṣyase*.

#### LIBERATION FROM BONDAGE THROUGH KNOWLEDGE

This liberation can also be expressed in terms of release from *saṃsāra*. You are released from the bondage of *saṃsāra*, which is due to ignorance about *ātmā* being *akartā*. The moment you take *ātmā*, the self, as *kartā*, *saṃsāra* is born and you become a *saṃsārī*. Knowledge of *ātmā* as *akartā* is the clear vision, *samyag-darśana*, of *ātmā* as it is. Knowing this, you will be freed from all *karmas* and *karma-phalas*, which is what *saṃsāra* is all about.

*Karma-phala* is what accounts for a given birth, *janma*, during which there is again *karma* and therefore, more *karma-phala* accrued to you, which results in yet another birth. This cycle continues until you come out of its orbit by knowing that you are not the doer. As *Śaṅkara* puts it in the last line of his commentary, you know that all the activities that you perform are not your activities. You know that you are *nirvyāpāra*, free from all activities, and that you perform no action whatsoever.

#### KNOWLEDGE THAT I AM NOT THE DOER DOES NOT IMPLY INDIFFERENCE

Knowing that you are *nirvyāpāra* does not mean that you are indifferent to everything or that you do not exert yourself, which is sometimes how the word

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<sup>1</sup> *Gītā* – 4-24

*nirvyāpāra* is understood. That I am devoid of activities is a fact, whereas to not exert myself is a condition of laziness.

*Śaṅkara* defines *nirvyāpāra* as *udāsīna*, meaning here that *ātmā* is always the *sākṣī*, a witness who never gets involved in activity. Thus, without me, no activity can take place but, at the same time, I am indifferent to all activities, meaning that I am independent of all activities.

When you say, ‘I am indifferent,’ there is definitely a *kartā* involved, an attitude of doership. But, here, *ātmā* is purely the *sākṣī*, the witness. It does not perform any action. When this is your vision of yourself, *ātmā*, you will be *mukta*, free, from the bondage of *saṃsāra* — *saṃsāra-bandhanāt vimokṣyase*. Seeing doership in the self, *ātmani kartṛtva-darśana*, is the only cause for bondage; there is no other.

If you see doership in the *ātmā*, meaning that you take yourself to be a doer, then there will be *saṃsāra* for you. And if you take yourself to be a non-doer, you are free, released from the bondage of *saṃsāra*. This is the only difference there is between bondage and liberation, as this verse makes clear.

In the next verse, *Kṛṣṇa* goes on to praise the knowledge that is liberation:

श्रेयान् द्रव्यमयाद् यज्ञाज्ज्ञानयज्ञः परन्तप ।

सर्वं कर्माखिलं पार्थ ज्ञाने परिसमाप्यते ॥ ३३ ॥

*śreyān dravyamayād yajñājjñānayaajñāḥ parantapa  
sarvaṃ karmākhilaṃ pārtha jñāne parisamāpyate*

Verse 33

परन्तप *parantapa* — O Scorcher of foes! (*Arjuna*); द्रव्यमयात् यज्ञात् *dravyamayāt yajñāt* — as compared to the religious disciplines performed with materials; ज्ञान-यज्ञः *jñāna-yajñāḥ* — the discipline of knowledge; श्रेयान् *śreyān* — (is) superior; पार्थ *pārtha* — O Son of *Prthā*! (*Arjuna*); सर्वम् *sarvam* — all; कर्म *karma* — action; अखिलम् *akhilam* — in its entirety; ज्ञाने *jñāne* — in knowledge; परिसमाप्यते *parisamāpyate* — is resolved

This discipline of knowledge, O Scorcher of foes, is superior to religious disciplines performed with materials. O *Pārtha*! All action in its entirety, is resolved in knowledge.

In verse 24, the clear vision of *ātmā*, *samyag-darśana* of the nature of the *ātmā*, was given the status of a *yajña*, that is, it was explained in the form of a *yajña*. This was done in order to present *ātmā* as a non-doer by converting all the *kāraṅkas*<sup>1</sup> into *Brahman*, which means that everything is *Brahman*.

<sup>1</sup> The factors related to the action such as the *kartā*, the doer of the action, *karma*, the object of the transitive verb, *karāṇa*, the instrument, etc.

To unfold this knowledge, many kinds of *yajñas* were mentioned, each of which can help a seeker gain a purified mind so that the knowledge can take place. Because of their usefulness in gaining *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*, these *yajñas* were pointed out. However, one must avoid being carried away by the disciplines themselves because they have a limited end; they can only prepare the mind for the knowledge. The ultimate end, *mokṣa*, can only be gained by knowledge, not by the performance of religious disciplines.

### DISCIPLINES ARE ONLY A MEANS, NOT AN END

Therefore, the discipline itself is not an end. Any discipline is but a means for a given end, one of which is *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*, purification of the mind, and another is *antaḥ-karaṇa-naiścalya*, steadiness of the mind. With such a mind you will surely gain the *samyag-darśana*, the clear vision of the nature of the self being totally free from action.

This *samyag-darśana* is praised in this verse by contrasting it with the various *karmas* mentioned previously. Clear vision means the clear knowledge of oneself. And how do you gain this clear vision? Not by any of these disciplines, *Kṛṣṇa* points out here. The *samyag-darśana* is something that has to be understood, for which there is also a *yajña* to be done — *jñāna-yajña*. This *yajña*, is being praised here.

*Kṛṣṇa* addresses *Arjuna* as *parantapa* in this verse, meaning one who scorches enemies. We have seen that the word ‘enemy’ can stand for one’s *kāma-krodha*, afflictions such as one’s likes, dislikes, anger, and so on. Since *Arjuna* was a *kṣatriya*, a warrior, the word can also apply to enemies in the usual sense of the word as well.

We are told here that *jñāna-yajña* is *śreyān*, something superior, meaning that it is definitely the thing to be done. Wherever the word ‘superior’ appears, the question always arises, superior to what? But, there is no real comparison here. Instead, *Kṛṣṇa* is pointing out what *jñāna-yajña* is. It is superior, *śreyān*, because it gives you *mokṣa*. Therefore, there is not the usual sense of better and best here. Here the word *śreyān* means ‘the best.’

*Dravya-yajña* refers to a *yajña* that is performed using oblations, which implies the use of certain materials or objects. All rituals fall into this category. Because *dravya-yajñas* can only give you limited results, in the form of *puṇya* and a certain satisfaction, *jñāna-yajña* is described here as being superior to them. For example, when you offer a prayer, there is an immediate satisfaction, which is *drṣṭa-phala* or a seen result. That you are able to pray is an end in itself and, as a result of prayer, you will also have some relative contentment. This too is *drṣṭa-phala*. There will also be *adrṣṭa-phala*, an unseen result, in the form of *puṇya*.

## KNOWLEDGE SWALLOWS THE DOER

Thus, there are two types of *phala* for prayer. One is the immediate result that you gain and the other is the invisible result that is accrued to you. Any ritual implies a *kartā*, a doer, as well as various materials, and it is therefore, an initiator of results, whereas *jñāna-yajña* is a swallower of all results. The pursuit of knowledge itself is the *yajña* — *jñānam eva yajñaḥ*.

Because *jñāna-yajña* swallows the *kartā*, the doer, it does not further perpetuate the *saṃsāra*; it swallows the *saṃsāra*. *Jñāna-yajña* does not initiate any result — *na phala-ārambhakaḥ* — because it devours the very doer. The moment you begin to ask what is *jñāna*, what is *ātmā*, and so on, the *kartā* is very much in question. As long as you are questioning with your inference and perception, however, the *kartā*, the one who inquires, infers and perceives, will remain. If, on the other hand, the *kartā* is exposed to the teaching of *Vedānta*, the *kartā* will be swallowed.

*Vedānta* will tell the *kartā*, ‘You are *akartā*, but you think you are *kartā* because you do not understand what *ātmā* is. Doership is just a thought that comes and goes. When that thought is not there, like in sleep, where is the *kartā*? Or, between two thoughts, where is the *kartā*? There is no *kartā*; you are *akartā* only. You perform no action at any time. You are not the thought; you are the one behind every thought. The thought is you, no doubt, but you are free from the thought. When thought goes, you are and when thought is, you are.’ Like this, *Vedānta* teaches the *kartā* that he or she is *akartā*, thereby knocking off the *kartā*.

## KNOWLEDGE IS BEYOND THE RANGE OF COMPARISON

To say that this verse is comparing *jñāna-yajña* to the religious disciplines mentioned earlier, is not appropriate because *jñāna-yajña* destroys all *karma*. To say that something is better than something else implies that the something else is still there. Here, the *karma* that *jñāna-yajña* is supposedly being compared to is gone — destroyed by *jñāna-yajña*. How, then, can it be said that *jñāna-yajña* is better than *karma*?

When a person says, ‘It is better to be married than to be single,’ or ‘It is better to be single than to be married,’ there is something better involved. But, here, it is not a matter of *jñāna-yajña* being better than *karma* since absolute knowledge of oneself is beyond the range of comparison. It is not even the best. All comparisons are possible only when both things being compared are within the range of comparison.

Knowledge and *karma* are two different orders of reality. Knowledge deals with the absolute and *karma* is completely swallowed by that knowledge. Also, in terms of the result achieved, there is no possibility of comparison. The result achieved by *karma* is limited and that achieved by knowledge is limitlessness itself.

When I am limitless, where is the possibility of comparison? You can compare members of the same order of reality. You cannot compare an achievement belonging to one order of reality with the achievement belonging to another order of reality. Therefore, *karma* is one thing and *jñāna* is quite another. Still, for want of a better expression, the word *śreyān*, superior, is used here. One of the beauties of this word is that, even though it is a comparative expression, it indicates *mokṣa*. By one kind of *yajña*, i.e., *jñāna-yajña*, you get *mokṣa* and, by the other kind, i.e., the *dravya-yajña*, you do not.

*Dravya-yajña* can only give you a limited result that is other than yourself — either some external result or an internal result, called *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*. If you are a *karma-yogī*, a *mumukṣu*, you will gain *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*, which is useful for gaining the knowledge. The various *yajñas* or religious disciplines you perform as a *karma-yogī* help you to perform the *jñāna-yajña*, the inquiry into the *śāstra*, properly. Inquiry is the direct means for gaining *samyag-darśana*, the clear vision, whereas the other *yajñas* simply help you in that inquiry.

#### THE DESTRUCTION OF KARMA IS TOTAL

*Jñāna-yajña* is said to be *śreyān*, superior, because knowledge destroys all *karma*, meaning that *karma* in its entirety resolves in knowledge — *sarvaṃ karma akhilaṃ jñāne parisamāpyate*. *Akhilam*, with reference to *karma*, means that there is absolutely nothing left over after knowledge takes place. All *karmas* and everything connected with them are totally gone, without so much as a trace of anything left behind.

*Sarva* is used here to indicate that all *karma* goes in the wake of knowledge. Sometimes, even when ‘all’ is said, there is something left over. For example, when you say, ‘All the people at that beach are surfers’ or ‘All the people living in Beverly Hills are rich,’ these statements are not really true. There are people in Beverly Hills who are not rich — the servants, for instance. There are also those who, while living in big houses, have enormous debts, their liabilities being much greater than their assets.

Therefore, statements using the word ‘all’ are not always totally true. This word is more often used to indicate a predominance, rather than an entirety wherein there is absolutely nothing left over. Recognising that the relative meaning of *sarva* may exclude some things, *Kṛṣṇa* uses the word *akhila* also in this verse. Since both of these words appear together — *sarvam akhilam* — there is no doubt whatsoever that, what was meant here was *karma* in its entirety. And this *karma* resolves into knowledge — *jñāne parisamāpyate*.



तद्विद्धि प्रणिपातेन परिप्रश्नेन सेवया ।

उपदेक्ष्यन्ति ते ज्ञानं ज्ञानिनस्तत्त्वदर्शिनः ॥ ३४ ॥

*tadviddhi praṇipātena paripraśnena sevayā*

*upadekṣyanti te jñānaṃ jñāninastattvadarśinaḥ*

Verse 34

प्रणिपातेन *praṇipātena* — by prostrating; परिप्रश्नेन *paripraśnena* — by asking proper questions; सेवया *sevayā* — by service; तत् *tat* — that; विद्धि *viddhi* — understand; ज्ञानिनः *jñāninaḥ* — the wise; तत्त्वदर्शिनः *tattva-darśinaḥ* — those who have the vision of the truth; ते *te* — for you; ज्ञानम् *jñānam* — knowledge; उपदेक्ष्यन्ति *upadekṣyanti* — will teach

Understand that (which is to be known) by prostrating, by asking proper questions, (and) by service. Those who are wise, who have the vision of the truth, will teach you (this) knowledge.

Here, *Kṛṣṇa* explains how this knowledge can be accomplished, how the *jñāna-yajña* is to be conducted. Every *yajña* is in the form of a ritual and has certain stipulations such as — when it is to be performed, what kind of and how many priests should participate, which materials to provide, who is to be paid what, and so on. These stipulations are all elaborately detailed in the Veda.

For the *jñāna-yajña*, however, you require no priests, only a teacher. Nor is there a stipulated time for the *yajña*, which is nothing but your inquiry. When you find your teacher, when you are ready, then you begin. There is no question of ‘when’ here; there is only ‘then.’ There are no other considerations. It does not matter whether you inquire in the morning or in the evening, in the summer or in the winter; whether you inquire before you are married, after you are married, or after your retirement. There are no such rules because knowledge is involved, and not *karma*.

Only for *karma*, for religious disciplines, are there such rules. For example, only married people can perform certain rituals. Without a wife, a man is not qualified to perform them. Further, a *brahmacārī* can perform certain rituals that a married man cannot perform. Like this, there are varieties of stipulations with reference to *karma* whereas for a *jñāna-yajña* there are really only two.

Firstly, you must find a proper teacher. The next stipulation is that you yourself must be proper. The propriety of the teacher and the student is all that really counts in *jñāna-yajña*. In this verse, *Kṛṣṇa* says, ‘Understand that — *tad viddhi*,’ meaning, ‘Understand how this knowledge is to be gained, by what means it is to be gained.’ Three other things were mentioned as the secondary means towards gaining this knowledge — *praṇipāta*, prostrating to the teacher, *paripraśna*, asking proper questions, and *sevā*, serving the teacher.



## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ACT OF PROSTRATION

To perform the act of prostration does not mean that you are doing exercises. First, you have to find a teacher. Then, approaching the teacher, *ācāryam abhigamya*, you salute him or her. This is what is meant by *praṇipāta*, the literal meaning of which is ‘falling down properly’ — that is, with the right attitude. This attitude is also called *namaskāra*, the intention of which is to show one's respect.

There are different forms of *praṇipāta* or falling down. One way is to bend down and touch the teacher's feet. Another is to place your hands together and bend your head slightly. Like this, there are a variety of *namaskāras*, one of which is called *aṣṭāṅga-namaskāra*, a *namaskāra* in which all the eight limbs — the head, chest, trunk, knees, hands, feet, the mind, and one's words — touch the ground.<sup>1</sup> To touch the mind to the ground indicates that what you do with your body is to be backed by an attitude or feeling of respect. By words, also, one pays one's respect saying, ‘O *Bhagavan*, I salute you.’ Because one's whole body stretches out on the ground, this *namaskāra* is also called *dīrgha-namaskāra*, *dīrgha* meaning ‘long.’

Prostration implies a certain surrender on one's part. I want to learn and I have found a teacher. I therefore, approach the teacher with an attitude of surrender. I am ready to give up my *ahaṅkāra*, my ego, because I want to know. This giving up is an important attitude and the *dīrgha-namaskāra* is a symbol of this particular disposition.

## PROPER QUESTIONING AND SERVICE TO THE TEACHER

The second means for gaining the knowledge is proper questioning, *paripraśna* — asking appropriate questions at the right time, taking into consideration the context of what is being taught. We have seen such questions in our own inquiry into the *Gītā*. To name a few — What is this bondage? — *ko'yaṃ bandhaḥ?* How has it come about? — *kathaṃ bandhaḥ?* What is release from this bondage? How does it take place? — *kathaṃ mokṣaḥ?*

Only when the bondage is clear, will *mokṣa* become clear. In response to such questions, the teacher will say, ‘You require knowledge.’ Then, you may ask, ‘What is that knowledge — *kā vidyā?*’ ‘The knowledge, *vidyā*, is opposed to ignorance, *avidyā*,’ the teacher will reply. In this way, certain questions may arise and, whenever appropriate, they should be asked because the subject matter is something that must be understood. This type of questioning is what is meant by *paripraśna*.

<sup>1</sup> ?????? ?????? ??? ??? ?????? ??? ??????

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*padbhyāṃ karābhyāṃ jānubhyāṃ urasā śirasā dṛśā  
vacasā manasā caiva praṇāmo'ṣṭāṅga ucyate*

The third means of gaining the knowledge, mentioned in this verse, is *sevā* — service to the teacher. Anything that can be done for the teacher is done. This is a very common aspect of the *guru-śiṣya* relationship while the student is gaining the knowledge. There is no other payment involved — no tuition fee, no charge for room and board, and so on. *Guru-sevā* is an attitude that is important for gaining the knowledge.

And what happens when these three-fold means for gaining the knowledge are followed? The teachers, who have been won over by your devotion and your commitment to the knowledge, your seriousness, will teach you; they will give you the knowledge — *jñāninaḥ upadekṣyanti te jñānam*. The word ‘teachers’ is put in the plural here either to refer to all teachers or for the sake of respect.

### A TEACHER MUST HAVE THE VISION

In order to bless you with this knowledge, the teachers have to be *jñānīs*; they have to know the *śāstra*. Because they themselves were exposed to the teaching, they also know the methodology of it; therefore, they will definitely teach you.

Such teachers must also be *tattvadarśīs*, those who have the clear vision of the truth. *Kṛṣṇa* adds this word because there are those who know the *śāstra*, logic, grammar, and so on, and who teach. But, because they still have some obstructions, *pratibandhaka*s, they do not see the vision very clearly. Thus, only those who know exactly what they teach are called *tattvadarśīs* — those who clearly see the truth about themselves, the world, and God, according to the *śāstra*.

Those who know the *śāstra* are not merely informed in terms of the words, but they also know the meaning of the words. They know the meaning of words like *tat tvam asi* — ‘You are That.’ Thus, they are not the knowers of the words; they themselves personify the content of these words of the *śāstra*. Such people alone are called *tattvadarśīs* and, if they teach you, the teaching will do exactly what it is supposed to do.

The purpose of the teaching is to reveal, not to advise. Advice is something meant for you to do, like when a doctor advises you to follow a particular treatment. This is purely advice, which you have to follow; in other words, it is *karma*. Whereas, if the same doctor teaches you medicine — how to diagnose a problem, what it is, how it happened, what treatment is to be given, why it is given, how it may affect the patient, and so on — then it is knowledge, meaning that, it is something to be understood.

Here, the intention is to reveal the nature of the *ātmā*, the world, and God. This is what the teaching does. And only when the words come from a teacher who knows what he or she is talking about is the teaching able to accomplish what is intended. This is why this teaching cannot be successfully taught by everyone. The words themselves can

put people on the right track. But only when they are spoken by a person who sees what the words are, can they create the knowledge. When the words are spoken by one who is himself the meaning of these words, there is real teaching, *upadeśa* .

This description of the proper teacher given here by *Kṛṣṇa* is also the contention of the *śruti*. Only when a teacher is a *tattvadarśī*, one who has the clear vision of the truth, will the teaching be conclusive. Otherwise, your pursuit will not end; it will have to continue.

The next verse describes what happens when one gains the clear vision:

यज्ज्ञात्वा न पुनर्मोहमेवं यास्यसि पाण्डव ।

येन भूतान्यशेषेण द्रक्ष्यस्यात्मन्यथो मयि ॥ ३५ ॥

*yajjñātvā na punarmohamevaṃ yāsyasi pāṇḍava*  
*yena bhūtānyaśeṣeṇa drakṣyasiātmanyatho mayi*

Verse 35

पाण्डव *pāṇḍava* — O *Pāṇḍava!* (*Arjuna*); यत् ज्ञात्वा *yat jñātvā* — knowing which; पुनः *punaḥ* — again; एवम् *evam* — in this manner; मोहम् *moham* — delusion; न यास्यसि *na yāsyasi* — you shall not get; येन *yena* — by which; अशेषेण *aśeṣeṇa* — all; भूतानि *bhūtāni* — beings; आत्मनि *ātmani* — in yourself; अथो *atho* — and; मयि *mayi* — in Me; द्रक्ष्यसि *drakṣyasi* — you shall see

Knowing this knowledge (which was taught by them <sup>1</sup>) O *Pāṇḍava*, you shall not again be deluded in this manner (and) by this (knowledge) you shall see all beings in yourself and in Me.

The knowledge referred to in this verse is that, which is taught by the teachers described in the previous verse. Gaining that knowledge, *yat jñātvā*, the delusion you had about being a doer and an enjoyer will not return. I am a doer — *ahaṃ kartā*, I am an enjoyer — *ahaṃ bhoktā*, I am limited, I am a seeker, I am seeking knowledge, I am seeking *mokṣa* — all these delusions, *mohas*, that have been with you thus far, you will not gain again, *punar na yāsyasi*. Never again will you come under the spell of *moha*, *Kṛṣṇa* tells *Arjuna*, addressing him as *Pāṇḍava*, the son of *Pāṇḍu*.

And how is it that this delusion does not return? Because delusion, *moha*, once gone, is gone for good. *Moha* means confusion born of self-ignorance. Once the cause for the confusion, ignorance of the self, has been removed, you cannot commit the same mistake again. Previously, there was a mistake. But, if this mistake is corrected removing the ignorance because of which the mistake was originally committed, how can you again be in the same situation? Unless ignorance comes back, it is not possible. And

<sup>1</sup> *The jñānīs and tattvadarśīs mentioned in the previous verse.*

ignorance does not come back — like one-way traffic! Therefore, ignorance, once removed, is gone for good. It goes, never to return.

### KNOWLEDGE NEVER GOES

Knowledge, on the other hand, comes and never goes, which is what makes it impossible for ignorance to come back. Whatever ignorance you had before knowledge took place is gone. For example, can you be ignorant of an apple for even a moment? You cannot be ignorant of an apple because it is something you already know. What you know you cannot again give up, even if someone asks you to, because ignorance is not something that ever comes back.

You may ask, ‘But suppose I were to have a brain haemorrhage or something and lose all my knowledge, memory, and everything. Would ignorance not come back?’ No! Ignorance does not come back. The memory and other mental activity may be gone, but the self-ignorance you had before cannot come back because it had already gone — and gone means gone for good. ‘Gone’ means no more delusion, no more *karma* for you, which means that *saṃsāra* is also not there for you. All that is lost, if the mind ceases to function, is the capacity to enjoy the *jīvanmukta* state. *Jīvanmukta* means that, while living, one is free. When you are free inside, this freedom can be enjoyed through your body, mind and senses interacting with the world. But if you are in a coma, or some equivalent state, even if you are free inside, due to the absence of the interaction with the world on the part of the body, mind, and senses you will not be able to enjoy this freedom; nor will you have any problems of *saṃsāra*.

Once knowledge is gained, it is always gained, even though the physical body may or may not continue to function, just as computer software cannot function if the hardware is damaged. New hardware, of course, can usually be obtained, but here, once knowledge of *ātmā* is gained, there is no longer any *karma* to generate new hardware. Therefore, no new software is necessary either, *ātmā* now being in the form of *Parameśvara*. The *jīva* is gone. From the standpoint of the world, all there is now is *Īśvara*, the Lord. There is no longer the individual, you. The individual, the person has become *Īśvara*.

This is what is meant by ‘gaining *Īśvara* — *īśvara-prāpti*.’ If the *jīva* as an individual is not there, there is only *Brahman*. And with reference to the people who exist, what does that *Brahman* become? *Īśvara*, the cause of the world — *jagatkāraṇa*. Therefore, you are *Īśvara*. There being no more *jīvatva*, there is only *īśvaratva*. This, then, is the contention presented in this verse.

### SEEING EVERYTHING IN ONESELF

The knowledge that removes your previous delusion and prevents it from returning is described in one sentence here — the knowledge by which you will see all beings in

yourself, *yena bhūtāni aśeṣeṇa draṅṅasyasi ātmani*. All beings, *bhūtāni*, means all living beings, without exception, *aśeṣeṇa*. Whatever being you come across, whatever you see, you will see in yourself alone — *ātmani eva draṅṅasyasi*. Why? Because the knower is yourself, knowledge is yourself, and the object of knowledge is also yourself.

Previously, you had this problem of *kartṛtva*, doership, in that, you took yourself, the *ātmā*, to be the *kartā*, the agent, of either knowing or doing. Because the *kartā* is always opposed to what it is related to, you were always different from the objects you related yourself to. Therefore, a subject-object division was a reality for you.

This duality, which was a reality before, is removed by eliminating the *kartṛtva*, the doership in the *ātmā*. Now I see the self as pure consciousness that is not involved in anything but, at the same time, nothing is separate from it. All that is there is *ātmā* which is *Brahman*, which is what *Kṛṣṇa* reveals here when he says, ‘You will see all beings in yourself — *ātmani sarvāṇi bhūtāni draṅṅasyasi*.’

The consciousness that is conditioned by the knower, the consciousness that is conditioned by the knowledge, and the consciousness that is conditioned by the object of knowledge is one consciousness alone — *caitanya*. The names and forms, *nāma-rūpa*, have no independent existence apart from this consciousness. The knower, known, knowledge conditioning is not separate from *caitanya*, the consciousness, because the existence of everything, *sat*, is nothing but the existence of *caitanya*, consciousness.

#### **BETWEEN YOU AND THE LORD THERE IS NO DIFFERENCE**

Because there is no separation, *Kṛṣṇa* says here that, once knowledge has taken place, whatever you previously saw as existing separately, as different from yourself, you will see in yourself alone. This means, you are the whole. And not only will you see everything in yourself, you will see it all in *Īśvara*, the Lord also. ‘Because you see everything in yourself, you will see everything in Me,’ *Kṛṣṇa* says talking as *Īśvara*, the Lord. This means that between you and the Lord, there is no difference.

If the Lord is both the efficient and material cause of everything, nothing is separate from the Lord. Therefore, the entire creation and everything in it is the Lord. This means that the five elements, *ākāśādi-bhūtas*, are the Lord and everything in space being non-separate from the Lord, is also the Lord. So too your physical body being included in the physical universe which is the form of the Lord, is the Lord, as are its physiological functions, the mind, and senses. Everything, then, is the Lord.

#### **YOU ARE THE CONSCIOUSNESS THAT IS THE LORD**

Because consciousness is never created it was always there, just as the Lord was. In fact, the Lord is this consciousness, the *caitanya*, and as such, is not created. In other words, the Lord does not create himself, the *caitanya*. This Lord is the consciousness

that is the mind, the senses, and everything else. Given this fact, who is there? Only the Lord is there; there is no individual. All that is there, including the physical body, the physical universe, the mind, and the subtle universe, are all included in the Lord. What is left out is consciousness that is you. And the consciousness that is you is the same consciousness that is the Lord.

The Lord is in essence uncreated consciousness; therefore, all that is there is the Lord. And what is created by the Lord is non-separate from the Lord, while what is not created by the Lord, the consciousness that is the Lord's essential nature, continues to be the Lord. All that is there is one whole that is the Lord. Therefore, you are not an individual separate from the Lord.

Or, we can look at this in another way. If you are not separate from the Lord, either the Lord alone exists or you alone exist. When you say the Lord alone exists, there is no you, no small 'I.' Either way, it is the same. Therefore, *Kṛṣṇa* says, 'You will see all beings in yourself and in Me' There is no difference whatsoever between the *jīva*, the individual, and *Īśvara*, the Lord.

This, then, is the vision that is the knowledge itself, which *Kṛṣṇa* describes further in the next verse.

अपि चेदसि पापेभ्यः सर्वेभ्यः पापकृत्तमः ।

सर्वं ज्ञानप्लवेनैव वृजिनं सन्तरिष्यसि ॥ ३६ ॥

*api cedasi pāpebhyaḥ sarvebhyaḥ pāpakṛttamaḥ  
sarvaṁ jñānaplavenaiva vṛjinam santariṣyasi*

Verse 36

सर्वेभ्यः पापेभ्यः अपि *sarvebhyaḥ pāpebhyaḥ api* — as compared to all sinners; पापकृत्तमः असि चेत् *pāpakṛttamaḥ asi cet* — even if you are the greatest sinner; सर्वम् *sarvam* — all; वृजिनम् *vṛjinam* — sin; ज्ञानप्लवेन *jñānaplavena* — by the raft of knowledge; एव *eva* — alone; सन्तरिष्यसि *santariṣyasi* —you will cross with ease

Even if you are the greatest sinner among all sinners, you will cross all sin with ease by the raft of knowledge alone.

Here, a question may arise as to how can one, who is limited in so many ways, hope to gain such knowledge? After all, the knowledge being discussed is no ordinary knowledge. It is the knowledge of the whole. It is the knowledge that I am the fullness that is *Brahman*, that I am everything, that I am the Lord. To gain this knowledge seems to be a very tall order indeed! It is too big a lump for me to swallow. It is not even a lump; it is the whole thing!

If this is your problem, I would say that, because it is the whole, you need not swallow it at all; you need only to understand. If it were a matter of faith, you would

definitely have to swallow it. Wherever faith is involved, one is not to inquire; it is simply to be swallowed! Here, however, there is nothing to be swallowed because it is the whole.

Still, you may say, ‘But it is too big for me, Swamiji! You have no idea of all that I have done in my life! This knowledge is possible for the people who have lived a clean life, who have dotted all the ‘i’s and crossed all the ‘t’s, who have never crossed the bounds, who have always lived within the framework of what is to be done and what is to be avoided. You are addressing only those fortunate people who have not transgressed the structure of *dharma*. This knowledge is much too sacred for a sinner like me. Therefore, I do not see how I can ever qualify for it.’

### OCEAN OF SIN

There are many people who, because of the particular religious doctrine they have been exposed to, think of themselves as born sinners through no fault of their own. Since their birth was not an immaculate one, they are told that they have been born of sin and they accept it. And, after birth, of course they were sinners. If I am already a born sinner, what difference does it make if I commit a few more sins? Therefore, I did whatever I could do. I would have committed even more sins, no doubt, had there not been some obstacle or the other in my way. Because I was born with certain limitations and was unable to do certain things because of my love for or commitment to *dharma*, I could not commit certain sins. If I had even the slightest chance to commit them, I would surely have done so. How, then, can you say that I am *Īśvara*? Do you expect me even to understand?

‘Yes,’ *Kṛṣṇa* says in this verse. It is the glory of the knowledge that even the greatest sinner can gain the vision of the identity between the Lord and the self. The word ‘sinners’ here refers to the people who do things that are not becoming and includes all types of sinners found in the world — bootleggers, drug pushers, hit men, small sinners, big time criminals, and so on. To make his point, *Kṛṣṇa* chooses the greatest sinner of them all, *pāpakṛttama*, as the subject of this verse.

Such a person is in the midst of the ocean of sin that is called *sarvaṃ vṛjinam* here, *vṛjina* meaning *pāpa* or sin. Even the greatest of all sinners can cross this ocean of sin by a single raft, the raft of knowledge, *jñāna-plava*. This raft of knowledge is just one short statement, ‘You are That — *tat tvam asi*.’ The meaning that these three words convey is the knowledge after all. And, by this raft of knowledge, even if you are the worst among all sinners, you can cross the entire ocean of sin — *vṛjinam sarvaṃ santariṣyasi*.

But, you may ask, will this crossing not take a long time and involve great difficulties? Not at all; effortlessly you shall cross because all you have to do is to wake up to the reality of *ātmā*, the self.

Suppose you dream that you have committed multiple murders and that you are caught. In the dream, you appeared before the judge and the jury, you were declared guilty, sentenced to death, and now, you are about to be executed. This is the entire scenario in the dream for you. And now you wake up! What happens to all the sins you committed in the dream? By the raft of knowledge, by being awake to the fact that you are not the doer of the dream actions, you are rescued from the entire scene — the sins, the sentence, everything. None of it can affect you in any way.

Who was the doer of the dream actions, then? The doer was not you. It was someone else, someone who was ignorant. That, doership was something you imposed upon yourself and, therefore, all the problems of the doer were yours. Then, by falsifying the dreamer, you falsified the entire act of dreaming and the dream itself — everything that was done in the dream and the results born out of those actions. If the dreamer is real, you cannot falsify him or her. But, in the wake of the knowledge of the waker, the dreamer is resolved. In other words, the waker swallows the dreamer, along with the dream world, the dream actions, and the dream results.

### ĀTMĀ IS NEVER A SINNER

Similarly, the waker thinks that he or she is the *kartā* now, but this *kartā* is also false. The one who is able to see the falseness of doership of the self is free from doership. Seeing the falseness is *jñāna*, the knowledge that releases you completely from all that was done by the false doer. *Ātmā* is not a sinner because it is not a *kartā*; *ātmā* is always pure, *śuddha*, free from all doership.

You may say that previously you were a sinner, but now you are a saint because the unbecoming actions you did in the past have been neutralised by good actions. But the status of being a sinner or a saint is in the terms of doership alone. The *kartṛtva*, doership, is retained in both the sinner and the saint. When one says, ‘I am a sinner,’ or ‘I am a saint,’ both the statements have an equal implication of doership. Previously you were a sinner; now you are a saint. You have given up all the sinful activities and are now transformed. You have changed your ways and your life-style. But the *kartṛtva*, doership, is just as much there as it was when you were a sinner. The point here is that *ātmā*, ‘you,’ was never a sinner. Even when you thought you were a sinner, you were not a sinner.

*Ātmā* is more than a saint. It has always been pure, *śuddha*. *Ātmā* takes on no blemish at all because it has neither doership nor enjoyership, neither happiness nor sorrow. *Ātmā* is neither a liker nor a disliker. It has always been free, pure consciousness — *nitya-śuddha-buddha-mukta-svabhāvaḥ ātmā*. There is no action here. Where, then, is the question of even the worst of the sinners not being able to gain this knowledge?



Being a sinner, of course, is a problem. But, if you know you have been a sinner and your intention is to be rid of all the sin, then you require only *śraddhā*, faith, about which *Kṛṣṇa* talks a little later. In fact, you need not get rid of anything. You need only understand *ātmā* as already free from all sins.

This is why *Kṛṣṇa* says here, ‘you will cross all sin by the raft of knowledge.’ By saying this, *Kṛṣṇa* leaves no excuse for an escape. Even if you are a sinner, you have to strive. You cannot just say, ‘I am a sinner,’ and give up. With this knowledge, you can cross the entire ocean of sin.

### NO EFFORT IS REQUIRED

This verse is in praise of the knowledge itself. Even the worst sinner among the sinners can be liberated without tears by knowledge. This is because the very idea of sin and all that it implies is dependent upon the notion, ‘I am the doer, the *kartā*.’ This notion of doership that is imputed to the self is the cause for all actions and their results. In the wake of knowledge, the *kartr̥tva*, doership, is falsified. Thus, *karma-phalas*, the results of action, are likened to the ocean and knowledge is the raft by which you cross the ocean without effort because the self, *ātmā*, is already free.

Since *karma-phala* can only be neutralised by another *karma-phala*, how can this knowledge destroy the results of injurious, sinful actions? Is it not true that destruction of something can only be brought about by another having the same order of reality? For example, only a tangible object, like a bullet or sword can destroy another tangible object like a physical body. Knowledge does not destroy it. But this particular argument is not valid here; let us see why.

Upon inquiry, we find that the destruction of something belonging to a given order of reality can be brought about by shifting to a higher order of reality. For example, when the dreamer wakes up, everything that was done in the dream is destroyed. Therefore, destruction can take place by falsification. To falsify that which is false is knowledge. The false snake seen, instead of the rope, is destroyed in the wake of the knowledge of the rope. And, by destroying the snake in this way, the products of the vision of snake — fear and so on — are also destroyed.

Here, too, in the wake of knowledge, the notion of doership gets destroyed. In the next verse, *Kṛṣṇa* uses an illustration to prove this point.

यथेधांसि समिद्धोऽग्निर्भस्मसात्कुरुतेऽर्जुन ।

ज्ञानाग्निः सर्वकर्माणि भस्मसात्कुरुते तथा ॥ ३७ ॥

*yathaidhāṃsi samiddho'gnirbhasmasātkurute'rjuna*  
*jñānāgniḥ sarvakarmāṇi bhasmasātkurute tathā*

Verse 37

अर्जुन *arjuna* — O *Arjuna*!; यथा *yathā* — just as; समिद्धः *samidhah* — well-lighted; अग्निः *agniḥ* — fire; एधांसि *edhāṃsi* — wood; भस्मसात् कुरुते *bhasmasāt kurute* — reduces to ashes; तथा *tathā* — so too; ज्ञानाग्निः *jñānāgniḥ* — fire of knowledge; सर्वकर्माणि *sarvakarmāṇi* — all actions; भस्मसात् कुरुते *bhasmasāt kurute* — reduces to ashes

Just as a well-lighted fire reduces wood to ashes, O *Arjuna*, so too, the fire of knowledge reduces all actions (results of actions) to ashes.

### THE FIRE OF KNOWLEDGE

There are different kinds of fire. Even the flame of a matchstick is fire. A small flame, however, cannot destroy everything unless it becomes big. Until then, even a small breeze is its enemy. But, once it turns into a big fire, the wind becomes its friend. This is true also with one's strength. If a man is weak, anyone can bully him, whereas if he is strong, everyone wishes to be his friend.

If the fire is a huge conflagration, then all the wood, wet or dry, turns to ashes — *bhasmasāt bhavati*. *Kṛṣṇa* tells *Arjuna* here that, this is exactly what happens to all one's actions in the fire of knowledge. Like the wood in a fire, all action turns to ashes in the fire of knowledge, *jñāna-agni*.

Knowledge itself is the fire, which is the meaning of the word *jñāna-agni*, even though this compound is translated into English as 'fire of knowledge.' And what is the object of this burning to ashes? The object of burning is not the usual fuel like logs of wood, *edhāṃsi*. The fire of knowledge burns all one's actions to ashes, *karmāṇi bhasmasāt kurute*; *karmāṇi* meaning all *karmas* along with their *karma-phalas*.

Of course, when it is said that knowledge destroys all *karmas* like fire destroys wood, it is not meant that there is any actual burning involved. Knowledge does not 'burn' *karma* like fire burning wood but it negates the doership and thereby all the *karma-phalas*.

'All *karmas*' means *sañcita-karma*, those that have not yet begun to manifest, those that were previously gathered and are still standing in your account like a fixed or term deposit, and *āgāmi-karma*, those that you gather in this life before the knowledge takes place. Both the *sañcita-karma* and *āgāmi-karma* are reduced to ashes by *jñāna-agni*.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Refer to page 418, Vol 1, for a discussion on the inexhaustible nature of karma.

### PRĀRABDHA-KARMA EXHAUSTS ITSELF

Only the *prārabdha-karma* is not destroyed by knowledge, in the sense that the physical body continues. A *jñānī* is the one who, while living, is liberated — *jīvan-mukta*. If the knowledge destroys *prārabdha-karma* also, the body, which is the product of *prārabdha-karma* would also be destroyed and there would be no *jñānī*! But we do not see this happening. Therefore, when it is said, ‘all *karma, sarva-karmāṇi*’ here, it excludes *prārabdha-karma*, the *karma* that has already begun fructifying with the birth of the body. This *karma* can only be exhausted by going through the experiences for which this physical body has come into being. Thus, day after day, one's *prārabdha-karma* is being exhausted, even in the case of a *jñānī*.

*Chāndogyopaniṣad* says, ‘a *jñānī* continues to be here until he is released from this body. Then he becomes one with *Brahman*.’<sup>1</sup> As long as the physical body, mind, and senses continue, the person lives here as a *jīvan-mukta*. With the death of the body, there is no *jīva* or *karma* to cause rebirth for the *jñānī*. There is no separation between the person, the Lord, and the world. In this way, the apparent divisions, the seeming limitations, also disappear.

The *prārabdha-karma* of a *jñānī* continues until it gets exhausted, but the *karmas* gathered in this life prior to gaining the knowledge are all destroyed in the wake of knowledge. And what about the *karmas* done after the knowledge is gained? With the knowledge, the *jñānī* does various *karmas*. These are *āgāmi-karmas*, which along with the *sañcita-karmas* gathered from countless previous births, get burned to ashes — *sarvakarmāṇi bhasmasāt kurute*. In other words, all actions that had not yet begun bearing fruit before the knowledge took place are burned in the fire that is knowledge and also those done after the knowledge, or along with the knowledge, because they are done without the notion of doership.

Therefore, *Kṛṣṇa* says:

न हि ज्ञानेन सदृशं पवित्रमिह विद्यते ।

तत्स्वयं योगसंसिद्धः कालेनात्मनि विन्दति ॥ ३८ ॥

na hi jñānena sadṛśaṃ pavitramiha vidyate

tatsvayaṃ yogasaṃsiddhaḥ kālenātmani vindati

Verse 38

हि *hi* — therefore.; इह *iha* — in this world; ज्ञानेन सदृशम् *jñānena sadṛśam* — equivalent to knowledge; पवित्रम् *pavitram* — that which purifies; न विद्यते *na vidyate* — does not exist; कालेन *kālena* — in time; योगसंसिद्धः *yoga-saṃsiddhaḥ* — one who has

<sup>1</sup> ??? ? ???

*tasya tāvadeva ciram yāvanna vimokṣye'tha sampatsya iti*

(*Chāndogyopaniṣad* – 4.1.4)

attained preparedness through *karma-yoga*; आत्मनि *ātmani* — in the mind; स्वयम् *svayam* — naturally; तत् *tat* — that (knowledge); विन्दति *vindati* — gains

Therefore, in this world, there is no purifier equivalent to knowledge. One who has in time attained preparedness through *karma-yoga* naturally gains (knowledge) in the mind.

### KNOWLEDGE IS THE GREATEST PURIFIER

The word *sadṛśa* along with a noun in the third or instrumental case means ‘equivalent to’ in English. Thus, *jñānena sadṛśam* means equivalent to knowledge in terms of its ability to purify. There are many means, like rituals, charities, prayer and so on, for self-purification. But none of them equals knowledge — self-knowledge.

Prayer is a very important means for purifier no doubt. But it is not equal to knowledge. Only knowledge can destroy the *kartā*. The one who prays being the *kartā*, prayer cannot destroy the *kartā*. There is a person offering a prayer. Because prayer gives rise to a desirable result, it is also considered to be a purifier. But there is nothing that purifies like self-knowledge. Prayer can lead you to the knowledge of what is, but it is that knowledge alone that releases you completely — even from the need of prayer.

Prayer implies some impurity or imperfection, *aśuddhi*, on your part. The sense of limitation, bondage, and helplessness is a form of *aśuddhi*, because of which prayer emerges from you. This sense of helplessness is centred on the *kartā*, the doer, the one who prays. The greatest result of prayer is knowledge, which is the best purifier there is because it eliminates all sense of helplessness by releasing you from the very notion that you are imperfect, subject to various forms of limitation. Self-knowledge releases you totally from doership and sorrow.

### PREPAREDNESS THROUGH YOGA

In the *Gītā*, the word ‘yoga’ is generally used in the sense of *karma-yoga* and occasionally in the sense of *jñāna-yoga*, depending on the context. Here, *yoga* as a means for gaining success in one’s pursuit of knowledge means *karma-yoga*. One who has succeeded in becoming eligible for the knowledge, who has gained the preparedness of the mind to make him or her competent to receive the knowledge, is called *yoga-saṃsiddhaḥ* in this verse. Such a person has gained *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*, purification of the mind, meaning that the mind of the person is steady and enjoys a certain freedom from *rāga-dveṣas*.

The accomplishment of this kind of mind requires time. It can happen immediately or it can take time. The expression ‘in time,’ *kālena*, here does not necessarily imply a long time; it only means some time. Therefore, if you ask, ‘Swamiji, how long will I

have to do *karma-yoga*?' I cannot give you a specific period of time. I cannot say, for example, 'Practise *karma-yoga* for three years and *jñāna-yoga* for four years.' The expression 'in time' does not have such a meaning here because we are not producing anything. If there is production involved, as in baking cookies, for example, I can say, 'Mix the ingredients together and bake for twenty minutes at 350° Fahrenheit. Then, the cookies will be ready.' The exact time can be stated only when something new is being produced, or when something is happening that can be predicted in terms of time.

Here, however, nothing new is to be created. Since you are already *Brahman*, where is the question of time? If you ask when you will get *Brahman*, there is no answer possible because you 'are' *Brahman*. And if you do not know that you are *Brahman*, you had better know. And when will you know? When you are ready. Then, the next question is, 'When will that be?'

All you need to do now is to live your life with the right attitude and pursue knowledge. In this way, gain of the knowledge will take care of itself; in time, you will gain it — automatically, naturally — because what you are trying to gain is already there. You do not have to create any thing.

And where does the knowledge take place? Knowledge takes place where it always takes place — in the mind, in the *buddhi, ātmani*. Here, the word *ātmani* is not intended to convey its usual meaning, namely, 'in the self,' because that is not where knowledge takes place. This knowledge of the self is like any knowledge, and it takes place in the *buddhi, ātmani* — in the mind, that is prepared.

Then, in the next verse, *Kṛṣṇa* describes what else is required for gaining this knowledge and what is accomplished by the knowledge:

श्रद्धावाँल्लभते ज्ञानं तत्परः संयतेन्द्रियः ।

ज्ञानं लब्ध्वा परां शान्तिमचिरेणाधिगच्छति ॥ ३९ ॥

*śraddhāvāṅllabhate jñānaṃ tatparaḥ saṃyatendriyaḥ*

*jñānaṃ labdhvā parāṃ śāntimacireṇādhigacchati*

Verse 39

श्रद्धावान् *śraddhāvān* — one who has faith (in the *śāstra* and in the words of the teacher); तत्परः *tatparaḥ* — one who is committed to that (knowledge); संयतेन्द्रियः *saṃyatendriyaḥ* — the one who is a master of one's senses; ज्ञानम् *jñānam* — knowledge; लभते *labhate* — gains; ज्ञानम् *jñānam* — knowledge; लब्ध्वा *labdhvā* — having gained; अचिरेण *acireṇa* — immediately; पराम् शान्तिम् *parāṃ śāntim* — absolute peace; अधिगच्छति *adhigacchati* — gains

One who has faith (in the *śāstra* and in the words of the teacher), who is committed to that (knowledge, and) who is master of one's senses gains

the knowledge. Having gained the knowledge, one immediately gains absolute peace.

This is another verse of the *Gītā* that is important, in that it is often quoted. ‘*Śraddhāvān labhate jñānam* — one who has faith in the *śāstra* gains the knowledge,’ is an expression you will often hear quoted.

*Śaṅkara* introduces it by saying, ‘This verse points out the means by which this knowledge is gained without fail.’ Knowledge will definitely take place when the appropriate means is present. And what is that means, because of which one will definitely gain the knowledge?

First, one must have *śraddhā*, faith, in the *śāstra* and in the words of the teacher. Gaining the knowledge is dependent upon this *śraddhā* because of which the *śāstra* is looked upon as a *pramāṇa*, a means of knowledge.

Without *śraddhā* in the *śāstra*, one cannot look upon it as a *pramāṇa*. *Pramāṇa* means that which is instrumental in gaining *pramā*, knowledge, and should not create doubts. Any doubt has to be converted into *pramā*, ascertained knowledge. The motivation to inquire further in order to convert a doubt or contradiction into *pramā*, which is non-contradictory, is created by the attitude called *śraddhā*. Therefore, to gain the knowledge, the *śāstra* must be looked upon as a means of knowledge; only then can it deliver the goods.

## COMMITMENT TO MOKṢA

By adding two more qualifications, this verse also reveals that *śraddhā* alone is not enough. Faith in the *śāstra* may be there, but there are people who are slow starters, meaning they do not have the necessary commitment. Perhaps they do not see the benefit of this knowledge or they may not have discerned the problem of life. For whatever reason, there may be those who have *śraddhā* in the *śāstra* but do not have the necessary commitment. When there is no commitment backing up one's faith in the *śāstra*, the approach or attitude of the person towards the pursuit will be lukewarm.

And what does commitment mean here? There is commitment when I recognise that I must have this knowledge, that there is nothing else that is important to me, and that I am prepared to burn all my boats. The person who has this kind of commitment to the knowledge is called *tatpara* in this verse — *para* meaning ‘one who is committed to.’

Other than knowledge, there is no way to gain this freedom. You do not become free from mortality; you already are immortal. The freedom is only in terms of knowing that you are immortal.

It is possible for a person to be *tatpara* in that the person is committed to liberation, but he or she may not have *śraddhā* in the *śāstra*. Between liberation and the *śāstra*, there is a relation, a *sambandha*; one is *sādhana*, the means, and the other is *sādhya*, the end. In order to gain liberation, *mokṣa*, you go to the *śāstra*, for which you require *śraddhā*. You need to know that the *śāstra* is the means of knowledge whereby you will gain the knowledge that is liberation.

*Śraddhā* may be there without *tatparatva*, commitment, and *tatparatva* may be there without *śraddhā*. If both *śraddhā* and commitment are there, the person looks upon the teaching as a means to freedom, *mokṣa*, and also has a love for that freedom.

### MASTERY OVER THE SENSE ORGANS

Both *śraddhā* and commitment may be there, but the person may still not make it. Why? Because his or her mind is not together with reference to the senses and their pursuits. Dissipation and distraction, therefore, stand in the person's way of gaining the knowledge. Therefore, one more requirement is given here — *saṃyatendriya*, one whose sense organs, meaning sense pursuits, are under control. This means that you do not propitiate your fancies, that you are not controlled by fancies. If you always go by your fancies, you will find no time for anything, even for something you have a great love for.

*Saṃyatendriya* here means one whose mind is steady. When such a person also has *śraddhā* in the *śāstra* and is committed to *mokṣa*, he or she will definitely gain the knowledge.

### RELATIVE ŚĀNTI AND ABSOLUTE ŚĀNTI

What happens when this knowledge is gained? The person who gains this knowledge immediately gains absolute peace — *parāṃ śāntim acireṇa adhigacchati*. This *śānti* is not the kind of peace or truce that exists between two bouts of conflict. It is the peace that is one's essential nature.

Peace is usually understood to be a state of the mind as opposed to agitation which is also a state of the mind. You generally take yourself to be silent when actually the mind is silent. And therefore, you think the self is agitated when actually it is the mind that is agitated. But the peace referred to here is not a state of mind. It is rather the nature of the self which is always silent, *śānta*, regardless of the state of mind. A *śānti* for which one does not depend upon the condition of the mind is called *parā*. *Parā-śānti* does not call for a non-thinking mind because it is not opposed to thinking.

We see here, then, two types of *śānti*. One is the *śānti* or tranquillity that is gained through *yoga*. By *karma-yoga*, one can gain a certain tranquillity that is purely a condition of the mind. Being a condition of the mind, this *śānti* is subject to change.

This type of *śānti* is also a necessity and is indicated by *saṃyatendriyatva*, mastery of the sense organs.

A person who enjoys the *śānti* gained by *karma-yoga* gains another *śānti* too, the absolute *śānti*, through knowledge. This is what is called *parā-śānti*. In spite of what the mind thinks, the person knows, ‘I am *śānta*’ meaning that at the level of ‘I,’ there is freedom — freedom from *aśānti* because the person recognises that *ātmā* is always *śānta*. This recognition gives rise to *parā-śānti*.

The peace discussed in this verse is your very nature — *svarūpa-bhūta-śānti*. And, in the wake of knowledge, it is gained immediately, *na cireṇa*, not after a time. The person gains this *śānti*, which is *mokṣa*, because of the knowledge of the self that is *śānta*. And what is the distance in terms of time between knowledge and *mokṣa*? There is no distance between them because knowledge is the means and *mokṣa* is the end, just as there is no distance, no interval of time, between eating food and appeasing hunger. In the wake of one, the other takes place. In the wake of knowledge, there is liberation. This, then, is the meaning of the words, *acireṇa – na cireṇa*, immediately.

In his commentary of this verse, *Śaṅkara* clarifies the order involved in gaining this knowledge. First, there is *śraddhā* in the *śāstra* as a means of knowledge. Then, as a result of this *śraddhā*, a commitment arises that causes a person to give up everything and pursue the knowledge by approaching a teacher with the proper attitude. One who approaches the *guru* has both *śraddhā* in the *śāstra* as the means of knowledge and commitment to the knowledge. In addition, the person must also have the sense organs under control. These three factors being there, the knowledge will definitely be gained.

## OUTWARD EXPRESSION IS NOT ENOUGH

*Śaṅkara* also comments here on the three aspects of outward expressions of *śraddhā* towards the teacher that we saw in verse 34 of this chapter — *praṇipāta*, prostration, *paripraśna*, proper questioning, and *sevā*, service. Because these are external, they can be exhibited even without sufficient *śraddhā*. You can always put on an act. Just because you are smiling does not mean there is a smile inside. You may be crying at that time, but as soon as someone approaches you, you can wash your face quickly and smilingly say, ‘Hello, how are you?’

In the same way, prostrating to the teacher, asking questions, and even the service you perform to the teacher may be nothing more than an act. Therefore, *Śaṅkara* says that outward expression is not a guarantee for knowledge because it can be false.

Therefore, without *śraddhā*, the prostration, questioning, and service are not enough. Only when *śraddhā* is there, does one's outward expression become a means for gaining the knowledge.



Thus, in this verse, *Kṛṣṇa* presents the positive aspect of *śraddhā* by telling *Arjuna* that a *śraddhāvān* gains knowledge. In the next verse, he presents the negative aspect by stating what happens to one who does not have *śraddhā*.

अज्ञश्चाश्रद्धधानश्च संशयात्मा विनश्यति ।

नायं लोकोऽस्ति न परो न सुखं संशयात्मनः ॥ ४० ॥

*ajñāścāśraddadhānaśca saṁśayātmā vinaśyati*

*nāyaṁ loko'sti na paro na sukhaṁ saṁśayātmanaḥ*

Verse 40

अज्ञः *ajñāḥ* — one who has no discrimination; च *ca* — and; अश्रद्धधानः *aśraddadhānaḥ* — one who has no faith (in the *śāstra* and the teacher); च *ca* — and; संशयात्मा *saṁśayātmā* — one who has a doubting mind; विनश्यति *vinaśyati* — perishes; संशयात्मनः *saṁśayātmanaḥ* — for the doubter; अयम् लोकः *ayam lokaḥ* — this world; न अस्ति *na asti* — is not there; न परः *na paraḥ* — nor (there is the) other (world); न सुखम् *na sukham* — nor happiness

One who has no discrimination, and who has no faith (in the *śāstra* and the teacher), and one who has a doubting mind perishes. Because, for the one with a doubting mind, this world is not there, nor the world beyond, nor happiness.

*Ajña* here means *avivekī*, one who does not have discrimination. *Śaṅkara* clarifies this point here by saying that *ajña* means *anātmajña*, one who does not know *ātmā*, one who does not have *ātma-anātmā-viveka*, discrimination between the self and non-self.

Almost everyone is an *anātmajña*. If the *anātmajña* has *śraddhā* in what the *śāstra* says, he or she has some hope. Such a person knows what is right and wrong and can follow his or her own *dharma* by performing the *nitya-naimittika-karmas* enjoined by the *śāstra*. By living in this way, *viveka* will eventually be gained — and knowledge also.

Because of *śraddhā*, the non-discriminative ignorant person can become discriminating. And once there is discrimination, *viveka*, there will be detachment or objectivity, *vairāgya*, because of which the person will have the desire for liberation, *mumukṣutva*. This desire for liberation will lead to the inquiry whereby the knowledge is gained and, along with it, *parā-śānti*. In this way, the person who has *śraddhā* gains this world as well as the other.

The problem comes when the person who is an *ajña* is also *aśraddadhāna*. Not only does the person not have discrimination, he or she has no *śraddhā* either. Such a person cannot even give benefit of the doubt to the *śāstra*. But, disbelief is not based on reason. How can you prove there is no heaven, for example? You can neither prove its

existence nor disprove it. How can you conclude something is right or wrong unless you make an inquiry, for which you must have some *śraddhā*? No inquiry is made if *śraddhā* is not there.

However, people who have no faith in the *śāstra* may have faith in themselves or in other people. They may also have faith in money or in power. This kind of faith will give these people something, at least. If a person has faith in the world, he can gain some happiness and security. The world does offer some *sukha* to such a person. And for the person who trusts his or her abilities and has faith in the efficacy of the various means and ends available to explore and use, there definitely are opportunities to pick up some *sukha*. Such a person is deprived of the other world, but he does gain this world.

The main problem presented in this verse is doubt, *saṁśaya*. One who is a doubter is called *saṁśayātmā*, the word *ātmā* meaning, the mind, *antaḥ-karaṇa*, in this context. Doubt can exist only in the mind.

About the *saṁśayātmā*, *Kṛṣṇa* says, ‘Neither this world, nor the world beyond, nor happiness, is there for the doubter.’ In his commentary, *Śaṅkara* explains that both the non-discriminative person and the one who has no *śraddhā* perish, meaning, they go from death to death. But such people are not as badly off as the *saṁśayātmā* who has no *śraddhā* in the *śāstra*. He or she does not believe in the existence of *punya* and *pāpa* and therefore, does not care to follow *dharma*, and is therefore, deprived of the world hereafter.

The *saṁśayātmā* cannot gain happiness in this world. Such a person cannot even get married! He or she always asks, ‘Will I be able to make a success of it? I doubt it.’ And even if the person does get married, how long will the marriage last when one is always doubting the other person? Every phone call becomes a matter for doubt — even if it is only a telephone operator on the other end! Like this, the *saṁśayātmā* is not only a tragedy to himself, but also to everyone else around.

Thus, *Kṛṣṇa* says that this world is not there for the doubting person; nor is there the world beyond nor any happiness here.

While knowledge of *ātmā* is not possible without *śraddhā*, a person who has faith in something other than the *śāstra* can get something out of life. But the *saṁśayātmā* has no trust whatsoever — in the scriptures, in other people, or even in oneself! Therefore, even this world is not there for the person — *ayaṁ lokaḥ nāsti*. This world, that is, whatever one can get from one's life is also not there for the *saṁśayātmā*.

Therefore, *Kṛṣṇa* says:

योगसन्न्यस्तकर्माणं ज्ञानसञ्चिन्नसंशयम् ।  
आत्मवन्तं न कर्माणि निबध्नन्ति धनञ्जय ॥ ४१ ॥

*yogasannyastakarmāṇaṃ jñānasañchinnasaṃśayam  
ātmavantaṃ na karmāṇi nibadhnanti dhanañjaya*

Verse 41

धनञ्जय *dhanañjaya* — O *Arjuna* !; कर्माणि *karmāṇi* — actions; योग-सन्न्यस्त-कर्माणम् *yoga-sannyasta-karmāṇam* — the one who has renounced action through *yoga*; ज्ञान-सञ्चिन्न-संशयम् *jñāna-sañchinna-saṃśayam* — the one whose doubts have been completely severed by knowledge; आत्मवन्तम् *ātmavantam* — the one who is together; न निबध्नन्ति *na nibadhnanti* — do not bind

O *Arjuna*, actions do not bind the one who has renounced action through *yoga*, whose doubts have been completely severed by knowledge (and) the one who is together.

*Kṛṣṇa* addresses *Arjuna* as *Dhanañjaya* here, meaning one who has earned a number of titles and all kinds of wealth. The actions, *karmāṇi* referred to in this verse include all types of actions — proper and improper acts, Vedic rituals, and all worldly activities. None of them, *Kṛṣṇa* tells *Arjuna*, bind the person — *karmāṇi na nibadhnanti*.

And who is the one not bound by actions? Three qualifications are given here for such a person — *yoga-sannyasta-karmā*, *jñāna-sañchinna-saṃśaya*, and *ātmavān*.

## YOGA-SANNYASTA-KARMĀ

*Śaṅkara* explains *yoga-sannyasta-karmā* as one who has given up *karma* through *yoga* characterised by the clear vision of reality — in other words, through the knowledge of the true nature of the self.

*Yoga* refers to *jñāna-yoga* here, but the word is used also to include *karma-yoga*, since, in order to have gained the knowledge, one should have lived a life of *karma-yoga*. Thus, *yoga-sannyasta-karmā* is the one who has given up all actions through knowledge. Such a person is a *jñānī*, one who sees *akarma* in *karma*, as we saw in verse 18 of this chapter.

A *yoga-sannyasta-karmā* is different from a *sannyasta-karmā*. A *sannyasta-karmā* is one who is a *sannyāsī*, who has given up all duties by will, in order to pursue knowledge. A *yoga-sannyasta-karmā*, on the other hand, is the one who on account of the knowledge of the self as *akartā* knows he or she is not the doer, and is therefore, not bound by any action whatsoever. The knowledge that one is not the doer distinguishes the *yoga-sannyasta-karmā* from a mere *sannyasta-karmā*.

**JÑĀNA - SAÑCHINNA - SAṂŚAYA**

The second qualification is freedom from doubt. The person is described as a *jñāna-sañchinna-saṁśaya*, one whose doubts have been completely severed by the knowledge. In his commentary, Śaṅkara poses the question, ‘How did the person become a *yoga-sannyasta-karmā*?’ and replies, ‘By knowledge.’ He then describes this knowledge, this *yoga*, as the vision of the identity between oneself and the Lord, the vision that completely destroys all one's doubts. And what doubts are these? One may doubt whether or not fullness is really the nature of oneself, or if *ātmā* is eternal and *anātmā* non-eternal? Is there a connection between *ātmā* and *anātmā*? And, if so, what kind of a connection? Is there division or identity between the individual and *Īśvara*, the Lord? — these are the doubts that arise.

The one who is free from all doubts knows that *ātmā* is real, *satya* and *anātmā* is unreal or false, *mithyā*. When the person has no doubt whatsoever about this fact, there is knowledge, not faith. Faith in the *śāstra* as a *pramāṇa* is required only until knowledge takes place.

With reference to heaven and so on, mentioned by the *śāstra*, the statements are not verifiable here. Therefore, existence of heaven remains a faith for you till death. If there is a heaven, you will go there, provided, of course, you have done whatever is to be done to get there according to the *śāstra*. But, what is to be understood here, is that this heaven-going is purely faith — and, as such, is not verifiable while in this body.

When it comes to *Vedānta*, however, knowledge is involved, not faith. Here we are talking about the self, the self-evident ‘I.’ ‘I am’ is self-evident, and hence I do not need the *śāstra* to tell me that I am, that I exist. The *śāstra* is required only to correct the erroneous notions or conclusions that I have about myself.

That I am is a self-evident fact; it is not a conclusion, whereas ‘I am a *saṁsārī*’ is a conclusion. This conclusion is purely notional, and is absent when I am asleep, is absent between two thoughts, is absent in a moment of joy, and is falsified in the wake of the knowledge. I do not need to verify that I am, that I exist; I need to only eliminate the doubts and the errors about myself. The *śāstra* enables me to do this.

The removal of the error is what is *ātma-jñāna* — knowledge of the identity of the self with *Īśvara*. And the one whose doubts have all been removed by this knowledge is called *jñāna-sañchinna-saṁśaya*.

**ĀTMAVĀN**

The third qualification mentioned is *ātmavān*, which explains how the removal of doubt and error is achieved. The *ātmavān* is a *yogī*, one who has the body-mind-sense complex under control. *Ātmā* here refers to one's physical body, mind, and senses, and the one who has control over them is called *ātmavān*.

Although everyone has a body, mind, and senses, not everyone has control over them. Instead, the person is generally under their control and is therefore, *anātmavān*. For the *anātmavān*, it is the body, etc., that determines whether or not he is happy. If the body puts on a little extra weight, becomes ill, or ages, the person thinks that he or she is finished. In this way, the body is said to control the person when there is a lack of maturity.

A person who is mature has the body-mind-sense complex with him. Such a person is a *yogī*. Before knowledge, he was a *yogī*, a *karma-yogī*, and after gaining the knowledge, the person continues to be a *yogī*. *Kṛṣṇa* quietly mentions *ātmavān* here to emphasise what he said in verse 39 of this chapter. There, he referred to someone who has mastery over the senses, *saṃyatendriya*; here he calls the person *ātmavān*.

In his commentary of this verse, *Śaṅkara* equates the word *ātmavān* to *apramatta*, meaning one who has no *pramāda*, no laziness, no indifference, no dullness, or no lack of alertness — in other words, a person who is together.

*Yoga-sannyasta-karmā* is the real *sannyāsī*. This person has given up all the *karmas*, not necessarily by renouncing them, but by the knowledge, 'I am *akartā*.' In this way, then, no action binds the person by producing unseen results, *puṇya* or *pāpa*. Because of the knowledge, whatever would have accrued to the doer simply resolves because doership is not there.

Knowing that the self is not the doer, the *jñānī* appears to perform *karma* based on *prārabdha*. Because the body-mind-sense complex is there, certain situations present themselves and actions take place, which however, do not bind the person. Actions can only bind the one who takes the self to be the doer, *Kṛṣṇa* keeps saying throughout the *Gītā*. When there is no doership, actions cannot bind. Even though the person appears to be engaged in action, he or she performs no action — *naiva kiñcit karoti*. This is because of the knowledge of non-action in action, *karmaṇi akarma darśana* — all of which we have seen before.

Now after explaining all this *Kṛṣṇa* concludes the chapter by urging *Arjuna* to take to action with an attitude of *karma-yoga*, which will lead him to knowledge.

तस्मादज्ञानसम्भूतं हृत्स्थं ज्ञानासिनात्मनः ।

छित्त्वेनं संशयं योगमातिष्ठोत्तिष्ठ भारत ॥ ४२ ॥

*tasmādaññānasambhūtaṃ hṛtsthaṃ jñānāsinātmanaḥ*  
*chittvainam saṃśayaṃ yogamātiṣṭhotttiṣṭha bhārata*

Verse 42

तस्मात् *tasmāt* — therefore,; अज्ञानसम्भूतम् *aññāna-sambhūtam* — born of ignorance (lack of discrimination); हृत्स्थम् *hṛtstham* — rooted in the mind; एनम् *enam* — this; आत्मनः *ātmanaḥ* — about the self; संशयम् *saṃśayam* — doubt; ज्ञान-असिना *jñāna-asinā*

— by the sword of knowledge; छित्त्वा *chittvā* — slaying; योगम् *yogam* — *karma-yoga* (leading to knowledge); आतिष्ठ *ātisṭha* — take to (follow); भारत *bhārata* — O *Bhārata!* (*Arjuna*); उत्तिष्ठ *uttisṭha* — get up

Therefore, O *Bhārata*, slaying with the sword of knowledge this doubt about the self, which is born of ignorance, which is rooted in the mind, get up (and) take to *yoga* (*karma-yoga*).

In this verse, *Kṛṣṇa* addresses *Arjuna* as *Bhārata*, meaning one who is born in the family of *Bharata*, and asks him to stand up and take to the life of *yoga*. Here, *yoga* means *karma-yoga* which leads to *jñāna*, knowledge. When one lives a life of *karma-yoga*, the knowledge will face no obstruction. Therefore, *Kṛṣṇa* says to *Arjuna*, ‘You have been listening to me all this time. Now, take to *karma-yoga*, through which you will gain the knowledge that is liberation.’ In other words, since you should live a life of *karma-yoga* for a length of time while pursuing *jñāna*, do it — *yogam ātisṭha*.

We have seen that a person does not become a *sannyāsī* just by giving up all duties, even though there is a life-style called *sannyāsa*. A *sannyāsī*, in the primary sense, is one who gives up all activities by knowledge, by knowing that he is not the doer of action. Thus, *Kṛṣṇa* uses the word, ‘therefore, – *tasmāt*’ here. *Kṛṣṇa* says, ‘Therefore, take to *karma-yoga* so that you can gain the knowledge that will enable you to become a *sannyāsī*, the one whose doubts have all been slain by knowledge, *jñāna-sañchinna-saṁśaya*, and who has renounced all activities through the *yoga* that is knowledge.’ Having given up the doership, *kartṛtva*, the *sannyāsī* performs no action in terms of knowledge even though action is apparently done by the person.

*Kṛṣṇa* has already told *Arjuna* in verse 39 of this chapter that he had to destroy whatever doubts he had. He did this by describing the *saṁśayātmā*, a person who doubts himself, the *śāstra*, and everything else. Such a person, *Kṛṣṇa* said, perishes, meaning that he destroys the self. Therefore, in the present verse, he tells *Arjuna* that the doubt in his heart, born of ignorance, must be slain.

## DOUBT IS AN ENEMY THAT RESIDES IN THE MIND

Ignorance, *ajñāna*, results in lack of discrimination, *aviveka*. One's doubt about the self is born of ignorance and lack of discrimination. Therefore, *Kṛṣṇa* says, ‘And where is this doubt, this enemy that can destroy you? This enemy is not outside of you, *Arjuna*, not like *Duryodhana* who is outside of you. This enemy, this Mr. Doubt, is inside you, in your heart; it is *hṛtstha* — in your mind. The doubt, *saṁśaya*, has entered into your mind and is rooted there.’

Doubt is born because of your own lack of discrimination. It is not born of simple ignorance of facts but is born of lack of discrimination. Absence of discrimination here is

absence of *ātma-anātmā-viveka* which means that, there is no *vicāra*, no inquiry, about life and therefore, everything is subject to doubt.

Doubts can be about anything, but the doubt referred to here is about oneself and this doubt is to be slain. But to slay something one requires a sword and sword in this context is in the form of knowledge. By this sword of knowledge, one should destroy doubt about oneself, the doubt that is in the mind, born of ignorance and non-discrimination.

### THE SWORD OF KNOWLEDGE

To clarify *Kṛṣṇa's* point, *Śaṅkara* defines *jñāna* in his commentary as the clear vision that destroys defects such as sorrow, delusion, and so on. 'Clear vision' here refers to the discrimination, *viveka*, between *ātmā* and *anātmā* — the real and the unreal. Knowledge alone is the sword that can destroy all of one's defects, *doṣas*, such as, *śoka* – sorrow, *moha* – delusion, *rāga-dveṣas* – likes and dislikes, *krodha* – anger, and so on.

Because the doubt is in your own heart, born of your own lack of discrimination between the real and the unreal, you alone can destroy it. Your doubt does not belong to anyone else, even though others may have the same doubt. What is meant here is that the doubt that is in your own heart, in your own mind, born of your own self-ignorance, can only be slain by your gaining self-knowledge. And this knowledge can only be gained by first taking to the life of *karma-yoga*.

'*Ātmanaḥ*,' here with reference to doubt, does not have the usual sense of the genitive or possessive case here — that is, it does not mean 'one's own – *svasya*' — since *Kṛṣṇa* says that the doubt is in one's own heart, *hṛtstha*. Therefore, the expression, *ātmanaḥ saṁśayam*, means a doubt whose subject matter is *ātmā* and not one's own doubt. For example, the expression, 'knowledge of the *Gītā*,' is also in the genitive case, but it does not have the sense of possession that 'the book of Rama,' meaning 'Rama's book,' has. In other words, it does not mean 'the *Gītā's* knowledge' in that the knowledge does not belong to the *Gītā*. Rather, 'knowledge of the *Gītā*' means the knowledge for which the *Gītā* is the subject matter, just as 'knowledge of Electronics' means the knowledge for which Electronics is the subject matter. In these examples and in the use of '*ātmanaḥ*' in this verse, the genitive case is used in the sense of object, *karma*, rather than to indicate possession. This usage, which is called *karmani śaṣṭhī* is common to many languages, including English and Sanskrit.

Therefore, *ātmanaḥ jñānam* means knowledge of the *ātmā* — knowledge for which the subject matter is *ātmā*. Similarly, *ātmanaḥ saṁśayam*, a doubt about the *ātmā* means a doubt for which the *ātmā* is the object, *viṣaya*.

This doubt about the self creates all kinds of problems; therefore, it should be put to rest. Doubt can only be put to rest by slaying it with the sword of knowledge, for which you must take to *karma-yoga*. Therefore, *Kṛṣṇa* says, ‘Come on, stand up, *Arjuna!* — *uttiṣṭha yogam ātiṣṭha.*’

*Śaṅkara* also explains that the doubt being discussed is that which is the cause for one's own destruction, following up on what *Kṛṣṇa* has said in verse 39 of this chapter — the one who doubts, perishes. For the doubter, *saṁśayātmā*, there is neither this world nor any other; nor is there any happiness for the person.

Since doubt is the cause for your own destruction, you should not allow it to remain in your heart. Only by gaining self-knowledge can you destroy it. For this you must live a life of *karma-yoga* and pursue the knowledge that completely destroys the doubt. Therefore, with *śraddhā*, one should take to *yoga* and pursue the knowledge.

### JÑĀNA-KARMA-SANNYĀSA-YOGA

This chapter of the *Gītā*, the fourth chapter, is called *jñāna-karma-sannyāsa-yoga* because its subject matter, *yoga*, is *sannyāsa*, the renunciation, of *karma*, action, through *jñāna*, knowledge. *Sannyāsa* here is not in terms of the life-style of renunciation of all duties to pursue this knowledge; *sannyāsa* here means the giving up of all action by knowledge that the self is not the doer. With this knowledge, one performs no action even when action appears to take place — *kurvannapi na karoti*. The one who is able to see non-action in action has given up all *karma* because there is no longer any doership for the person.

In this chapter, we saw that by the knowledge of *ātmā* as a non-doer, *akartā*, *karma* is given up. When doership, *kartṛtva*, resolves in the wake of knowledge, all action, *karma*, along with everything connected with action, the *kāraṅkas*, also resolves. They are all sublated, negated, in terms of reality. The *kāraṅkas*, you may recall, are denoted by the six grammatical declensions, excluding the genitive case. They are the *kartā*, the agent, *karma*, the object, *karaṇa*, the means or instrument, the purpose, *apādāna*, the source from where the action is produced, and *adhikaraṇa*, the location of the action.

When the knowledge is gained, the *kartā* or the agent of action is understood to be *mithyā*. The agent of action being *mithyā*, the action itself is *mithyā*, the instrument and purpose of action are *mithyā*, from where the actions takes place is *mithyā*, and the location of the action is also *mithyā*. In fact, everything becomes *mithyā* for the person who has the vision of non-action in action.

As mentioned earlier, the word *yoga* in the title of the *Gītā* chapters means subject matter. The first chapter was called *arjuna-viṣāda-yoga*, indicating that the subject





## INTRODUCTION TO THE FIFTH CHAPTER

The fourth chapter concluded with *Kṛṣṇa's* advice to *Arjuna*, 'Stand up and take to *karma-yoga*.' That means *Arjuna* could not run off to the Himalayas to take up the life-style of a *sannyāsi*. He was advised to take to the life-style of a *karma-yogi* and pursue the knowledge.

With the last statement of the fourth chapter the *Gītā* seemed to be over. *Arjuna* had already been told about *karma-yoga*. Now, he was to destroy all his doubts by the sword of knowledge and take to *karma-yoga*, a means to knowledge. For *Kṛṣṇa* then, the teaching was over. But in *Arjuna's* mind, it was not. In fact, what *Kṛṣṇa* had said moved *Arjuna* to ask one more question.

Many of *Arjuna's* questions, although phrased differently, are essentially the same in that they all relate to whether he should pursue *sannyāsa* or *karma-yoga*. He wants to know which one is better. Because he still has a doubt at the end of the fourth chapter, he asks a question that marks the beginning of the fifth chapter. His question is really a doubt — a doubt about *sannyāsa* and *karma*.

*Śaṅkara* introduces the fifth chapter in great detail, explaining the reason for *Arjuna's* question. Throughout the fourth chapter, *Kṛṣṇa* talked about knowledge in such a way that *Arjuna* found it contradictory when he was told that he should follow *karma-yoga*. *Kṛṣṇa* said that because of knowledge the wise person sees non-action in action and described this person as one who has renounced all action through knowledge. A number of verses also talked about total renunciation, *jñāna-karma-sannyāsa*, the renunciation of all *karma* by knowledge. But after all this, *Kṛṣṇa* said, 'Take to *karma-yoga* — *yogam ātiṣṭha*.'

In *Arjuna's* mind, there is a contradiction here. He thinks, 'If knowledge is the ultimate end, and, once having gained it, all *karma* is given up, is it not more expedient for me to seek knowledge straightaway instead of doing *karma* while seeking knowledge?' If renunciation of all actions is the main emphasis and this renunciation has to take place by knowledge, why not take to a life-style which is meant for gaining that knowledge, the life-style called *sannyāsa*? *Arjuna's* question is both obvious and understandable, given what he understood so far from *Kṛṣṇa's* teaching.

We have seen that there are two types of *sannyāsa* accepted by the *śāstra*. One type *Kṛṣṇa* talked about was renunciation of all action through knowledge. This type of *sannyāsa* is called *vidvat-sannyāsa*, the *sannyāsa* of a *vidvān*, one who has the knowledge that the self is not the doer. And by taking to the life-style of *sannyāsa*, the *vidvān* releases himself from all the duties enjoined by the *śāstra*. The other is the

*sannyāsa* as a life-style where one renounces all duties, in order to pursue knowledge. This is called *vividiṣā-sannyāsa*.

If the wise person does not adopt the life-style of a *sannyāsa*, continuing to remain as a householder, he or she performs the enjoined duties so as to set an example for the society. It is not proper for one who is a householder to give up the duties that are to be done. However, for the *jñānī*, there is a choice; he or she can take to *sannyāsa*, renouncing all the duties.

In this way, the *jñānī* can give up all activities or continue them. Even when engaged in activity, he or she really performs no activity. *Kṛṣṇa* talked about these two types of *jñānīs* — the one who is engaged in activity and still free from all actions,<sup>1</sup> and the one who is engaged in only the minimum activity necessary to sustain the body<sup>2</sup>.

### VIDVAT-SANNYĀSA

*Vidvat-sannyāsa* — the *sannyāsa* wherein a person gives up all activities because he or she has the knowledge — means that the person is a *sannyāsī* with all that *sannyāsa* implies. The person wears orange robes, has no family or societal connections, and no job. And, within, he or she knows, ‘I perform no action even if action is performed.’ In this way, the person is a *karma-sannyāsī* in life and by knowledge also. Within and without, he or she is a *jñāna-karma-sannyāsī*.

The *vidvat-sannyāsī* has nothing to accomplish by performing Vedic rituals, or any other action for that matter. Earlier in the *Gītā*, it was said that for a *jñānī* to perform rituals enjoined by the Veda is as useful as well water is when the well is under water because the whole area is flooded.<sup>3</sup> Such a person can therefore, give up all the duties and walk away, taking to a life of *sannyāsa*, called *vidvat-sannyāsa*.

### IS THERE ANY CHOICE BETWEEN KNOWLEDGE AND KARMA-YOGA?

Given this definition of *vidvat-sannyāsa*, meaning *sannyāsa* with knowledge, is there any choice possible between *jñāna-karma-sannyāsa* and *karma-yoga*? There is no choice possible here because one is a means and the other is the end. This is like choosing between enrolling in a doctoral program at a university and getting a Ph.D. You cannot get a Ph.D. unless you enrol in a doctoral program. Where then is the choice?

Between *karma-yoga*, which is the means, and *jñāna-karma-sannyāsa*, which is the end, there is no choice. There can be a choice only between the two life-styles —

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<sup>1</sup> *Gītā* – 4-20

<sup>2</sup> *Gītā* – 4-21

<sup>3</sup> *Gītā* – 2-46

*karma-yoga* and *vividiṣā-sannyāsa*. This distinction, made by the *śāstra* is very important and should be understood well because there is a lot of confusion about it in the modern tradition of *Vedānta*. We must know that *vidvat-sannyāsa* is not open to choice; it is something that happens as a result of knowledge.

*Jñāna-karma-sannyāsa* is the end, whether the person is a *sannyāsī* in life-style or not. The *jñāna-karma-sannyāsī* may be a person like King *Janaka* who ruled a kingdom. He was not a *sannyāsī* in terms of life-style. Nevertheless, he was a *jñāna-karma-sannyāsī*. He was a politician and a ruler of a kingdom, and hence had daily activities to perform. However, in spite of all the royal activities he was engaged in, he performed no action because he knew he was not a doer. Therefore, he was a *sannyāsī*, a *jñāna-karma-sannyāsī*, even though he did not follow the life-style of a *sannyāsī*.

Choice is available between *karma-yoga* and *vividiṣā-sannyāsa*, both of which are life-styles. And *Kṛṣṇa* made it very clear that *Arjuna* should choose *karma-yoga*.

#### ARJUNA'S CONFUSION ABOUT SANNYĀSA

When *Arjuna* expressed a desire to be a *sannyāsī*, he meant it in the sense of the life-style only. Thinking that *karma* was fraught with problems, he wanted to live the life-style of a *sannyāsī*. He knew he was not a *jñānī*, he did not have the knowledge, and so he knew he should be pursuing it. And to do this, what better life-style was there than that of a *sannyāsī*?

This, then, was the thinking that prompted *Arjuna's* question, 'O Lord! which of these two — *sannyāsa* or *karma-yoga* — is better? Which one should I choose? If I have understood you correctly, you are saying that *karma* is limited and therefore, *karma* cannot liberate me. And, although you say that *karma-yoga* is for *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*, you say that there is nothing equal to knowledge as a purifier. Therefore, I should gain this knowledge, for which *sannyāsa* seems to be the better course. Furthermore, you have been praising the renunciation of all action. If renunciation of all actions is the final end, why should I not give up all duties right now? This definitely seems to be the more straightforward and appropriate way to gain the knowledge.

To *Arjuna*, then, what *Kṛṣṇa* was recommending seems to be an unnecessarily cumbersome way to proceed. First, you perform actions and then, later, you discover that you are not the doer! You perform *karma* and then you have to release yourself from *karma-phala*. Hence, to give up *karma* and pursue knowledge seemed more appropriate.

'As the end, so the means,' *Arjuna* thinks. If the end is renunciation of all action, the means should also be renunciation of all action. Why should one have to perform

activities in order to discover oneself to be free from all activities? Based on what *Arjuna* had understood from listening to *Kṛṣṇa*'s words, he feels that *Kṛṣṇa* had a great value for knowledge and a value for *sannyāsa*. 'You say that liberation is *sannyāsa*. Why, then, do you ask me to pursue *karma-yoga*?' — this is *Arjuna*'s plea.

*Arjuna* wants to understand everything before he decides what he should do. Therefore, he keeps asking the same question. At the beginning of the third chapter, *Arjuna* had said, 'O Lord, if it is your contention that knowledge is better than action, why then, do you engage me in this terrible action?'

Because *Arjuna* asked this question, *Kṛṣṇa* continued to teach. Now two chapters later, at the beginning of the fifth chapter, *Arjuna* again asks essentially the same question, although he puts it a little differently, as we shall see presently. The same question is asked at the beginning of the twelfth chapter and again in the eighteenth chapter, each time in a slightly different form.

*Arjuna* is confused because *Kṛṣṇa* has praised both *sannyāsa* and *karma-yoga*. And, having praised *sannyāsa*, *Kṛṣṇa* said to him, 'Take to *yoga* — *yogam ātiṣṭha*.' He therefore, wants *Kṛṣṇa* to indicate which of the two is better — *sannyāsa* or *karma-yoga* — since the same result could not be gained from both.

## CHAPTER 5

### KARMA-SANNYĀSA

अर्जुन उवाच ।

सन्न्यासं कर्मणां कृष्ण पुनर्योगं च शंससि ।

यच्छ्रेय एतयोरेकं तन्मे ब्रूहि सुनिश्चितम् ॥ १ ॥

*arjuna uvāca*

*sannyāsaṃ karmaṇāṃ kṛṣṇa punaryogaṃ ca śaṃsasi*

*yacchreya etayorekaṃ tanme brūhi suniścitam*

*Verse 1*

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

कृष्ण *kṛṣṇa* — O *Kṛṣṇa!*; कर्मणाम् *karmaṇām* सन्न्यासम् *sannyāsam* — renunciation of actions; पुनः *punaḥ* — again (also); योगम् च *yogam ca* — and *karma-yoga*; शंससि *śaṃsasi*— you praise; एतयोः *etayoḥ* — of these two; यत् *yat* — that which; श्रेयः *śreyah* — better; तत् एकम् *tat ekam* — that one; सुनिश्चितम् *suniścitam* — definitely; मे ब्रूहि *me brūhi* — tell me

*Arjuna* said:

O *Kṛṣṇa*, you praise renunciation of actions and also *karma-yoga*. Tell me definitely which one of these two is better.

Once again, *Arjuna* raises the same doubt. In the last chapter *Kṛṣṇa* continued to praise the renunciation of all activities and ended by praising the person who gives up all actions through knowledge. <sup>1</sup> Therefore, in *Arjuna's* mind, *Kṛṣṇa* was clearly advocating *sannyāsa*. Why, then, was the Lord telling him to take to a life of *karma-yoga*?

*Kṛṣṇa* was in fact praising renunciation of all activities through knowledge, *jñāna-karma-sannyāsa*. He said that all *karma* resolves in this knowledge. <sup>2</sup> However, *Arjuna* understood that to be the praise of *karma-sannyāsa*, which is really a life-style wherein one is free from the obligation of having to perform the rituals enjoined by the Veda and other obligatory duties.

Thus, *Arjuna* understands that the renunciation of action is proper and that *Kṛṣṇa* is enjoining *sannyāsa* as a means of knowledge. What confuses *Arjuna* however, is that

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<sup>1</sup> *Gītā* – 4-41

<sup>2</sup> *Gītā* – 4-33

*Kṛṣṇa* is also praising *karma-yoga*. Thus, at one and the same time, the Lord seems to be praising the renunciation and the performance of action!

### WHICH IS BETTER?

Since *mokṣa* means the knowledge of *akarma* in *karma*, meaning one should see the *akartā*, non-doer, in the *kartā*, the doer, *Arjuna* wants to pursue that knowledge. It being very clear that this was what was to be done, renunciation of action seems to be the right thing to do — especially since the knowledge, ‘I am *akartā*’ is the renunciation of all activities. Why, *Arjuna* thinks, should I perform actions and then try to discover the *akarma* in them? It seems so much more logical to him to renounce action.

In *sannyāsa*, role playing being minimal, minimum action is involved. Whereas, in *karma-yoga* roles are many and so are the actions. To be a son or daughter, husband or wife, father or mother, citizen, neighbour, or a friend implies activities and duties that have to be performed. *Karma-yoga* means that the activities and duties involved in the varieties of roles one plays are to be done properly and at the right time. This is what is meant by the proper attitude, the attitude of *yoga*. If, however, one takes to *sannyāsa*, there is only one role, that of the disciple and, later perhaps, that of the *guru*. There is no other role for the *sannyāsī*, meaning there are no other duties. The person is released from all familial and social duties, thereby reducing the number of roles. Role reduction is what is accomplished by the life-style of *sannyāsa*, the roles having been reduced to one.

This role-reducing life-style, *sannyāsa*, seems to *Arjuna* to be the most appropriate one for gaining *mokṣa*. And *Kṛṣṇa* was definitely praising it by praising the renunciation of all action by knowledge.

Whatever *Kṛṣṇa* praises, *Arjuna* thinks he should follow. But *Kṛṣṇa* was praising both the renunciation and performance of action. *Kṛṣṇa* had said there was nothing like knowledge for gaining *mokṣa*. And *Kṛṣṇa* was definitely praising it by praising the renunciation of all action by knowledge.<sup>1</sup> And having praised knowledge in this way, told *Arjuna* to take to *yoga*!<sup>2</sup>

*Arjuna* feels that *Kṛṣṇa* was contradicting himself by praising the renunciation of activity while asking him to perform activity. The advice does not seem appropriate. But, *Arjuna* knows that *Kṛṣṇa* knows better. Therefore, he expresses his doubt. Is the renunciation of all action better or the performance of action? Which of these two — *sannyāsa* or *karma-yoga* — is better?

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<sup>1</sup> *Gītā* – 4-38

<sup>2</sup> *Gītā* – 4-42

By 'better' *Arjuna* means the one that would give him *mokṣa*, *śreyas*. Knowing that renunciation and performance of action could not yield the same result, he wants to know which one would lead him to *mokṣa*. His doubt, then, is centred on which one he should follow. Both are good, but if one is better than the other, meaning one is a means to *mokṣa*, and the other is not, then *Arjuna* wants to follow the better of the two.

The renunciation of action and the performance of action cannot both be pursued at the same time. They are opposed to each other. One cannot simultaneously renounce activities and do them also. And since they are contradictory, he cannot even follow each of them partially — a little bit of *sannyāsa* and a little bit of *karma-yoga*. Just as fasting and eating cannot be followed by the same person at the same time, so too, *sannyāsa* and *karma-yoga*, being opposites, cannot be followed by the same person at the same time. Therefore, *Arjuna* again asks *Kṛṣṇa* to clarify as to which of the two is better.

Once again, *Kṛṣṇa* responds:

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।

सन्न्यासः कर्मयोगश्च निःश्रेयसकरावुभौ ।

तयोस्तु कर्मसन्न्यासात् कर्मयोगो विशिष्यते ॥ २ ॥

*śrībhagavān uvāca*

*sannyāsaḥ karmayogaśca niḥśreyasakarāvubhau*

*tayostu karmasannyāsāt karmayogo viśiṣyate*

Verse 2

श्रीभगवान् *śrībhagavān* — *Śrī Bhagavān* (Lord *Kṛṣṇa*); उवाच *uvāca* — said;  
सन्न्यासः *sannyāsaḥ* — renunciation (of action); कर्म-योगः च *karma-yogaḥ ca* — and the performance of action as *yoga*; उभौ निश्रेयसकरौ *ubhau niśreyasakarau* — both lead to liberation; तयोः तु *tayoḥ tu* — but of these two; कर्म-सन्न्यासात् *karma-sannyāsāt* — as compared to (mere) renunciation of action; कर्म-योगः *karma-yogaḥ* — performance of action as *yoga*; विशिष्यते *viśiṣyate* — is better

*Śrī Bhagavān* said:

Both renunciation (of action) and performance of action as *yoga* lead to liberation. But, of these two, the performance of action as *yoga* is better than renunciation of action.

We have seen that, although the word *śreyas* means 'better,' it also means *mokṣa*. *Niśreyasa* means the same. And what leads to *mokṣa*? *Kṛṣṇa* responds to *Arjuna*'s question by saying that both *sannyāsa* and *karma-yoga* lead to *mokṣa*.

For *Arjuna*, it is an either-or situation. Either *sannyāsa* can do it or *karma-yoga*, but not both. For *Kṛṣṇa*, however, there is no either-or; *sannyāsa* and *karma-yoga* both lead to *mokṣa*.



The problem here does not have a simple either-or solution. But to appreciate this fact requires that both *sannyāsa* and *karma-yoga* be properly understood. In each life-style, there are advantages and disadvantages, depending on the qualifications of the person. One life-style may be advantageous to one person, while the other may be advantageous to another.

Both life-styles have an equal status because both are means, *sādhana*s. Therefore, between these two life-styles — *sannyāsa* and *karma-yoga* — there is a choice. But *Kṛṣṇa* is not praising *sannyāsa* as a life-style; he merely states that there was such a life-style. Nor does he ever say that *sannyāsa* as a life-style is preferable to *karma-yoga*. He praises *sannyāsa* only as an end to be gained.

At the beginning of the third chapter, *Kṛṣṇa* said that there were two life-styles — *jñāna-yoga* and *karma-yoga*.<sup>1</sup> *Jñāna-yoga* is characterised by the pursuit of knowledge alone and *karma-yoga* combines the pursuit of knowledge with *karma*. In the verse presently under study, *Kṛṣṇa* again refers to these two life-styles as being equal. Since both of them are means, what else could he do? Even though *Arjuna* wants to know only one of them, *Kṛṣṇa* has to teach both. Therefore, once again, *Kṛṣṇa* seems to be confusing him.

It is wonderful if you understand *Kṛṣṇa*'s statement, 'Both renunciation and *karma-yoga* lead to *mokṣa*,' but it can be exasperating if you do not understand it. If both *sannyāsa* and *karma-yoga* lead you to *mokṣa*, you may also prefer *sannyāsa*, as *Arjuna* did. It is like being told that, to reach a certain place, there are two routes. One route requires you to walk half a mile and the other route requires you to walk five miles. Which one are you likely to choose? You will no doubt choose the easier of the two, because we always go for the easiest way to do anything.

Similarly, if both *sannyāsa* and *karma-yoga* lead you to *mokṣa*, you will choose the easier. And which is the easier? At first glance, it looks as though *sannyāsa*, doing nothing or doing very little, is easier. But, in fact, *sannyāsa* is definitely the more difficult of the two if you are not ready for it. *Kṛṣṇa* makes it very clear in this verse that performing action is better than giving it up.

Renunciation of all actions means that you should be able to be with yourself, you should be happy with yourself — for which you require preparation. This is why *Kṛṣṇa* says here that *karma-yoga* is better than renunciation.

This does not mean, however, that no one should take *sannyāsa*. It simply means that *sannyāsa* is difficult, and therefore, one should be ready for it, as *Kṛṣṇa* makes clear later on. *Karma-yoga* actually paves the way to *sannyāsa*.

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<sup>1</sup> *Gītā* – 3-2

Here, *Kṛṣṇa* is simply saying that *karma-yoga* is better than a mere life of *sannyāsa*, without the necessary preparation. He explains why this is so in the next verse.

ज्ञेयः स नित्यसन्न्यासी यो न द्वेष्टि न काङ्क्षति ।

निर्द्वन्द्वो हि महाबाहो सुखं बन्धात्प्रमुच्यते ॥ ३ ॥

*jñeyaḥ sa nityasannyāsī yo na dveṣṭi na kāṅkṣati*

*nirdva ndvo hi mahābāho sukhaṃ bandhātpramucyate*

Verse 3

यः *yaḥ* — the one who; न द्वेष्टि *na dveṣṭi* — does not hate; न काङ्क्षति *na kāṅkṣati* — does not long (for anything); सः *saḥ* — that person; नित्यसन्न्यासी *nitya-sannyāsī* — always a renunciate; ज्ञेयः *jñeyaḥ* — should be known as; महाबाहो *mahābāho* — O Mighty armed! (*Arjuna*); हि *hi* — because; निर्द्वन्द्वः *nirdvandvaḥ* — free from the opposites (likes and dislikes); बन्धात् *bandhāt* — from bondage; सुखम् *sukham* — effortlessly; प्रमुच्यते *pramucyate* — is released

The person who neither hates nor longs (for anything) should be known as always a renunciate O *Arjuna*, because one who is free from the opposites (likes and dislikes) is effortlessly released from bondage.

We saw that, in answer to *Arjuna*'s question, whether *sannyāsa* leads to *mokṣa* or *karma-yoga* leads to *mokṣa*, *Kṛṣṇa* said that both lead to *mokṣa*. If you have the knowledge, you already are a *sannyāsī*. If you are not a *jñānī*, there is a choice in that there are two life-styles for pursuing the knowledge. But, having said this, *Kṛṣṇa* hints at the difficulties inherent in merely giving up all action, *karma-sannyāsa*, without the necessary preparation, by saying that *karma-yoga* is preferable.

To say that *karma-yoga* is better than *karma-sannyāsa* is strictly from the standpoint of one's qualifications, since both are means for *mokṣa* alone. The *karma-yogī* and the *karma-sannyāsī* are both *mumukṣus*; they both desire liberation, freedom. The only difference is that the *karma-yogī* has duties to perform and the *sannyāsī* does not. And, if you have no duties to perform, you should be able to live with yourself and pursue knowledge to the exclusion of all else, which takes a certain preparedness. This is why *Kṛṣṇa* says that *karma-yoga* is better than simply giving up action.

### LORD KṚṢṆA'S DEFINITION OF A SANNYĀSĪ

*Kṛṣṇa* wants *Arjuna* to understand what *sannyāsa* means. You do not become a *sannyāsī* simply by giving up action, even though by your appearance people may look upon you as one. You are not a *sannyāsī* if the inner preparedness or maturity that characterises a *sannyāsī* is not there.

The external symbols, like wearing the orange cloth, may be of some psychological help to the person who takes to the life-style of *sannyāsa* in order to pursue knowledge. Combined with the discipline of the life-style itself, external symbols can help the person bring about the inner changes necessary to prepare the mind for the knowledge. These external factors are an advantage if the person is ready for this lifestyle, but if the person is not ready, such a life-style can become a decided disadvantage.

Thus, without *jñāna* or at least a certain preparedness, *sannyāsa* can be a real problem. You need not have complete knowledge, but some insight and a cheerful disposition are definitely required. If this much is not there, *sannyāsa* is definitely a problem. The person is neither in the world where he or she can work things out nor is he or she in the world of *sannyāsīs*. The person is somewhere in between — a *sannyāsī* without a field in which to polish oneself.

Under such circumstances, *sannyāsa* becomes an onerous responsibility, one that the person is not really able to fulfil. This is why *Kṛṣṇa* says that *karma-yoga* is better than simply giving up action. By merely changing your life-style, you do not become a *sannyāsī*. Whereas a person who neither hates nor longs for things is to be understood as a *sannyāsī*.

### THE NITYA-SANNYĀSĪ

An adjective, *nitya*, is also added to the *sannyāsī*. *Nitya-sannyāsī* does not mean ‘eternal *sannyāsī*.’ Rather, the *nitya-sannyāsī* is one who is a *sannyāsī* always, as opposed to the person who is sometimes a *sannyāsī* and sometimes not. This ‘sometime *sannyāsī*’ is called a *kādācitka-sannyāsī*.

With reference to certain things, everyone is a *nitya-sannyāsī*. And, with reference to everything for a certain period of time, everyone is a *kādācitka-sannyāsī*. For example, with reference to balloons, spinning tops, and Barbie dolls, you are a *nitya-sannyāsī*. In fact, with reference to a lot of things you loved once, without which you could not live because they were so important to you, and which you have completely grown out of, you are a *nitya-sannyāsī*. You did not give up these things; you simply grew out of them.

If you had given them up, you would still be attached to them. But, if you have grown out of them, you no longer think about them, let alone talk about your having given them up. If a man says that he has given up a title and a job, for example, it is because the person has only given them up; he has not grown out of them. A taste or a value for what has been given up remains in the mind. This is why the person talks about them.

No one ever says, 'I gave away the garbage the day before yesterday.' You simply leave the garbage out and forget about it. If, however, you still talk about the garbage, then you still have a value for it. Similarly, when anyone talks about what he has given up, it means that the person still has a value for it. Whereas, you do not say, 'I have given up spinning tops, balloons, and dolls,' because you have grown out of them. If you have only given them up, you will be afraid to face them because they still remain tempting factors in your life.

Being tempting objects, you are not free from desire for them and therefore, you cannot face what you have only given up. Naturally, then, you have to keep away from them to protect yourself from them. If, however, you have grown out of them, you have neither hatred nor longing for them.

Thus, with reference to a number of things, you are a *nitya-sannyāsī*, but with reference to other things, you are not a *sannyāsī* at all. As long as there are things without which you cannot live, you cannot call yourself a *sannyāsī* because there are things that still bind you and upon which you depend for your sense of well-being. Even though you are a *sannyāsī* with reference to a few things, if you are not a *sannyāsī* with reference to all things, I cannot call you a *nitya-sannyāsī*. *Nitya-sannyāsī* refers to a person who is a *sannyāsī* in all situations. If this is not the case, then you are a *kādācitka-sannyāsī* only, meaning that you are a *sannyāsī* whenever you confront certain things; otherwise, you are not.

There are also times when you can be a *sannyāsī* with reference to everything — moments when you are totally free, when you do not need anything. For instance, in your seat of meditation, you may feel that you are everything. At such times, you do not need anything other than yourself; you are full, *pūrṇa*. There you can experience a total contentment with yourself, which is *sannyāsa*.

You are definitely a *sannyāsī* whenever you are happy. The world does not seem to have anything to demand your attention, which is exactly what is meant by *sannyāsa*. There is no longing or hatred, no *rāga* or *dveṣa*. At that moment you are a totally free person, a *sannyāsī*. Everyone is a *sannyāsī* in this way — occasionally, with reference to everything. But, being only for the moment, this is *kādācitka-sannyāsa*, not *nitya-sannyāsa*.

And who is always a *sannyāsī*? The one who neither hates nor longs for anything. One can long to avoid things and also to have things. Both are longings. However, when one wants to avoid things, we do not call it longing; we call it hatred or dislike, *dveṣa*.

The *sannyāsī* is not bound by *rāgas* and *dveṣas*, meaning that he or she is not under the spell of likes and dislikes. Only such a person can be a *nitya-sannyāsī*. To be free from *rāga* and *dveṣa* with reference to everything means that you are not affected

by the presence or absence of a given thing. You are not overwhelmed or afraid in the presence of something and you do not miss something when it is not there.

### ESCAPE BREEDS WEAKNESS, NOT STRENGTH

*Sannyāsa* is not simply giving up duties. It is very easy to give up one's duties, especially those that are cumbersome and difficult. In fact, one's tendency is to avoid them! You always want to escape from any situation that is painful or difficult to handle. Therefore, *sannyāsa* can become an escape.

But no one becomes strong by escaping situations; only by facing them do you become strong. By escaping, you become necessarily weak. You may think you have avoided something but, in fact, what has really happened is that you have lost something — your strength. Escape means you have yielded to the enormity of the problem. By running away from the problem, no matter how enormous it is, you become weaker. Escape has another disadvantage in that in the future you will find it necessary to run away from lesser problems. With each escape, you lose the strength you would have gained by remaining and facing the problem, for you become stronger with every problem you face, whether you are successful or not.

*Kṛṣṇa* wants *Arjuna* to know that one does not really grow by running away from duties, however painful they may be. Nor does one become a *sannyāsi*, in the real sense. In fact, giving up the duties that are to be done, *kevala-karma-sannyāsa* is exactly what is not to be done! Only the person who neither hates nor longs for anything is a *sannyāsi*.

According to *Śaṅkara*, a *nitya-sannyāsi* can be understood in an absolute as well as a relative sense. Relatively, *Śaṅkara* explains a *nitya-sannyāsi* as a *karma-yogī*, one who may have *rāga-dveṣas*, but who does not come under their spell. In an absolute sense, the *nitya-sannyāsi* is one who has self-knowledge and is therefore, totally free from *rāga-dveṣas*.

### SANNYĀSA WILL NOT WORK IF IT IS AN ESCAPE

If you are afraid of *karma* and you choose *sannyāsa* as a life-style in order to avoid it, then you are definitely under the spell of your *rāga-dveṣas*. A *sannyāsi* is one who is not under their spell. The fear of *karma* is *dveṣa* and the love for *sannyāsa* is *rāga*. If *sannyāsa* is an object of your *rāga*, it will not work for you. As a *karma-yogī*, however, you have an opportunity to release yourself from the spell of *rāga-dveṣas*.

By living the life of a *karma-yogī*, you allow your *rāga-dveṣas* to manifest themselves and, at the same time, you are able to manage them effectively. The ability to remain free from their spell is what makes you a *karma-yogī*. This is why *karma-yoga* is referred to as *buddhi-yoga*, the *yoga* of attitude, in the second chapter. *Buddhi* there

means a particular attitude towards what is to be done, what is not to be done, and also towards the results of action.

Towards the results of action, there is an attitude called *prasāda-buddhi*, wherein whatever comes is looked upon as *prasāda*, a gift from the Lord. With reference to action itself, you conform to *dharma*, which is looked upon as *Īśvara*. This attitude is called *īśvara-arpaṇa-buddhi*, an attitude of offering your actions to the Lord. These two *buddhis*, *attitudes* — the *prasāda-buddhi*, and the *īśvara-arpaṇa-buddhi* — constitute *karma-yoga*. This attitude, maintained in the midst of activities, makes you a *karma-yogī* and frees you from the spell of your *rāga-dveṣas*.

There is no problem once one is a *sannyāsī*, even relatively. But, until then, one has to live a life of a *karma-yogī*. This is why *Kṛṣṇa* describes the *nitya-sannyāsī* in this verse, as *nirdvandva*, one who is free of the pairs of opposites. ‘Opposites’ here stands for *rāga-dveṣas*, pleasant and unpleasant situations, success and failure, and so on. All such situations are *dvandvas*, opposites. These *dvandvas* are always there, and because of your *rāga-dveṣas*, they can bind you.

## MASTERY OVER LIKES AND DISLIKES

The world does not bind you nor do the events that take place. What binds you is only your *rāga-dveṣas*, *dvandvas*. All the opposites can be reduced to *rāga-dveṣas*, and therefore, one who is free from the hold of *rāga-dveṣas* is *nirdvandva*.

In fact, even the opposites themselves do not really bind you; they are simply facts of life. Not getting what you want is always in terms of your *rāga*, meaning that certain situations are not in keeping with your likes. You want something to happen which may not happen and instead, the opposite may happen. This is the very nature, the order, of things — not because the world is bad or your *rāga-dveṣas* are bad but simply because that is how it is. Since you are not omniscient, you are not free from *rāga-dveṣas* and since you are not omnipotent, they will often remain unfulfilled. If you were almighty, all-powerful, then you could fulfil all your *rāga-dveṣas*, but you are not.

The only way out, then, is to have mastery over your *rāga-dveṣas*. To the extent that you have such mastery, you will have mastery over your life, over the world. Management of your emotional life, spiritual life, everything, can be narrowed down to the management of these two — *rāga* and *dveṣa*. This is why the psychology of the entire *gītā-śāstra* is based on *rāga-dveṣas*.

Therefore, in order to be a *jñānī*, in order to gain *mokṣa*, freedom from bondage, you must be a *nitya-sannyāsī*. A *nitya-sannyāsī* is either a *jñānī* or an accomplished *karma-yogī*. An accomplished *karma-yogī* is a *sannyāsī*. Anyone who has the maturity, meaning that the person is not in the hands of *rāga-dveṣas*, is a *sannyāsī*, whether he or

she has the external symbols or not. This is the person that is fit to be released from bondage.

*Kṛṣṇa* also says here that, for such a person, the release is effortless — *sukhaṃ pramucyate*. If a person is ready, if he or she is mature, not in the hands of *rāga-dveṣas*, there is nothing that can deny him or her the knowledge; therefore, the release from bondage is indeed effortless. *Sukham* can also be translated as ‘happily’ here. Happily, the person is released from bondage if he is prepared.

### MOKṢĀ IS THE ONLY AIM OF THE KARMA-YOGĪ

A *karmī* is interested in *karma-phalas*, which are many and varied, and for which the person performs a variety of actions. If, however, the *karmī* becomes a *karma-yogī* he or she will not be doing these actions for heaven, power, wealth, or something else, because the person has no interest in such things. The *karma-yogī* is interested only in *mokṣa*.

A person who does not have *mokṣa* as the only end cannot be a *karma-yogī*. He or she remains only a *karmī*, also called *karmaṭha*, one who is interested in the various ends that action can provide. The person who is interested in heaven is also not a *karma-yogī*, even though he or she may think that heaven is the same as *mokṣa*, because it promises a certain security and pleasure. Therefore, such a person is an *artha-kāma-kāmī*, one who desires security and pleasure, and not a *karma-yogī*.

Who, then, is a *karma-yogī*? The one who goes about doing the various actions that are to be done purely for his or her own *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*, the preparation of the mind that is required in order to be freed from *rāga-dveṣas*. Fulfilment of *rāga-dveṣas* is not the criterion for the *karma-yogī*. His or her motive is rather to gain a mastery over the *rāga-dveṣas*.

In fact, *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi* is itself a kind of *mokṣa*, freedom from the hold of *rāga-dveṣas*. This is the first *mokṣa*. Then, freedom from the sense of bondage, freedom from *ajñāna*, is the ultimate *mokṣa*. One is of the nature of maturity and the other of the nature of *jñāna*, knowledge. Maturity itself is an accomplishment, for which one takes to the life of *karma-yoga*. Later, there is the further accomplishment, knowledge.

Giving up activity and performing activity can only have the same end in view — *mokṣa*. One person gives up action and gains *mokṣa* and the other continues all his activities and gains *mokṣa*. But, how can this be? Should there not be a difference in what is accomplished when the means are different? Surely, there should be a different result when you perform actions, and when you do not. This was *Arjuna*’s thinking.

*Kṛṣṇa* addresses this doubt of *Arjuna*’s, from the standpoint of the result, *phala*, by saying that the result is one and the same for both *karma-yoga* and *sannyāsa*.

सांख्ययोगौ पृथग्बालाः प्रवदन्ति न पण्डिताः ।

एकमप्यास्थितः सम्यग्भयोर्विन्दते फलम् ॥ ४ ॥

*sāṅkhyayogau prthagbālāḥ pravadanti na paṇḍitāḥ  
ekamapyāsthitaḥ samyagubhayorvindate phalam*

Verse 4

बालाः *bālāḥ* — children (those who do not know); सांख्य-योगौ *sāṅkhya-yogau* — knowledge and *karma-yoga*; पृथक् *prthak* — (as) different; प्रवदन्ति *pravadanti* — argue; न पण्डिताः *na paṇḍitāḥ* — not the wise; एकम् अपि *ekam api* — even one; सम्यक् *samyak* — properly; आस्थितः *āsthitaḥ* — the one who follows; उभयोः *ubhayoh* — of both; फलम् *phalam* — result; विन्दते *vindate* — gains

Children (those who do not know), (but) not the wise, argue that knowledge and *karma-yoga* are different. The person who follows even one (of the two) properly, gains the result of both.

By nature, of course, *sannyāsa* and *karma-yoga* are different, one implying the renunciation and the other the performance of activity. Here, *Kṛṣṇa* brings in the word *sāṅkhya* in the place of *sannyāsa*, the reason for which we shall see later. In the compound *sāṅkhya-yogau*, *sāṅkhya* means knowledge and *yoga* means *karma-yoga*. People argue that knowledge and *yoga* are different, meaning that they are not only different in nature, but their results are also different.

And who argues in this way? *Kṛṣṇa* refers to such people here as children, *bālāḥ*, meaning those who do not know. These people have studied the *śāstra* and know what it says, but do not know what it means. Therefore, like children, they repeat what they have heard without understanding. The child having been told by his father that money is dangerous, keeps repeating the statement, 'Money is dangerous.' But he does not know why. He does not know that his father means that money, if not handled properly, is dangerous. There is always some truth in such statements, but the child does not know the meaning even though he may constantly repeat his father's words. In the same manner these people repeat the words of the *śāstra* without knowing what they mean.

## KNOWLEDGE ALONE IS THE MEANS

*Sannyāsa*, meaning renunciation of action, is not the means to *mokṣa*, nor is *karma-yoga*. *Jñāna* alone is the means. Only by knowledge is *mokṣa* gained. There is no other way because the bondage from which *mokṣa* is sought is ignorance. To gain this knowledge, you need a *pramāṇa*, a means of knowledge. Therefore, whatever you follow, knowledge is common.

Separate paths are not mentioned anywhere in the *śāstra*. All that is mentioned are only two life-styles, *niṣṭhās* — the pursuit of activities, *pravṛtti*, called *karma-yoga*,



and the giving up of all activity, *nivṛtti*, called *sannyāsa* or *jñāna-yoga*. This is all the *śāstra* talks about and both of these life-styles are meant for *mokṣa*.

Earlier in this chapter, *Kṛṣṇa* said that *karma-yoga* is preferable to *sannyāsa*.<sup>1</sup> Knowing this to be the case for a person who is not ready for *sannyāsa*, *Kṛṣṇa* wants the seeker to play it safe.

### THE END IS ONLY ONE: MOKṢA

*Kṛṣṇa* says that whichever one you follow — *sannyāsa* or *karma-yoga* — the result is the same provided, of course, you follow it properly. The two life-styles do not yield different results. The result is one and the same — *mokṣa*.

By following a life of *karma-yoga*, which means performance of duties and pursuit of knowledge, you first gain *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi* and then knowledge. And, by following a life of *sannyāsa*, which is pursuit of knowledge, you gain the same end. In other words, what can be gained by *sannyāsa* can also be gained by living a life of *karma-yoga*. *Sannyāsa* deprives you of the field necessary for polishing yourself, whereas *karma-yoga* provides you with all those factors which, by rubbing up against, enable you to become polished in the process. This is the difference between the two and is why *Kṛṣṇa* says that *karma-yoga* is preferable to simply giving up the duties.

### SĀṆKHYA AND SANNYĀSA MEAN THE SAME

Now, why does *Kṛṣṇa* use the word *sāṅkhya* instead of *sannyāsa* in this verse? At the beginning of the chapter, *Arjuna* asked *Kṛṣṇa* to tell him which would give him *mokṣa*, *sannyāsa* or *karma-yoga*. *Kṛṣṇa* responded in the second verse by saying that *sannyāsa* and *karma-yoga* both result in *mokṣa*. He followed this up in the third verse by pointing out that the person to be known as a *sannyāsi* was one who had no hatred or longing for anything.

But here, in the fourth verse, *Kṛṣṇa* replaces the word *sannyāsa* with *sāṅkhya*. This means that for *Kṛṣṇa*, *sāṅkhya* and *sannyāsa* are one and the same. The word *sāṅkhya* means ‘that which is very well unfolded by *Vedānta*’ — in other words knowledge. This is the knowledge called *brahma-jñāna*, the knowledge of the identity between *Brahman* and *ātmā*. This knowledge is what the *śāstra* unfolds. Therefore, *sāṅkhya* means *brahma-jñāna*, which is also the meaning of the word *sannyāsa* in the primary sense.

*Arjuna* wants to know which of the two, *sannyāsa* or *karma-yoga*, is better, and *Kṛṣṇa* begins talking about *sāṅkhya* and *yoga*. *Śaṅkara* confirms in his commentary to this verse that this is not something new that *Kṛṣṇa* is introducing. In fact, *Kṛṣṇa* had

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<sup>1</sup> *Gītā* – 5-2

already used the word *sāṅkhya* in the third chapter when he described the two life-styles given by him, one of which was ‘the pursuit of knowledge for the *sannyāsī*.’ In the present verse, he uses the word again, the context having been made very clear in the previous two verses by his use of the word *sannyāsa*. Thus, *sāṅkhya* here means the same as *sannyāsa*. It also fits into the metre of this particular verse easier than *sannyāsa* because it has one syllable less.

By using the word *sāṅkhya* instead of *sannyāsa*, *Kṛṣṇa* is quietly telling *Arjuna* that *sannyāsa* is the pursuit of knowledge and that it is common to both *karma-yoga* and *sannyāsa*. And both of them produce the same result — *mokṣa*. All one has to do is follow one of them properly.

You can be either a *karma-yogī* or a *sannyāsī*, but *mokṣa* is the result of *jñāna* alone. Therefore, both the *sannyāsī* and the *karma-yogī* have to pursue knowledge. No one becomes liberated simply by taking to a life of *sannyāsa* or by remaining a *karma-yogī*. Only by knowledge does one become liberated.

There is no choice here at all. The choice is only between *sannyāsa* and *karma-yoga* as a life-style. That is what *Kṛṣṇa* means here when he says that by following either one properly, the result achieved is the same.

In the next verse, *Kṛṣṇa* explains how the same result is accomplished by both *sannyāsīs* and *karma-yogīs*.

यत्साङ्ख्यैः प्राप्यते स्थानं तद्योगैरपि गम्यते ।

एकं साङ्ख्यं च योगं च यः पश्यति स पश्यति ॥ ५ ॥

*yatsāṅkhyaiḥ prāpyate sthānaṁ tadyogairapi gamyate*  
*ekaṁ sāṅkhyam ca yogam ca yaḥ paśyati sa paśyati*

Verse 5

साङ्ख्यैः *sāṅkhyaiḥ* — by the *sannyāsīs*; यत् स्थानम् *yat sthānam* — which end; प्राप्यते *prāpyate* — is gained; योगैः अपि *yogaiḥ api* — by the *karma-yogīs* also; तत् *tat* — that (end, *mokṣa*); गम्यते *gamyate* — is reached; यः *yaḥ* — the one who; साङ्ख्यम् च *sāṅkhyam ca* — knowledge; योगम् च *yogam ca* — and *yoga* (*karma-yoga*); एकम् *ekam* — as one; पश्यति *paśyati* — sees; सः *saḥ* — he; पश्यति *paśyati* — sees (the truth)

The end (*mokṣa*) that is gained by the *sannyāsīs* is also reached by the *karma-yogīs*. The one who sees knowledge and *karma-yoga* as one, that person (alone) sees (the truth).

The knowledge, which is *mokṣa*, gained by the *sannyāsīs*, is also the *mokṣa* reached by the *karma-yogīs* in time. First, they gain *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*, a pure mind, and then they gain the knowledge. *Sthāna* means place or end and here the end is the knowledge that is *mokṣa* for both the *sannyāsī* and the *karma-yogīs*.

The use of the words ‘gained, *prāpyate*,’ and ‘reached, *gamyate*,’ denotes a small difference here — the difference in the degree of preparedness of the *sannyāsī* and the *karma-yogī*. That which is accomplished, *prāpyate* by the *sannyāsī* is reached, *gamyate*, by the *karma-yogī* in time, meaning when his or her mind has been properly prepared by living a life of *karma-yoga*. This, then, is the only difference.

The *karma-yogī* lives a life of *karma-yoga* and gains the knowledge, either by becoming a *sannyāsī* or while still remaining a *karma-yogī*. Either way, the person can gain the knowledge. Even when the knowledge takes place, he or she can become a *sannyāsī* or continue to remain as a *karma-yogī*, as King *Janaka* did.

The one who understands this clearly, is a wise person, *pañḍita*, whereas the others are children, *bālas*, those who do not see clearly, even though they have studied the *śāstra*. One person may renounce activities, looking upon renunciation as more desirable than *karma-yoga*, while another may perform action and look upon it as more desirable than *sannyāsa*. Thus, we have these two groups of people, one group insisting that you must renounce and the other group advocating that you must do *karma*. In fact, neither group knows the truth.

There are those who, analysing the *Gītā* in their own way, have tried to prove that the *Gītā* advocates *karma* only, that the performance of *karma* alone produces *mokṣa*, and that it does not talk about *sannyāsa* at all. This is an error and it creates problems for others as well. *Kṛṣṇa* has said very clearly that there are two life-styles in this world.<sup>1</sup> It is, therefore, difficult to understand how anyone can interpret the *Gītā* to mean that *karma* alone produces *mokṣa*. But, being prejudiced, being committed to the hard and fast conclusions they have made before even studying the *Gītā*, they do. This is why we have to analyse if what they advocate is true and, to do so, we have to look into the *Gītā* and see what it actually does say.

To first make a conclusion and then look into the *Gītā* to support your conclusion is not inquiry, *pramāṇa-vicāra*. It is merely your own interpretation. *Pramāṇa-vicāra* is to see what the *Gītā* really says; for this, one has to be highly objective. When one thinks, ‘Because I have *śraddhā* in the *Gītā*, I want to know what it says,’ that is called *pramāṇa-vicāra*.

### SANNYĀSA ONLY LOOKS EASIER

Here, *Kṛṣṇa* says the one who sees that *sannyāsa* and *karma-yoga* are one is the one who really sees. This means that both are equal.

If both are equal, I will take *sannyāsa* because it is easier than *karma*. *Karma-yoga* means that I have so many duties to perform, whereas *sannyāsa* seems to

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<sup>1</sup> *Gītā* – 3-3

be free from problems. *Karma-yoga* means that I have to get up early in the morning, take a bath, and do the required rituals and prayers. The duties involved in a life of *karma-yoga* are endless and, as in *Arjuna's* case, can even amount to killing people! *Sannyāsa* definitely seems easier. I have no duties and therefore, no problems!

This may have been *Arjuna's* thinking, and therefore, *Kṛṣṇa* goes on to tell him that knowledge is difficult to gain without the proper preparation that living a life of *karma-yoga* provides. This is what we see in the next verse.

सन्न्यासस्तु महाबाहो दुःखमाप्तुमयोगतः ।

योगयुक्तो मुनिर्ब्रह्म नचिरेणाधिगच्छति ॥ ६ ॥

*sannyāsastu mahābāho duḥkhamāptumayogataḥ*  
*yogayukto munirbrahma nacireṇādhiḡacchati*

Verse 6

महाबाहो *mahābāho* — O Mighty armed! (*Arjuna*); अयोगतः *ayogataḥ* — without *karma-yoga*; सन्न्यासः *sannyāsaḥ* — renunciation of action; आप्तुम् *āptum* — to accomplish; दुःखम् *duḥkham* — difficult; तु *tu* — whereas; योग-युक्तः *yoga-yuktaḥ* — committed to the life of *karma-yoga*; मुनिः *muṇiḥ* — one who is capable of reasoning; न चिरेण *na cireṇa* — not after a long time (quickly); ब्रह्म *brahma* — *Brahman*; अधिगच्छति *adhiḡacchati* — gains

Renunciation of action, O *Arjuna*, is difficult to accomplish without *karma-yoga*. Whereas, one who is capable of reasoning, who is committed to a life of *karma-yoga*, gains *Brahman* quickly.

Although *sannyāsa* and *karma-yoga* are both the means to knowledge, without *yoga*, it is not easy to live the life of *sannyāsa*, let alone gain knowledge. This is what *Kṛṣṇa* is telling *Arjuna* here.

If you take the word *sannyāsa* to mean knowledge, it is certainly difficult to gain *sannyāsa* without *karma-yoga* which is essential for *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*, purification of the mind. Without *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*, you cannot gain the knowledge. Without *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*, you cannot even live a life of *sannyāsa*. Thus, *karma-yoga* is the means to accomplish *sannyāsa* both in terms of life-style as well as knowledge.

## THE NECESSITY OF LIVING A LIFE OF KARMA-YOGA

Whether or not a person takes to the life of *sannyāsa*, certain qualities of a *sannyāsi* are acquired by the person if he lives the life of *karma-yoga*. But a person under the spell of *rāga-dveṣas* will find it very difficult to live a life of *sannyāsa*. Such people sometimes take to *sannyāsa* simply because they are disenchanted with life,

being unable to fulfil their *rāga-dveṣas*. Impelled as they are by their *rāga-dveṣas*, they continue to be frustrated. As a *sannyāsī* also, a person may have to deal with the mind if *rāga-dveṣas* have not been resolved and therefore, he has a lot to do in addition to serving the *guru*, *guru-seva*. It is strictly with reference to one's *rāga-dveṣas* that the two life-styles are given and choice exists only in terms of these two life-styles.

Suppose you go to a teacher with many *rāga-dveṣas* in your mind. If you are lucky, the teacher who knows the subject matter perhaps can help you neutralise them. By serving the teacher and following his instructions, you can gain *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*. What *Kṛṣṇa* points out here is that, without *karma-yoga*, *sannyāsa* is not easy to accomplish. He does not say it is impossible, but he does say here that it is difficult to accomplish *sannyāsa* without the preparation of *karma-yoga* — *duḥkham āptum ayogataḥ*.

You cannot become a *sannyāsī* by will, by just deciding to do so. You need to be endowed with *karma-yoga*, *yoga-yukta*, meaning that you need to live a life of *karma-yoga*. One who is endowed with *yoga* is one who can understand and analyse what is being said. Such a person is called a *muniḥ*, one who can understand. This is the person who gains *Brahman* — *muniḥ brahma adhigacchati*.

### SANNYĀSA IS BRAHMAN

*Nyāsa* means renunciation and *sannyāsa* means perfect or total renunciation, a renunciation with maturity. *Sannyāsa*, *sāṅkhya*, and *Brahman* all have the same meaning. Knowledge of *Brahman* is called *sāṅkhya*, which is also called *sannyāsa*. And *sannyāsa* is also called *brahma*, which is gained by the *yoga-yukta*, the one endowed with *yoga*, and who is a *muni*. Such a person gains *Brahman*, otherwise referred to as *sannyāsa*, knowledge of *Brahman*.

*Adhigacchati* means ‘goes to’ or ‘gains.’ And when does the person gain *Brahman*? *Na cireṇa*, meaning not after a long time. Once a person has the maturity on account of *karma-yoga*, he or she gains *Brahman* quickly. How this is so, is explained in the next verse.

योगयुक्तो विशुद्धात्मा विजितात्मा जितेन्द्रियः ।

सर्वभूतात्मभूतात्मा कुर्वन्नपि न लिप्यते ॥ ७ ॥

*yogayukto viśuddhātmā vijitātmā jīteन्द्रियाḥ*

*sarvabhūtātmabhūtātmā kurvannapi na lipyate*

Verse 7

योग-युक्तः *yoga-yuktaḥ* — one who is committed to a life of *karma-yoga*; विशुद्धात्मा *viśuddhātmā* — a person who has a purified mind; विजितात्मा *vijitātmā* — one who has mastered the physical body (organs of action); जितेन्द्रियः *jīteन्द्रियाḥ* — one whose sense organs are under control; सर्वभूत-आत्मभूत-आत्मा *sarvabhūta-ātmabhūta-ātmā* — one

who knows oneself as the self in all beings; कुर्वन् अपि *kurvan api* — even though doing (actions); न लिप्यते *na lipyate* — is not tainted (affected)

One whose mind is purified by being committed to a life of *karma-yoga*, who has mastered the body and has the sense organs under control, and who knows oneself to be the self in all beings, (such a person) is not affected even while doing (actions).

In this verse, Lord *Kṛṣṇa* tells *Arjuna* in detail how one gains this knowledge and, at the same time, explained the meaning of the expression, *na cireṇa*. It takes time to gain the necessary maturity of the mind, and this maturity is the result of living a life of *karma-yoga*. But once this maturity is gained, not much time passes before the knowledge is gained, *na cireṇa adhiḡacchati*.

A natural order is presented in this verse. Lord *Kṛṣṇa* begins by saying that the person under discussion has the discipline of *karma-yoga*. As a result of that, the person becomes a *viśuddha-ātmā*, one whose *ātmā*, mind, is *viśuddha*, pure. The word *ātmā* refers to the mind here and so, *viśuddha-ātmā* means a person whose mind is free from the spell of *rāga-dveṣas*, likes and dislikes.

Next, the person acquires a control of the physical body, meaning the organs of action, and also control of the organs of perception, he is a *vijitātmā*. The word *ātmā* in *vijitā-ātmā* refers to the body, which has the ability to move and is therefore, synonymous with the organs of action. The movements and actions of the physical body must also be properly integrated. Therefore, the *karma-yogī* is one who not only has his senses under control but also the organs of action.

### THERE IS ONLY ONE SELF

To have the control of the organs of action is possible only when one's mind is pure, when it is no longer under the spell of *rāga-dveṣas*. Thus, there is an order presented here, a natural order that is very beautiful. Having the discipline of *karma-yoga*, the mind is pure and, therefore, the body, mind, and senses are under one's control. Such a person then becomes the one who knows oneself as the self in all beings and is called *sarvabhūta-ātmabhūta-ātmā*. *Sarva* means 'all' and *bhūta* means 'beings.' And who are these beings? Every being from *Brahmāji* to a mosquito — all of them. This means that one's self is the self of all beings and that there is no other self or anything else apart from the self.

Previously, the person knew the self as separate from every other self, but now the person knows the self to be the one who is the self of all beings. This means that the self is one non-dual self, the truth of all beings. Everything else being *anātmā*, this is the only self there is, the non-dual self.

The self does not become non-dual by any process. It is only by knowledge that the self is discovered to be non-dual. By knowledge, the person discovers the fact that he or she is the non-dual self that is the self in all. In the wake of this knowledge, the person comes to be called *sarvabhūta-ātmabhūta-ātmā*; he or she performs no action even though appearing to do so, being free from the sense of doership. Such a person performs *karma* according to his or her *prārabdha* for the welfare of the world or just to sustain the body, but he or she is not tainted, stained or affected by the result of the *karma* in any manner — *kurvan api na lipyate*.

The person who knows that the self is the self of all cannot have the sense of doership. The self performs no action whatsoever because it is all-pervasive. Even though appearing to perform actions, the wise person is free from the notion of doership and is therefore, not affected by *karma*. This is exactly what *Kṛṣṇa* said in the fourth chapter: the person who sees non-action in action and action in non-action is wise among people and has done all that is to be done.<sup>1</sup> This, then, is the knowledge, *sannyāsa*, accomplished by the wise, who is *sarvabhūta-ātmabhūta-ātmā*.

That the *ātmā* in all beings is one's own *ātmā* is a fact, but previously the person did not know that. Once this knowledge takes place, the person is no longer tainted or affected in any way by the performance of action. The person finds himself or herself free of *karma* even while performing it.

Where, then, is the question of the wise giving up *karma*? Only when you are affected by *karma* does the question of giving it up arise. In that case, even if you give up *karma*, you will still be affected by it in the sense that if you are not doing the *karma* that you should be doing, you will be doing something else. This is why the life-style of *sannyāsa* is only appropriate if one is ready for it; otherwise it is difficult. *Kṛṣṇa* tells *Arjuna* here that only when action is given up through knowledge is there real *sannyāsa*, wherein the person knows that he or she performs no action even while doing actions — *kurvan api na karoti*.

*Kṛṣṇa* then goes on to explain this ‘not doing in spite of doing’ in the next two verses:

नैव किञ्चित्करोमीति युक्तो मन्येत तत्त्ववित् ।

पश्यञ्शृण्वन् स्पृशञ्जिघ्रन्नाशनं गच्छन् स्वपञ्चसन् ॥ ८ ॥

*naiva kiñcitkaromīti yukto manyeta tattvavit*

*paśyañśṛṇvan sprśañjighrannaśnan gacchan svapañśvasan Verse 8*

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<sup>1</sup> *Gītā* – 4-18

प्रलपन् विसृजन् गृह्णन्निमिषन् निमिषन्नपि ।

इन्द्रियाणीन्द्रियार्थेषु वर्तन्ते इति धारयन् ॥ ९ ॥

*pralapan visrjan grhṇannunmiṣan nimiṣannapi  
indriyāṇīndriyārtheṣu vartanta iti dhārayan*

Verse 9

युक्तः *yuktaḥ* — one who is together; तत्त्ववित् *tattvavit* — one who knows the truth; पश्यन् *paśyan* — seeing; शृण्वन् *śṛṇvan* — hearing; स्पृशन् *sprśan* — touching; जिघ्रन् *jighran* — smelling; अश्नन् *aśnan* — eating; गच्छन् *gacchan* — walking; स्वपन् *svapan* — sleeping; श्वसन् *śvasan* — breathing; प्रलपन् *pralapan* — talking; विसृजन् *visrjan* — releasing, गृह्णन् *grhṇan* — grasping; उन्मिषन् *unmiṣan* — opening (the eyes); निमिषन् *nimiṣan* — closing (the eyes); अपि *api* — even (while); इन्द्रियाणि *indriyāṇi* — the organs; इन्द्रियार्थेषु *indriyārtheṣu* — in their objects; वर्तन्ते *vartante* — are engaged; इति *iti* — thus; धारयन् *dhārayan* — knowing (full well); किञ्चित् *kiñcit* — anything; न एव करोमि *na eva karomi* — I do not do at all; इति *iti* — thus; मन्येत *manyeta* — would think (thinks)

The one who is together, who knows the truth, thinks, ‘I do not do anything at all,’ even while seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, eating, walking, sleeping, breathing, talking, releasing, grasping, opening and closing the eyes, (the person) knowing (full well that) the organs are engaged in their objects.

In these two verses, *Kṛṣṇa* continues to describe the person who is a *sarvabhūta-ātmabhūta-ātmā*. It is not that such a person has done away with all actions; rather, he or she is not affected by them in any way. The word ‘doing – *kurvan*’ in the previous verse is in the present continuous tense, meaning that, while doing action, the *sarvabhūta-ātmabhūta-ātmā* is not affected by the action or its result.

How can a person who performs action not be affected by the result of the action? Whether the person likes it or not, the result is slapped on him or her by the law of *karma*. Does *Kṛṣṇa* really mean that the person who has this knowledge is not affected by the results of action? Yes, because the person does not look upon himself or herself as the *kartā*, the doer, and is therefore, not affected by the result. *Kṛṣṇa* explains this in these two verses, giving number of examples of the various actions that such a person performs — seeing – *paśyan*, hearing – *śṛṇvan*, touching – *sprśan*, smelling – *jighran*, eating – *aśnan*, walking – *gacchan*, sleeping – *svapan*, breathing *śvasan*, talking – *pralapan*, releasing – *visrjan*, grasping – *grhṇan*, opening the eyes – *unmiṣan*, and closing the eyes – *nimiṣan*. Thus, the word *kurvan* of the previous verse is explained elaborately in this way in this verse.



Actions can be either voluntary or involuntary. Or they can be both, like breathing and opening and closing the eyelids. The activities mentioned in this verse stand for both voluntary and involuntary actions.

Each sense organ and organ of action has its own function to perform, its own purpose to serve. For example, the eyes see, the ears hear, and the legs walk. And the one who knows this is described here as *yukta*, *tattvavit*. *Tattvavit* means the knower of the truth of oneself and *yukta* means *samāhita*, a person who is together. Thus, the same person who was previously referred to as *yoga-yukta* and *sarvabhūta-ātmabhūta-ātmā* is called *yukta* and *tattvavit* here.

The person who is together and who knows the truth of the *ātmā* knows the self to be one who performs no action. He knows that — ‘I do not do anything — *naiva kiñcit karomi*.’ Unless a person is a *yukta*, together, he or she cannot be a *tattvavit*, wise. Therefore, the words *yukta* and *tattvavit* are used here to describe the wise person.

### LORD KṚṢṆA IS NOT GIVING A MANDATE HERE

Lord *Kṛṣṇa* is not giving a mandate to *Arjuna*, as the mood of the verb, *manyeta*, here might suggest. He is not saying, ‘You must look upon yourself as one who performs no action.’ What he is saying is that a person who is *yukta* and *tattvavit* does not consider (*na manyate*) the self to be the performer of any action. Rather, the person knows, ‘I perform no action.’

Is this because there is no action performed by the person? No, even while appearing to perform all these actions — seeing, hearing, touching, etc., the person knows that it is the sense organs and organs of action which are engaging themselves in their own spheres of activity, *indriyārtheṣu vartante*. And, knowing this very well, *dhārayan*, what does the person think while doing these actions? ‘I perform no action whatsoever, *naiva kiñcit karomi*.’

This means that *aham*, the *ātmā*, is *akartā* and performs no action. This person does not have the notion of doership in the self, meaning that he or she does not look upon the self as a doer. The *tattvavit* understands that the sense organs and organs of action are simply doing their jobs.

In the next verse, the *karma-yogī* is again discussed:

ब्रह्मण्याधाय कर्माणि सङ्गं त्यक्त्वा करोति यः ।

लिप्यते न स पापेन पद्मपत्रमिवाम्भसा ॥ १० ॥

*brahmaṇyādhāya karmāṇi saṅgaṃ tyaktvā karoti yaḥ*

*lipyate na sa pāpena padmapatramivāmbhasā*

Verse 10

यः *yaḥ* — the one who; सङ्गम् *saṅgam* — attachment; त्यक्त्वा *tyaktvā* — giving up; कर्माणि *karmāṇi* — actions; ब्रह्मणि *brahmaṇi* — unto *Brahman*; आधाय *ādhāya* — offering (one's actions); करोति *karoti* — performs; सः *saḥ* — he; पद्मपत्रम् अम्भसा इव *padmapatram ambhasā iva* — like (how) the leaf of a lotus (is not wetted) by water; पापेन *pāpena* — by sin; न लिप्यते *na lipyate* — is not affected

The one who performs actions, giving up attachment, offering (one's actions) unto *Brahman*, is not affected by sin, just as the leaf of a lotus (is not wetted) by water.

Here, *karmāṇi* refers to all actions, those enjoined by the Veda as well as all other actions. And how are these actions to be performed? Giving up attachment — *saṅgam tyaktvā* — for the results of one's actions and offering all actions to *Īśvara*, the Lord — *brahmaṇi ādhāya*. From this we understand that it is the *karma-yogī* who is being discussed here.

When it is said that the *karma-yogī* offers his or her actions to the Lord, it implies giving up one's attachment. Here a question may arise as to, how is it that one offers one's actions unto *Īśvara*. I am walking, talking, seeing, hearing, and doing various things. How can I offer these actions unto the Lord? I can understand that placing flowers or fruit at the altar of the Lord is an offering, but how can all these actions be an offering? When I am cooking, cleaning the floor, or washing the dishes, how does this action become an offering to the Lord?

## HOW ONE'S ACTIONS CAN BECOME OFFERINGS

We have already seen how one's actions can be offerings.<sup>1</sup> This is a very crucial point in terms of understanding *karma-yoga* and *dharma*. We have seen that *dharma* is two-fold — *sāmānya-dharma* and *viśeṣa-dharma*. *Sāmānya-dharma* is a term used to denote universal values such as not hurting others, not stealing, not doing things that I do not want others to do to me.

The other kind of *dharma*, *viśeṣa-dharma*, which is born out of *sāmānya-dharma*, refers to what you have to do in a given situation, given the role you are playing. Every role has a script and that script becomes *viśeṣa-dharma*, which is governed by *sāmānya-dharma*. This *sāmānya-dharma* and *viśeṣa-dharma* is nothing but *Īśvara*. Only when *Īśvara* is looked upon as *dharma* can there be an attitude of offering one's actions unto the Lord. Only then will it work. Otherwise, performing one's actions in this way becomes *Īśvara's* mandate which you have to obey. Of course, you can take what is being said here as a mandate and follow it, or you can look upon the *dharma* itself as *Īśvara*, which is how it is presented in the *Gītā*.

<sup>1</sup> Refer to *Gītā* –2-47 (Vol 1)

We will see in the eighteenth chapter how *Īśvara* and *dharma* are non-separate, the creation being pervaded by *Īśvara* — *yena sarvaṃ idaṃ tatam*.<sup>1</sup> Since the Lord is both the material and the maker, the creation is non-separate from the creator. Any natural order is a part of the creation, not something that some individual has created; it is universal — universal *dharma*.

In the eighteenth chapter, Lord *Kṛṣṇa* says that your action becomes a worship of the Lord when you perform your duty, *sva-karma*, the action that is to be done by you at a given time and place.<sup>2</sup> By doing this, *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi* is gained. By living a life of *karma-yoga*, *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi* takes place, after which the knowledge can be gained. This, then, is what is meant by *karma-yoga*.

### DHARMA IS ĪŚVARA

What we call *dharma* is to be looked upon as *Īśvara*; then, offering actions to the Lord is possible. Even if you look upon *dharma* as the mandate of *Īśvara*, there is no problem. But a mandate implies a master-servant situation, wherein the faithful, obedient servant goes about doing what is to be done without necessarily knowing why, simply because it is the mandate of the master. The servant's will is surrendered to the will of mandator, the master. In the same manner, the individual may surrender his or her will to the Lord, which is also *īśvara-arpaṇa-buddhi*.

Thus, either you take the *dharma* as a mandate or you take it as *Īśvara*. Either way, this awareness of *Īśvara* makes you a devotee. A devotee is the one who is aware that the mandate or the *dharma* is non-separate from *Īśvara*. Such people alone are devotees. They alone can be *karma-yogīs*.

A *karma-yogī* is a devotee. What is commonly called *bhakti-yoga* is actually *karma-yoga*, because only a devotee can perform actions as an offering to the Lord. Thus, the *karma-yogī* performs an action saying, 'I perform this action for the sake of *Īśvara* — meaning according to His mandate, His order. I happen to be in this situation and this is to be done. Let it be an offering, *arpaṇa*, to the Lord.' In his commentary of this verse, *Śaṅkara* equates this attitude to that of a servant who goes about doing various actions for the sake of the master.

This expression. 'For the sake of *Īśvara*' is further qualified in the verse by the words, '*saṅgaṃ tyaktvā*.' *Saṅga* means attachment, implying that the person is impelled or dictated by *rāga-dveṣas*. And *tyaktvā* means giving up. When you are impelled by likes and dislikes, you are performing action for your own sake. Whereas, if you sacrifice your likes and dislikes and perform action with the awareness of *dharma*, then you are doing it for the sake of *Īśvara*.

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<sup>1</sup> *Gītā* – 18-46

<sup>2</sup> *Gītā* – 18-46

You have no problem if what you have to do for the sake of *Īśvara* happens to be in agreement with your *rāga* and what you should not do happens to be in agreement with your *dveṣa*. Then you are a *bhakta* and your actions become spontaneous. Only when your *rāga-dveṣas* are against *dharma* does the conflict arise.

Therefore, what does a *karma-yogī* do? He or she conforms to *dharma*, even though it may be unpleasant. In this way, the action of the *karma-yogī* becomes an offering to *Īśvara*.

In the next verse *Kṛṣṇa* describes the kinds of action that a *karma-yogī* engages in, and their purpose:

कायेन मनसा बुद्ध्या केवलैरिन्द्रियैरपि ।

योगिनः कर्म कुर्वन्ति सङ्गं त्यक्त्वात्मशुद्धये ॥ ११ ॥

*kāyena manasā buddhyā kevalairindriyairapi*

*yoginaḥ karma kurvanti saṅgaṃ tyaktvātmaśuddhaye*

Verse 11

योगिनः *yoginaḥ* — *karma-yogīs*; सङ्गम् *saṅgam* — attachment; त्यक्त्वा *tyaktvā* — giving up; आत्म-शुद्धये *ātma-śuddhaye* — for the purification of the mind; केवलैः *kevalaiḥ* — purely (without being impelled by likes and dislikes); कायेन *kāyena* — with the body; मनसा *manasā* — with the mind; बुद्ध्या *buddhyā* — with the intellect; इन्द्रियैः अपि *indriyaiḥ api* — and also with the senses; कर्म *karma* — action; कुर्वन्ति *kurvanti* — perform

Giving up attachment, *karma-yogīs* perform action purely (without attachment) with the body, mind, intellect, and also by the senses, for the purification of the mind.

In this verse, we see what the *karma-yogīs* do, how they do it, and why they do it. The *karma-yogī* performs action by using his or her instruments or means, *karaṇas* — the physical body, the mind, the senses, and the intellect.

Since everyone performs actions using the body, mind, senses, and intellect, why does *Kṛṣṇa* say here that the *karma-yogī* performs actions in this way? The *karma-yogī* does exactly what others do with only one difference — giving up attachment, *saṅgam tyaktvā*. Both the *avivekī*, a person without discrimination, and the *vivekī*, *karma-yogī*, may appear to perform action in a similar way, but the *vivekī* does it having given up attachment to the results of action.

We have already seen what giving up attachment means. All one's actions are offered to the Lord without the mind being dictated by *rāga-dveṣas*. This is the reason why the adjective *kevalaiḥ* is used here. *Kevalaiḥ* means 'purely,' without likes and dislikes. This attitude is called *īśvara-arpaṇa-buddhi*. With *īśvara-arpaṇa-buddhi*, the

*yogī* performs actions. Giving up attachment also means that the results of one's actions are taken as *prasāda*, a gift from the Lord. Actions are done in keeping with *dharma*, which is *Īśvara*. This, then, is how actions are performed by the *karma-yogī*.

And what do *karma-yogīs* get out of performing action in this way? They perform action purely for *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*, for purifying the mind, *ātma-śuddhaye*, nothing more. They do not perform action for their own pleasure and security as the *avivekīs* do. This is the only difference.

Between the *karma-yogī* and the *jñānī*, there is one more difference. The *jñānī* does not have the notion of doership. The *jñānī* knows that the self is not the doer, he knows very clearly that he performs no action whatsoever. All that is happening when an action takes place is that the sense organs are engaged in their respective fields. Thus, the difference between the *jñānī* and the *karma-yogī* is that *jñānī* does not have the sense of doership whereas the *karma-yogī* does. But the *karma-yogī* has the proper attitude, *īśvara-arpaṇa-buddhi*, the awareness of *Īśvara* and, therefore, he or she gains *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*.

Because *karma-yogīs* are *mumukṣus*, they perform actions as a means for *mokṣa* just as *sannyāsīs* do, whereas those who are not *mumukṣus* perform actions for the sake of results. *Karma-yoga* is primarily for purifying the mind so that the knowledge can be gained, but it is not a direct means for *mokṣa*. This is why it is said that *karma-yogīs* perform action for the sake of *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*, which prepares the mind for knowledge.

Further, *Kṛṣṇa* says:

युक्तः कर्मफलं त्यक्त्वा शान्तिमाप्नोति नैष्ठिकीम् ।

अयुक्तः कामकारेण फले सक्तो निबध्यते ॥ १२ ॥

*yuktaḥ karmaphalaṃ tyaktvā śāntimāpnoti naiṣṭhikīm*  
*ayuktaḥ kāmakāreṇa phale saktō nibadhyate*

Verse 12

युक्तः *yuktaḥ* — the one who is endowed with (*karma-yoga*); कर्मफलम् *karma-phalam* — the result of action; त्यक्त्वा *tyaktvā* — giving up; नैष्ठिकीम् *naiṣṭhikīm* — born of a commitment to a life of *karma-yoga*; शान्तिम् *śāntim* — composure; आप्नोति *āpnoti* — gains; अयुक्तः *ayuktaḥ* — one who is not committed to a life of *karma-yoga*; कामकारेण *kāma-kāreṇa* — led by desire; फले सक्तः *phale saktāḥ* — (being) attached to the result (of action); निबध्यते *nibadhyate* — is bound

The one who is endowed with (*karma-yoga*), giving up the result of action, gains a composure born of a commitment to a life of *karma-yoga*. (Whereas) one who is not committed to a life of *karma-yoga*, led by desire, is bound, (being) attached to the result (of action).

In this verse, Lord *Kṛṣṇa* explains the meaning of ‘purification of the mind.’ Such a mind is what is implied here by the word *śānti*, meaning composure. To the extent that one has a pure mind, to that extent is his or her degree of composure.

This *śānti* is gained because of a certain freedom from *rāga-dveṣas* that is gained by living a life of *karma-yoga*. *Prasāda-buddhi* is an attitude wherein there is a glad acceptance of whatever comes. Whatever comes now and whatever has happened before are taken gladly, cheerfully. This means that nothing is taken personally, either as something that has happened to me or something that I have accomplished. And this is only possible when there is *prasāda-buddhi*.

The *karma-yogī* does not impute to the self all the omissions and commissions of the past. And, with reference to the present, whatever happens is taken as *prasāda*. He or she is not dictated by *rāga-dveṣas*.

### BEING IN HARMONY WITH THE ORDER THAT IS *ĪŚVARA*

As long as your likes and dislikes dictate your activities, you are bound to have problems of frustration, anger, and so on. Because of the pressure of *rāga-dveṣas*, such problems cannot be avoided. Whereas, if you have *īśvara-arpaṇa-buddhi*, devotion to the Lord or an awareness of the Lord as *dharma*, you are in harmony with the Lord. This is why there is always a sense of relief when you do something that is right. There is a certain satisfaction because there is no rubbing against the law. You know what is right and, if this is done, you find you are in harmony. There is no conflict. This absence of conflict is *śānti*. On the other hand, if you go against the *dharma* in order to fulfil your *rāga-dveṣas*, conflict, *aśānti* will result.

The *yukta* referred to in this verse is the *karma-yogī*, the person who performs action in accordance with the *dharma* of *Īśvara* or the *dharma* that is *Īśvara*. We saw how, if *dharma* is taken as the mandate of *Īśvara*, there is a master-servant relationship, wherein you become the servant and the Lord is the master. Then you simply do what you have to do, and what is expected of you, given the situation in which you are placed. In this way, there is a conformity to the natural order, *Īśvara’s* order, which gives you *śānti*.

And, if you look upon *dharma* as *Īśvara*, which is how *dharma* is presented in the *Gītā*, you become a contributor. As an individual you are endowed with certain means of action — hands and legs, for example — and with these you participate. You are not a mere witness; you are an active participant in the creation, which itself is *Īśvara’s* order. In keeping with the order, there is a huge offering, *yajña* going on and you contribute to it through active participation. This active participation is nothing but doing what is to be done by you when it is to be done.

If something is to be done by me right now, and I do it for *Īśvara* and not just for fulfilling my *rāga-dveṣas*, I enjoy a certain attitude which gives me composure. I give up the results of my action in the sense that there is no reaction on my part, whatever be the result. I simply accept the *karma-phala* as *prasāda*.

### WHATEVER HAPPENS IS ACCEPTABLE TO ME

Since the action is not done for the fulfilment of *rāga-dveṣas*, there is no attachment to the actions and their results. The *karma-yogī* does not desire that a given thing should happen or that some other thing should not happen. The person does not impose this kind of pressure on himself or herself. This pressure is something that you can happily be without since it is always possible that what you wish should happen may not happen, and what you do not want to happen can certainly happen. The only way to deal with such happenings is to have the attitude that whatever happens is acceptable. Otherwise, you will always have to cope with a sense of failure because, to use the vernacular, you do not call all the shots. And, since you do not call all the shots, you had better accept things as they are and do what you can do.

This is the attitude of the *karma-yogī* when he or she says, 'I perform actions for *Īśvara*.' And, with this attitude, *buddhyā*, having given up the results of action, the person gains composure, *śāntim āpnoti*. This is what is meant by purification of the mind, *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*. *Antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi* is nothing but *śānti*, an inner leisure because there is a glad acceptance of what is.

If you do not accept your past, for example, who is going to suffer? Whether anyone else accepts your past or not, you must accept it because you are the one who suffers if you do not. Of course, there may be people who do not accept your past, for whom there is no forgiveness for the sins of others, but you must accept it, at least. The glad acceptance of the past, whatever it is, brings about *śānti*.

### KARMA-YOGA IS NOT A TECHNIQUE

There is no technique involved in gaining this *śānti*. If it were born of a technique, it would not last long because any technique wears out. Either the technique becomes monotonous or it becomes inadequate in itself to significantly change you, the person. Techniques can be useful, but they cannot change the person. A restless person continues to be restless; an angry person continues to be angry.

And, just as a technique will not give you the kind of *śānti* being discussed in this verse, so too, situations cannot give it to you. This is because the situation itself changes or it eventually becomes monotonous. In either case, the *śānti* is lost. For example, when you go to a beautiful beach, you become happy, a state of mind that is also *śānti*. But this happiness depends entirely upon the situation. How long will you be able to enjoy

the sand and so on unless, of course, you are a beach bum? Even a beach bum cannot be that happy when there is no surf.

What happens here is similar to the principle of diminishing utility in the economics of Adam Smith. When you are hungry, food is very valuable but when you are not hungry, it is no more as valuable. As the utility of the food diminishes, so does your value for it. Every situational *śānti* is governed in the same way.

*Karma-yoga* is not a technique, like *prāṇāyāma*, for instance. *Prāṇāyāma* can give you a certain *śānti*, which you can utilise to understand yourself and your mind. Thus, it is a useful discipline, but it cannot give you the *śānti* being discussed here because you cannot do *prāṇāyāma* all the time.

Unlike a technique or a discipline, *karma-yoga* is not a particular action. There is no particular situation in which you follow *karma-yoga*. *Karma-yoga* is your life and, as a *karma-yogī*, you are a devotee, whose devotion is not spasmodic. It is not something that comes every now and then, and then goes away. A person who has *īśvara-arpaṇa-buddhi* is one who is abidingly devoted to *Īśvara*, taking things as they come. And when such a person performs action, he or she conforms to *dharma*. This awareness of *Īśvara* is what brings about the change in the person.

## RELATIVE ŚĀNTI AND SVARŪPA-ŚĀNTI

*Naiṣṭhikīṃ śānti*, a composure, *śānti*, born of a commitment, *niṣṭhā*, can be understood either as relative composure or absolute composure, depending upon the interpretation of the word *niṣṭhā*. *Niṣṭhā* can be *yoga-niṣṭhā*, commitment to the life of *karma-yoga*, or it can be *jñāna-niṣṭhā*, abidance in knowledge. The *śānti* born of *yoga-niṣṭhā* will be a relative *śānti*, meaning that there is a certain degree of composure, which helps you gain the knowledge. Because of the purity of the *antaḥ-karaṇa*, characterised by a relative degree of *śānti*, the person gains *jñāna-niṣṭhā* as a result of which the person gains absolute *śānti*, *parā śānti*. Thus, there is an order here — *yoga-niṣṭha-śānti*, followed by *jñāna-niṣṭha-śānti*.

*Śaṅkara* explains this order in his commentary of the verse. First, there is a *śānti* gained by *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi* or *sattva-śuddhi*, *sattva* being another word for *antaḥ-karaṇa*, the mind. When one has *sattva-śuddhi*, as a result of which, self-knowledge is gained — there is *ātma-jñāna-prāpti*. When knowledge is gained, there is *sarva-karma-sannyāsa*, renunciation of all *karma*. *Ātmā* being free from the sense of doership, the person knows, ‘I perform no action.’ This renunciation of action by knowledge is in fact *jñāna-niṣṭhā*. And the one who has this knowledge of the *ātmā* has *svarūpa-śānti*.

There being two *niṣṭhās*, both are pointed out here as the basis for *śānti* — the *śānti* born out of knowledge and *śānti* born out of *karma-yoga*. One is relative *śānti*



and the other, *svarūpa śānti*, is absolute *śānti*, *parā śānti*. Just as there is relative *ānanda*, happiness, and the *ānanda* that is the very nature of *ātmā*, the *svarūpa-ānanda*. *Svarūpa-ānanda* is my nature, meaning that I am free from all limitations, I am fullness itself, I am the whole, whereas relative *ānanda* is the experiential happiness dependent upon the disposition of the mind. *Antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi* results in relative *śānti*, whereas knowledge, *jñāna*, gives you the *svarūpa-śānti*, the *śānti*, that is your nature.

Between gaining the relative *śānti* that comes from a life of *karma-yoga* and gaining the *śānti* that is the *svarūpa* of oneself, several stages mentioned in verse 7 of this chapter have already occurred — *viśuddha-ātmā*, *viñitātmā* and so on. It was also said that the wise man was *sarvabhūta-ātmabhūta-ātmā*, the one who knows the self as the self in all beings. This knowledge has to take place to convert the relative *śānti* to *svarūpa-śānti*.

### WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A PERSON DOES NOT FOLLOW KARMA-YOGA?

The second half of this verse is an example of how the *Gītā* sometimes states the positive, followed by the negative, in order to emphasise the positive. The first line reveals what happens when a person is committed to a life of *karma-yoga*. To emphasise the value of *karma-yoga*, the second line of this verse tells what happens when a person does not follow this life-style. Such a person is referred to as *ayukta* here, one who is not endowed with *karma-yoga*.

The *ayukta* performs *karma* as dictated by *rāga-dveṣas*, rather than for the sake of *Īśvara*. He performs *karma* to fulfil his likes and dislikes and not because of any consideration for the natural order. Thus, the *ayukta* performs action only for his own sake and fails to recognise the cosmic ecology, the divine ecology, the order that is there. This person is completely oblivious to the fact that there is an order, a *dharma*, and thus performs action strictly to fulfil his desires, *kāma*. Because of the commitment to *kāma*, meaning *rāga-dveṣas*, the person is committed to the results of action, *karma-phala* rather than to the *dharma* that is *Īśvara*.

Thus, we have two opposing situations — actions performed for my own sake to fulfil my *rāga-dveṣas*, and actions performed for the sake of the world, *loka-saṅgrahārtham*, or for the sake of *Īśvara*.

When a person is dictated by *rāga-dveṣas*, consideration for right and wrong is set aside. The *ayukta* remains bound, *nibadhyate*, to *karma* and *karma-phala*, to *puṇya* and *pāpa*, and therefore, to the cycle of birth and death. Even in this life, let alone in future lives, the person is bound by *sukha-duḥkha*, being tossed from one to the other all the time as the barometer of the mood goes up and down. Today, the person is up and tomorrow he is down. Deflation and inflation are always there. Why? Because the ego is so huge, so obese, that it inflates and deflates constantly. Therefore, *Kṛṣṇa* says to

Arjuna here ‘May you become a *karma-yogī*. Once you become a *karma-yogī*, you will gain the *śānti* that will lead you to *jñāna-niṣṭhā*.

Lord *Kṛṣṇa* explains this *jñāna-niṣṭhā* in the next verse:

सर्वकर्माणि मनसा सन्न्यस्यास्ते सुखं वशी ।

नवद्वारे पुरे देही नैव कुर्वन्न कारयन् ॥ १३ ॥

*sarvakarmāṇi manasā sannyasyāste sukhaṃ vaśī*

*navadvāre pure dehī naiva kurvanna kārayan*

Verse 13

वशी *vaśī* — one who is self-controlled; देही *dehī* — the indweller of the physical body; मनसा *manasā* — mentally (by knowledge); सर्व-कर्माणि *sarva-karmāṇi* — all actions; सन्न्यस्य *sannyasya* — having renounced; नव-द्वारे पुरे *nava-dvāre pure* — in the nine-gated city (the body); एव *eva* — indeed; न कुर्वन् *na kurvan* — not acting; न कारयन् *na kārayan* — not causing (others) to act; सुखम् *sukham* — happily; आस्ते *āste* — remains

The indweller of the physical body, the one who is self-controlled, having renounced all actions mentally (by knowledge), remains happily in the nine-gated city (the body) neither performing action, nor causing (others) to act.

Here, the *jñāna-niṣṭhā* is discussed by presenting the *sannyāsī* who has renounced all actions by knowledge.

We have seen previously the two meanings of *sannyāsa*, one being the renunciation of action by will when a person takes to a life of *sannyāsa* and the other being renunciation of action by knowledge. This latter *sannyāsa* — renunciation of all action by knowledge — is the one discussed in this verse.

Because this knowledge takes place in the mind, the word *manas*, the mind, is used here in the sense of knowledge. Mentally, one gives up all *karmas*. How? By knowledge. Therefore, *manasā* means *jñānena*, by knowledge — by knowing that the *ātmā*, ‘I,’ performs no action.

The person who has this knowledge is called *vaśī* here, one who has his personality together. *Vaśa* means control. Bringing any power, like money or a kingdom, under your control is called *vaśīkaraṇa*.

What you can have under your control is your body, mind, and senses. In fact there is nothing else in your *vaśa*, not even your child. Otherwise, the child would always do as you say which is not what happens. Therefore, only your own body, mind and senses can be in your control and the person in whose control these are, is called a *vaśī*.

## THE INDWELLER OF THE BODY

A *jñānī* is naturally a *vaśī* and in this verse, is also referred to as *dehī*, one who dwells in the physical body, *deha*. *Kṛṣṇa* says here that the one who has everything under control, the indweller of the body, *dehī*, having given up all actions by knowledge, remains happily in the nine-gated city, *nava-dvāre pure*. This nine-gated city is the physical body which has nine apertures or gates — the two sockets of the eyes, the two nostrils, the two ears, and a mouth, and the two lower apertures for rejection make a total of nine. And in this nine-gated city, the *jñānī* remains happily.

Here, one can raise an objection. Since everyone dwells in the physical body, why does *Kṛṣṇa* make a point of saying that the *jñānī* alone dwells in the body? The reason is that people do not know that they are dwelling in the body. If you ask them where they are located, they will say, ‘I live in this city, in this area, on this street, in this building, in this apartment,’ and so on. They all see themselves located somewhere, but no one says, ‘I am seated in my body.’ They take the body to be the self and the body is seated somewhere; and so, they think the self is located in that place. The ignorant do not know that the body is the place where the self dwells, and that the body is not the self.

To make it clear that the body is not the self, Lord *Kṛṣṇa* describes the body here as a nine-gated city in which the person, the self, dwells. The wise man knows, ‘I am not the body; I dwell in the body.’ This is why giving up all action, knowing that action is nothing but the sense organs being engaged in their respective fields, the *jñānī* says, ‘I perform no action,’ and remains happily in the body.

The *jñānī* knows that he or she does no work. And, if you do not do any work, how can you get worked up about anything? Therefore, for the *jñānī*, there is no problem; he or she simply remains happily, *sukham āste*. People think that they would be happy if they did not have work. But, in fact, no one works at all because the self is actionless. The wise man knows this and, therefore, work is not a burden for him at all.

## ĀTMĀ DOES NOT CAUSE ANY ACTION EITHER

We saw in the third chapter how no one can completely give up all action — *na hi kaścit kṣaṇamapī jātu tiṣṭhati akarmakṛt*<sup>1</sup>. Even in deep sleep, certain involuntary activities are going on. In the eighteenth chapter also, *Kṛṣṇa* would say that it is not possible for one who has a physical body to give up all actions entirely — *na hi dehabhṛtā śakyaṃ tyaktuṃ karmāṇi aśeṣataḥ*.<sup>2</sup> As long as the person is alive, some action will go on.

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<sup>1</sup> *Gītā* – 3-5

<sup>2</sup> *Gītā* – 18-11

Why then does *Kṛṣṇa* say here that all actions are given up by the *jñānī*? If it is not possible to give up all actions completely, how does the *jñānī* renounce all actions? This verse tells us that they are given up mentally — *manasā sannyasya*. The word *manasā* makes it clear that renunciation by knowledge is what is meant here — the knowledge that *ātmā*, ‘I,’ performs no action whatsoever. We may think that *ātmā* itself does not perform action but perhaps it makes the mind, the intellect, and so on, perform action. But *ātmā* neither performs actions — *na karoti*, nor directs, the body, the senses, the mind or the intellect to perform action — *na kārayati*. This is what is meant by saying that the *jñānī* has renounced all action by knowledge. And with this knowledge the *jñānī* abides in the happiness, fullness, that is his or her own nature.

### THE MASTER OF THE NINE-GATED CITY

In a walled city, there would always be a king, a *svāmī*, or master of the various activities going on inside the city. The wise person is also called a *svāmī* because he or she is the master of the body, mind, and senses. This *svāmī* dwells in the body, the nine-gated city, and remains happily, *sukham āste*, because he or she does not identify with the body, mind, and senses.

This *svāmī* understands that physical body-mind-sense complex is a city, *pura*, and that he is the *pura-svāmī*, the master of the city, performing no action. This person does not have the problems that a king has because he knows that *ātmā* neither performs action nor causes others to perform action. *Kṛṣṇa* said the same thing in the second chapter when he told *Arjuna* that the one who knows the *ātmā* kills no one nor causes anyone to kill.<sup>1</sup> Such a person performs no action whatsoever, either directly or indirectly.

The nature of *ātmā* is consciousness and, therefore, it performs no action. At the same time, no action is possible without the *ātmā*. Thus, there is no seer without the *ātmā*, but *ātmā* is not the seer; there is no hearer without the *ātmā*, but *ātmā* is not the hearer. Knowing this is what is meant by *manasā sannyasya*, renouncing mentally, in terms of knowledge. Seeing, I perform no action of seeing; hearing, I perform, no action of hearing; thinking, I perform no action of thinking.

*Ātmā*, ‘I,’ never performs any action. *Ātmā* never performed action before, nor does *ātmā* perform action now. Previously, the person did not know that and now he or she does. Knowing this fact, he or she is free from all doing.

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<sup>1</sup> *Gītā* – 2-21

In the next verse, *Kṛṣṇa* goes on to describe this freedom.

न कर्तृत्वं न कर्माणि लोकस्य सृजति प्रभुः।

न कर्मफलसंयोगं स्वभावस्तु प्रवर्तते ॥ १४ ॥

*na kartṛtvaṃ na karmāṇi lokasya sṛjati prabhuḥ*  
*na karmaphalasaṃyogaṃ svabhāvastu pravartate*

Verse 14

प्रभुः *prabhuḥ* — the one who is self-effulgent (*ātmā*); लोकस्य *lokasya* — for any person; कर्तृत्वम् *kartṛtvam* — doership; न सृजति *na sṛjati* — does not create; न कर्माणि (सृजति) *na karmāṇi (sṛjati)* — nor (does he create) actions; न कर्म-फल-संयोगम् (सृजति) *na karma-phala-saṃyogam (sṛjati)* — nor the connection with the results of action; तु *tu* — but; स्वभावः *svabhāvāḥ* — one's own nature; प्रवर्तते *pravartate* — leads to action

*Ātmā* creates neither doership nor action for any person nor the connection with the results of action. But one's own nature leads to action.

In this verse, we are told why the wise person can remain happily in the physical body. *Ātmā*, the one who is self-existent, is called *prabhu* here. Existence cannot be established unless there is consciousness, and therefore, that which is self-existent must be self-effulgent, and is called *prabhu* here.

And this *prabhu* does not create, *na sṛjati*, doership, *kartṛtva*, for the person, *lokasya*. *Ātmā* does not issue order to anyone, and therefore, does not create doership in anyone.

Doership can be created in you if someone orders you, 'Please do this!' and you do it. *Ātmā* does not ask anyone to do anything, nor does it ask the mind, the intellect, or the memory to do, to think, to decide. It does not say, 'Come on, recollect! Get depressed! Get angry! Learn *Vedānta*!' It does not issue such orders to anyone. It is not the cause of doership within oneself, nor is it the cause of anyone else's doership.

The person who knows this was described in the previous verse as a *vaśī* meaning master, one who is seated happily inside the nine-gated city, the physical body, just as a king sits in his walled city with many gates. There is, however, as in all illustrations, a defect in this comparison between a king and a *vaśī*. All the work is done by others, but still the king is a *kartā*, a doer. He sits on his throne wearing a crown and wields the royal sceptre of power.

The question now is, is *ātmā* also a doer, like a king? Is *ātmā* seated in its inner chambers ordering the mind, the intellect, and so on, to do this and that? If so, *ātmā* would also be a *kartā*, a doer. In response to this question, Lord *Kṛṣṇa* says that *ātmā*

does not create or cause doership, *karṭṛtvaṃ na sṛjati*, meaning that even indirectly the *ātmā* is not involved in doing anything.

Now a question may arise here. While I can understand that *ātmā* is not a doer, is it not the *ātmā* that makes the mind and senses function? Even the *śruti* describes the *ātmā* as the ear of the ear, *śrotrasya śrotram*, the mind of the mind, *manaso manaḥ*, the eye of the eye, *caḥṣuṣascakṣuḥ*, and so on. Since *ātmā* is said to be behind all the functions, does *ātmā* not order all of them? No! *Kṛṣṇa* says here, that it is not so.

### ĀTMĀ DOES NOT CREATE KARMA

*Ātmā* does not create any action, *karmāṇi na sṛjati*, meaning that *ātmā* performs no action, *karmāṇi na karoti*. Thus, *na sṛjati*, ‘does not create,’ is understood as *na karoti*, ‘does not do.’ *Ātmā* does not perform action directly or indirectly.

If we translate the word *karmāṇi* in its grammatical sense, then the phrase, *karmāṇi na sṛjati*, means that *ātmā* does not create objects. ‘Karma’ in grammar means the object of a verb such as chariot, pot, house, etc. These are called objects in terms of action. For example when you say, ‘He makes a pot,’ ‘She bakes a cake,’ ‘The children eat food,’ the objects like pot, cake, food, and others are not created by *ātmā*. *Ātmā* neither performs actions nor creates objects — *karmāṇi na sṛjati*. Thus, the word *karmāṇi* here can be understood as the object of an action as well as the action itself.

### ĀTMĀ ALSO DOES NOT CREATE KARMA-PHALA -SAMĶYOGA

Since the results of action are accrued to the doer, the *kartā*, *Kṛṣṇa* also says that *ātmā* does not create this connection between the result of an action and the doer — *na karma-phala-samᶑyogam sṛjati*. The results of action are in keeping with the laws of *Īśvara*, but here we are talking about *Īśvara’s svarūpa*, which is also *ātmā*, the self. Since *ātmā* does not create doership nor objects, it does not create the connection between one’s actions and the results of action.

If *ātmā* does not do anything, who is it that does all this? *Kṛṣṇa* says, *svabhāvastu pravartate*, one’s own nature engages itself. We saw this in verse 9 of this chapter when *Kṛṣṇa* said, ‘The sense organs engage themselves in the sense objects.’ The sense organs are *svabhāva*. The eyes see, the ears hear, the mind thinks, the intellect decides, and so on.

Due to lack of discrimination, one superimposes these activities on the *ātmā*. This is why one thinks, ‘I am the doer,’ ‘I am the thinker,’ and so on. Since people do not know that there is this superimposition, *Kṛṣṇa* discusses it in the next verse.

नादत्ते कस्यचित्पापं न चैव सुकृतं विभुः ।

अज्ञानेनावृतं ज्ञानं तेन मुह्यन्ति जन्तवः ॥ १५ ॥

*nādatte kasyacitpāpaṃ na caiva sukṛtaṃ vibhuḥ  
ajñānenāvṛtaṃ jñānaṃ tena muhyanti jantavaḥ*

Verse 15

विभुः *vibhuḥ* —the all pervasive (*ātmā*); कस्यचित् *kasyacit* — of anyone; पापम् *pāpam* — *pāpa*; न आदत्ते *na ādatte* — does not accept; सुकृतम् *sukṛtam* — *puṇya*; च न एव *ca na eva* — and indeed not; अज्ञानेन *ajñānena* — by ignorance; ज्ञानम् *jñānam* — knowledge; आवृतम् *āvṛtam* — covered; तेन *tena* — because of that (ignorance); जन्तवः *jantavaḥ* — people; मुह्यन्ति *muhyanti* — are deluded

The *ātmā* accepts neither the *pāpa* nor the *puṇya* of anyone. Knowledge is covered by ignorance and because of that (ignorance) people are deluded.

It was said earlier the *ātmā* does not create the connection between one's actions and the results. That is being explained here by saying that *ātmā* does not take on *puṇya* or *pāpa* because *ātmā* does not have enjoyership, *bhoktrva*. It is one luminous self that lights up the *antaḥ-karaṇa*. *Ātmā* is called seer, *draṣṭā*, because seeing cannot take place without *ātmā*, but in reality *ātmā* is the very *svarūpa* of the seer, and not the seer in the primary sense. The seer is *ātmā*, but *ātmā* is not the seer. *Ātmā*'s nature is *caitanya*, pure consciousness, which is why it is referred to as the ear of the ear, the eye of the eye, and so on. Therefore, there is no connection between *ātmā* and the results of action; neither the *pāpa* nor the *puṇya* of anyone is taken by *ātmā*.

## KNOWLEDGE IS COVERED BY IGNORANCE

If this is so, why do people think, 'I am the doer,' 'I am the enjoyer,' 'I am performing this ritual for this reason,' and so on? There is nothing wrong with performing action to invoke the grace of the Lord. It is all to be done — as long as you do not understand *ātmā*. Once you have the knowledge of the true nature of *ātmā* such action is not necessary. Presently, this knowledge is covered by ignorance — *ajñānena āvṛtam*. The very fact that you do not know that *ātmā* is not a doer means there is ignorance. Since knowledge, *jñāna*, can only take place in your mind, not knowing *ātmā* means that your mind is covered by ignorance.

The word *jñāna* here can be taken to mean either the discriminative knowledge of *ātmā* and *anātmā*, or the mind. We can say either that the mind is covered by ignorance or the discriminative knowledge is covered by ignorance, the idea being that knowledge is never created, it is only covered.

Human beings are deluded because the discriminative knowledge of *ātmā* is covered by ignorance. And what is the delusion, the *moha*, here? 'I am a doer. I will do this. I will get this result. I will go to heaven. I will accomplish this by doing that,' and so on — all of which is because the knowledge is covered by ignorance.

The next verse explains what happens when this ignorance is removed:

ज्ञानेन तु तदज्ञानं येषां नाशितमात्मनः ।

तेषामादित्यवज्ज्ञानं प्रकाशयति तत्परम् ॥ १६ ॥

*jñānena tu tadjñānaṃ yeṣāṃ nāśitamātmanah  
teṣāmādityavajjñānaṃ prakāśayati tatparam*

Verse 16

तु *tu* — whereas; आत्मनः *ātmanah* — of the self; ज्ञानेन *jñānena* — by knowledge; येषाम् *yeṣām* — whose; तत् *tat* — that; अज्ञानम् *ajñānam* — ignorance; नाशितम् *nāśitam* — is destroyed; तेषाम् *teṣām* — for them; ज्ञानम् *jñānam* — knowledge; आदित्यवत् *ādityavat* — like the sun; तत् परम् *tat param* — that (the self as) *Brahman*; प्रकाशयति *prakāśayati* — reveals

Whereas for those whose ignorance of the self is destroyed by knowledge, the knowledge reveals (the self as) that *Brahman*, like the sun (reveals objects previously covered in darkness).

*Ajñāna*, ignorance, here is not the absence of knowledge, but is that which is opposed to knowledge. Ignorance exists only until it is removed by knowledge. This word *ajñāna* is not to be interpreted as absence of knowledge, because absence, *abhāva*, cannot cause problems; only presence of something, *bhāva* can cause problems. Therefore, *ajñāna* is not absence of knowledge, *jñāna-abhāva*. Ignorance is opposed to knowledge and, because it causes problems, ignorance is a very crucial issue. Because it is opposed to knowledge, ignorance has a certain status of existence as long as it lasts. However, in the wake of knowledge, it cannot exist at all. Therefore, ignorance can rule the roost only until another rooster, knowledge, takes its place.

## WHEN DOES THE IGNORANCE GO?

Just as darkness is there until the light comes in, so too, ignorance will be there until knowledge comes. This is what *Kṛṣṇa* means when he says, ‘Ignorance of the self is destroyed by knowledge.’

This ignorance has an existence, *bhāva*, and therefore, causes error and problems. Ignorance of the rope, for example, causes the error of a snake which causes fear. In dream also, ignorance of the waker on the part of the dreamer causes problems like a millionaire dreaming that he is a beggar and vice versa.

And by what knowledge is this ignorance destroyed? Just as ignorance of a pot can only be destroyed by knowledge of the pot, and not by knowledge of cloth, so too, ignorance of the *ātmā* can only be destroyed by knowledge of the *ātmā*.



For whom is this ignorance of the self destroyed? The knowledge that the self is *Brahman* takes place in the minds of those who were ignorant. *Kṛṣṇa* likens this knowledge to the sun. As the sun rises, darkness rolls away. And not only does the sun cause the darkness to roll away, it also lights up everything there is. As the sun rises in the eastern sky, the darkness rolls away and the objects that previously were not visible now come to be lighted. Like the sun, self-knowledge destroys self-ignorance and reveals the self-ignorance and reveals the self as *Brahman*, *tatparaṃ prakāśayati*, a fact which was previously not known.

The analogy here between knowledge and the sun must be understood properly; otherwise, this verse can be very confusing. It is not that knowledge lights up the self that you can then see. Rather, knowledge destroys the ignorance you had about the self and reveals a fact that was unknown to you — the fact that you are *Brahman*. Knowledge does not light up the self; the self itself is the light. Knowledge destroys the ignorance and reveals the nature of the self.

This knowledge is *vṛtti-jñāna*. The word *vṛtti* means thought. Here the *vṛtti* is, ‘I am *Brahman* — *ahaṃ brahma asmi*.’ This *vṛtti* takes place in the mind and is what is meant by the knowledge that destroys the ignorance of the self, revealing the truth about the self being *Brahman*. ‘I am *Brahman*’ is the truth of all truths, the ultimate truth, *tattva*, that one comes to recognise by this knowledge born of the teaching of the *śāstra*.

In the next verse, *Kṛṣṇa* describes those who have come to recognise the fact that *ātma* is *Brahman*.

तद्बुद्धयस्तदात्मानस्तन्निष्ठास्तत्परायणाः ।

गच्छन्त्यपुनरावृत्तिं ज्ञाननिर्धूतकल्मषाः ॥ १७ ॥

*tadbuddhayastadātmanastanniṣṭhāstatparāyaṇāḥ*

*gacchantyapunarāvṛttiṃ jñānanirdhūtakalmaṣāḥ*

Verse 17

तद्बुद्धयः *tadbuddhayaḥ* — those whose intellect is awake to that (*Brahman*); तदात्मानः *tadātmanāḥ* — those for whom the self is that (*Brahman*); तन्निष्ठाः *tanniṣṭhāḥ* — those who are committed only to that (*Brahman*); तत्परायणाः *tatparāyaṇāḥ* — those for whom the ultimate end is that (*Brahman*); ज्ञान-निर्धूत-कल्मषाः *jñāna-nirdhūta-kalmaṣāḥ* — those whose impurities have been destroyed by knowledge; अपुनरावृत्तिम् *apunarāvṛttim* — a state of no return; गच्छन्ति *gacchanti* — they attain

Those whose intellect is awake to that (*Brahman*), for whom the self is that (*Brahman*), who are committed only to that (*Brahman*), for whom the ultimate end is that (*Brahman*) which they have already accomplished), whose impurities have been destroyed by knowledge — they attain a state from which there is no return.

In the previous verse, *Kṛṣṇa* said that knowledge reveals the truth that *ātmā* is *Brahman*. That *Brahman* is the meaning of the pronoun ‘that,’ *tat*, occurring in the compound words in the present verse — *tadbuddhayaḥ*, *tadātmānaḥ*, *tanniṣṭhāḥ*, and *tatparāyaṇāḥ*.<sup>1</sup>

Because of this knowledge, the wise become *tadbuddhayaḥ*, *tadātmānaḥ*, *tanniṣṭhāḥ*, and *tatparāyaṇāḥ*. All of their impurities are destroyed by this knowledge and, when they go, meaning when they die, they do not return again. There is an order to be noted here, as we shall see by analysing these compounds one by one.

### THOSE WHO ARE AWAKE TO BRAHMAN

*Tadbuddhis* are those whose *buddhi* is in *Brahman*, meaning that the *buddhi* is awake to the knowledge of *ātmā* being *Brahman*. In *Brahman*, their *buddhi* is rooted. Previously the *buddhi* was awake only to *anātmā* — the *ahaṅkāra*, the ego, or I-notion. When the *buddhi* is awake only to *anātmā*, it is always concerned with securities, *artha*, and pleasure, *kāma*, because the ‘I’ always feels small and has to be boosted up. Only then can the person feel good. Everything is centred on feeling good and that is necessarily dependent upon a number of external physical and psychological factors. Therefore, the *ahaṅkāra* always holds on to these factors, which are all *anātmās*.

However, for the *tadbuddhis*, those who are awake to *Brahman*, whose *buddhi* is in *Brahman*, everything is *Brahman* alone. The *buddhi* is *Brahman*, the mind is *Brahman*, the body is *Brahman*, everything is *Brahman* alone. Therefore, the *buddhi* is never away from *Brahman*. Go where it will, the *buddhi* is always in *Brahman* alone.

### THOSE FOR WHOM THE SELF IS BRAHMAN

Why are these people called *tadbuddhis*? Because, for them, the *ātmā* is *Brahman*, they are *tadātmās*. Previously the body, mind, intellect, memory, and so on were *ātmā*. History was *ātmā*; biology was *ātmā*. Even the hair and skin were *ātmā* — ‘I am blonde,’ ‘I am black,’ etc. Money was also *ātmā* — ‘I am rich,’ ‘I am poor.’ The body’s physiological system was *ātmā* — ‘I am restless,’ ‘I am sad,’ and so on. Even time and nationality were *ātmā* — ‘I am young,’ ‘I am old,’ ‘I am an American, Indian,’ etc. These, then, are some of the many notions people have about *ātmā*.

<sup>1</sup>?? ????????? (?????)

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Do not make the mistake of thinking that all of these I-notions together constitute the *ātmā* because some are contradictory. Each of them has its own problems. For example, when you say, ‘I am an Indian,’ there is a problem and when you say, ‘I am an American,’ there is another problem. If you take the sense organs to be the *ātmā*, there is the problem of requiring reading glasses because you cannot see well, or having to have everything repeated to you three times because you cannot hear well! Since all memories are not pleasant or interesting, memory also is a problem. Everything is limited in some way or the other and therefore, taking any of these to be *ātmā* is a problem.

Everyone has this problem of placing the I-notion somewhere — one says, ‘This is I,’ with reference to the body, mind, etc. This verse says that for the wise, the notion, ‘This is I’ is totally negated and the ‘I’ is recognised as pure consciousness — that which is not limited in any way, and which is the truth that is the basis of the entire world. The *jagat* is understood as *mithyā* by this person — *mithyā* being that which is dependent on *satya*, while *satya* is self-existent.

Only the self can be self-existent. Nothing else is self-existent. Those for whom the self, the ‘I,’ is this self-existent *Brahman* are called *tadātmānaḥ*.

#### THOSE WHO ARE COMMITTED TO BRAHMAN

*Niṣṭhā* means commitment, as we have seen in our study of the third chapter. For example, a *japa-niṣṭha* is one who is committed to the practice of *japa*, and a *tapo-niṣṭha* is one who is committed to the practice of certain spiritual or religious disciplines called *tapas*. A *yoga-niṣṭha* is one who is committed to the eight-fold discipline called *aṣṭāṅga-yoga*. There are thus a variety of *niṣṭhās*, commitments. This verse refers to those who are committed to *Brahman* alone.

For the *tanniṣṭhas*, *Brahman* is all that counts because all there is, is *Brahman*, and therefore, for them, there is nothing else to be counted. Having this knowledge, there is nothing more for them to accomplish. If there were something more for them to accomplish, their *niṣṭhā*, commitment, would shift. Perhaps they would do *japa* for some time and then their *niṣṭhā* would shift to something else. Such a shift in commitment does not happen for the *tanniṣṭhas* whose commitment is to *Brahman* alone. This means that their knowledge of *ātmā* is firm; it is no longer shaky. They have no vagueness nor any more problems to solve with reference to the self, and therefore, nothing further to accomplish.

#### THOSE FOR WHOM THE ULTIMATE END IS BRAHMAN

Having become *tanniṣṭhas*, *brahma-niṣṭhas*, what else remains for these people to do? Whether they do or do not do anything, it is the same for them because they have already gained the ultimate end that is *Brahman*. *Parāyaṇa* means the ultimate end, the

real home and those for whom the ultimate end is *Brahman*, *tat*, are called *tatparāyaṇas*.

Knowing that *Brahman* is *ātmā*, is the goal that they have to accomplish. And now that they have this knowledge, there is no more goal. This is what *Kṛṣṇa* meant earlier when he said, ‘The one who sees *Brahman* in everything attains *Brahman*, is *Brahman*.’

People have different goals — security, *artha*, pleasures, *kāma* — either here or in the hereafter like heaven and so on. But, for the wise, there is no goal other than *Brahman*, which they already are. Because they are *tadbuddhayaḥ*, *tadātmānaḥ*, and *tanniṣṭhāḥ*, they are *tatparāyaṇāḥ*. This means that their goal is accomplished; there is nothing more to be done.

### SELF-KNOWLEDGE REMOVES ALL ONE'S IMPURITIES

*Kṛṣṇa* then describes these people as *jñāna-nirdhūta-kalmaṣas*, those whose impurities, *kalmaṣas*, have been removed, *nirdhūta*, by knowledge, *jñānena*. And what are these impurities that have been removed? Likes and dislikes, ignorance and error, *punya* and *pāpa*, happiness and unhappiness — all of these are referred to here as *kalmaṣa*, impurities. These impurities are removed by knowledge.

When such people go, meaning when they die, they do not come back, that is, they are not born again — *apunarāvṛttiṃ gacchanti*. And while living, they are already *tadbuddhayaḥ*, *tadātmānaḥ*, *tanniṣṭhāḥ*, and *tatparāyaṇāḥ*.

*Jñāna-nirdhūta-kalmaṣas* are *jīvanmuktas*, people who are free, even when they are alive. And they cannot become bound again when they die, because there is no ‘they.’ They are *Brahman* and *Brahman* does not come and go, let alone come back. For such people, there is no more duality; there is only *Brahman* who is *Īśvara* and also the world. Those who know the self as *Brahman* gain an end from which there is no return, *apunarāvṛttiṃ gacchanti*; there is no longer any connection to another physical body.

How do these people, whose self-ignorance is destroyed, see the truth? Do they see the world differently from those who are ignorant?

विद्याविनयसम्पन्ने ब्राह्मणे गवि हस्तिनि ।

शुनि चैव श्वपाके च पण्डिताः समदर्शिनः ॥ १८ ॥

*vidyāvinayasampanne brāhmaṇe gavi hastini*

*śuni caiva śvapāke ca paṇḍitāḥ samadarśinaḥ*

Verse 18

विद्या-विनय-सम्पन्ने *vidyā-vinaya-sampanne* — in one who is endowed with knowledge and humility; ब्राह्मणे *brāhmaṇe* — in a *brāhmaṇa*; गवि *gavi* — in a cow; हस्तिनि *hastini*

— in an elephant; शुनि च *śuni ca* — and in a dog श्वपाके एव च *śvapāke eva ca* — and indeed in a dog-eater; पण्डिताः *paṇḍitāḥ* — wise people; समदर्शिनः *samadarśinaḥ* — (are) those who see the same (*Brahman*)

Wise people are indeed those who see the same (*Brahman*) in a *brāhmaṇa* who is endowed with knowledge and humility, in a cow, in an elephant, in a dog, and (even) in a dog-eater.

In this verse, *Kṛṣṇa* says that wise people become *samadarśīs*. They see the same *Brahman*, *sama*, which is not subject to change, in everything. This means they are able to recognise *Brahman* everywhere, as that which is not affected or stained in any way by *puṇya* or *pāpa* or by different types of impressions, *saṃskāras*, be they conscious or unconscious. They know everyone to be that *Brahman* that remains untouched by all *karma* and *karma-phala* because it remains always the same, unaffected by any change whatsoever.

*Brahman* remains the same, unstained by anything, eternally pure, and is never involved in any way, at any time. Remaining uninvolved itself, *Brahman* is that without which no involvement is possible. This is the beauty of *Brahman*, which is *ātmā*, the self. Those who see this *sama*, *Brahman*, everywhere, in everything, are called *samadarśīs*.

To make this point, *Kṛṣṇa* points out a few instances in which the wise see the *sama*, *Brahman*. The first is a *brāhmaṇa*, described here as a *vidyā-vinaya-sampanna*, one who is endowed with both knowledge and humility. In such a *brāhmaṇa*, the wise person sees the same *Brahman* as he or she sees in a cow – *gavi*, in an elephant – *hastini*, in a dog – *śuni*, and even in a dog-eater – *śvapāke*.

From childhood onwards, a *brāhmaṇa* is brought up in a religious way and lives according to the rules and stipulations set out for *brāhmaṇas* in the Veda. Such a person therefore, has devotion, a prayerful mind, knowledge, and humility. Naturally, such a person also has good *saṃskāras* and a relatively happy mind free of emotional problems. Because this person is endowed with knowledge and humility, his or her actions are always good, thereby creating a lot of *puṇya* for the person. Is the *brāhmaṇa-ātmā* affected by good *saṃskāras*? ‘No,’ *Kṛṣṇa* says here.

A cow, an elephant, and a dog, on the other hand, have no *saṃskāras* whatsoever, neither good nor bad. They behave according to the particular programme governing the species to which they belong. Still, there is a difference between a cow and an elephant, for example, in terms of the qualities — *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*. The cow is not a lazy animal; it does not have a predominance of *tamas*. It has some *sattva* and a lot of *rajas* in that it is active. An elephant, however, even though a very intelligent animal, has more *tamas* because it moves slowly. And a water buffalo has much more *tamas*! Dolphins and whales, for example, seem to have more *sattva*, intelligence, as evident by the

manner in which they respond to people, as compared to many other animals. Thus, there are differences in qualities in different animals. Here, *Kṛṣṇa* probably mentions the dog in order to bring in the dog-eater, a person considered to be despicable.

In all of them — the *brāhmaṇa*, the cow, the elephant, the dog, and the dog-eater — the wise see one *ātmā*. And what is that *ātmā*? *Sama-ātmā*, *ātmā* that is never subject to change and, therefore, unaffected by either good or bad *saṃskāras*. Nor is *ātmā* affected by any of the qualities or attributes, *guṇas* — *tamas*, *rajas* and *sattva* — even though it is the basis for all of them. *Ātmā* is the truth of all of them because without *ātmā* none of them can exist. However, *ātmā* itself is free from all of them. This is the *ātmā*, *Brahman*, that is the same in all. If *ātmā* could be affected in any way, then the dog-*ātmā* would be different from the elephant-*ātmā* and so on. When the dog bends its head, the *ātmā* will also bend! If this is your understanding, you may think that when you were born, your *ātmā* was innocent and now the *ātmā* has become wild, sad, or whatever. You may also think that you are all of these things and that they cannot be removed. To correct such thinking, *Kṛṣṇa* makes it clear that *ātmā* is always pure, *śuddha*.

The wise people, called *paṇḍitas* here, are those who see *Brahman*, which is not subject to modification, in everyone and everything. Because they have this vision, these *paṇḍitas* are more than scholars; therefore, they are also called *samadarsīs*.

*Kṛṣṇa* then explains what is attained by those who have this vision of sameness:

इहैव तैर्जितः सर्गो येषां साम्ये स्थितं मनः ।

निर्दोषं हि समं ब्रह्म तस्माद् ब्रह्मणि ते स्थिताः ॥ १९ ॥

*ihaiva tairjitaḥ sargo yeṣāṃ sām्यe sthitaṃ manaḥ*

*nirdoṣaṃ hi samaṃ brahma tasmādbrahmaṇi te sthitāḥ* Verse 19

येषाम् *yeṣāṃ* — whose; मनः *manaḥ* — mind; साम्ये *sām्यe* — in that which is the same (in *Brahman*); स्थितम् *sthitam* — rooted; इह एव *iha eva* — even here (in this life); तैः *taiḥ* — by those (wise people); सर्गः *sargaḥ* — the cycle of birth and death (*saṃsāra*); जितः *jitaḥ* — is won over; हि *hi* — because; निर्दोषम् *nirdoṣam* — free from any defect; ब्रह्म *brahma* — *Brahman*; समम् *samam* — same; तस्मात् *tasmāt* — therefore; ते *te* — they; ब्रह्मणि *brahmaṇi* — in *Brahman*; स्थिताः *sthitāḥ* — abide

The cycle of birth and death (*saṃsāra*) is won over by those whose mind is rooted in the same (that is *Brahman*) here itself (in this life). Since *Brahman*, that is free from any defect, is (always) the same, they (the wise people) abide in *Brahman*.

We have seen how those who have knowledge of the *ātmā* being *Brahman* are free from doership and enjoyership caused by ignorance and error. Their self-ignorance

and everything caused by it has been destroyed in the wake of knowledge. Their minds are awake to *ātmā* being *Brahman*, being free from any sense of limitation. They know they are free because, for them, the 'I' is *Brahman* alone. There is no longer any doubt or error and nothing more remains to be accomplished.

Such people see *Brahman* in everyone and everything, from the most exalted to the lowliest. How? Because they know that there is only one *ātmā* in all of them and that the *ātmā* in all beings is the *ātmā* that is their own self. They know that the *ātmā* is not affected by anything that happens to the body, mind, or senses, be it the respected *brāhmaṇa's ātmā* or the dog-eater's *ātmā*.

*Ātmā* is one, whole, limitless, and is manifest in every intellect, just as there is one whole space present in every stomach. Just as you find the all pervasive space wherever you go, so too is consciousness everywhere. Consciousness is not limited by time and space. Consciousness is always there in any place and all movement takes place in consciousness. *Ātmā* is this consciousness. Those who know this are *samadarsīis* because they recognise the *ātmā* that is the same in all beings.

## THE MIND HAS TO BE PREPARED

The wise do not take the *ātmā* as a limited entity, knowing that it is all-pervasive and unaffected. *Ātmā* is not affected by the body or the nature of even a dog-eater, or anything the person does, but the ignorant do not recognise this fact. If a wise man were to teach a dog-eater, what would he teach him? Would he say, 'Your *ātmā* is impure because you have been eating dogs?' *Ātmā* is ever pure and so, a wise man cannot make such a statement. Therefore, all he can teach is '*tat tvam asi*,' regardless of whether the listener is an angel, a god, or a dog-eater. And how can one say, '*tat tvam asi*,' unless the self happens to be *tat*, the self of everything?

*Ātmā* is the truth of everything and hence, it is always the same. It does not undergo any change. This is why the wise can share his or her vision with anyone. The question, of course, remains whether the listener will be able to understand the teaching. He or she may require some polishing, for which we have various disciplines. First, the dog may be removed from the dog-eater's diet so that the person can become a little more sensitive, and that may be followed by other disciplines such as prayer. Only when the mind of the listener has been prepared, can the knowledge take place.

None of the preparations being discussed here are to purify the *ātmā*. It is only to prepare the person's mind to recognise that the *ātmā* has always been pure. There is no other purpose for such a preparation. It is not a preparation for *ātmā*; it is a preparation for the mind. Nor does this preparation have anything to do with changing the cells of a person's physical body. The preparation has only to do with the person's mind. The mind has to be prepared and that is all we try to do.

**TREATING EVERYONE AS EQUAL IS NOT THE POINT**

Another point that Śaṅkara clarifies in his introduction to this verse is that when Kṛṣṇa says that the wise see the same *ātmā* in everyone, it does not mean that he treats everyone equally.

Suppose a person looks upon a *brāhmaṇa* and a dog-eater as equals, placing them on the same pedestal, so to speak. Can you say that such a person has the vision of the same, *Brahman*, in all? Not necessarily; the person may be ignorant, not wise.

What must be understood here is that it is not that the wise do not perceive a dog-eater as a dog-eater; of course, they do. What Kṛṣṇa says here is that they recognise one *ātmā* in everyone and everything — one self that is the self, the truth, of all. These are the people being discussed in this verse; they alone are *samadarśīs* referred to in the previous verse.

The word *sarga* means birth and implies the cycle of births and deaths called *saṃsāra*, the life of becoming that the ignorant are caught up in. The *saṃsāra* is now won over (*jīta*) by the wise, which means that there is no future birth for them. And the winning over takes place while one is alive, in this body, in this life, at this time — right now, here, *iha eva*. These people have gained a victory over this life of becoming through knowledge, thereby proving that such a victory is indeed possible.

Kṛṣṇa then describes the mind of those who gain this victory, as being established or steady, *sthita*, in that which has sameness, *sāmye*, that which does not undergo any change whatsoever — *Brahman*.

**ĀTMĀ IS FREE FROM ATTRIBUTES**

Not being subject to time, *Brahman* undergoes no change whatsoever. *Brahman* has no qualities and therefore, there is nothing that can undergo change. A substance, for example has its own peculiar attributes. By adding or taking away certain attributes, the substance undergoes a change. Even if the substance is left alone, in the course of time its attributes undergo changes. Thus, it always goes on changing.

There is only one thing that does not undergo any change whatsoever and that is *ātmā*, that is *Brahman*. Even space disappears in sleep, but not *Brahman*. Not being subject to change, there is no death for the *ātmā*. *Ātmā* neither dies nor does it cause anything to die. Death is only for a substance that obtains within time.

If you analyse *ātmā*, you will see it can only be *caitanya*, consciousness. The analysis itself is possible because of my being conscious of my mind, senses, body, this world, and other people, with reference to which I take myself to be a separate entity, which is not true. In fact, all that I can objectify is *anātmā*; *ātmā* is the only one that is self-evident.



Even time is evident to this self-evident *ātmā*. Time does not objectify consciousness; rather, in my consciousness there is the concept of time. Anything other than *ātmā*, being totally dependent upon *ātmā* for its existence, is called *mithyā* and *ātmā*, that is self-existent, is *satya*, the truth of everything. Not being bound by time, *satya-ātmā* is not subject to change or death; it always remains the same. Therefore, in this verse, *ātmā* is called *sāmya*, meaning that the self is in everything and yet is not affected by *puṇya-ṛāpa* or the qualities of *tamas, rajas,* and *sattva*.

And for whom is this *sāmya*, the *ātmā*? Certainly not for the one who is affected. Suppose I take myself as one who possesses the good qualities of a *brāhmaṇa*, for example, can I sit beside a dog-eater and watch him eat, even if the food is nicely served and the table beautifully decorated with flowers and all? Of course not. Being a humble *brāhmaṇa*, I will surely shrink and want to leave immediately.

If I am the *ātmā* that enjoys the attributes of scholarship and so on, and another *ātmā* is the one who has the attributes of ignorance and error, then definitely each *ātmā* is different. But the wise people, *paṇḍitas, samadarśīs*, have the vision of the self that is the same in all, unaffected by anything and everything that happens to be done by anyone.

## MOKṢA IS NOT AFTER DEATH

For those whose minds are awake to this *ātmā*, the life of becoming, *saṃsāra*, is no more, even while they are alive, here, *iha eva*, in this body. This means that freedom, *mokṣa*, is not after death. How can knowledge of *ātmā* happen after death? All you do after death is travel. If you spend your life meditating on *Brahman* as the cause of everything, praying to that *Brahman* and so on, without understanding that you are *Brahman*, then you may go to *brahma-loka*, the heaven considered to be the greatest of all the heavens.

Please do not ask me if there is a *brahma-loka*. I cannot prove that there is, and you cannot prove that there is not. Therefore, let us simply assume that *brahma-loka* is, and that you, having lived a life of devotion to *Īśvara*, will go there and live with *Brahmāji* for some time. There you will enjoy peace and whatever happiness *brahma-loka* has to offer. Eventually, *Brahmāji* may even decide to teach you. What will he teach? He can teach only *tat tvam asi*, exactly what you were taught before; when you were here in this life! Now *Brahmāji* is teaching you and you understand. You are liberated by the knowledge. And when does this liberation take place? Only now; always now.

There is no after-death *mokṣa*. If there is survival after death, there is only travel — not *mokṣa*. *Mokṣa* gained by being taught by *Brahmāji*, is also not after-death *mokṣa*. *Mokṣa* is not an event in time; it is an accomplished fact. *Ātmā* is always liberated, *mukta*. If bondage were real, even God could not remove it because it would

be a reality, God's own reality. Nor can God remove a bondage that is false because it is not there. No one can remove something that does not exist, not even God. God can only teach and make you understand that there is no bondage.

### ĀTMĀ IS SINLESS, PURE

*Kṛṣṇa* also describes *samaṁ brahma* in this verse as *nirdoṣam*. *Doṣa* means a defect or blemish. Ultimately, any attribute or quality is a *doṣa*, and it exists because it can only belong to a substance. And a substance is always *anitya*, non-eternal. Therefore, *nirdoṣa* means free from any defect, free from any attribute, such as mortality, division, etc.

For those people who do not know the true nature of *ātmā*, *ātmā* is something that has dog-eating, etc., as attributes, defects. When you say that a dog-eater is a sinner, what do you mean? A sinner means one who has committed sins and therefore, all the sins are sticking to the person. And who is this person? Is the physical body the sinner? Are the senses or the mind the sinner?

The body itself cannot perform any action, and therefore, it cannot be taken as the sinner. The senses are only instruments; they are not sinners either. Similarly, the mind is not a sinner; it too is an instrument, a means. Who then, is a sinner? *Ātmā* is the sinner. When you condemn a person as a sinner, you are condemning *ātmā* as the sinner, because you look upon *ātmā* as one that possesses all the attributes or defects. Then, anything you do as though sticks to the *ātmā* and *ātmā* is taken as defective, *doṣavān*. This means that *ātmā* is already *doṣavān* and keeps gathering more *doṣas*. *Ātmā* is equivalent to a substance, like any other substance with a nucleus, and attracts a variety of seen and unseen results in the form of *puṇya* and *pāpa*.

All of this sticks to *ātmā* for those who are deluded, who do not know that *ātmā* is always pure and, therefore, never affected by *puṇya* and *pāpa*. *Ātmā* is not affected in any way whatsoever by the *doṣa* you impute to it.

Because *Brahman*, which is *ātmā*, is *nirdoṣa*, it is *sama*, always the same, even when the self is taken to be a sinner and so on. *Sama* means one, *eka*. *Brahman* does not undergo any change; it is always one, the same. And in *Brahman* alone, the wise people ever remain rooted, *sāmye brahmaṇi sthitaḥ*. They remain rooted because they are *Brahman*, *ātmā* being *Brahman*. *Brahmaṇi te sthitāḥ* means that the wise are non-separate from *Brahman*.

Previously, due to lack of discrimination, *aviveka*, not knowing the true nature of *ātmā*, they thought *ātmā* was subject to *puṇya* and *pāpa*, meaning subject to defect, *doṣa*. Therefore, everyone appeared different — ‘I have my own *puṇya-pāpa* and you have yours.’ Each one comes with his or her own baggage, collects a lot of additional baggage, and leaves the world taking only the subtle baggage with him or her. Just as

you throw away useless baggage and take only what is important, the subtle baggage called *puṇya* and *pāpa* is carried to the next birth.

Even if you do not want to, you have to carry your *puṇya-pāpa* baggage with you, because that is the law. As long as you look upon yourself as the receptacle for *puṇya-pāpa*, assuming doership, there will be this connection with *karma*. When there is the notion, 'I am the doer,' due to *aviveka*, one is bound. By *viveka*, one comes to recognise that the self is *Brahman* now and always. They remain *Brahman* and there is no question of re-birth. They never return, *gacchanti apunrāvṛttim*. To remain in *Brahman* means they are *Brahman*. Therefore, there is no question of their taking another birth.

### THE INTEREST IN SURVIVAL AFTER DEATH

You may say here that, while it is very pleasant to think of yourself as eternal, you do not like the idea of not coming back. This is because you want to survive, which is every mortal's desire. Survival being the original instinct, no one wants death and so one thinks he has to survive. 'I want to survive' is a part of the original problem.

If I want to survive here, naturally I want to survive after death also. The scriptures say that I will survive, a point that I am very much interested in. And if I am told that after realising *Brahman* I will again come back, that I will be born with this self-knowledge and I will enjoy this world, that too is very interesting. Or, if I am told that, after gaining this knowledge here, I will have increasing layers of happiness, I can enjoy that possibility. Perhaps I will have a different type of body, X-ray eyes, better ears, and so on. If I am told all this, and similar things, I will definitely find it interesting.

The problem here is that I think I am imperfect. I am imperfect is a conclusion I have made and because of that, there is a love for getting something later. This is the problem of all *saṃsārīs*. Therefore, they say, 'Swamiji, I don't like this idea of not coming back. I want to return.' For the *saṃsārī*, I can definitely say, 'Don't worry, you will come back. Who told you, you won't be reborn? Just don't ask me how you will be born because there are so many possibilities! You may be born as an angel or as a cockroach. But, definitely, you will return!'

Whereas, for the wise, no such thing happens. Knowing they are *Brahman*, the wise are established in *Brahman*, *brahmaṇi sthitāḥ*, meaning they are non-separate from *Brahman*. There is no cause for fear.

The original fear is the fear of death. But *ātmā*, the self, just is; it is not born and it does not die. The problem is that I think I am subject to mortality, imperfections, and attributes. That I am subject to *doṣas* is the original problem. As long as one thinks that 'I,' the *ātmā*, has attributes or defects, there are problems. *Ātmā* being subject to time is a *doṣa*. *Ātmā* being subject to imperfection is a *doṣa*. *Ātmā* being subject to sorrow is a

*doṣa*. *Ātmā* being subject to limitation is a *doṣa*. *Ātmā* being subject to birth and death is a *doṣa*. *Ātmā* being subject to *punya-pāpa*, doership, and enjoyership is a *doṣa*. As long as you look upon *ātmā* as a *doṣavān*, there is no way of getting rid of the *doṣas*. Even if you remove one *doṣa*, another will arise.

### THERE IS NOTHING TO BE AFRAID OF

Therefore, *Kṛṣṇa* makes it very clear here that because *ātmā* is free from defect, *nirdoṣa*, it is *sama* — *Brahman*. Knowing this, the wise are *Brahman*. There is no *jīva* left anymore to come back. Remaining in *Brahman*, they have won over the cycle of birth and death. That is *mokṣa*, liberation. They are liberated right now and, after the death of the present body, there is no coming back.

Does this mean they completely disappear? They cannot disappear because all that exists is *satya-ātmā* alone. What disappears is the false and the truth alone remains. *Ātmā* is *satya-brahma* and *Brahman* is *Īśvara*, the cause of the world. You are *Brahman* and as *Īśvara*, you are *jagat-kāraṇa*. All there is, is *Īśvara*, there being no other entity. This is the truth.

You are *Īśvara* even now. Who says you are not? ‘*Tat tvam asi*’ means ‘You are *Īśvara*’ — from the standpoint of the self. The self, *ātmā*, is *Īśvara*. When all there is, is *Īśvara* you do not lose anything by becoming *Īśvara*. There is no birth and there is no death. What, then, is there to be afraid of?

न प्रहृष्येत्प्रियं प्राप्य नोद्विजेत्प्राप्य चाप्रियम् ।

स्थिरबुद्धिरसम्मूढो ब्रह्मविद् ब्रह्मणि स्थितः ॥ २० ॥

*na prahṛṣyetpriyaṃ prāpya nodvijetprāpya cāpriyam*

*sthirabuddhirasammūḍho brahmavid brahmaṇi sthitaḥ* Verse 20

ब्रह्मवित् *brahmavit* — one who knows *Brahman*; ब्रह्मणि *brahmaṇi* — in *Brahman*; स्थितः *sthitaḥ* — established; स्थिरबुद्धिः *sthirabuddhiḥ* — one whose knowledge is firm; असम्मूढः *asammūḍhaḥ* — one who is free from delusion; प्रियम् *priyam* — that which is desirable; प्राप्य *prāpya* — gaining; न प्रहृष्येत् *na prahṛṣyet* — should (does) not rejoice over; अप्रियम् च *apriyam ca* — and that which is undesirable; प्राप्य *prāpya* — gaining; न उद्विजेत् *na udvijet* — should (does) not resent

The one who knows *Brahman*, who is established in *Brahman*, whose knowledge is firm, and who is free from delusion, should (does) not rejoice over gaining that which is desirable and should (does) not resent gaining that which is undesirable.

In this verse, *Kṛṣṇa* continues his discussion of the person who has the vision of the self, *ātmā*, as that which never undergoes any change, that which is always the same (*sama*). Such people were referred to as *samadarśinaḥ* two verses previously because they see this sameness, this *ātmā*, in everyone and everything — in a *brāhmaṇa*, a cow, an elephant, a dog, and even in a dog-eater. It is not that they see everyone and everything as equal but, rather, they see the *ātmā*, the self, in everyone that undergoes no change. This is a very important distinction that needs to be clearly understood.

Here, in this verse, we are told how such a wise person would respond to situations, both the desirable, *priya*, and the undesirable, *apriya*. Examples have already been given — a *brāhmaṇa*, one who has knowledge and humility, *vidyā-vinayavān*, and a dog-eater, *śvapāka*, respectively. The wise person is called *sthira-buddhi* in this verse, which we shall discuss later.

### IS A MANDATE INTENDED HERE?

Gaining something desirable, *priyaṃ prāpya*, the *sthira-buddhi* does not rejoice, *na prahr̥ṣyet*. The form of the verb used here, *prahr̥ṣyet*, generally implies a mandate — ‘May the wise person not rejoice. May he or she not become elated.’ But is this really a mandate? *Kṛṣṇa* is not cautioning the wise here. He is not saying, ‘Be very careful! You are a knower of *Brahman* and, if you rejoice or get upset, your knowledge may be disturbed. So, don't get elated or troubled by anything!’ Since there is no question of a wise person becoming elated or troubled, *Kṛṣṇa*'s statement, ‘May one not become elated by the desirable and troubled by the undesirable!’ is not a mandate.

Whenever this kind of statement comes up in the *Gītā*, there is a conversion to be made because it is not *Kṛṣṇa*'s intention to mandate behaviour here or to set down rules. The words as they are do, however, accomplish something in that they are quiet statements for those who want to become wise, *brahmavits*, because they imply that, by following *karma-yoga*, the mind will become prepared for gaining the knowledge. But, with reference to the person who already has the knowledge, the sentence, ‘May he or she not rejoice — *na prahr̥ṣyet*,’ should be translated as ‘He or she does not rejoice — *na prahr̥ṣyati*.’ Similarly, ‘May he or she not get upset — *na udvijet*’ is to be taken as, ‘He or she does not get upset — *na udvijate*.’ This, then, is the intended meaning here.

What *Kṛṣṇa* is saying here is that if a person is wise, he or she does not get elated when confronted by desirable situations. Nor does such a person get upset by undesirable situations, *apriyaṃ prāpya ca*. This response to situations is quite unlike how others usually behave. When something desirable comes along, you become so elated — you hit the ceiling, to use the vernacular! And if it is something undesirable, you hit the ground, rolling around moaning and groaning about your lot. In this way, your responses are like the ups and downs of a yo-yo because anyone who is subject to elation is also subject to the anti-climaxes that come in its wake.



person was ignorant about the nature of *ātmā* and ignorance is no longer there now. Because the self is always there, there is no question of forgetting the self. The person who knows *Brahman* is *Brahman* and he or she remains in *Brahman*. Even after death the person is *Brahman*! The entire meaning, then, is expressed by this one short sentence — *sthira-buddhiḥ asamūdhaḥ brahmavit brahmaṇi sthitaḥ*.

In the next verse, *Kṛṣṇa* describes the happiness of such people:

बाह्यस्पर्शेष्वसक्तात्मा विन्दत्यात्मनि यत्सुखम् ।

स ब्रह्मयोगयुक्तात्मा सुखमक्षयमश्नुते ॥ २१ ॥

*bāhyasparśeṣvasaktātmā vindatyātmani yatsukham*  
*sa brahmayogayuktātmā sukhamakṣayamaśnute*

Verse 21

बाह्य-स्पर्शेषु *bāhya-sparśeṣu* — with reference to external (sense) objects that contact (the sense organs); असक्त-आत्मा *asakta-ātmā* — one whose mind is not attached; आत्मनि *ātmani* — in the self; यत् सुखम् *yat sukham* (अस्ति तत् *asti tat*) — that happiness (fullness) (which is present); विन्दति *vindati* — gains; सः *saḥ* — he (or she); ब्रह्म-योग-युक्त-आत्मा *brahma-yoga-yukta-ātmā* — one whose mind is endowed with the knowledge of *Brahman*; अक्षयम् सुखम् *akṣayam sukham* — happiness that does not wax and wane; अश्नुते *aśnute* — gains

The one whose mind is not attached to the external (sense) objects that contact (the sense organs) gains that happiness, (fullness), which is in oneself. One whose mind is endowed with the knowledge of *Brahman* gains that happiness that does not wax and wane.

This verse can be interpreted in two ways. First, we will see how *Śaṅkara* explains it. Then we will see the other interpretation. *Bāhya-sparśa* refers to external objects that come into contact with the sense organs. This compound is resolved by *Śaṅkara* as *bāhyāśca te sparśāśca*, meaning they are external, *bāhyas*, and they come into contact with the sense organs, *sparśas*. Generally, *sparśa* is used only in the sense of touch; that which is experienced by the sense of touch is called *sparśa*. Extending this meaning, any object that a person comes in contact with is *sparśa*.

All the sense objects, sound, etc., are *sparśas* and they are external; therefore, they are *bāhya-sparśas*. *Śabdādayaḥ*, ‘sound, etc.’ include all sounds, forms, touch, taste, and smell. And, with reference to these external objects, *bāhya-sparśeṣu*, the person is *asakta-ātmā*. That is, his or her mind, *ātmā*, is uninvolved, *asakta*, with any of them, meaning that the person's mind is not hooked by them. In other words, the fancies of the mind do not bother the person. The one whose mind is not carried away by such fancies with reference to external sense objects is therefore, described in this verse in two words — *bāhya-sparśeṣu asakta-ātmā*.

## FREEDOM FROM LONGING

Śaṅkara expresses this *bāhya-sparṣeṣu asakta-ātmā* as one who is free from longing with reference to the sense objects, as *viśayeṣu prīti-varjita* — a person who does not miss the external objects. This being so, the person gains that happiness that is in the *ātmā* — *ātmani yat sukhaṃ tat vindate*. *Ātmā* here means *sat-cit-ānanda-ātmā*.

Happiness, *sukha*, has to be mentioned in this way because people generally think that the objects themselves give them *sukha*. But the wise person is also happy — without objects being instrumental in any way. If a wise man is not elated by objects, how does he become happy? He is happy because all the happiness is with himself.

*Sukha* is the very *svarūpa*, the very nature of *ātmā*. Thus, the word *sukha* really means fullness here, fullness being *ātmā*'s nature. This *sukha*, fullness, is gained by the *jñānī* who knows that the *ātmā* is not affected by the external objects that come into contact with the sense organs. He or she gains the *sukha* that obtains in the *ātmā*, which is the person's *svarūpa*.

And how do we know that the person being discussed here is wise? The next line points this out, along with the context provided by the previous verse. The person is referred to as *brahma-yoga-yukta-ātmā*. *Brahma-yoga* is the recognition of *ātmā* being *Brahman*. This recognition itself is the *yoga*. *Yukta*, in this compound, means 'endowed with.' Thus, the one endowed with the knowledge of *Brahman* is *brahma-yoga-yukta* and the one whose mind is endowed with, or resolved in the knowledge of *Brahman* is *brahma-yoga-yukta-ātmā*, *ātmā* meaning the mind, *antaḥ-karaṇa*, here. This, then, is the person who gains the happiness that is oneself — *brahma-yoga-yukta-ātmā ātmani* (in oneself) *sukhaṃ vindate*.

## RELATIVE AND ABSOLUTE SUKHA

A question might now be asked, 'How much *sukha* is there in that *ātmā*? There may only be a little bit of happiness, like the happiness one gets from eating ice cream, for example. Such happiness comes, but it also goes. For a *brahma-yoga-yukta-ātmā*, is this the kind of *sukha* that is there in the *ātmā*? 'No!' says *Kṛṣṇa*. The *sukha* in the *ātmā* is *sukha* that does not wane — *sukham akṣayam aśnute*. There is a song, the theme of which is that if you give love away, it will grow. In other words, it does not get spent or die. Similarly here, the *sukha* in the *ātmā* is a *sukha* that is not dependent upon any situation, *sukham akṣayam*; it is yourself, *svarūpa*.

This verse can also be looked at as a description of two different people by taking the two lines separately. The first line describes the *karma-yogī* who is not carried away by fancies, *bāhya-sparṣeṣu asakta-ātmā* and the second line describes the *jñānī* who is



endowed with the knowledge of *Brahman*, *brahma-yoga-yukta-ātmā*. If we look at the verse in this way, we see that there are two types of *sukha* mentioned here.

A person who does not depend on any external object or situation for his or her happiness — whether he or she lives the life-style of a *sannyāsī* or a *karma-yogī* — has a certain attitude, a cheerfulness and contentment with whatever there is. And, because of this attitude, the person gains a greater degree of *sukha* than a person who is entirely dependent upon the presence of desirables and the absence of undesirables. The latter person's *sukha* is definitely going to be more short-lived when compared to the *sukha* of a person who is not dependent on situations. For example, you may like tofu, but it may not be served in the way you want it. You may like it as it is and it may come to you fried. Therefore, there are comparable degrees of *sukha* that people get. All over the world, it is the same. Generally, people are dependent for their *sukha* upon desirable things coming and undesirable things staying away.

### THE SUKHA OF MATURITY

Suppose, however, there is a person who, because of an inner maturity, is able to find a happiness, a cheerfulness, in doing what he or she can do. Such a person definitely gains some *sukha*. Because of a prayerful attitude, the person picks up a *sukha* that is not totally dependent upon his or her *rāga-dveṣas*. Instead, it depends upon the person's sense of satisfaction. This is the person who begins to discover that there are certain things that are to be done and enjoys doing them as an offering to the Lord — *īśvara-arpaṇa-buddhyā*. Because the person is courting the Lord, so to speak, he or she will naturally discover a certain joy. And, because of this love or cheerfulness that the person enjoys, he or she is not held by *rāga-dveṣas*.

The freer you are from your *rāga-dveṣas*, the more you can enjoy small things. Even the stars will be enjoyable to you. There are many things in life you can enjoy without fulfilling your likes and dislikes. Thus, the person who is *bāhya-sparṣeṣu asakta-ātmā* gains *sukha* in the mind. Even if the person gives up something, he or she does not really miss it and, again, there is *sukha*, a *sukha* which is limited but definitely better than the *sukha* enjoyed by the person who is totally dependent on one's *rāga-dveṣas*.

The *sukha* of the person who is committed to *rāga-dveṣas* is going to be very limited and is not going to be lasting. Whereas, the one who is not in the hands of likes and dislikes, whether a *karma-yogī* or a *sannyāsī*, has a certain disposition because of which happiness is gained in oneself — *ātmani sukhaṃ vindati*. Here, *ātmani* should be taken as 'in oneself,' i.e., in one's mind.

Now, what happens if this same person, the *bāhya-sparṣeṣu asakta-ātmā*, becomes a *brahma-yoga-yukta-ātmā*? By withdrawing from the hold of likes and dislikes, the person definitely gains some *sukha*. But when this same person becomes

one with *Brahman*, when the person's mind is alive to the knowledge of *Brahman*, what *sukha* will the person gain? Such a person gains a *sukha* that does not wax or wane, the *sukha* that is the *svarūpa* of oneself.

We see in all of this, then, an order. For one whose mind is not attached to external objects, there is some *sukha*, not because of the objects but because of the cheerfulness of the mind. This is due to *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*. And if such a person becomes a *brahma-yoga-yukta-ātmā*, the *sukha* gained will be one's very nature — unlimited and eternal.

### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CONTEXT

Thus, this verse can also be seen as reflecting this order. If *Śaṅkara* were here, I think he would agree with this latter interpretation, given that it holds with what was said before and what was said later. Whenever you interpret what is said differently from *Śaṅkara's* interpretation, you must see that it is contextually proper. Otherwise, anyone who knows what it is all about can easily prove you wrong. If, however, having understood the context properly, you are able to see another meaning, one that does not go against anything that is said and fits better into the context, you can present it and the tradition will accept it.

*Śaṅkara* himself often views a verse in two or three different ways, a practice the tradition allows, provided of course, that it facilitates understanding without hurting what the *śāstra* says grammatically, contextually, and logically. Because the tradition thoroughly analyses the *śāstra* before giving its meaning, presenting any other meaning requires the utmost care and consideration in terms of what has been said before and what is said later.

We shall see how this latter interpretation is upheld as we proceed:

ये हि संस्पर्शजा भोगा दुःखयोनय एव ते ।

आद्यन्तवन्तः कौन्तेय न तेषु रमते बुधः ॥ २२ ॥

*ye hi saṁsparśajā bhogā duḥkha-yonaya eva te*  
*ādyantavantāḥ kaunteya na teṣu ramate budhaḥ*

Verse 22

कौन्तेय *kaunteya* — O son of *Kuntī!*; हि *hi* — because; ये *ye* — those which; संस्पर्शजाः *saṁsparśajāḥ* — are born of contact (between the sense organs and desirable objects); भोगाः *bhogāḥ* — enjoyments; ते *te* — they; दुःख-योनयः एव *duḥkha-yonayaḥ eva* — (are) the sources of pain alone; आदि-अन्तवन्तः *ādi-antavantāḥ* — (and they) have a beginning and an end; बुधः *budhaḥ* — the wise person; तेषु *teṣu* — in them; न रमते *na ramate* — does not revel

Because those enjoyments that are born of contact (between the sense organs and desirable objects) are the sources of pain alone, and have a beginning and an end, O son of *Kuntī*, the wise person does not revel in them.

Both the *bāhya-sparṣeṣu asakta-ātmā* and the *brahma-yoga-yukta-ātmā* of the previous verse are again commented upon here. The objects contacted by the sense organs are called *saṁsparśas*, *sparśa* meaning ‘contact’ as we have seen. Between the sense organs, *indriyas*, and the desirable objects, *iṣṭa-viṣayas*, there is contact and because of that contact there is a *sukha*, called *bhoga* here, meaning enjoyment, a pleasant experience. These pleasant experiences are born out of the sensory contact with desirable sense objects — *saṁsparśajāḥ bhogāḥ*.

*Kṛṣṇa* also says here that these enjoyments are the potential causes for sorrow, *duḥkha-yonayaḥ*. *Yoni* means womb. Therefore, enjoyments or pleasant experience, born of the contact between the sense organs and desirable objects, are the wombs or potential causes for *duḥkha*. They are sources of sorrow. Why? Because, even before gaining these pleasant experiences, there is *duḥkha* in that you have to work for them until you get them.

To bring a desirable object or pleasant experience into alignment with the sense organs is not an easy thing. If you want to see an object that is away from you, you either have to take yourself to the object or bring the object to you. If it is a mountain, you have to go to the mountain. If it is something else, you may be able to bring it to yourself. Either way, you have to work for coming into contact with it. You either have to come in contact with the object or it has to come in contact with you. This contact has to take place, which itself implies a lot of effort on your part. And this is only the beginning!

When the contact takes place, it must be proper; it must be desirable. The sight of a favourite dish may make you happy, but if, when you put it on your tongue, it is too hot, there is a problem. The sight of it was one contact, which was desirable, and the contact the food made with your tongue was another, which was undesirable. Thus, to ensure that the contact is proper and desirable is not always easy.

### DESIRABLE EXPERIENCES CANNOT LAST

How long the desirable contact can last is another problem. The process of experiencing an object itself may exhaust the object and then you will miss the contact. Or, you yourself may become tired and therefore, unable to continue the contact. The attitude or the mood to enjoy also goes away and, again, you lose the contact. Whether due to change of mood, the sense organs becoming tired, or the object no longer being available, you always find that this kind of happiness is only temporary, if not momentary. And when it goes, it leaves you high and dry; it leaves you unhappy.

We see, then, that before gaining enjoyments there is *duḥkha*. And after you get them you spend your time thinking, 'I am going to lose this happiness.' Finally, when they are over, there is more *duḥkha*. Again, you have to work for them.

All enjoyments are the sources of sorrow, *duḥkha-yonis*, because they have a beginning, *ādi*, and an end, *anta*. Thus, they are called *ādi-antavantaḥ* in this verse. A desirable contact is the beginning; the end is when the desirable contact is no longer available. This means that these *bhogas* are all *anitya*, not lasting; they are non-eternal.

The person who understands the limited nature of such enjoyments is called *budhaḥ* in this verse. *Budha* means *vivekī*; thus, *budha* can be taken either to mean a discriminative person or a wise person. In his commentary on this verse, *Śaṅkara* defines *budha* in the latter sense — one who understands the real nature, the truth, of oneself, *avagata-paramārtha-tattvaḥ*.

Because a *vivekī* understands the limitations of ordinary happiness, he or she goes after the happiness that does not wane, *akṣaya-sukha*, which is why the person was called *bāhya-sparṣeṣu asaṅkta-ātmā*, one who is not carried away by the mind's fancies for external objects. Because of the person's discrimination, he or she becomes *bāhya-sparṣeṣu asaṅkta-ātmā*.

Enjoying a natural cheerfulness, this person, the *karma-yogī*, goes about doing only what is to be done, not bound by anything. The *karma-yogī* may enjoy certain objects, but he or she is not bothered by any of them. And this *karma-yogī*, on becoming a *brahma-yoga-yukta-ātmā*, one who is endowed with the knowledge of *ātmā* as *Brahman*, gains the happiness that does not wane.

## GIVING ONESELF TO ONE'S DESIRES

In his introduction to the next verse, *Śaṅkara* points out that desire or longing for enjoyments is opposed to serious inquiry into oneself, an inquiry that requires a certain maturity. A person who wants to understand *ātmā*, *Brahman*, the ultimate, and who, at the same time, wants to go to discos will have no time for such an inquiry. First, the mind of such a person has to be fixed up, but he or she will not have any time for that either. The person is acting out of the likes and dislikes in his or her mind and not dealing with them directly. Only when you begin to deal with your *rāga-dveṣas* do you become an inquirer and a serious person, a seeker.

You may have a hundred problems, but as long as you are ready to deal with them, there is no real problem at all. The person, who deals with his or her problems, already has a certain maturity and the problems of such a person will resolve in time. But, for the person who is given to the problems themselves, where is the chance for him or her to deal with them? Giving oneself to one's desires is the real problem and, as *Śaṅkara*

says, is opposed to the pursuit of liberation, *mokṣa* — *kāmaḥ śreyomārga-pratipakṣī*. This problem, then, is the one that is the most difficult to deal with.

Being controlled by one's desires, *kāmas*, is considered to be the most difficult problem, Śāṅkara continues, because it becomes the cause for that which you do not want — *duḥkha* in all of its many forms. For example, if you lose your health due to the over-indulgence of certain desires, you will also lose your money and a variety of other things in the process. Or, losing your money, you may lose your health! And these *kāmas*, in the form of *rāga-dveṣas*, are not easy to eliminate, *durnivāra*; in other words, they are difficult to get in hand.

Therefore, extra effort is required in order to bring about an antidote for *kāma*, as *Kṛṣṇa* infers in the next verse:

शक्रोतीहैव यः सोढुं प्राक्शरीरविमोक्षणात् ।

कामक्रोधोद्भवं वेगं स युक्तः स सुखी नरः ॥ २३ ॥

*śaknotīhaiva yaḥ soḍhum prākśarīravimokṣaṇāt*

*kāmakrodhodbhavaṃ vegam sa yuktaḥ sa sukhī naraḥ*

Verse 23

यः *yaḥ* — the one who; प्राक् शरीर-विमोक्षणात् *prāk śarīra-vimokṣaṇāt* — before release from the body; काम-क्रोध-उद्भवम् *kāma-krodha-udbhavam* — born of anger and desire; वेगम् *vegam* — force; इह एव *iha eva*—here itself (in this world); सोढुम् *soḍhum* — to endure (to master); शक्रोति *śaknoti* — is able; सः *saḥ* — he (or she); युक्तः *yuktaḥ* — (is) a *karma-yogī*; सः *saḥ* — he (or she); सुखी नरः *sukhī naraḥ* — (is a) happy person

The one who is able to master the force born of anger and desire here (in this world) before release from the body is a *karma-yogī*. He (or she) indeed is a happy person.

Here, *Kṛṣṇa* is saying that you do not control *kāma* and *krodha*, desire and anger; rather, you knock off the *kāma-krodha-udbhavaṃ vegam* — the force born of *kāma* and *krodha*. First, you should know how to take care of the force, *vega*; then you can take care of the desire, anger, and the pain that become the cause for that force. Behind every pain, there is an expectation, and unfulfilled expectation leads to anger, as we have seen. *Kāma* and *krodha* have a certain sting and, by taking care of the force born of them you remove their sting. Thus, one has to pay attention to *kāma* and *krodha*.

The entire psychology of the *Gītā* is in terms of *rāgas* and *dveṣas* — the management of one's likes and dislikes. By managing one's likes and dislikes, a normal person can overcome all the psychological problems that he or she may have. Such problems are natural. That one is angry is normal. That one has desires is normal. That one is subject to pain is also normal. This normal psychology is dealt with by the *Gītā* in terms of likes and dislikes.

*Kāma*, desire, is a common word for both *rāga* and *dveṣa*. *Kāma* is purely a want. The thought process through which you desire an object, an end, is called *kāma*. The desire can be either to gain something, *rāga*, or to avoid something, *dveṣa*; to retain something gained, or to get rid of something that one already has. This *kāma* produces a certain force, certain symptoms, which are indicative of the virulence of desire. If these symptoms were not there, you would not know whether the *kāma* was a binding desire or a non-binding desire.

If a person has a desire that is not fulfilled and he or she does not get upset in the process, then that desire is not a binding desire. We are not dealing with non-binding desires here; we are dealing only with those that produce a force, *vega*. This *vega* is the outcome of desire and is something that indicates the virulence or the intensity of the *kāma*, as well as the *krodha*, the anger, that results if the desire is not fulfilled. The *vega*, then, described here by the expression — *kāma-krodha-udbhavaṃ vegam* — the force that is released by or born of *kāma* and *krodha*, is the ultimate object to be mastered.

Another important expression used in this verse is *prāk śarīra-vimokṣaṇāt*. *Prāk* means ‘before,’ *vimokṣaṇa* means ‘release,’ and *śarīra* is the physical body. Therefore, the expression means — before release from the physical body. Before one dies away, then, one is able to master, *soḍhum śaknoti*, this force born of *kāma* and *krodha*. *Kṛṣṇa* mentions this for two reasons, the first one being that if a person is able to accomplish this before he or she dies, then the person is a mature human being, *nara*. And, because he or she is mature, having mastered his or her own mind, the person is happy — *saḥ sukhī*.

## THE DEFINITION OF ADULTHOOD

It seems to me that human life is divided into two activities — one is to gather all sorts of nonsense as a child and the other is to learn how to manage them all. Somewhere along the way, you are able to realise that what you had gathered as a child has nothing to do with what you are now. Only the person who realises this and then addresses the problems that arise can be called *nara*. Until then, the person is still a child.

Therefore, I would say, that if a person is able to master the force born of desire and anger, he or she has made it as an adult human being. I would say that he is a *sukhī* and also a *karma-yogī* because to master the *vega* of *kāma-krodha* requires a certain attitude.

Maturity also implies expressing one's free will in its highest form, meaning that one can voluntarily appreciate and offer prayer. Prayer and a prayerful attitude are the expressions of a mature will. In fact, they are based on will alone. No one is driven to prayer. You are driven to swear, to cry, and to do varieties of things, but you can never

be driven to prayer. Even if one prays in a moment of distress, the will is expressing in its highest form.

In the act of prayer, you do not see the one to whom you pray. *Īśvara* is nowhere around. All you see are the contending forces that you have to deal with. Therefore, if in the process of living, a person is able to appreciate an *Īśvara* and offer a prayer to him, that person becomes a *karma-yogī*. Without this, the *kāma-krodha-udbhavaṃ vegam* is not easy to master. This particular religious conversion, as it were, has to take place in the person and is what is implied here by the word *yukta*, meaning *yogī*. And this *karma-yogī*, this mature person who is able to master the force born of desire and anger, is a happy person — *sa sukhi narah*.

### KARMA-YOGA AND KNOWLEDGE REFLECT AN ORDER

In the previous verse we saw that this person does not get carried away by the mind's fancies, knowing them to be the sources of pain and sorrow. A person who is carried away by such fancies is one who is subject to *kāma*, to his or her *rāga-dveṣas*. Such a person cannot get the happiness that a *yogī* can get.

Thus, there is an order involved here, meaning that everyone has to become a *karma-yogī* first. The knowledge will then take care of itself. And when does all this take place? In this life itself, *iha eva*, as we saw in the nineteenth verse, and also at any time until death, until one is released from the physical body. While living, until death, the *yogī* who is yet to be a *jñānī* must have this particular capacity, this mastery of *kāma* and *krodha*. You cannot simply say, 'I have already mastered my *kāma* and *krodha*,' and then sit back and think they will not come back. They will come back. There is no such thing as, 'One day, I mastered them; therefore, they will not come back.' This is not a one-day problem that one deals with for once. It is something that has to be dealt with everyday, until death as *Śaṅkara* makes it clear here.

We have already seen that, in terms of knowledge, liberation or *mokṣa* can happen at any time in one's life, even in old age.<sup>1</sup> This, then, is another meaning for the expression *prāk śarīra-vimokṣaṇāt* — at anytime, while living here in this world, in this physical body, this knowledge can be accomplished by a mature human being.

### THE FORCE OF KĀMA-KRODHA CONTINUES UNTIL DEATH

In his commentary to this verse, *Śaṅkara* emphasises the 'until death' meaning to make it clear that the force, *vega*, released by *kāma* and *krodha*, by one's *rāga-dveṣas*, operates throughout one's lifetime, until death, just as the force of hunger and thirst does. For the living person, this *vega* definitely takes place. It is not something that happens

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<sup>1</sup> ??? ???? *Gītā* – 2 (2) ?

one day and goes away the next. And what is its cause? The causes are endless, *Śaṅkara* says — *ananta -nimittavān hi saḥ vegah* .

What makes you angry? There are countless situations that can cause anger. Therefore, there is no end to the force, *vega* , that is born of desire and anger. In certain situations, there will be no force, whereas in other situations, the *vega* will be there in various degrees and the *kāma-krodha* from which this force comes can be virulent indeed!

### THE NECESSITY FOR ALERTNESS

Until a person sees something, he or she may not have *kāma* at all. But once it has been sighted, *kāma* is there. Similarly, there can be *kāma* with reference to what is heard. Thus, you find that *kāma* can take place at any time, which is why *Śaṅkara* describes the *vega* as that for which the cause is endless. Therefore, in terms of tackling or mastering the force born of *kāma-krodha*, you must be alert; you should not relax. This does not mean that you should become tense; it simply means that you should not become indifferent. And, from the standpoint of one who is a *yogī* and not a *jñānī*, this alertness must continue until death.

As we have seen previously, *kāma* refers to both likes and dislikes, *rāga-dveṣas*. Here, the emphasis is mainly on *rāga*, that which is desired by you. Within the scope of your sense perception, an object is seen or heard. You may have experienced the object before as something desirable and therefore, you remember it. When you experience this object, it becomes the cause for your happiness and is therefore, desirable to you. Then you long for it. This longing is like thirst, a thirst for the objects that make you happy. The longing itself is called *kāma*. All desires are not the *kāmas* that we discuss here, only those which are binding.

*Krodha* is something born of your seeing or remembering something that is opposed to your desire, opposed to your longing, causing you pain. Naturally, between the *kāma*, desire, and, *krodha*, anger, a certain pain is involved. Anger would not come unless there was pain in between.

When your expectation is not fulfilled, there is pain, and what you consider to be the obstruction or cause of the pain becomes the object of your anger. Thus, *kāma* itself, causing pain, dislike, and hatred, turns into what we call a ‘locked-up’ anger, *krodha*. The force that arises out of this *kāma-krodha*, referred to in this verse as *kāma-krodha-udbhavaṃ vegam* is what must be mastered.

How do we know there is a force? *Śaṅkara* gives a few interesting indications of its existence. When you hear or see something that you find so desirable that you long for it, what happens? Your very hair stands on end — *romāñcana* , your eyes open wide —



*prahṛṣṭa-netratva*, and your mouth is agape – *prahṛṣṭa-vadanatva*. These are the symptoms, says Śaṅkara, of the force of *kāma*.

Each culture has its own way of expressing *kāma* and this expression takes many forms. Naturally, you express the force of your desires according to your culture. How you express also depends on how cultured you are!

Śaṅkara also gives a few symptoms of the force of *krodha*. They are: shaking of the body – *gātra-prakampa*, sweating – *prasveda*, bloodshot eyes – *rakta-netra*, and biting the lips – *sandaṣṭa-auṣṭhapuṭatva*. Other symptoms of the force arising out of anger are shouting, screaming, heavy breathing, and so on. When the force of *kāma-krodha* is there, you are no longer in charge; the force itself is in charge. Thus, this is the force that is to be mastered, the methods for which were already pointed out in the third chapter, where Kṛṣṇa talked about *karma-yoga*. In fact, this self-mastery is mentioned all over the *Gītā*.

### WHAT IS SELF-MASTERY?

Self-mastery comes with living a disciplined life, having a sound value structure that includes prayer and a prayerful attitude, *prasāda-buddhi*, all of which we have seen. This attitude is based on a glad acceptance of what is, living in conformity with the order of *dharma*, and appreciating this order as *Īśvara*. If you live in this way, you find that the *kāma-krodha-vega* loses its sting. Even if anger comes, you are not overcome by it. Only in this way do you become one who has self-mastery, one who is a *yogī*.

As a *yogī*, you are in charge and, therefore, you are a cheerful person, *sukhī*. Otherwise, you will have a yo-yo life wherein the *vega* takes care of you. Under the spell of this *vega*, you are likely to do anything because you are no longer rational. Whatever wisdom or culture, you have becomes useless when the *vega* born of your desire and anger is in charge. Whereas one who is able to address this problem, who can withstand this force, is a *nara*, a mature human being.

### PROBLEMS MUST BE ADDRESSED

People do not address this problem at all and for the most part suffer under the force of *kāma-krodha* for their entire lifetime. They live a life of *vega* and then they die. They do not even have a chance to address the problem. But everything does seem to happen finally for the good in that there seems to be a new awareness in the society today. For example, alcoholism has been causing problems that people were not really aware of until fairly recently. But, now, it is understood that everyone who lives or has lived in a house where alcohol is used, is affected. And, because of this realisation, a huge movement has resulted, a brand new wave that is not an ordinary one, in which it is commonly accepted that there is no way of resolving these problems without addressing

them directly. And to do this, it is also accepted that there must be prayer and religious conversion.

A better society may be the natural outcome of this particular awareness alone because those who go through this programme of conversion, and experience the changes that such a programme implies, will become really saintly people. These people will be sensitive to the problems of others. They will be people who do not harm others and who are very understanding and mutually helpful to each other. Having come through their own problems, they understand the problems of others; they know what pain is and why others behave the way they do. Perhaps, then, we are in for a new society — because of alcohol!

Addressing the problem is the main point here. That you have a problem is not important because you are not responsible for it. It has all been picked up over a period of time. You did not go out looking for your problems because you wanted to have problems. Rather, they are all problems that you happened to pick up. But you must address them — here, while living in this life, in this physical body, before you die — *prāk śarīra-vimokṣaṇāt*.

First, we pick up the problems and then we solve them. This seems to be how growth is. We create hurdles and then try to jump over them. That is the fun of it all. Life is like a hurdle race. The race itself is fun, but when you create hurdles and then try to jump over them, it makes the race even more fun. Because you have free will, this situation is inevitable. The creation, the world, is like what it is, because, it cannot be any better right now. If I were already programmed — that is, without free will — there would be no human being, at all. Nor would there be a *Gītā* or any further evolution. To be a human being implies free will. And once free will is given to you, then wisdom is something that has to be gathered by you — in other words, by free will.

Everyone is given innocence first. Then, while innocent, you gather problems. But you will also become mature. Enough experiences, enough pain, enough sorrow, is given to you so that you can become an adult. Thus, you find that the person who addresses the problem becomes a happy person. This person alone is a true human being, a *karma-yogī*, one who is ready to take the next step, meaning that the person's mind is prepared for the knowledge.

In the next verse, *Kṛṣṇa* describes the person who has this knowledge:

योऽन्तःसुखोऽन्तरारामस्तथान्तर्ज्योतिरेव यः ।

स योगी ब्रह्मनिर्वाणं ब्रह्मभूतोऽधिगच्छति ॥ २४ ॥

*yo'ntaḥsukho'ntarāramastathāntarjyotireva yaḥ*

*sa yogī brahmanirvāṇaṃ brahmabhūto'dhigacchati*

Verse 24

यः *yaḥ* — the one who; अन्तः सुखः *antaḥ sukhaḥ* — one whose fulfilment is in oneself; अन्तर्-आरामः *antar-ārāmaḥ* — one who revels in oneself; तथा *tathā* — so too; यः *yaḥ* — the one who; अन्तर्ज्योतिः *antarjyotiḥ* — one whose mind is awake to oneself; सः एव *saḥ eva* — he alone; योगी *yogī* — is a wise person; ब्रह्म-भूतः *brahma-bhūtaḥ* — being the one whose self is *Brahman*; ब्रह्म-निर्वाणम् *brahma-nirvāṇam* — the freedom that is *Brahman*; अधिगच्छति *adhigacchati* — gains

The one whose fulfilment is in oneself, the one who revels in oneself, the one whose mind is awake to oneself, that wise person alone, whose self is *Brahman*, gains the freedom which is *Brahman*.

In the previous verse, *Kṛṣṇa* talked about the *karma-yogī*, *sukhī*, the happy, cheerful person. Here, we have three beautiful words to describe the wise person, one who has the knowledge of the *ātmā* being *Brahman* — *antaḥ-sukhaḥ*, *antar-ārāmaḥ*, and *antarjyotiḥ* — the meanings for which we shall see now.

The *antaḥ-sukha* is one for whom fulfilment is in oneself alone. What kind of self? The self that is *sat-cit-ānanda-ātmā* that is *Brahman*. Generally, people look to situations for their happiness, which is why they have problems — all of which have been already pointed out. We also saw that the *karma-yogī*, because of his or her attitude, enjoys a certain *sukha*. Here, knowing the *ātmā*, the person finds fulfilment in oneself.

Where else can you find fulfilment in fact? Because I am fullness, I am fulfilled. You cannot say I am fulfilled because I am married, because I have a son, because I have this job, because I have this or that. If you think your fulfilment depends on such things, you will definitely find yourself in trouble sooner or later. The one who is fulfilled is one for whom fulfilment is centred on the knowledge of ‘I.’ That ‘I’ is fulfilment in itself. It is fullness; it does not lack anything whatsoever. It is free from any notion, free from doership, free from any sense of limitation or imperfection. All that is there is pure consciousness, which is fullness, which is whole. The person who is truly fulfilled with this knowledge of oneself is called *antaḥ-sukha* here.

### NOTHING IS REQUIRED TO AMUSE THE WISE PERSON

Because this person is *antaḥ-sukha*, he or she revels in the self. The word ‘revel’ here is used in the sense of play. People generally require a lot of play things to keep themselves in good humour — like skating rinks, theatres, or a pack of cards. Because you have to amuse yourself, you are always doing something. Here *Kṛṣṇa* says that the wise man amuses himself by himself. Nothing else is required to amuse the person. And he is amused all the time! With eyes open or closed, he is amused. And, when he looks at

his mind, he is definitely amused. Even the wise man has memories, but instead of getting into them, he is simply amused by them.

The mind itself is like an amusement park; you require no one or nothing else to thrill you. Your own mind provides all kinds of amusement, musings, and thrillers, too! It has music and talk shows also. Because a wise man is amused in himself by himself, he is called *antar-ārāma* here.

Finally, the wise person is called *antar-jyotiḥ*, meaning ‘mind’ here. *Jyotiḥ* usually means ‘light.’ Like light, the mind illumines objects for you to see. Therefore, it is called *jyotiḥ*. In addition to illumining objects, the mind is also awake to the self, the self that puts up the seeming show of division. In dream, you are the dreamer, the dreaming, and the objects dreamt. In waking, it is the same thing. The seer or the knower is the self; the sight, the thought, is the self; and the objects of the thought, the seen, is the same self alone. The consciousness that is the self is the same knower consciousness.

All knowledge implies consciousness. Every thought is consciousness and the object of thought is not separate from this consciousness, which is the existence, *sat*, of everything. This knower-known-knowledge difference is purely a show, a good show. And the one whose mind is awake to this *ātmā*, who is aware of the self, is called *antarjyotiḥ*.

The wise person, also referred to as a *yogī* in this verse, is said to be one who is in the form of *Brahman*, *brahma-bhūtaḥ*, meaning one whose *ātmā* is *Brahman*, the one whose *ātmā* is no more separate from *Brahman*, whose very self is *Brahman*. And what does this wise person gain? *Mokṣa* liberation, *brahma-nirvāṇa*. *Brahma-nirvāṇa* means *brahma-nirvṛti* or *brahma-ānanda*, otherwise called *mokṣa*.

The one who is *antaḥ-sukha*, *antar-ārāma*, and *antar-jyoti* being one whose self is *Brahman*, *brahma-bhūta*, gains *mokṣa*, freedom from a sense of limitation and bondage. The self that is *Brahman* is understood by this person; therefore, the person is *Brahman*.

And who is this person?

From verse 22 of this chapter onwards, Lord *Kṛṣṇa* has started summing up his description of a *sannyāsī* as the person who is a *sarva-karma-sannyāsī*, the one who renounces all forms of action, not literally, but, by knowledge.

*Kṛṣṇa* used the same word, *brahma-nirvāṇa*, in the last verse of the second chapter; the person whose self is in *Brahman* is not deluded and, being established in *Brahman*, even at the end of one's life, gains liberation.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Gītā* – 2-72

This person is called *brahma-bhūta* in the present verse, one whose *ātmā* is *Brahman*, free from doership and enjoyership. Such a person gains *brahma-nirvāṇa*, which is *mokṣa*. Because the word *nirvāṇa* alone is sometimes understood as some kind of void, we use the word *brahma-nirvāṇa*. *Nirvāṇa* means *ānanda*, freedom from everything — in other words, the limitlessness that is one's own nature.

*Kṛṣṇa* then goes on to complete his summary of a *sarva-karma-sannyāsī* in the last few verses of this chapter.

लभन्ते ब्रह्मनिर्वाणमृषयः क्षीणकल्मषाः ।

छिन्नद्वैधा यतात्मानः सर्वभूतहिते रताः ॥ २५ ॥

*labhante brahmanirvāṇamṛṣayaḥ kṣīṇakalmaṣāḥ*  
*chinnadvaidhā yatātmānaḥ sarvabhūtahite ratāḥ*

Verse 25

क्षीणकल्मषाः *kṣīṇa-kalmaṣāḥ* — those whose impurities have been destroyed; छिन्नद्वैधाः *chinna-dvaidhāḥ* — those whose doubts have been resolved; यत-आत्मानः *yata-ātmānaḥ* — those who have self-mastery; सर्व-भूत-हिते रताः *sarva-bhūta-hite-ratāḥ* — those who are happily engaged in the good of all beings; ऋषयः *ṛṣayaḥ* — sages; ब्रह्म-निर्वाणम् *brahma-nirvāṇam* — liberation; लभन्ते *labhante* — gain

Sages whose impurities have been destroyed, whose doubts have been resolved, who have self-mastery (and) who are happily engaged in the good of all beings, gain liberation.

In the previous verse, *Kṛṣṇa* described the person who has already gained *mokṣa*, using the words, *antaḥ-sukha*, *antar-ārāma* and *antar-jyotiḥ*. Such people are also the subject of this present verse. They are called *ṛṣis*, which is generally translated as sages.

For some people, the word *ṛṣi* brings to mind an old man with matted hair, a long white beard, and long finger nails, practising extreme forms of austerities. In reality, the word *ṛṣi* has two meanings — the one who keeps moving, *aṭati*, who does not get caught up in any one place or situation and, the one who knows, *jānāti*. In the present context, the latter meaning applies. All the teachers in the Vedas are referred to as *ṛṣīs*. These are the people who gain *mokṣa*.

## HOW DOES ONE BECOME A SAGE?

How did they become *ṛṣīs*? Once again we find that *Kṛṣṇa* gives a complete description of the wise man within the verse itself. First of all, they are *kṣīṇa-kalmaṣāḥ*, those for whom all impurity, *kalmaṣa* is destroyed, *kṣīṇa*. Impurity here means one's *rāga-dveṣas*. By living a life of *karma-yoga* and inquiry, the impurities are gone.

They are also described here as *sarva-bhūta-hite ratāḥ*, those who joyously engage themselves for the good of all beings. This is a very important qualification for the one who wants to gain knowledge. Afterwards, of course, acting in this way becomes natural to the person. Such people observe *ahiṃsā*, non-violence, with great alertness and sensitivity. They do not hurt other persons or beings in any way — by word, action, or even by thought. In fact, the vow of *ahiṃsā* not to hurt another, is the main vow a person takes when he or she takes to the life of *sannyāsa*. This is why *sannyāsīs* give up all competitive activities. For, in order to win or compete in anything, injury to another person or living being is inevitable; it is inherent in competition of any kind. By taking the vow of *ahiṃsā*, the *sannyāsī* announces to all beings that they have nothing to fear from him or her.

### ALL DOUBTS ARE RESOLVED FOR GOOD

The word *yatātmānaḥ*, in this verse, refers to those who have control or mastery over the organs of action and organs of perception. Such people are also *chinna-dvaidhas*. *Dvaidha* means *saṃśaya*, doubt, and *chinna* means resolved, removed, uprooted. For these people, all doubts are gone. In this pursuit, doubts can take many forms such as: Is *ātmā* limitless or limited? Is *ātmā* eternal or non-eternal? Is *ātmā* one or many? Is the individual, *jīva*, different from *Īśvara*? Is the world real or unreal?

The wise are free from all such doubts, which means a lot of inquiry has been done. All the concepts have been carefully analysed and the knowledge has been freed of all possible doubts.

### SĀDHANAS FOR A SEEKER

While the qualifications given in this verse are natural to a wise person, they are means or *sādhana*s for the one who wants to gain self-knowledge. Enjoying these virtues, people become *ṛṣis* and gain the freedom they are seeking.

Further, *Kṛṣṇa* says:

कामक्रोधवियुक्तानां यतीनां यतचेतसाम् ।  
 अभितो ब्रह्मनिर्वाणं वर्तते विदितात्मनाम् ॥ २६ ॥  
*kāmakrodhaviyuktānāṃ yatīnāṃ yatacetasām*  
*abhito brahman irvāṇaṃ vartate viditātmanām*

Verse 26

काम-क्रोध-वियुक्तानाम् *kāma-krodha-viyuktānām* — for those who are free from desire and anger; यतचेतसाम् *yatacetasām* — for those whose mind is under control; विदितात्मनाम् *viditātmanām* — for those who know the self; यतीनाम् *yatinām* — for the

*sannyāsīs*; अभितः *abhitaḥ* — both here and in the hereafter; ब्रह्म-निर्वाणम् *brahma-nirvāṇam* — liberation; वर्तते *vartate* — there is

For *sannyāsīs*, those who are free from desire and anger, whose mind is under control, (and) who know the self, there is liberation, both here and in the hereafter.

Throughout the *Gītā* there is a repeated mention of *kāma* and *krodha* and the need to become free of them. Those who have freed themselves from *kāma-krodha* are referred to here as *kāma-krodha-viyuktāḥ*.

*Kāma*, as we have seen, is desire born of one's likes and dislikes, *rāga-dveṣas*, and *krodha*, anger, is born of desire. These two, *kāma* and *krodha*, hold people under their control. And those who have freed themselves of them are the subject of this verse. There are a few more words in this verse qualifying those who are wise.

*Yati* means a person who is a *mumukṣu*, who has a desire for *mokṣa*. Such a person makes proper effort, which implies *yoga*. In common parlance, *yati* means a *sannyāsī* but, in its true sense, it includes the *karma-yogī* also. Anyone who is engaged in a well-directed pursuit or inquiry into the nature of oneself is a *mumukṣu* and therefore, a *yati*, whether the person lives the life of a *sannyāsī* or a *karma-yogī*.

Such a person who has his or her mind under control is called a *yata-cetas*. Because these people are also described here as *viditātmās*, those who know the *ātmā*, in this compound the word *yata* indicates that they are *sarva-karma-sannyāsīs*, those who have given up all action in terms of knowledge of the actionless self. Not only are they totally free from *kāma* and *krodha*, they are also free of all action because of the knowledge of *ātmā*.

If all that is required is knowledge of *ātmā*, why worry about *kāmas* and *krodhas*? Is it not a waste of time to get rid of desire and anger? Why not pursue *ātmā-jñāna* straightaway? The answer is that unless *kāma-krodha* is addressed, you cannot know the *ātmā*. Once again, then, what is implied here is the need for a certain level of maturity and a commitment to the knowledge.

Once the commitment is total, you will gain the knowledge, you will be a *viditātmā*. Then there is nothing for you to worry about because knowing *ātmā* and gaining *mokṣa* are one and the same. Because of the knowledge of the self that is ever free, you are liberated.

### ONCE LIBERATED ALWAYS LIBERATED

The word *abhitaḥ*, in the verse, is explained as *ubhayataḥ*, meaning ‘in both ways.’ Here, while living, there is *mokṣa* for these people and, later, in the hereafter, also there is *mokṣa*. Knowing you are free is the greatest freedom. While living you are

liberated; you are free. This is one freedom. The second freedom is called ‘after-death’ freedom, in that there is no coming back to this bondage because you are free, once and for all.

Some people worry about what happens after death, saying, ‘I take all this effort and gain liberation here, but suppose I come back?’ Any supposing with reference to coming back, having gained liberation by knowledge, is totally irrelevant. There must be a nucleus of some kind for there to be any coming back. The nucleus is the *jīva*, the individual, and that is what is falsified. Who or what, then, is there to come back? Liberation having been gained, there is no one any more to come back. Thus, *Kṛṣṇa* says that in both ways, here and hereafter, those who know the *ātmā* gain *mokṣa*. Although a two-fold *mokṣa* is talked about in terms of a here and a hereafter, in fact, there is only one *mokṣa*. A two-fold *mokṣa* is mentioned only with reference to this question of coming back.

There are, on the other hand, people who are afraid that they will not be able to come back; they want to come back to this world. ‘What for?’ I ask. ‘So that I can accomplish something more or do something better next time,’ they say. This means they have already concluded that they are not going to make it in this life! First, let us take care of this life. Then the next life will take care of itself!

## INTRODUCTION TO MEDITATION

There are two types of *sādhana* — *bahiraṅga-sādhana*, or external means; and *antaraṅga-sādhana*, or internal means. Doing *karma* is doing what is to be done by you with the right attitude and following proper values. In other words, *karma-yoga* is called *bahiraṅga-sādhana*. Meditation, *dhyāna*, wherein the mind alone is involved, is called *antaraṅga-sādhana*. It can be a prayer, a contemplation, or any inner discipline, but it is purely internal. No limbs are involved, nor is the organ of speech. Therefore, one type of *sādhana* is external and the other is internal, both of which we should follow.

The external means, *bahiraṅga-sādhana*, take care of your likes and dislikes because these can only be worked out through your interactions with the external world. For gaining steadiness of mind and the composure necessary to gain self knowledge, there is the inner discipline of meditation, *antaraṅga-sādhana*, which is also very important. Thus, *Kṛṣṇa* first gives a brief account of *dhyāna-yoga*, meditation, in the next three verses and then discusses it at length in the next chapter.

स्पर्शान् कृत्वा बहिर्बाह्यांश्चक्षुश्चैवान्तरे भ्रुवोः ।

प्राणापानौ समौ कृत्वा नासाभ्यन्तरचारिणौ ॥ २७ ॥

*sparśān kṛtvā bahirbāhyāṁścakṣuścaivāntare bhruvoḥ*  
*prāṇāpānau samau kṛtvā nāsābhyantaracāriṇau*

Verse 27



यतेन्द्रियमनोबुद्धिर्मुनिर्मोक्षपरायणः ।

विगतेच्छाभयक्रोधो यः सदा मुक्त एव सः ॥ २८ ॥

*yatendriyamanobuddhirmunirmokṣaparāyaṇaḥ*  
*vigatecchābhayakrodho yaḥ sadā mukta eva saḥ*

Verse 28

बाह्यान् *bāhyān* — external; स्पर्शान् *sparśān* — objects; बहिः कृत्वा *bahiḥ kṛtvā* — shutting out; च *ca* — and; चक्षुः *cakṣuḥ* — eye; भ्रुवोः अन्तरे एव (कृत्वा) *bhruvoḥ antare eva (kṛtvā)* — placing between the eyebrows alone; नासा-आभ्यन्तरचारिणौ *nāsā-ābhyantaracāriṇau* — moving inside the nostrils; प्राण-अपानौ *prāṇa-apānau* — exhalation and inhalation; समौ कृत्वा *samau kṛtvā* — keeping them rhythmic; यः मुनिः *yaḥ muniḥ* — the contemplative person, who; यत-इन्द्रियमनो-बुद्धिः *yata-indriya-mano-buddhiḥ* — (is the) one who has mastered his (or her) organs of action, senses, mind, and intellect; मोक्ष-परायणः *mokṣa-parāyaṇaḥ* — (is the) one for whom *mokṣa* is the ultimate end; विगत-इच्छा-भय-क्रोधः *vigata-icchā-bhaya-krodhaḥ* — (is the) one who is free from desire, fear, and anger; सः *saḥ* — that person; सदा *sadā* — always; मुक्तः *muktaḥ* — is liberated; एव *eva* — indeed

Shutting out the external objects and keeping the eyes between the two eyebrows, (closed), keeping the movement of the exhalation and inhalation in the nostrils equal, (rhythmic), the contemplative person, who has mastered his (or her) organs of action, senses, mind, and intellect, for whom *mokṣa* is the ultimate end, who is free from desire, fear, and anger, that person is always liberated indeed.

Here, *Kṛṣṇa* gives out the small tips that would be of help in the preparation for meditation. We have already seen that anything that comes in contact with a sense organ is called *sparśa*, object. And because they are external, *bāhya*, to the body, they are called *bāhya-sparśa*. The sense organs are exposed to the sense objects, meaning the world. The eyes are exposed to colours and forms; the ears are exposed to sounds; the nose is exposed to smells; the tongue is exposed to tastes; and the sense of touch is exposed to the textures of various sense objects.

## HOW THE SENSE OBJECTS ARE KEPT OUTSIDE

In his commentary, *Śaṅkara* explains that all the sense objects — sound, etc. — enter your mind through the gates of the sense organs — ears, etc. In meditation, all of the external objects are to be kept outside, meaning you leave them alone for the time being. You simply stop thinking about them. You turn your mind to something else. You do not need to turn these sense objects away from yourself, nor do you have to turn away from them. You just have to leave them right where they are.

The sense objects enter your mind in the first place by your thinking about them. Therefore, you cannot blame the sense objects for being in your head. Do not think about them, *Śaṅkara* said, and they will not be there. The sense objects are already external and by not dwelling on them, they remain external. This, then, is how the sense objects are kept outside.

The eyes are generally kept closed. You can meditate with your eyes open, but keeping the eyes closed makes it easier for the mind to think about the object of meditation. If your eyes are open, your mind may wander to what is in front of you. Therefore, we close the eyes to eliminate distraction from this one particular sense perception. The expression, *caḅᅁuᅁca bhruvoᅁ antare kᅁtvā*, used in this verse, means, 'keeping the eyes between the eyebrows,' meaning that the eyeballs are kept inside the eyelids. In other words, the eyes are kept closed.

### WATCHING THE BREATH

Then, breathing is mentioned — *prāᅁa-apāᅁau samau kᅁtvā*, *nāᅁā-ābhyantaracāriᅁau*. Here, *prāᅁa* and *apāᅁa* mean exhalation and inhalation, respectively. How is this breathing to be done? Moving inside the nostrils, *nāᅁā-ābhyantaracāriᅁau*, the incoming air and the outgoing air should be kept rhythmic. By making the inhalation and exhalation rhythmic, you become conscious of the breathing process and, by watching the breath, the breathing becomes quiet, thereby relaxing the body and quietening the mind.

Doing all this the person becomes one who has mastered the senses, organs of action, mind, and intellect, *yata-indriya-mano-buddhi*. This person is called *muni*, meaning one who has done a lot of listening, *śravaᅁa*, and analysis, *manana*. For the *muni*, *mokᅁa* is the ultimate end — he is *mokᅁa-parāyaᅁa*. The knowledge is relieved of all doubt and the person is freed from all problems, meaning that he or she is always liberated.

### FREEDOM FROM FEAR

There is one more qualification describing such a person which serves to repeat what has been said before — *vigata-icchā-bhaya-krodha* — meaning the person is free from desire, fear, and anger. Previously, *Kᅁᅁᅁa* said that the wise person is freed from *kāma* and *krodha*. Here, he added one more word — fear, *bhaya*. The person is emotionally mature in the sense that he or she is not under the spell of desire, fear, or anger. Such a person is a *sannyāᅁī*. He or she is indeed always liberated because of self-knowledge.

As an introduction to the next verse, *Śaṅkara* refers to the person who is totally committed to knowledge, meaning one who has done a lot of *śravaᅁa* and *manana*, as

*samāhita-citta*, meaning one whose mind is steady and well absorbed in oneself and who is more or less satisfied with himself or herself.

*Kṛṣṇa* concludes this chapter with the next verse revealing the identity between the individual, *jīva*, and *Īśvara*, the Lord and what any one gains knowing this identity.

भोक्तारं यज्ञतपसां सर्वलोकमहेश्वरम् ।

सुहृदं सर्वभूतानां ज्ञात्वा मां शान्तिमृच्छति ॥ २९ ॥

*bhoktāraṃ yajñatapasāṃ sarvalokamaheśvaram*

*suhṛdaṃ sarvabhūtānāṃ jñātvā māṃ śāntimṛcchati*

Verse 29

यज्ञ-तपसाम् *yajña-tapasām* — of rituals and disciplines; भोक्तारम् *bhoktāram* — the sustainer; सर्व-लोक-महेश्वरम् *sarva-loka-maheśvaram* — the Lord of all worlds; सर्व-भूतानाम् *sarva-bhūtānām* — of all beings; सुहृदम् *suhṛdam* — friend; माम् *mām* — Me; ज्ञात्वा *jñātvā* — knowing; शान्तिम् *śāntim* — peace (liberation); ऋच्छति *ṛcchati* — gains

Knowing Me as the sustainer of rituals and disciplines, the Lord of all the worlds, friend of all beings, he (or she) gains peace (liberation).

*Kṛṣṇa* is talking here as *Īśvara* when he uses the word *mām*, Me. He says, ‘Knowing Me, the person gains Me — *jñātvā māṃ śāntim ṛcchati*.’ Here gaining *śānti* means gaining *Īśvara*, that is, by understanding the identity between oneself and *Īśvara*, one becomes *Īśvara* as we shall see.

Generally, by knowing something, you do not become that thing. By knowing it, you only know it. It can become an object of your desire. You can appreciate it, but you cannot become the object. Here *Kṛṣṇa* says that by knowing him, the absolute peace *śānti* that is one's nature, is gained.

The *śānti* that is centred on oneself, that is one's *svarūpa*, is gained by knowing Me. Now, who is this Me? Is it *Kṛṣṇa*, the son of *Devakī*? No, the verse says ‘Me,’ the sustainer of rituals and disciplines, the Lord of all worlds, and the friend of all beings.

The word, *yajña*, in the compound *yajña-tapas* stands for all actions that are performed by you, as well as the rituals enjoined by the Vedas. *Tapas* refers to all forms of meditation and forms of discipline also. There are, of course, many forms of exercise that can also be considered disciplines, such as jogging, walking, cycling, and so on. There is, however, an important difference here.

For example, *yogāsanas* are much more than exercise; they are a form of prayer also. For every *āsana* there is a *devatā*. Originally, every *āsana* was performed as a prayer to its presiding *devatā*. Thus, there is a certain attitude involved on the part of the person, a prayerful attitude. Only prayerful disciplines are called *tapas*.

## THE JĪVA AND ĪŚVARA ARE ONE

The one who sustains all *yajñas* and who enjoys them is called *bhoktā*. Who is the one who enjoys the results of them all? The doer, *kartā*, the enjoyer, *bhoktā* — the *jīva*, in other words. But then it is said here that the *bhoktā* is the Lord of all worlds.

The word *maheśvara* is an important word because *Īśvara* can be used in a relative sense too. Any boss can be considered *Īśvara*, as can a king or *devatā*; in their own domains, they are *Īśvara*. Thus, anyone who is lord in his or her domain can be called *Īśvara*. When the word *maheśvara* is used however, any chance of a local person being mistaken for *Īśvara* is eliminated. *Maheśvara* means one who does not have a superior or an equal. The two words — *mahat* and *Īśvara* — are in apposition with each other, meaning that they enjoy the same status. They both qualify the same object; they reveal the same object. The object they reveal is *mahān*, one without equal; *Īśvara*, the Lord, is the *maheśvara* of all worlds, worlds here including all living beings also.

The one who is the Lord of all worlds is the *kartā*, the doer, and he is the *bhoktā*, the enjoyer of all the *karmas*. When, a ritual is performed there is always a doer involved, who is *Īśvara*, and also a deity involved, who is also *Īśvara*. Thus, the *kartā* is *Īśvara*, the *devatā* is *Īśvara*, and the enjoyer of the results of the *karma* is also *Īśvara*, meaning there is no *jīva* at all. The one who is the *kartā* and *bhoktā* is *Īśvara* alone. The one who enjoys the results of action is *Parameśvara* and the one who performs the action is also *Parameśvara*. This means that doership, *kartṛtva*, and enjoyership, *bhokṛtva*, are false.

## FRIENDSHIP WITHOUT EXPECTING A RESULT

The word ‘Me’ in this verse is also qualified by the expression *suhṛdam sarva-bhūtānam*, the friend of all beings. A friend is someone who helps you. Help can be extended for a number of reasons. Someone may help you because he or she expects something from you in return. This is generally the case. A return can be in any form — simple thanks or some other expression of gratitude, or it may be the nice feeling you receive from being able to help someone — all of which is related to ego. Some parents, even when their children are grown up, like to be asked for help now and then so that they can still have that feeling of being parents, of helping their children. When they are asked for help, they feel they are wanted. This is one kind of help.

There is also the help that is given without the person expecting any kind of result. Without so much as an introduction or without there being any friendship or affection involved, one may help someone out of empathy alone. One who gives such help, even to a stranger, without expecting any type of return, is called *suhṛd*, different from a mere *mitra*, friend.

We all need a friend who will be able to do things for us. Due to friendship, affection, *sneha*, then, one's help is extended. This kind of friend is called *mītra*, whereas *suhṛd* is one who extends his or her help without even knowing the person or expecting any result. The Lord is also called *suhṛd*. He is a friend to all beings, *suhṛd sarva-bhūtānām*, and the giver of the fruits of action, *karma-phala-dātā*. You perform the action and he gives the result without getting involved. His nature is to give according to what you do.

If you want to think, you can. If you want to sleep, you can. If you want to daydream, you can. He never says, 'No!' Sometimes even your own mind will say, 'No!' If you want to think, the mind may say, 'No, let's go to sleep!' If you want to eat, the stomach says, 'No, I can't eat anymore!' If you want to walk, the legs may say, 'No, we have had enough!' Everyone says, 'No!' sometimes. The liver says, 'No'; the kidneys say, 'No'; everything says, 'No,' except the *ātmā*. Even if you say, 'I want to keep the ignorance going,' the *ātmā* will say, 'No problem!' It simply illumines the ignorance.

And ultimately, he is the end, *Nārāyaṇa*, that all human beings seek. Knowing *Nārāyaṇa*, meaning *Īśvara*, the 'Me – *mām*' in this verse, the person gains *śānti*. *Śānti* here does not mean simple peace. It is the point where all forms of *saṃsāra* resolve. It is a *śānti* that amounts to the resolution of *saṃsāra*, of doership and enjoyership.

### ĀTMĀ IS UNOPPOSED TO EVERYTHING

The *ātmā* is not opposed to anything; it is unopposed to everything. But this does not mean that *ātmā* is a 'yes-man!' A 'yes-man' says 'Yes!' only when it is convenient, when it serves his ends. Here, 'yes' is absolute. Why is that?

*Ātmā* is that without which no action is possible, no enjoyment of the results of action is possible. Therefore, the enjoyer is nothing but *Parameśvara*, whereas *Parameśvara* is not the enjoyer. *Parameśvara* is not the doer, but the doer is *Parameśvara*. B is A, but A is not B.

The teaching, that is self-knowledge, is for the doer/enjoyer alone, the *jīva* — and the *jīva* is *Parameśvara*. Thus there is an equation between the *jīva* and *Īśvara*. By understanding this equation and by appreciating the identity that obtains between the *jīva*, the individual, and *Īśvara*, the Lord, the person gains the *śānti*, *śāntim ṛcchati* — gains the *śānti*, that is the resolution of *saṃsāra*. The result of this knowledge of the identity between *jīva* and *Īśvara* is what is called *mokṣa*. This *mokṣa*, this *śānti* is gained by one who has this knowledge.

Again, the fifth chapter concludes with the words that we have seen at the end of each of the four chapters that have gone by.

ॐ तत्सत् ॥ इति श्रीमद्भगवद्गीतासु उपनिषत्सु ब्रह्मविद्यायाम्  
योगशास्त्रे श्रीकृष्णार्जुनाभ्यां वदे कर्मासन्न्यासयोगो नाम  
पांचमोऽध्यायः ॥

*om tatsat. iti śrīmadbhagavadgītāsu upaniṣatsu brahmavidyāyām  
yogaśāstre śrīkṛṣṇārjunasaṃvāde karmasannyāsayogo nāma  
pañcamo'dhyāyaḥ*

'*Om tat sat,*' as we have seen before, is a statement made at the end of the teaching, meaning, 'That alone is *Brahman.*' *Om* is the name for *Brahman*, *Parameśvara*, the Lord. That *Brahman* alone is *satya*. The *kartā* is not *satya*; *karma* is not *satya*, *karma-phala* is not *satya*; the *karmaphala-bhoktā* is not *satya*; the *devatā* is not *satya*; the world is not *satya*; the body is not *satya*; the mind is not *satya*. But *Brahman* alone is *satya*. They are all *Brahman*, but *Brahman* is none of them.

Then what is *satya*? *Om* alone is *satya*. That *Parameśvara*, *paraṇi brahma*, the cause of the world, *jagat-kāraṇa*, the cause of everything is *satya*. Therefore, the effect becomes *mithyā*. If the effect is *mithyā*, the causal state is also *mithyā*, whereas the *svarūpa*, the essence of the cause, is *satya*. The causal state is *mithyā* because the effect is *mithyā*. For example, clay is the cause for the pot. The pot being *mithyā*, the causal state for the clay is also *mithyā* because, if you look into the clay, there is no cause; there is only clay. Thus, the cause and the effect are equally *mithyā* and the *svarūpa*, the essence of the cause, is called *satya*. Everything else being *mithyā*, *Om* alone, the *Om* that is *Brahman*, *jagat-kāraṇa*, is *satya*.

The following is always the conclusion.

When all is said and done, it is all *Om tat sat*. In the *Bhagavadgītā* — in the *Gītā* of *Bhagavān* or in the *Gītā* whose topic is *Bhagavān* — which contains the teaching that is called *Upaniṣads* whose subject matter is the knowledge of *Brahman* which is also the *karma-yoga-śāstra*, in the dialogue that took place between *Kṛṣṇa* and *Arjuna* there is the topic, *yoga*, called 'renunciation,' *sannyāsa-yoga*, which is the fifth chapter, *pañcamo'dhyāya*, is concluded.

**ABABABABAB**

## INTRODUCTION TO THE SIXTH CHAPTER

The topic of the next chapter, the sixth chapter, is meditation, *dhyāna*. *Dhyāna* means the act of meditation. Thus, *dhyāna* is a *sādhana*, a means for gaining *mokṣa*.

We have seen that *sādhana* is two-fold — *bahiraṅga-sādhana*, implying *karma*; and *antaraṅga-sādhana*, which is where *dhyāna* comes in. *Karma* becomes a *yoga* because it helps you gain the preparedness of mind, *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*, that enables you to gain the knowledge that is *mokṣa*. *Karma-yoga* is an external means, *bahiraṅga-sādhana*, whereas *dhyāna* is purely internal, *antaraṅga-sādhana*.

Meditation is an action born purely of the mind. In fact, every action is born in the mind, but it does not necessarily remain in the mind. The act of speaking, for example, is born of the mind. The words are all formed in the mind and are then expressed through the organ of speech. Although all forms of action emanate from the mind alone, they do not always stop there. They may manifest through the various means of expression. But in *dhyāna*, the activity is born of mind and remains in the mind; therefore, it is purely a mental action, *mānasa-vyāpāra* — an activity that is a *sādhana*, a means, a *yoga*.

Any worry is also a mental activity. But, can a person who worries constantly say, 'I am doing meditation?' No, he cannot say that. *Dhyāna* is a mental activity in which the subject matter is predetermined. It is an activity whose subject matter is *saguṇa-brahma* — *saguṇa-brahma-viśaya-mānasa-vyāpāra*. This is one definition of meditation.

*Saguṇa-brahma* means limitless *Brahman*, *satya-jñāna-ananta-brahma* as *Īśvara*, the cause of the world. *Saguṇa-brahma* is the object for the mental activity called meditation. Now, suppose I think of *saguṇa-brahma* for half-a-minute every morning at nine o'clock and then again at twelve o'clock for another half-a-minute. Is this *dhyāna*? It is a mental activity, no doubt; I think of the Lord and then the thought goes away. But, even though this thinking occurs in the mind and resolves there, it is not *dhyāna*. Therefore, the mental activity, the *mānasa-vyāpāra* called *dhyāna*, is defined still further as a mental activity where all the thoughts other than those concerning the chosen object are removed, *vi-jātīya-pratyaya-rahita*, and only those concerning the chosen object flow for a length of time, *sajātīya-pratyaya-pravāha*. Then there is *dhyāna*.

The word *jāti* means 'species.' Here, *vi-jātīya* refers to external objects, objects other than the one chosen for meditation. *Pratyaya* is a thought, *vṛtti*, and *vi-jātīya-pratyaya* is a thought other than the one chosen, in other words, other than

*saguṇa-brahma*. *Rahita* means ‘without.’ When there are no thoughts other than *saguṇa-brahma*, all of them having been removed, there is a flow, *pravāha*, of the chosen *vṛtti*, the chosen thought, there is a *sajātīya-pratyaya-pravāha*.

When the *vi-jātīyas* are removed and the *sajātīyas* are allowed to flow for a length of time, then the on-going mental activity is called meditation, *dhyāna*. Therefore, *dhyāna* is definitely an action on the part of the mind, a mental activity, *mānasa-karma*, the object of meditation being *saguṇa-brahma*. This is therefore, a *saguṇa-brahma-viṣaya-mānasa-karma*. This definition of the act of doing *dhyāna* is given in one compound that is given here. This one word defines it completely — *vi-jātīya-vṛtti-rahita-sajātīya-vṛtti-pravāha-rūpa-saguṇa-brahma-viṣaya-mānasa-vyāpārah*.

### THE WANDERING MIND IS PART OF MEDITATION

Another aspect of *dhyāna* that you must know is that when the mind moves away from the object of meditation, it should be brought back to the object of meditation. This ‘bringing it back’ is a part of the definition, *lakṣaṇa*, of *dhyāna*. It is not going away from *dhyāna*, as you may think. Many times people say to me, ‘Swamiji, when I meditate, my mind goes away!’ Going away is not a distraction to meditation; it is a part of meditation. In fact, thinking that it is a problem is the problem. When the mind goes, you simply bring it back. Bringing the mind back is a part of the definition of *dhyāna*. The mind running away is definitely a characteristic of *dhyāna* and when it does you bring it back. If the mind does not run away at all, it is called *samādhi*.

### THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MEDITATION AND CONTEMPLATION

When the *vi-jātīya-vṛttis* come, we turn away from them and return to the object of meditation, the *saguṇa-brahma*, the *iṣṭa-devatā*. This is one definition of *dhyāna*. The other is the mental activity involved when the object of meditation is *Brahman* with no attributes — *nirguṇa-brahma-viṣaya-mānasa-vyāpāra* — wherein *saguṇa-brahma* is substituted by *nirguṇa-brahma*. This mental activity is called *nididhyāsana*, contemplation.

Both *dhyāna* and *nididhyāsana* are *mānasa-vyāpāras*, mental activities. In the former, there is *saguṇa-brahma* and in the latter, there is *nirguṇa-brahma*, meaning *svarūpa-dhyāna*, contemplating on the truth of *Brahman*. In this *nididhyāsana*, you contemplate on certain words or statements such as, ‘I am the whole, *ahaṃ pūrṇaḥ*,’ or ‘my nature is nothing other than existence-consciousness-limitlessness, *ahaṃ satya-jñāna-ananta-svarūpaḥ*.’ This contemplation implies thought because, you bring up a word and you see its meaning. Therefore, there is *mānasa-vyāpāra*, mental activity, but, at the same time, it is different than the mental activity involved in



*saguṇa-brahma-viṣaya-mānasa-vyāpāra*, which is why it is called contemplation rather than meditation.

The topic of contemplation is naturally preceded by all types of meditation or internal means, *antaraṅga-sādhana*, for gaining *mokṣa*. Therefore, any prayerful meditation, which is *saguṇa-brahma-viṣaya-mānasa-vyāpāra*, and *nididhyāsana*, which takes the form of a quiet contemplation, should be taken as *dhyāna*. The *dhyāna* discussed in the sixth chapter, immediately after *Kṛṣṇa* talked about *sannyāsa*, is mainly the second type of *dhyāna*, that is, *nididhyāsana* — which we shall see as we proceed.

## CHAPTER 6

### MEDITATION

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।

अनाश्रितः कर्मफलं कार्यं कर्म करोति यः ।

स सन्न्यासी च योगी च न निरग्रिर्न चाक्रियः ॥ १ ॥

*śrībhagavān uvāca*

*anāśritaḥ karmaphalaṃ kāryaṃ karma karoti yaḥ*

*sa sannyāsī ca yogī ca na niragnirna cākriyaḥ*

*Verse 1*

श्रीभगवान् *śrībhagavān* — Lord *Kṛṣṇa*; उवाच *uvāca* — said;

यः *yaḥ* — the one who; कर्म-फलम् *karma-phalam* — result of action; अनाश्रितः *anāśritaḥ* — without depending on; कार्यम् *kāryam* — (that is) to be done; कर्म *karma* — action; करोति *karoti* — performs; सः *saḥ* — he (or she); सन्न्यासी *sannyāsī* — renunciate; च *ca* — and also; योगी *yogī* — *yogī* (the one who has a contemplative mind); च *ca* — and; न *na* — is not; निरग्रिः *niragniḥ* — the one who does not perform fire rituals; न *na* — not; च *ca* — and; अक्रियः *akriyaḥ* — one who does not perform (other) actions

*Śrī Bhagavān* said:

The one who performs action that is to be done without depending on the result of action, he is also a *sannyāsī* and a *yogī*, and not just the *sannyāsī* who has renounced all fire rituals and who does not perform any other action.

A means, *sādhana*, to an end, *sādhya*, can be with reference to anything. There are even means for gaining imprisonment, such as breaking the law. However, when what is to be accomplished is freedom from bondage, freedom from *saṃsāra*, the *sādhana* is two-fold, external and internal, as we have seen. Performing *karma* as a *yoga*, called *karma-yoga*, is the external means, *bahiraṅga-sādhana*. Both the internal and external means are meant to prepare the mind, *antaḥ-karaṇa*, for knowledge, *mokṣa*.

Generally speaking, one can say that meditation gives you steadiness of mind, *citta-naiścalya*. The mind is always in a state of flux, *cala*; that which is free from this *calatva*, the state of being in a flux, is called *niścala*. Steadiness of mind, also referred

to as composure, is therefore, called *naiścalya*, the nature of being *niścala*, which is the result of the *antaraṅga-sādhana*, called *dhyāna*, meditation.

Meditation, is for *antaḥ-karaṇa-naiścalya*, steadiness of the mind, and *karma-yoga* is for *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*, purification of the mind, by freeing oneself from one's *rāga-dveṣas*. Both these *sādhanas* are for *mokṣa*.

Leading up to the topic of *dhyāna*, which *Kṛṣṇa* introduced in the last three verses of the previous chapter, he again talks about *karma-yoga* in the first two verses of this chapter. *Karma-yoga* was also discussed in the second, third, fourth and fifth chapters and is mentioned throughout the *Gītā* as a means for gaining *mokṣa*. Here, *Kṛṣṇa* uses the external means, *karma-yoga*, to introduce the internal means — *dhyāna*, meditation.

### KARMA TO BE DONE

In this verse, *karma* refers to any type of action that is to be done. How does the person under discussion perform this action? Without depending on the result or various ends of the action, the person does what is to be done. For this person, *karma-phala* alone is not the principal criterion for performing action.

Whereas, for a *karmī*, the personal likes and dislikes are the only factors that determine what he has to do. No other criterion is taken into account by the person because he has *rāga-dveṣas* that must be fulfilled. The person is a go-getter, always busy trying to accomplish or acquire this or that. And, in the process of fulfilling the *rāga-dveṣas*, the person does not care about *dharma* and *adharma*, right and wrong, since these are not the governing factors.

*Rāga-dveṣas* being the only criterion for performing action, the *karmī* is one who is completely dependent on the result of action, *karma-phala-āśritaḥ*. And these are the very tendencies that the *karma-yogī* has to give up; otherwise, he is still a *karmī*.

### A KARMA-YOGĪ ALSO HAS RĀGA-DVEṢAS

A *karma-yogī* is not a person who has no *rāga-dveṣas*. He is someone who has *rāga-dveṣas* but gives them up, meaning that he does not go by them. Instead of going by 'I must get this' and 'I must not get that,' the *karma-yogī* goes by what is to be done. In other words, he gives up the desires for this and that and performs whatever action that is to be done according to *dharma* and *adharma*, not going by his or her own *rāga-dveṣas*. In this way, one's *rāga-dveṣas* are given up to a certain extent and those that remain are pursued and fulfilled according to *dharma*.

### CONFORMITY TO DHARMA

In fulfilling any desire, there is choice involved in both the means and the ends. The choices themselves are determined by one's *rāga-dveṣas*, which need not

necessarily conform to right and wrong. Sometimes one's *rāga-dveṣas* will conform to right and wrong, but more often they may not. What, then, is a person to do? This will depend on whether or not he is a *karma-yogī*. If the person is not a *karma-yogī*, he will not care about the means and ends but will simply say, 'I want this; therefore, I will get it!' Such a person is a *karmī*, one who follows whatever means that are necessary to accomplish his or her chosen end.

The approach of a *karma-yogī* is different, often implying some renunciation on his or her part, the main criterion being conformity with *dharma* and *adharma*. The *karma-yogī* renounces his or her *rāga-dveṣas* and does whatever is to be done without being guided by likes and dislikes. When a person says, 'This is to be done; therefore, I do it whether I like it or not,' means that the person is renouncing certain *rāga-dveṣas*, the results of actions, and therefore, is a kind of *sannyāsī*. This is why Kṛṣṇa says here that such a person, meaning a *karma-yogī* is both a *sannyāsī* and a *karma-yogī*. The *karma-yogī* is not a complete *sannyāsī*, but has the quality of a *sannyāsī* in terms of his or her renunciation of *rāga-dveṣas*.

### THE VALUE OF VALUES

Anything that anyone wants is very important to that person. Someone may say, 'I am unhappy,' and go after certain pleasures. Here, again, the value of these pleasures is not adequately understood. Their limitations are not known and, therefore, they are over-valued. At the same time, the universal values, also not being fully understood by the person, are under-valued; they are de-valued. This means that, while we have knowledge of values, we have no education with reference to them. The value of the values not being known, we do not have adequate knowledge of the values and this situation creates conflict.

Upon analysis of the value structure, we see that if the value of all the values is not known, the universal values naturally remain under-valued and the things which people have a value for, like money and power, have an exaggerated value. However, when such 'values' are clearly understood, they no longer have full value for you. Until then, they rule; power rules, money rules, name and fame rule, influence rules. They rule the roost, the roost of your heart!

### VALUES REQUIRE ALERTNESS

To understand the value structure well and to see the limitations of what you value, you have to live an alert life, a life of *karma-yoga*. Because the *rāga-dveṣas* are still alive in the *karma-yogī*, what he values will have a hold over the person. Thus, the *karma-yogī* has to sacrifice his or her *rāga-dveṣas*. He may not be able to use the most convenient means available anymore, because his or her commitment now is to a life of *karma-yoga* for the sake of *mokṣa*.

The *karma-yogī* has a desire for knowledge, which implies purification of the mind, *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*. If nothing else, he wants to be a mature person and, to accomplish that, the person will definitely have to sacrifice something. The cause of conflict, *vikṣepa-hetu*, is what has to be sacrificed here. The person gives up the cause for conflict, meaning that he gives up doing wrong actions, the seeds of conflict.

Conflict begins even before doing a wrong action — ‘Should I do it or should I not?’ In fact, there is always conflict — before doing, while doing, and after doing! Before doing, there is the conflict of whether to do it or not. While doing, you have to look to both sides, especially if you are stealing something. And after doing, there is also conflict — when the police come looking for you!

If, however, you perform action in accordance with *dharma*, you sacrifice your *rāga-dveṣas*. Then what happens? Before doing, there may be conflict because you have to make a choice in order to avoid doing wrong. Doing the right thing is not always spontaneous; if there is a choice to be made on your part, there is conflict. However, once you have done the right thing, there is no conflict. Thus, the *karma-yogī* may start with a conflict but does not end with conflict.

In this way, both the *sannyāsī* and the *karma-yogī* are free from the spell of *rāga-dveṣas*. Therefore, *Kṛṣṇa* tells *Arjuna* that, by doing what is to be done without depending on one's likes and dislikes, a person is both a *sannyāsī* and a *yogī*.

## RENUNCIATION OF THE TWO-FOLD ACTIVITIES

*Kṛṣṇa* then goes on to describe what this person is not — *na niragnih na ca akriyah*. These two expressions refer to the two-fold activities given up by the person who takes to a life of *sannyāsa* — *vaidika-karma*, scripturally enjoined activities; and *laukika-karma*, all other activities. Before becoming a *sannyāsī*, the person performed certain daily and occasional Vedic rituals, *nitya-naimittika-karmas*. All Vedic rituals imply fire, *agni*, and, because a *sannyāsī* no longer performs fire rituals, the person is referred to in this verse as *niragni*<sup>1</sup>. The *sannyāsī* gives up all other activities also — all forms of worship, familial duties, and business. In other words, he has no more roles to play — as son or daughter, as a parent, as a friend, as a citizen. Thus, the person is also referred to here as *akriya*, one who has given up all activities.

When, a person has given up all scripturally enjoined and worldly activities as part of the ritual of *sannyāsa*, he is called a *sannyāsī*.

‘Why did you become a *sannyāsī*?’ is a very interesting question that people often ask a Swami. Each Swami has his or her own story, of course and, if the story is not a very pleasant one, the Swami is not likely to answer the question. Nevertheless, there is

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<sup>1</sup> ?? ?? ????????? ? ? ??? ? ? ? ?

always a reason. The person may have lost his business and had nowhere to go. A person can even become a *sannyāsī* by mail these days, I'm told! The point here is that if a person takes to a life of *sannyāsa* by choice, it does not mean that his or her *rāga-dveṣas* are gone. If nothing else, the person may have the desire to save people by teaching them without really knowing what it is all about! Often, such people will say, 'I have a burning desire to save the people, to serve the people.' The question must therefore, be asked, is this really a desire to save people or to save oneself? Surely, to save the people one should first save oneself! What service can you give when you yourself require all the services! Some people are so full of *rāga-dveṣas* that they are unable to understand even this simple fact. Therefore, taking *sannyāsa* does not mean that a person becomes a *sannyāsī* in the true sense of the word.

Further, *Kṛṣṇa* says:

यं सन्न्यासमिति प्राहुर्योगं तं विद्धि पाण्डव ।

न ह्यसन्न्यस्तस ? ल्यो योगी भवति कश्चन ॥ २ ॥

*yam sannyāsamiti prāhuryogaṃ taṃ vidधि pāṇḍava  
na hyasannyastasaṅkalpo yogī bhavati kaścana*

Verse 2

पाण्डव *pāṇḍava* — O Son of *Pāṇḍu*! (*Arjuna*); यम् *yam* — that which; सन्न्यासम् इति *sannyāsam iti* — as renunciation; प्राहुः *prāhuh* — they say; तम् *taṃ* — that; योगम् *yogaṃ* — as *karma-yoga*; विद्धि *vidधि* — know; हि *hi* — because; कश्चन *kaścana* — any one; असन्न्यस्त-स ? ल्यः *asannyasta-saṅkalpaḥ* — who has not given up desires (for limited results like heaven, etc.); योगी *yogī* — *karma-yogī*; न भवति *na bhavati* — does not become

What they say as renunciation, know that to be *karma-yoga*, O *Pāṇḍava*, because, any one who has not given up desires (for limited results like heaven, etc.) does not become a *karma-yogī*.

The person who becomes a *karma-yogī* has given up all *saṅkalpas*. *Saṅkalpas* are those which provide the impetus for all desires — the desire to earn money, to enhance the status of his or her family, to earn *puṇya*. Although the *karma-yogī* has given up all *saṅkalpas*, he continues to perform action for the purification of mind. If only the activities are given up and not the *saṅkalpas*, the person is neither a *karma-yogī* nor a *sannyāsī*.

How does a *karma-yogī* renounce all his or her *saṅkalpa*? By giving up only those *rāga-dveṣas* that are opposed to *dharma* and *adharmā*. Whereas the *paramārtha-sannyāsī*, the real *sannyāsī*, gives up all *rāga-dveṣas*, all activities, all *karma*. How does the *sannyāsī* do this? He does this by giving up the notion of doership through knowledge.

In this verse, *Kṛṣṇa* uses the word *sannyāsī* to mean the person who has taken *sannyāsa* to pursue knowledge. Because both the *karma-yogī* and the *sannyāsī* give up all *saṅkalpas*, he equates the two here. Since both the *sannyāsī* and the *karma-yogī* have to give up *saṅkalpas*, *yogī* is a kind of *sannyāsī*.

The topic of renunciation in terms of *karma-yoga* was also discussed by *Kṛṣṇa* at the beginning of the fifth chapter as an introduction to his discussion on *sannyāsa*, real *sannyāsa*. Here, the topic is meditation, *dhyāna-yoga*, for which you also require *karma-yoga*. Thus, *Kṛṣṇa* is praising *karma-yoga* as opposed to mere *sannyāsa* — simply giving up of action.

### KARMA-YOGA AS A MEANS FOR MEDITATION

Even though meditation is something that one can do by one's will, it is not effective unless the mind is ready for it. The mind's capacity to stay with itself or with the object of meditation is what we call *dhyāna-yoga*. *Karma-yoga* is the means for preparing the mind and is, therefore, a means for *dhyāna-yoga*. Thus, there is a connection between *karma-yoga* and *dhyāna-yoga*, the external and internal means for *mokṣa*.

In the next verse *Kṛṣṇa* points out how *karma-yoga* is a means for *dhyāna-yoga*:

आरुरुक्षोर्मुनेर्योगं कर्म कारणमुच्यते ।

योगारूढस्य तस्यैव शमः कारणमुच्यते ॥ ३ ॥

*ārurukṣormuneryogaṃ karma kāraṇamucyate*

*yogārūḍhasya tasyaiva śamaḥ kāraṇamucyate*

Verse 3

योगम् *yogam* — (the contemplative disposition of) *yoga*, (*dhyāna-yoga*) ; आरुरुक्षोः मुनेः *ārurukṣoḥ muneḥ* — for the discriminating person who is desirous of attaining; कर्म *karma* — *karma-yoga*; कारणम् *kāraṇam* — means; उच्यते *ucyate* — is said; योग-आरूढस्य *yoga-ārūḍhasya* — for the person who has (already) attained (this) *yoga*; तस्य *tasya* — for him (or her); शमः *śamaḥ* — total renunciation; एव *eva* —alone; कारणम् *kāraṇam* — means; उच्यते *ucyate* — is said

For the discriminating person wishing to attain (the contemplative disposition of the) *yoga* (of meditation), *dhyāna-yoga*, *karma-yoga* is said to be the means. For the person who has (already) attained (this) *yoga*, total renunciation alone is said to be the means for him (or her).

*Ārurukṣu* refers to one who wants to climb or mount something, for which there is always a method. For example, a person who wants to mount a horse, which is not easy to do, must have a method. Similarly, there are those who are desirous of mounting the

horse of *yoga*, *yoga* here meaning *dhyāna-yoga*, meditation. And what is the means, *kāraṇa*, for doing so? *Karma-yoga* alone is the means because you have to take care of the reasons for the problems that are created in your mind.

What are the reasons, the causes, for your problems? Your *rāga-dveṣas* are the causes; they have to be taken care of. For one who is desirous of gaining a mind that is not under the spell of *rāga-dveṣas*, *karma-yoga* is the means.

### MEDITATION DOES NOT INVOLVE THE WILL

A meditative or contemplative disposition is not created by your will, although you can will yourself to sit in meditation. Such a disposition happens when you are ready for it and that readiness is what is meant by the preparedness of the mind. Gaining this preparedness is not given over to the hands of time, but is created by living a life of *karma-yoga*.

We see that the external means, *karma-yoga*, for gaining *mokṣa* is not unconnected to the inner means, *dhyāna-yoga*. In fact, it is very much connected; it is a part of the whole thing. *Karma-yoga* becomes the *sādhana*, the means, for the person who wishes to mount the horse of *dhyāna-yoga*, the capacity to contemplate. Once this capacity is gained by living a life of *karma-yoga*, the person is called *yoga-ārūḍha*. Only then, *śama*, *sannyāsa*, giving up of all actions, takes place.

*Karma-yoga* itself does not make a person a *yoga-ārūḍha*. By living a life of *karma-yoga*, the person first becomes contemplative; then, he develops a complete dispassion or detachment towards all activities that makes one a *yoga-ārūḍha*. This complete detachment — complete withdrawal from all activity, comes only through knowledge.

### COMPLETE RENUNCIATION IS POSSIBLE ONLY BY KNOWLEDGE

*Śama* here means complete withdrawal, total renunciation of all activities. And, since this can only happen through knowledge, knowledge is the means. Therefore, as a *sādhana* for gaining *mokṣa*, knowledge, is equated to renunciation, *sannyāsa*. This is why a *jñānī*, a wise person, is called *yoga-ārūḍha* in this verse.

The *yoga-ārūḍha* did not become wise by *karma-yoga*; he is wise because of *jñāna*, knowledge. Thus, the direct means for becoming wise is given here as *sannyāsa*, which is nothing but *jñāna*. On this particular point, this verse is often misinterpreted even though *Śaṅkara*, in his commentary, has made its meaning very clear that only by knowledge can one be free of all activities; there is no other way. In order to be a *yoga-ārūḍha*, a complete renunciation of all *karmas* should take place. This is not a withdrawal from all activity, strictly speaking, but a renunciation of activity in terms of



knowledge — knowing that one is not the doer. Therefore, total renunciation, *śama*, is to be taken as knowledge.

And when does this person become *yoga-ārūḍha*? *Kṛṣṇa*'s answer to this question is in the next verse:

यदा हि नेन्द्रियार्थेषु न कर्मस्वनुषङ्गते ।

सर्वस ?ल्पसन्न्यासी योगारूढस्तदोच्यते ॥ ४ ॥

*yadā hi nendriyārtheṣu na karmasvanuṣaṅgate*

*sarvasaṅkalpasannyāsī yogārūḍhastadocyate*

Verse 4

यदा *yadā* — when; हि *hi* — indeed; न *na* — neither; इन्द्रिय-अर्थेषु *indriya-artheṣu* — with reference to sense objects; न कर्मसु *na karmasu* — nor with reference to actions; अनुषङ्गते *anuṣaṅgate* — is attached; तदा *tadā* — then; सर्व-स ?ल्प-सन्न्यासी *sarvasaṅkalpa-sannyāsī* — one who has renounced the cause of all desires; योग-आरूढः *yoga-ārūḍhaḥ* — one who has attained liberation; उच्यते *ucyate* — is said

When one is attached neither to sense objects nor to actions, then it is said that (the person) is one who has attained liberation, one who has renounced the cause of all desires.

The person described here is one whose mind is not disturbed by anything. Such a mind enjoys dispassion and contentment; it is a resolved mind. With reference to all sense objects, *indriya-artheṣu*, and with reference to all actions, *karmasu*, there is no attachment whatsoever.

All actions, *karmas*, come under two types, as we have seen previously — *vaidika-karma* and *laukika-karma*. With reference to both types of *karmas*, this person no longer thinks of himself or herself as a doer. In other words, the person does not have *kartavya-buddhi*, a mind that thinks in terms of, ‘This must be done by me, doing which I am going to better my lot.’

### ONLY THE DOER PERFORMS ACTION

A *karma-yogī*, on the other hand, has this *kartavya-buddhi* — the attitude that, something is to be done by me and therefore, I do it. This attitude itself is *karma-yoga*. Here, however, *Kṛṣṇa* is talking about a *yoga-ārūḍha*, one for whom doership no longer applies. In fact, the Veda does not address such a person at all; it addresses only the doer, the *kartā*. This is similar to you calling someone by name, ‘Hey! John, please come here!’ Only the person whose name is John will come. Similarly, the Veda addresses you, saying, ‘O *kartā*, O doer, do this action and you will get this result.’ Who will respond to this call? Only the doer, the one who has the *kartavya-buddhi*, the one who thinks, I am the doer.

Thus, the person who takes *ātmā* as the doer will respond. Whereas, the person who recognises that he or she is not the doer will not respond at all. This is what is meant here by the statement, *karmasu na anuṣajjate*. With reference to all *karmas*, there is no attachment because the *kartavya-buddhi* is not there for the person. When there is no *kartavya-buddhi*, the person is not attached to, or bound by, the sense objects or actions because they do not invoke the particular thought that makes the person think that he or she will be different because of it. Therefore, for such a person, there is nothing to be done.

In his commentary to this verse, Śāṅkara uses the compound, *nitya-naimittika-kāmya-pratiṣiddha*, to refer to the various types of action that people generally do. As we have seen before, *nitya-karmas* are the Vedic rituals that are to be done daily and *naimittika-karmas* are those that are to be done occasionally. There are also *vaidika-karmas* to fulfil certain desires, such as desires for progeny, health, wealth, or heaven, etc. These actions are called *kāmya-karmas*. *Pratiṣiddha-karmas* are the ones prohibited by the scriptures. The point being made here is that, whether the action is scripturally enjoined or worldly in nature, there is no *kartavya-buddhi* — ‘this is to be done by me’ — for the wise person because being full, he or she is not attached in any way to sense objects or the results of action.

### FREEDOM FROM THE ROOT OF ALL DESIRES

Thus, the person is a *sarva-saṅkalpa-sannyāsī*, *saṅkalpa* referring to the notion that ‘I am the doer, *kartā*, I am the enjoyer, *bhoktā*.’ Free of these notions of doership and enjoyership, the person does not think that this is to be done or gained by me so that I will be like this or that or I will liberate the whole world, I will save the world — which is the greatest fantasy of them all. Such grandiose ideas are simply erroneous notions about oneself, none of which the *sarva-saṅkalpa-sannyāsī* has.

A person can only be a *sarva-saṅkalpa-sannyāsī* when he or she does not have the notion of doership, *kartṛtva*. If this notion is there, then *kāma*, desire, will also be there. And wherever there is *kāma*, there is *karma*, action. This is the action that has to be made into *yoga*. As long as the *kartṛtva* is there, the person is a *karma-yogī*. When the *kartṛtva* is no longer there, there is nothing more to be accomplished by performing action and whatever the person does is due to *prārabdha* alone. This is why Kṛṣṇa said earlier that, in all the three worlds, there was nothing not yet accomplished that had to be accomplished by him, even though he was still engaged in action.<sup>1</sup>

*Karma* itself is not what binds you; it has no inherent hook that hooks you to it. It is the notion that you will become something or accomplish something by performing action that binds you to action. ‘I will become someone, I will become greater, I will be

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<sup>1</sup> *Gītā* – 3-22

more secure' are all notions, fancies, *sañkalpas*, and the person who is free from all *sañkalpas* is called a *sarva-sañkalpa-sannyāsi*.

Please do not conclude that you should become a *sarva-sañkalpa-sannyāsi*. *Sarva-sañkalpa-sannyāsa* is not an ideal; it is a thing to be understood. It is freedom from *sañkalpas*, a freedom that comes from knowing that the self is free from doership and enjoyership. The person who knows this is a wise person, a *yoga-ārūḍha*, a *jñānī*.

*Kṛṣṇa* is actually talking about *sarva-karma-sannyāsa* in this verse. Giving up all action implies giving up all desires since you cannot give up all actions unless you give up the desires that prompt them. And you cannot give up the desires unless you know, 'I am the whole.' Knowing this, the doership is gone; only then is the renunciation of all desires possible. Thus, this giving up of desires, passion, and activity is nothing but the discovery that the self, *ātmā*, is the whole.

Therefore, what should you do?

उद्धरेदात्मनात्मानं नात्मानमवसादयेत् ।

आत्मैव ह्यात्मनो बन्धुरात्मैव रिपुरात्मनः ॥ ५ ॥

*uddharedātmanātmānaṃ nātmanamavasādayet*

*ātmaiva hyātmano bandhurātmaiva ripurātmanaḥ*

Verse 5

आत्मना *ātmanā* — by oneself; आत्मानम् *ātmanam* — oneself; उद्धरेत् *uddharet* — may one lift; आत्मानम् *ātmanam* — oneself; न अवसादयेत् *na avasādayet* — may one not destroy; हि *hi* — for; आत्मा एव *ātma eva* — oneself alone; आत्मनः बन्धुः *ātmanaḥ bandhuḥ* — is one's benefactor; आत्मा एव *ātma eva* — oneself alone; आत्मनः रिपुः *ātmanaḥ ripuḥ* — is one's enemy

May one lift oneself by oneself, may one not destroy oneself. For, the self alone is one's benefactor (and) the self alone is one's enemy.

This verse makes it very clear that you have to save yourself, that you should not destroy yourself or allow yourself to be destroyed. Why? Because *ātmā*, oneself, is a great helper, a great benefactor, for oneself. In other words, you yourself are the benefactor. And who is the beneficiary? Yourself. Therefore, you are both the beneficiary and the benefactor. *Kṛṣṇa* also goes on to say that you are also your own enemy, which means you can become a great friend, a benefactor, or an enemy to yourself.

A person who is a *yoga-ārūḍha*, a *sarva-sañkalpa-sannyāsi*, has saved himself or herself totally from all that is undesirable — in other words, from the life of *saṃsāra*, just as one saves oneself from drowning by pulling oneself out of the water. In fact, all of a person's activities are meant only to save himself or herself. The person wants to

become secure, to be free of all problems, including loss of money or power, loss of health, old age, and death, which means that he or she wants to save himself or herself from insecurity. Thus, everyone is busy working for his or her own safety. Whether we call it self-safety, self-security, or self-welfare, there is no question that the pursuit is 'self-ish' — for the self alone.

## UNDERSTANDING THE FUNDAMENTAL PROBLEM

Seeking an alternative life-style is not what is implied here. Rather, the person is seeking answers to some very fundamental questions. Certain questions arise in the person, however vague they may be, which tend to disturb the usual activities that people naturally absorb themselves in. The questions themselves give a certain direction to one's life until the person comes to understand that he or she is under the spell of likes and dislikes, *rāga-dveṣas*, to use the language of the *Gītā*. One begins to recognise that the natural pursuit, *svābhāvika-pravṛtti*, that everyone engages in, is out of these likes and dislikes — 'I like it, I want it. Therefore, I do it.' All one's responses arise from these *rāga-dveṣas* alone.

And, within this particular sphere of reality, everything becomes right; anger is legitimate; sorrow is legitimate; pain is legitimate. This, then, is where we get confused. Where anger is legitimate, it is legitimate to get angry. Therefore, if someone says you should not get angry, you get even angrier. Even if you do not get angry, you run into problems! Once the legitimacy is accepted by you, you can move ahead without disturbing your natural activity. But, when you begin questioning the very activity itself, you question the very life you are living. Only when you really question, when the flame of inquiry is proper, can you come to understand the fundamental problem.

There is a mature way of approaching this problem and also an immature way of approaching it. And, in the light of what we discover, there is something that can be called a prayerful life, a life of enlightened prayer, not blind prayer. There is a prayerful attitude or disposition, which is *karma-yoga*. *Karma-yoga* implies the acceptance or appreciation of *Īśvara*, the Lord, and living a prayerful life. This is what brings about the capacity to be contemplative, meditative. Such a life creates this kind of a disposition naturally, a disposition in which knowledge of *ātmā*, oneself, takes care of itself. Thus, it is very clear that because of *karma-yoga* one can gain *jñāna*, knowledge.

## HELPING YOURSELF

In this verse, the word *ātmā* refers to you, the individual, who, by nature, is already in the ocean of *saṃsāra*. You did not suddenly slip into this *saṃsāra*; you were born into it, along with it. And how do you get out of it? By your own will, *ātmanā*, you turn yourself about; you question yourself and your values. By questioning yourself, you re-estimate the whole value structure and whatever there is about it that is confusing.

All problems are primarily due to improper priorities. Therefore, we have to reorganise our value structure and, in the process, our priorities will become proper. This inquiry, *vicāra*, into one's value structure is done by oneself alone, *ātmanā eva*; it is an inquiry into right and wrong, what one is to do and not to do. Because of this *vicāra*, your vision undergoes a certain cognitive change. This, then, is one stage of the inquiry.

The next stage of inquiry is also done by oneself alone. By one's own inquiry, one appreciates one's helplessness in certain situations. This itself brings about a prayerful attitude on one's part. A given situation raises certain doubts in you; then, afterwards, there is an appreciation of *Īśvara* and then there is prayer. This makes a person a *vaśī*, one whose body, mind, and senses are together — all of which is done by one's own efforts alone.

Going to a teacher to gain the knowledge is also done by oneself and implies a certain effort on the person's part. In all of these ways, the person pulls himself or herself up. This is why *Kṛṣṇa* says here that one's benefactor is no one else but oneself — *ātmā eva ātmanaḥ bandhuḥ*.

### AN ENEMY TO YOURSELF

To have been born a *saṃsāri* itself is destructive. If your mind is not in order, however, if your value structure is confused, then your entire life and the lives of those around you will be confused. Thus, *Kṛṣṇa* also says that you are your own enemy. When your own mind, *ātmā*, your own will, is abused, or when it is not used at all, then it naturally becomes your enemy; it stands against you, it destroys you. The mind is where all the notions that, this or that will save us, originate. These ideas are indicative of a will that has been fooled — by itself and by others — because one allows oneself to be fooled. This means that the final fool is myself alone. Because I am a fool, I can be fooled! I allow myself to be fooled; therefore, I am my own enemy. What is the use of blaming anyone? I myself am an enemy to myself — *ātmā eva ātmanaḥ ripuḥ*.

### DO NOT LOOK DOWN UPON YOURSELF

Therefore, *Kṛṣṇa* says, 'May one not destroy oneself, *ātmānaṃ na avasādayet*.' May you make use of the will and change, which does not happen without your undergoing some kind of inner revolution. This inner revolution is a quiet revolution; it is not the creation of a lot of conflicting ideas. Rather, a quiet, inner revolution takes place in one's way of looking at things, in one's understanding. Therefore, 'do not look down upon yourself,' is another way of taking the expression, *ātmānaṃ na avasādayet*, because to do so, is to destroy yourself.

In this process, you may sometimes have to mother the child within you and thus take care of it. If as a child you had been neglected then you have probably picked up some problems along the way. And who has to care for this 'child'? Who is the friend to

this child? You alone, as an adult, have to mother the child within. This is what *Kṛṣṇa* was trying to convey when he said here, ‘May one lift oneself up — *ātmānam uddharet*.’

The verse can be taken in an absolute sense in that, at every level, one can say, ‘May one not destroy oneself — *ātmānaṃ na avasādayet*; may one lift oneself up — *ātmanā ātmānam uddharet*.’ Since one has to take care of oneself at every level, in the final analysis, there is no other force, nothing external to yourself, that can help you. Oneself means one's own body-mind-sense-complex, *kārya-karaṇa-saṅghāta*. This *kārya-karaṇa-saṅghāta*, along with the will, is both the friend of the *ātmā* and the enemy of the *ātmā*. In other words, you can be either your own benefactor or your own enemy.

This means that to become free of this *saṃsāra*, another person cannot become a *bandhu*, a benefactor, for you. Only you can do what is to be done. To grow or to mature within the *saṃsāra*, another person may be helpful to you, but to get out of the *saṃsāra*, you have to release yourself. In fact, where *mokṣa* is concerned, the very person who was previously your benefactor could very well become an obstruction to you. *Bandhu* implies affection and friendship, which can also be binding, even though such qualities may be quite helpful to one's emotional growth. Therefore, in the final analysis, in terms of gaining *mokṣa*, you are the only one who can be a friend to yourself. And unless you become a friend to yourself, you become inimical to yourself and become your own enemy.

Further, *Kṛṣṇa* continues:

बन्धुरात्मात्मनस्तस्य येनात्मैवात्मना जितः ।

अनात्मनस्तु शत्रुत्वे वर्तेतात्मैव शत्रुवत् ॥ ६ ॥

*bandhurātmātmanastasya yenātmaivātmanā jitaḥ*  
*anātmānastu śatruṭve vartetaiva śatruvat*

Verse 6

येन *yena* — by whom; आत्मना एव *ātmanā eva* — by oneself alone; आत्मा *ātmā* — oneself; जितः *jitaḥ* — has been mastered; तस्य *tasya* — for that person (self); आत्मा *ātmā* — the self; आत्मनः *ātmanaḥ* — of oneself; बन्धुः *bandhuḥ* — friend; तु *tu* — whereas; अनात्मनः *anātmānaḥ* — for the self who has not mastered oneself; आत्मा *ātmā* — the self; एव *eva* — alone; शत्रुवत् *śatruvat* — like an enemy; शत्रुत्वे *śatruṭve* — in the status of an enemy; वर्तेत *varteta* — would remain

For that (self) who has mastered oneself by oneself, the self alone is a friend of oneself. Whereas, for the self who has not mastered oneself, the self alone would remain in the status of an enemy, like an enemy.

*Tasya* here refers to the *ātmā*, oneself, discussed in the previous verse — for that self, the self is a friend. When? When the self has been won over, *jitaḥ*. And what self is being discussed here? What *ātmā* can be won over? It cannot be *sat-cit-ānanda-ātmā*. Because I can only win over something that I can objectify. And the only object in which I have the 'I'-notion, *ātma-buddhi*, is the *kārya-karaṇa-saṅghāta*, the body-mind-sense-complex. It is this complex, then, that is in one's hands and has to be mastered. Won over by whom? By oneself, *ātmanā*, meaning by one's own inquiry, by one's own discipline, by one's own will and effort.

### THE THREE POWERS AT OUR DISPOSAL

The one who has mastered the body-mind-sense-complex is called a *vaśī* and is a friend to himself or herself. The body-mind-sense-complex serves this person with the three-fold powers, *śaktis*, it is endowed with — the power to think, explore, know, and remember — *jñāna-śakti*; the power to desire, to will — *icchā-śakti*; and the power to act, to make or do — *kriyā-śakti*. These three powers are at the disposal of one who is a *vaśī*, the one who has mastery over the entire *kārya-karaṇa-saṅghāta*.

When you have mastery over the body, mind, and senses, then all their powers are with you. Therefore, the *kārya-karaṇa-saṅghāta* becomes a benefactor for gaining that which is desirable; it can take you anywhere — to *brahma-loka* or even to *Brahman*, to *mokṣa*. This is the maximum it can do because you cannot become greater than *Brahman*. You are already *Brahman*, in fact. As one who has mastery over the body-mind-sense-complex, you are endowed with the powers — you require to recognise this fact.

Because you can gain *puṇya* by following a life of *dharma*, the *kārya-karaṇa-saṅghāta* again becomes a *bandhu*. And, for gaining *mokṣa*, it also becomes a benefactor to you. Thus, the same *kārya-karaṇa-saṅghāta*, the body-mind-sense-complex, is a benefactor to you all the way provided, of course, that it is won over by you.

Now, suppose this body-mind-sense-complex is not won over by you but, instead, is holding you hostage. Then what happens? The body-mind-sense-complex cannot become a *bandhu* for you. Instead, you are a *bandhu* for the body, mind, and senses. In this way, the same *ātmā*, *kārya-karaṇa-saṅghāta*, becomes *ripu*, an enemy, one who creates obstructions for you, one who puts the proverbial spokes in your wheels.

The person who does not have *ātmā*, oneself, in his or her own hands is called *anātmā* in this verse. This is the person for whom the *kārya-karaṇa-saṅghāta* remains as an enemy alone, meaning that the self plays the role of an enemy. *Kṛṣṇa* makes it very clear that there is no enemy other than oneself alone.

Generally, we point a finger at someone other than ourselves and declare that person an enemy. This is done by everyone to some degree or other. And, if no one is available locally, Satan or some other planet will be accused! Everyone feels persecuted by someone or something. Always, there is some imagined fear in people that makes them point at someone as an enemy. By doing this, of course, you are giving the other person a handle with which he or she can disturb you.

No one can disturb you unless you allow them to. Nevertheless, people do have this persecution problem to some extent and they suffer from it. In fact, whenever you point out an enemy with your index finger, your accusing finger, there are three remaining fingers that point back towards yourself. These three fingers, therefore, are said to stand for the physical body, mind, and senses, the *kārya-karaṇa-saṅghāta* that is *ātmā*, oneself, the only enemy, there is. In this way, then, *ātmā* occupies the place of the enemy. Just like an external enemy, it is inimical to you.

### **YOU TAKE YOUR MIND WITH YOU WHEREVER YOU GO**

When you analyse your complaints, you find that they are mental, meaning they are of the mind. You allow yourself to be affected by the world and then, afterwards, you call the world bad and renounce it. You want to renounce this world you have labelled ‘bad’ and go to a world that you have imagined to be ‘good,’ which is called fantasy. But, when you go to this good world, you find it is as bad as the one you left behind! Why? Because you carry your mind, the enemy, with you; you do not leave it behind.

The same mind that interpreted the world as bad is not given up and, with that mind, you move to the so-called good world. In this way, then, the mind is carried with you wherever you go. Even if you go to heaven, you will find problems there because the same mind goes with you — it is carried forward and carried over! And having this same mind with you, this same complaining mind, you always find reason enough to complain, whatever the place or the circumstances. This is what *Kṛṣṇa* means when he says that one is indeed like an enemy for oneself.

When you carry such a mind with you, mind that is always interpreting given situations according to its own notions, even your *guru*, considered to be a great *bandhu*, benefactor, cannot help you. What can any *guru* do if the person is always thinking, ‘My *guru* does not care about me. I don't think he considers me a good student,’ and so on. One makes such conclusions because of that same mind alone. Finally speaking then, you are the only *bandhu* there is.



In the next verse, *Kṛṣṇa* discusses the person who has been a friend to himself or herself.

जितात्मनः प्रशान्तस्य परमात्मा समाहितः ।

शीतोष्णसुखदुःखेषु तथा मानापमानयोः ॥ ७ ॥

*jitātmanaḥ praśāntasya paramātmā samāhitaḥ*  
*śītoṣṇasukhaduḥkheṣu tathā mānāpamānayoḥ*

Verse 7

शीत-उष्ण-सुख-दुःखेषु *śīta-uṣṇa-sukha-duḥkheṣu* — with reference to heat and cold, pleasure and pain; तथा *tathā* — so too; मान-अपमानयोः *māna-apamānayoḥ* — with reference to praise and criticism; जित-आत्मनः *jita-ātmanaḥ* — for the one who has mastery over oneself; प्रशान्तस्य *praśāntasya* — for the one whose mind is tranquil; आत्मा *ātmā* — the mind; परम् समाहितः *param samāhitaḥ* — is always in a state of composure

For the one who has mastery over oneself, whose mind is tranquil with reference to heat and cold, pleasure and pain, and praise and criticism, the mind is always in a state of composure.

This verse can be looked at in two ways, depending on whether the word *param* is placed with *samāhitaḥ* or *ātmā*. First we shall look at it as — *ātmā (mind) param samāhitaḥ*. And then we shall look at it as *paramātmā samāhitaḥ* — as *Śaṅkara* does in his commentary.

We have already seen the meaning of *jita-ātmā*, one whose body, mind, and senses are mastered. To have mastery over your mind means that you are not carried away by its various moods. In other words, moods should be left to grammar, i.e., imperative mood, potential mood, subjunctive mood, etc.! For one who has mastered the mind, there are no other moods than these!

People are generally subject to moods — in the morning there is one mood, in the evening there is another mood, and in between there are so many more! When the moods of the mind are understood properly, you are not carried away by the mind.

This is not to say that you should not have moods. To even suggest such a thing puts you in a bad mood! Please do not think, therefore, I say that one should not have moods. Have your moods, by all means — and understand them so that you will not be carried away by them. Then, you are the master of the moods; they are not the master of you. If you can gain the space necessary to come out on top of the mood, then, the mood does not take you as its hostage. This, then, is what is meant by *jita-ātmā*, one who has mastered his or her moods.

**THE NATURE OF TRANQUILLITY**

Naturally, such a person will be one whose mind is tranquil, *praśānta*. Why? Because he or she is *jitātmā*, one who is not carried away by the moods of the mind. Thus, for one who is *jitātmā* and *praśānta*, there is no situation that can disturb the person. The mind is always in his or her hands, meaning that it is always composed, *param samāhita*; it never loses itself in any situation.

When everything is going well, when the food you want is right there, when the music is just right, when the people you want to talk to are readily available, it is not difficult for the mind to be composed. In this verse, however, we are talking about a person whose mind is always composed, *param samāhita*, in all situations. The compound here, *śīta-uṣṇa-sukha-duḥkheṣu*, stands for all situations, all the opposites. *Śīta* means ‘cold’ — not simply pleasantly cold but so cold that you cannot stand it. Similarly, *uṣṇa* means unpleasantly hot. Thus, neither the cold nor the heat referred to here is at all comfortable.

Then, again, there are situations that give people some comfort, some happiness, some pleasure, *sukha*, and other situations that give discomfort, unhappiness, and sorrow, *duḥkha*. In all of these constantly changing situations, one who has mastery over the mind, remains always composed. For such a person, there is no question of *duḥkha* coming; because, for *duḥkha* to come, one's composure must already be gone. The point being made here is that all those situations that generally bring about *sukha* or *duḥkha* for people create no disturbance whatsoever in the mind of the person whose mind is always composed.

This verse also points out one more set of opposites — praise, *māna*, and censure or shame, *apamāna*. These two are given special mention here because they are very difficult to deal with. Even praise can be hard to handle sometimes because, when some one praises you, you may think the person is going to ask you for something; therefore, you are afraid. You can handle the praise alright, but if it is just a preamble to something else, you do not hear it because you are waiting for what is to come.

Censure is always difficult to handle. Suppose someone says about himself that he can handle criticism very well. And if another person counters that by saying ‘No! You cannot!’ this in itself is enough for the person to feel offended. This is because he cannot handle censure even though he thought he could. Another example of taking things personally and getting offended is, when you are doing a particular job and someone tells you that you are not to do that job, you are to do another. Immediately, you are inclined to take it personally.

## WHY CRITICISM IS SO DIFFICULT TO TAKE

Criticism is very difficult to take because it is personalised; it touches some painful part of you. This problem comes from one's childhood. If parents constantly criticise their child, the criticism becomes a problem for the child. It creates a vulnerable area, a raw, sensitive area, and any subsequent criticism causes the pain to come out. This is the aspect of criticism that makes it so difficult to handle.

The person discussed in this verse is one who has taken care of these problems through proper understanding. Without the proper understanding, new philosophies may be created, which are nothing but superimpositions upon the pain, sorrow, and other problems. To simply conclude that you should not subject yourself to censure, for example, does not work. You have to work on gaining mastery over your mind because these opposites — cold and heat, pleasure and pain, praise and censure — are all disturbing elements for people.

What *Kṛṣṇa* is saying here is that these pairs of opposites do disturb you; therefore, make sure that they do not disturb you. To say, 'I should not be disturbed,' is a superimposition upon yourself, the one who is disturbed and is nothing but confusion, in fact. People who preach that you should not be disturbed never help anyone because whatever they say becomes superimposed on the old pain that is already there. It becomes a superimposed philosophy — a list of 'do's' and 'don'ts,' 'shoulds' and 'should-nots.' The old pain that is inside simply becomes confused by the new superimposed philosophy, thereby adding to the confusion that was already there. Instead of the new philosophy helping, it becomes a problem.

We must, therefore, understand very clearly what this verse is trying to say — in all situations, the person's mind, *ātmā*, is always in a state of great composure, *paraṃ samāhitaḥ*, and we have to work for such composure, which does not imply the superimposition of ideas.

The verse can also be taken as how *Śaṅkara* took it. The person whose *kārya-karaṇa-saṅghāta* is mastered is called a *jitātmā*, and because his mind is tranquil, he is also called *praśānta* in this verse. For such a person, *paramātmā*, *Brahman*, becomes the *ātmā*. In other words, the person who has the knowledge recognises *sat-cit-ānanda-ātmā*, *paramātmā*, as his or her own *ātmā*. And such a person is one who is always the same, *samāhita*, even when the situations change.

ज्ञानविज्ञानतृप्तात्मा कूटस्थो विजितेन्द्रियः ।

युक्त इत्युच्यते योगी समलोष्टाश्मकाञ्चनः ॥ ८ ॥

*jñānavijñānatṛptātmā kūṭastho vijitendriyaḥ*  
*yukta ityucyate yogī samaloṣṭāśmakāñcanaḥ*

Verse 8





## THE NEED TO CONVERT JÑĀNA INTO VIJÑĀNA

Generally, however, a person is not a complete *adhikārī*. While the desire to be liberated, *mumukṣutva*, and the desire for knowledge, *jijñāsā*, may be there, the person has to convert his or her *jñāna* into *vijñāna* by *manana*, *nididhyāsana*, and anything else that may be required. In this process, the *jñāna* that one has about *ātmā* becomes *vijñāna*, immediate knowledge of the self, *aparokṣa-jñāna*.

The *śāstra* does not give you indirect knowledge, *parokṣa-jñāna*. It says, '*tat tvam asi* — you are *Brahman*,' and that is a fact. Because the *śāstra*'s vision is a fact, this knowledge has to be as true as the fact. You cannot have indirect knowledge here. At most, the word *parokṣa-jñāna* can refer to the insight a person has with reference to *ātmā* being *Brahman*, as opposed to *vijñāna*, the truth of that knowledge.

The *śraddhā* you have about *ātmā*, 'I,' being *Brahman*, the whole, helps you do the *manana* and *nididhyāsana* that converts the *jñāna* into *vijñāna*. This process of conversion is called *svānubhava-karaṇa*, meaning *aparokṣī-karaṇa* — converting it to immediate knowledge. *Anubhava* means immediate knowledge. And the word *svānubhava* with reference to this knowledge means that whatever has been revealed about the self is no more an insight or a possibility, no more an article of faith but immediate knowledge. There is a sure recognition, the immediate knowledge of the fact that 'I am *Brahman*.' And this sure knowledge is *vijñāna*.

## ONE WHO HAS ENOUGH — ALAṂ BUDDHI

Through *jñāna* and *vijñāna*, a person is *tr̥pta*, a beautiful Sanskrit word defined by Śaṅkara as *sañjāta-alam-pratyaya* — one who has a sense of satisfaction or completeness in himself. *Alam* means 'adequate' or 'enough.' *Sañjāta-alam-pratyaya* means the one in whom this recognition that, 'it is enough or there is nothing wanting in me' has been born due to the knowledge that he is *sat-cit-ānanda-ātmā*.

This person is always happy, always satisfied with whatever comes. And how does one become *sañjāta-alam-pratyaya*? Only by *jñāna* and *vijñāna* — wherein the self is no more found to be inadequate. The person is freed from all the notions previously held about the self. In its own essential glory, the self is *pūrṇa*, fullness, meaning that there is nothing that is separate from the self and the one for whom *ātmā* is *pūrṇa-ātmā*. Thus a person who is *sañjāta-alam-pratyaya* is called *tr̥pta* here.

The word *ātmā* in this compound, *jñāna-vijñāna-tr̥pta-ātmā*, means the mind, *antaḥ-karaṇa*. Thus, the *tr̥pta* is one whose mind says, '*alam!*' — an attitude born out of *jñāna* and *vijñāna*, insight and *śraddhā*. This attitude is born out of a *jñāna* that has been converted into immediate knowledge of oneself, *vijñāna*. This definition of a wise person, *jñāna-vijñāna-tr̥pta-ātmā*, also reveals the nature of the knowledge itself. This

is the advantage of Sanskrit compounds. Not only do they name a person; they also serve as definitions.

### THE WISE PERSON AS ĀTMĀ IS NOT MOVED BY ANYTHING

The wise person is also described here in this verse as *kūṭastha*, one who remains like an anvil, the solid iron block upon which the blacksmiths of yesteryear hammered red hot iron bits into different shapes. Knives used to be made this way. The point here is that, for all the hammering that went on, the anvil itself never changed. Since the iron bits had to change, the block on which they were changing could not change. Therefore, a person who does not change and allows all possible changes to take place is called *kūṭastha*. The person, like the *ātmā*, is not moved by anything.

In his commentary to this verse, *Śaṅkara* defined *kūṭastha* as *aparakampya*, one who is not swayed by any situation, internally or externally, because he or she is *jñāna-  
vijñāna-trpta-ātmā*. This person has gone through the necessary disciplines and has gained the knowledge of *ātmā* as fullness, without which all problems exist. Having gained this knowledge, there is nothing inside or outside to disturb the person. Such a person is strong and unshaken, *aparakampya*.

### THE NATURE OF COMPASSION

The beauty of a person is not in his or her nose or hair colour; it is in the strength, gentleness, and compassion of the person. Compassion is the readiness to share your time, your mind, your wisdom, your wealth. This readiness to share is strength. Only a truly rich person can share in this way. Therefore, this compassion is the beauty and also the strength of the person.

Compassion is not something that one melts into, although it sometimes looks as though, out of sheer compassion, people liquefy themselves to the extent that they begin to cry at the plight of another. But this is not compassion; nor does it help anyone. If someone requires help from you and you become liquefied in the process, what help is that? Now you require help from yet another person, who may also get liquefied in the process! We need solid people who have the compassion called strength, the compassion that requires inner satisfaction. Such a person is therefore, called *trpta*.

### HOW QUALIFICATIONS BECOME SPONTANEOUS VIRTUES

Please understand that we are not setting up ideals for ourselves. Rather, there is a condition that is to be understood wherein the sense organs, meaning the mind and all its fancies, are always mastered. This means that the eyes do not ask, 'Come on, take me to see something,' and the ears do not say, 'I am tired of listening to *Vedānta*; take me to listen to some music.' It is the unmastered mind with its fancies that makes one go after





## INSECURITY IS DUE TO ONE'S SUBJECTIVE VALUES

It is the subjective value, thinking that gold is security, that makes a person crazy. But does gold always give you security? Suppose, for example, I ask you to watch over a bundle of gold ornaments for me, valued at several hundred thousand dollars, while I am away. At first, you may agree — until you find that you cannot sleep! You keep waking up to see if the gold is still there. Whereas, if I ask you to keep an old vacuum cleaner for me, which weighs much more than the gold, you will not lose any sleep. Even though there is a lot more metal in the vacuum cleaner than there is in the gold, it is not a problem because it does not have the same value as gold. Therefore, does gold give you security or insecurity?

Similarly, if you are walking on the street with no money, there is no problem, whereas if you are carrying money, you feel very insecure and look around to see if any muggers are around. In fact, your very look will signal such people. Muggers are not unintelligent; we are the unintelligent ones! When you have money, it is more intelligent not to look around as though you were expecting to be robbed! The point to note in all of this, of course, is that money is not security in spite of what you may think. And, because it is not security, money can make you more insecure.

Money does have an objective value. It has buying power which can provide you with certain comforts. But, if you see more in money, if you think that it will make you secure, then the value you have for it is purely subjective.

## I AM SECURE

Everything is subject to change; it is always in a flux. The self alone remains changeless and that self is me. I am the only one who is secure; everything else is always changing. My mind is always changing; my thoughts are always changing; and the objects of thought are always changing. Whatever changes is time-bound; it has a beginning and an end. The only thing that remains untouched and comes out unscathed in all of this is 'I,' the self.

If the knowledge of this 'I' is clear, if you have this vision of yourself as secure, then you are a free person. You are a *jñāna-vijñāna-trpta-ātmā*. You are one who requires nothing to be free; you simply look out and see the world as it is. The world that you see is a simple world because you do not project all your nonsense onto it. The world remains as it is and you are a secure, free person. And why does this freedom seem so difficult to gain? Perhaps because it is all so simple, too simple; in fact, it is yourself. Because people always look for something big, this freedom, this security, seems difficult to gain.

The self, being infinite, is not something that is produced. Since it is not produced, it cannot be gained through effort. As long I look for something that can be produced by

my efforts, I will always miss out. In areas where I have to grow, effort certainly has its place and involves alertness, among other things. Whereas, here, fundamentally speaking, I am already secure.

### DOES THE PROBLEM BELONG TO THE GOLD OR TO THE PERSON?

There is a story told about a *guru* by his disciples. It seems that one *śiṣya*, wanting to test the *guru's vairāgya*, dispassion, placed a gold coin under his pillow. When the saint placed his head on the pillow, he found that he could not sleep. He tried everything, but still he could not fall asleep — so great was his *vairāgya*. The *śiṣya*, who was watching all this, realised his mistake, and prostrating to the *guru*, admitted what he had done. He then removed the gold coin and the *guru* fell asleep.

On hearing this story, one can question, whether the *guru* really had great *vairāgya*. Suppose the coin had been placed under the pillow of one for whom gold was everything. This person also would not be able to sleep for fear that someone would take the coin. Or, if the person did sleep and woke up to find the coin was gone, he or she would not sleep again until the thief had been found and the coin recovered. Thus, we have a person who loses sleep because of the absence of the gold and another person who loses sleep because of its presence. Who is greater, tell me? Since both are hooked to the gold, how can it be said that one is greater or lesser than the other?

In the *guru's* room there may be a variety of metals — a copper vessel, a metal plate, and iron nails to hold his cot together, doorknobs, and locks — all of which are metal. This iron and copper do not affect the person, whereas the gold does. What does this mean? Does the problem belong to the gold or to the person? The gold itself does not do anything; it is just what it is — metal with its own objective value, like any other metal. It is *Bhagavān's* creation. Therefore, to a god-inspired person, how can gold be any different than copper or iron, which is also *Bhagavān's* creation?

Are we to take the story to mean that the *guru* has a problem or that the *śiṣya* has a problem? It is usually better to give the benefit of doubt to the *guru* and take the problem to be the *śiṣya's* problem. Why? Because, sometimes, when *śiṣyas* praise their *guru*, the praise may actually belittle the *guru* without the *śiṣyas* intending to do so. In this particular story, the *śiṣya's* vision was that, not being able to sleep proved the greatness of the *guru's vairāgya*. But, all it did was demonstrate the *śiṣya's* lack of understanding of *vairāgya*. Therefore, because *vairāgya* may not have been properly understood, the benefit of the doubt should go to the *mahātmā*, not to the *śiṣya* or those who wrote about him. In other words, we assume that the limitation belongs to the writer; not to the *mahātmā* whom we do not know at all. If the person was a *mahātmā* he would not have lost sleep over a piece of gold because, as a *mahātmā*, the person is *sama-loṣṭa-aśma-kāñcana*. Whether the object is *loṣṭa*, a lump of earth, *aśma*, a rock,

or *kāñcana*, gold, the person's vision is that each object is the same in the sense that one's security does not lie outside oneself.

### **GOLD REPRESENTS ALL DESIRABLE OBJECTS, INCLUDING RELATIONSHIPS**

This applies not only to gold but to everything. The gold, *kāñcana*, is simply an *upalakṣaṇa*, meaning that it stands for everything else of the same category. It even stands for the notion that God is there and will protect me. Since God alone is there, where is the question of him protecting me? He will protect himself, which is myself. The security of one who is *sama-loṣṭa-aśma-kāñcana* does not depend upon anything. To everything, whether it is a lump of earth, a rock, or a piece of gold, the person responds equally, meaning indifferently.

Since no one has any great response towards a rock or a clump of earth, why are they brought in here? Simply to show that the wise person's attitude towards gold is the same as his or her attitude towards a pebble or a clump of earth. Just as the clump of earth or pebble does not enhance the person's security, neither does the gold. Generally, gold imbues people with a false sense of security, but, in fact, an insecure person does not become secure because of gold.

In the past, the value of gold was purely in terms of its usefulness in ornaments. Now, however, it is used in many ways, even in electronics, and has a bullion value as well. Currency, on the other hand, loses its value, its buying power, due to inflation, whereas gold retains its value. Therefore, people have a love for gold and retain their money in the form of gold.

Gold has both an intrinsic value and a certain man-made value in that it does give you a sense of security. This sense of security is false because it does not make you secure. The insecure person does not become secure just because he or she has some bars or bricks of gold. The insecure are always insecure. To have bricks of gold simply means that you are attracting thieves and all those other people who would never visit you otherwise! The point being made is that one commonly looks upon gold as providing a sense of security, whereas the wise person looks to oneself alone for security. In fact, the wise person is the only secure person on earth because he or she does not require gold or anything else in the world in order to be secure.

Having described the wise person's attitude towards all objects in the world, *Kṛṣṇa* then goes on, in the next verse, to describe the person's attitude towards different types of people:

सुहृन्मित्रार्युदासीनमध्यस्थद्वेष्यबन्धुषु ।

साधुष्वपि च पापेषु समबुद्धिर्विशिष्यते ॥ ९ ॥

*suhṛṇmitrāryudāsīnamadhyasthadveṣyabandhuṣu  
sādhuṣvapi ca pāpeṣu samabuddhirviśiṣyate*

Verse 9

सुहृद्-मित्र-अरि-उदासीन-मध्यस्थ-द्वेष्य-बन्धुषु *suhṛd-mitra-ari-udāsīna-madhyastha-dveṣya-bandhuṣu* — with reference to a benefactor, a friend, an enemy, an acquaintance, an arbitrator, someone who is deserving of dislike, and to a relative; साधुषु *sādhuṣu* — towards good people; अपि *api* — even; च *ca* — and; पापेषु *pāpeṣu* — with reference to sinners; सम-बुद्धिः *sama-buddhiḥ* — one whose vision is the same; विशिष्यते *viśiṣyate* — is the most exalted

The one whose vision is the same with reference to a benefactor, a friend, an enemy, an acquaintance, an arbitrator, someone who is deserving of dislike, and to a relative, and even towards good people and sinners, he (or she) is the most exalted.

The compound that forms the first line of this verse is so long that Śaṅkara thinks it necessary to confirm that it was one word, a *samasta-padam*. This compound — *suhṛd-mitra-ari-udāsīna-dveṣya-bandhuṣu* — describes various types of people. There are also two other kinds of people described in the verse — the good people and the sinners. With reference to all of them, *sādhuṣvapi ca pāpeṣu*, the wise person's vision or attitude is equal or the same. That is, he is a *sama-buddhiḥ*. Such a person is the most exalted among all people — *sa viśiṣyate*. One by one, let us look at the types of people Kṛṣṇa mentions and Śaṅkara's definitions of them.

## SUHṚD AND MITRA

According to Śaṅkara's definition, a *suhṛd* is a benefactor, one who extends a helping hand without expecting anything in return.<sup>1</sup> Generally, help is extended out of friendship or because some return is expected. But the person who is *suhṛd* helps without expecting any help in return — a rare person indeed. The next type of person mentioned is *mitra*, a friendly person or a person with whom you share a certain understanding or friendship.

## ARI

There is also the *ari*, an enemy, *śatru*, one who is inimical towards you. Why would a wise person consider anyone as an enemy, you might ask? Enemies are not necessarily created; sometimes they are just there, especially for a person who is always happy with himself or herself. That the person is always happy is often enough to make certain other people inimical.

<sup>1</sup> ??? ██████████ ??? ██████████

There are so many reasons for others to be inimical towards you. That you have a longer nose and another person wants to have a similar nose can be reason enough! The other person may have a flat nose, and, according to that person, you have a good nose. Therefore, he or she may become inimical towards you without you having done anything to the person. Therefore, an enemy is possible in the society, even for a wise person.

Some people may become inimical towards a wise person because of their own beliefs. They may think that a person teaching *Vedānta*, for example, is Satan himself, simply because he or she is saying that everything is *Brahman*. Such people may become very hostile towards a wise person and are therefore, described as enemies here.

### UDĀSĪNA AND MADHYASTHA

Then there is the *udāsīna*, one with whom you have a nodding acquaintance. This is the person you often see at the bus stop, or at the gas station every time you go for gas, or in the elevator every other day. You simply nod to each other and go about your business. Another type of person mentioned in this verse is *madhyastha*, one who arbitrates. If two people are fighting, the person previously mentioned, *udāsīna*, remains neutral and joins neither side; this person just watches and, at the most, may thank the two who are fighting for the thrill he or she got from watching the fight. Whereas, the *madhyastha* is an arbitrator, one who is interested in each of the contenders; therefore, whatever the *madhyastha* says is acceptable to both of them.

An arbitrator is always appointed based on the confidence that both people have about the person's ability to arbitrate objectively and not take sides. Switzerland, for example, often plays this role in world affairs. When there is a conflict between two countries that has resulted in the closing of one or both embassies, Switzerland is sometimes asked to take over as an arbitrator because it is one country that remains totally neutral. That the Swiss have gained considerably in terms of certain monetary benefits from its neutral status is a result of having lived smartly in this way.

A *madhyastha* is one who does not join any group or either side of a conflict. A person can be neutral, *udāsīna*, or desirous of the happiness of all, *hitaiṣī*. If you are a *hitaiṣī*, you try to bring about an understanding between people so that everyone can be happy, and the person who does this is called an arbitrator, a mediator, *madhyastha*, the literal meaning for which is 'one who is in between.'

### PEOPLE ARE THE SOCIETY

The types of people mentioned here are people we find in every society. There is no society, in fact; there are only people. 'Society' is not an entity unto itself; it is made up of people, all of whom are referred to in this verse. Any society always includes all these types of people. Whenever there is a dispute or fight between people, there are both

friends and enemies. There are also those who want to bring about an understanding and others who simply stand by and watch.

### DVEṢYA AND BANDHU

Another type of person mentioned in this long compound is the *dveṣya*, one who deserves to be disliked because of his or her actions. The *dveṣya* is someone who is not at all likeable, according to you, because of what the person is or did. Such a person therefore, becomes eligible for your dislike. Then, there are one's relatives, *bandhus* — father, mother, brother, sister, uncle, aunt, etc. — the people whose opinions really affect you. Because you want them to have a good opinion of you, they can control and manipulate you emotionally and psychologically.

### SĀDHUS AND PĀPAS

Finally, *Kṛṣṇa* mentions two more types of people, *sādhus* and *pāpas*.<sup>1</sup> A person who follows very closely what is enjoined in the *dharma-sāstra* is called a *sādhu* here and one who does not is called *pāpa* or a *pāpī*. The *sādhu* is found in every society; he or she is the person who follows what is right and avoids what is wrong.

The opposite type of person is also found in every society — those who always transgress the norms laid down by the *śāstra*. What is not to be done, according to the *śāstra* and the society, is done and what is to be done is not done. These actions are called *pāpas* and the person performing them is called a *pāpī*.

The *śāstra* does not specifically say that you should not take drugs because a drug problem was not there at that time. Simply because the *śāstra* does not say not to do something is no reason to do it. If you say you do not take alcohol because the *śāstra* specifically says it is not to be taken, but you do take heroin, you should not think you are conforming to the *śāstra*. If people had been taking drugs in those days as they are today, the *śāstra* would have certainly included drugs, along with alcohol, as substances to be avoided. The mention of alcohol in the *śāstra* is an *upalakṣaṇa*, meaning that it stands for all substances that are harmful to you.

### WHY PEOPLE REBEL

People love to rebel against statements such as ‘May you not drink alcohol — *surāṃ na pibet.*’ Anything that is not to be done, they want to do. Rebellion is due to some internal pressure. It may start with some sense of adventure, which is also due to some inner pressure. This is not to say that conformists are good people. Some people are good simply because they are incapable of being bad due to dullness or fear; such

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<sup>1</sup> *Pāpa* here means a sinner, a *pāpī*. The word *pāpa* means sin and the one who has sin is also called a *pāpa* — *pāpam asya asti iti pāpaḥ*.

people may even want to be bad, but their fear prevents them from doing what they really want to do. Whereas, for people who conform as a result of their knowledge and understanding, life is very pleasant; their conformity is a willing conformity in which there is no internal pressure and therefore, no problem.

To rebel means there is pressure inside the person and that pressure itself is the problem. The rebellious nature is not the problem: the pressure behind the rebellious nature is the problem.

We are all rebels, really speaking. I am also a rebel — which is why I became a Swami. I may not be a rebel in the eyes of the society in which I was raised, but certainly in my mothers eyes, I am one. Which mother wants her son to become a Swami? No Indian mother wants it. Only when the neighbour's son becomes a Swami is it alright! All Indian mothers prostrate to such a person and give *bhikṣā* and *dakṣiṇā* — as long as it is someone else's son! Therefore, to be a Swami, one has to be a rebel!

Rebellion can be due to some inner pressure or because there is some understanding, some vision. More often than not, however, a rebellious nature is because of some problem inside caused by one's upbringing or whatever. Due to this internal pressure, people do what is not to be done — from picking pockets to acting as dons of Mafia groups, with so many others in between. Looters come in many shapes and sizes, including the very dignified corporate looters, those who manage never to get exposed. The word *pāpī* here covers all types of wrongdoers in every society.

#### DO WE RELATE TO PEOPLE OR TO A DEFINITION?

Thus, *Kṛṣṇa* begins with *suhṛd* and ended with *pāpī*, with everyone else in the world being covered in between. And how are you to deal with all of them? *Kṛṣṇa* says here, in so many words, that you must always deal with them without differentiating between them. Instead, what you tend to do is bracket these various types of people and then deal with them. No one looks at a person as the person is; you look at the person according to a particular category or definition you have applied to him or her. Only then do you relate to the person. But this is not relating at all. When you look at people according to definitions or categories under which you have put them, you are relating to definitions, not to the people.

People relate to people very rarely. You define people and relate only to your definitions. No one can fulfil a definition. For example, no one can fulfil the definition of an enemy. What does it mean to define someone as your enemy? To what part of you is the person an enemy? You are made up of so many parts. Is the person an enemy to your nose? To your legs? To your hands? To your mind? To your soul? To what is the person an enemy? From this you can see that no one really fulfils any definition; but, still, you deal with people based on your definitions.

When you deal with people according to your definitions, you meet only your definition — your definition of friend, enemy, or whatever; you do not meet the person. This means you are stuck with yourself, with your own definitions. Therefore, you live in an imagined world. And this problem will only go when one's front is gone.

I have a front for myself, I want to protect myself, because I have my own insecurities, my own pains, etc. Therefore, there is always a shield, a mask, through which I face the world. But the person being discussed here, the *jñāna-trpta-ātmā*, has no such problem. By knowledge, this person is completely free, totally satisfied with himself or herself. What front has such a person got? None, whatsoever; all fronts are gone, and what remains is a simple person with a mind and senses. This is why the person is called *sama-buddhi* here.

### A WISE PERSON NEVER CONDEMNS ANOTHER PERSON

The *sama-buddhi* is not a dull, dumb person who cannot tell the difference between a *suhṛd* and a *pāpī*. He or she recognises a *suhṛd* as *suhṛd* and a *pāpī* as a *pāpī*. The point being made here is that the *sama-buddhi* does not condemn the person as a *pāpī*. Indeed, there is no such person as a *pāpī*; there is only a person who has done those actions that are *pāpas*. Therefore, you meet people as they are, take them as they are, and respond to them, deal with them. This particular vision, this capacity to take people as they are, definitely implies a certain freedom on your part and enables a new type of dynamic relationship, a true relationship, to take place.

If a man who has money, for example, goes to a party, he will search out a certain class of people and talk only to them — either his own class or a little higher. Everyone does this in one way or the other. You may come across someone who is informed, a scholarly person, and run away, simply because he or she is a scholar. Because you feel uneasy in this person's presence, you find it more comfortable to be away. You may either run away from those who are moneyed and proud or you may seek them out.

This is not the same thing as being careful about your choice of friends. A friend is one with whom you can share and be free. Therefore, there is some validity in choosing your friends carefully. But we are not talking about empirical life here; we are talking about a wise person, a *jñāna-trpta-ātmā*. How does he or she respond to all these different kinds of people? With reference to them all, this person is one of equal vision, *sama-buddhi*, regardless of their social status, profession, astrological sign, or whatever. The wise person does not bother about what a person was or is, what he or she did or is doing, whether he or she is a follower of the *śāstra*, *sādhu*, or one who goes against the *śāstra*, *pāpī*. Instead, the wise person takes people as they are because he or she is a free person — in other words, a non-judging person.



## THE FEAR OF BEING JUDGED

People are always afraid of being judged. Otherwise, why are they usually a little shy when asked to talk in front of others? Even those who have had the experience of talking publicly remain a little shy. Why? Because they are afraid of what other people think. In fact, we spend most of our lives thinking about what others think. Now, I ask, what do you think? What do you think about yourself? You are what you think about yourself and you think wrongly. This is the thinking we are trying to correct, not other people's thinking.

Others think you are an individual, a *jīva*. Are you accepting that? Who cares about what others think? What you think about yourself is what requires correction. Let others think what they think; that is their problem, not yours. Always thinking about what others think is a common problem. It is not just your problem or someone else's problem; it is the problem of the whole of humanity. You are not controlled by other people; you are controlled by your own thinking, your own fear about what others think.

You think that people are thinking about you, even though they have their own problems and have no time to think about you. In fact, they think only about themselves. But, still, you allow yourself to be controlled by your own thought of what others think! You think society is controlling you when, in fact, society does not control anyone. The only controlling factor here is your own thinking of what society thinks.

The wise person, on the other hand, is not subjectively involved in any of this; he or she is totally non-judgmental towards everyone. This is not to say that you should look at others in terms of whether or not they are non-judgmental. This would simply be making a new judgement! Non-judgement begins and ends with oneself alone. With reference to myself, I am non-judgmental. Otherwise, you are always going to be judgmental. Therefore, may you not be judgmental towards yourself and towards others.

## CORRECTION TAKES TIME

Empirically, being non-judgmental has a value and, for a wise person is very natural. In fact, the quality of being non-judgmental is to be accomplished before wisdom. Therefore, we say, do not judge yourself on the basis of your mind — that is, on the basis of your mental condition. This is the basis of all judgement — judgement of your qualifications, your skills, your physical body and its status in terms of age, weight, colour, hair and so on. Not only do we judge ourselves this way, but we judge others also. This is all false, absolutely false, which is why correction takes time.

In every area, there is a mistake, an error. One's whole perception of oneself and the world is wrong. Therefore, a total revolution has to take place. First, we put things in order empirically and, then, we say these are all judgements and the self is not to be

judged according to anything. The self is something that has to be recognised. Such recognition is knowing, not judging.

Knowing is simply recognising the nature of the self as it is. The whole vision, therefore, is a deconditioning programme. We have hypnotised ourselves into believing certain things about ourselves, and that self-hypnosis has to be removed by de-hypnosis. This de-hypnotising process culminates in the recognition that ‘I am limitless, fullness — *ahaṃ pūrṇaḥ, sat-cit-ānanda-ātmā.*’

### THE WISE PERSON IS THE MOST EXALTED AMONG YOGĪS

Because this *jñāna-vijñāna-tr̥pta-ātmā*, this *sama-buddhi*, does not sit in judgement, he or she attains the status of being the most exalted, *viśiṣyate*, among the *yogīs*. The expression, ‘the most exalted,’ has to be understood in this context here.

Among those who are not yet wise, there are different degrees of insight and understanding, whereas among those who are wise, there is no such difference. Thus, we cannot really compare the wise person being discussed here, the *jñāna-vijñāna-tr̥pta-ātmā*, with others. In terms of *sama-buddhi*, however, a word *Kṛṣṇa* uses as some kind of descriptive paradigm for the *jñāna-vijñāna-tr̥pta-ātmā*, some comparison can be made. Thus, it is said here that the one whose *buddhi* is of equal nature with reference to all these people, *sama-buddhi* is the most exalted, *viśiṣyate*.

Another interpretation is also possible. In Śaṅkara’s time all manuscripts were hand written on palm leaves. Śaṅkara may have seen the word *viśiṣyate* as *vimucyate* or he may have had a manuscript that actually said *vimucyate*, meaning the person whose vision is equal with reference to different kinds of people is liberated. Since one who is liberated is the most exalted among *yogīs*, the meaning is the same.

This verse and the one before it point out what is gained by this knowledge. The person is said to be the most exalted, the most accomplished, among *yogīs* and is called *brahma-niṣṭha*, one who has the knowledge of *ātmā* as *Brahman*. How to gain this great result is the subject matter of this chapter.

### WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

To gain the status of a *sama-buddhi*, to gain freedom from insecurity, otherwise called *mokṣa*, one should follow the two-fold *sādhana* of *karma-yoga* and *dhyāna-yoga*. We have already seen that *karma-yoga* implies one’s attitude with reference to action. *Dhyāna-yoga* or meditation is pointed out in the next verse:

योगी युञ्जीत सततमात्मानं रहसि स्थितः ।

एकाकी यतचित्तात्मा निराशीरपरिग्रहः ॥ १० ॥

*yogī yuñjīta satatamātmānaṃ rahasi sthitaḥ*  
*ekāki yatacittātmā nirāśīraparagrahaḥ*

Verse 10

सततम् *satatam* — constantly; रहसि *rahasi* — in a quiet place; स्थितः *sthitaḥ* — one who remains; एकाकी *ekāki* — being alone; यतचित्तात्मा *yatacittātmā* — one whose body and mind are relaxed; निराशीः *nirāśīḥ* — one who is free from longing; अपरिग्रहः *aparigrahaḥ* — one who is free from possessions; योगी *yogī* — the *yogī* (the meditator); आत्मानम् *ātmānam* — his (or her) mind; युञ्जीत *yuñjīta* — may (that *yogī*) unite (with the object of meditation)

May the *yogī* (the meditator), one who remains alone in a quiet place, whose body and mind are relaxed, who is free from longing and possessions, constantly unite his (or her) mind (with the object of meditation).

In this verse, the word *yogī* is qualified by several other words and this *yogī* constantly meditates upon the self. *Yogī* means meditator, *dhyātā*, the one who does the *dhyāna*, and the advice given is *yuñjīta*, may he or she absorb the mind, unite the mind, commit the mind to the object of meditation; in other words, may he or she meditate upon the object of meditation, which is mentioned later.

This is the general advice given by *Kṛṣṇa*. May the *yogī* always, *satatam*, connect his or her mind to the object of meditation. Although *satatam* means ‘always’ and can even mean ‘eternal,’ the context determines its actual meaning. Here, *satatam* means that the person should meditate as often as possible or as long as possible.

## MEDITATION DOES NOT REQUIRE AN ACCOMPLICE

And where should this meditation take place? In a secret place, *rahasi*, meaning a quiet place, which in *Śaṅkara*’s time was a hilltop, *giri*, or a cave, *guha*. Thus, *Śaṅkara* explains *Kṛṣṇa*’s words, *rahasi sthitaḥ*, as *giri-guhādaḥ sthitaḥ* meaning the one who meditates remaining on a hill or in a cave. Because a person may take along some other people when he or she goes to a quiet place, *Kṛṣṇa* says that the *yogī*, the meditator, is one who remains alone, *ekāki*, or as *Śaṅkara* puts it, without an accomplice, *asahāya*. In meditation you do not require an accomplice. It is not a job to be done that requires the help of others; no sidekick, accomplice, or understudy is needed.

To do meditation, you do not need anyone, not even a friend. It is your own job, a quiet job with yourself where you are your own friend, just as we saw earlier in the chapter.<sup>1</sup> Your *bandhu*, friend, is yourself.

<sup>1</sup> *Gītā* – 6-5

Śaṅkara uses the word *asahāya*, meaning without any accomplice (*sahāya* — accomplice), because he takes the word *ekākī* to refer to a *sannyāsī*, *sannyāsa* being synonymous with *jñāna* for him. *Sahāya* can also mean *bhāryā*, wife, whom the *yogī*, being a *sannyāsī*, naturally leaves behind. These kinds of mandates were meant as simple rules, not absolute rules. Therefore, we can take the spirit of them and edit or adopt them as necessary. Even so, how can you go to a quiet place, far away from home, wife, and children, unless you take to a life of *sannyāsa*?

If you are not a *sannyāsī*, you have to remain at home and perform your duties. Then the person who remains at home, who does not go away and leave all the people behind, is called a *grhastha*, *grha* meaning ‘home.’ All married people are called *grhasthas* whether they live in a house or a van! The word *grhastha* like all words, is born of the tradition itself. Even if a man does not always remain in the house because he has a job, he is at home in the sense that he has certain duties to perform. Thus, unless he renounces these duties, he remains at home and is called a *grhastha*.

### GRHASTHA- ĀŚRAMA HAS ITS BASIS IN SANNYĀSA ALONE

We have seen that the status of *grhastha*, householder, is one of the four stages, *āśrama*, of a person's life. First, the person is a *brahmacārī* and then a *grhastha*, which is important because this stage prepares one for the third and fourth stages, *vānaprastha* and *sannyāsa*. Once a person becomes a *sannyāsī* he or she leaves home and is no more a *grhastha*. Thus, *grhastha*, which means literally, ‘one who remains at home,’ is from the standpoint of *sannyāsa* alone. For instance, when a man leaves home as a *sannyāsī*, there is no sense of divorce implied in terms of his marriage. He is not renouncing his wife in order to be free to remarry, which is not renunciation at all; it is simply frustration. Rather, it is a growing out of, a maturing, because of which the marriage has served its purpose; neither person requires the other; they are both *sannyāsīs*. So he walks away and she remains where she is, protected no doubt, but also living like a *sādhu*, the home having become an *āśrama*.

Thus, the word *grhastha* itself has its basis in *sannyāsa*, *sannyāsa* being the ultimate goal of the *grhastha*. *Sannyāsa* is not a choice; it is the ultimate goal. A person who is alone, who remains in a quiet place, and who has the attributes of a *yogī* can meditate constantly, whereas a person who has a home and family cannot. It is impossible. Therefore, Śaṅkara says that Kṛṣṇa is talking about a *sannyāsī* here. First, he had talked about the *karma-yogī*, and now he is talking about the *dhyāna-yogī*, the *sannyāsī*, one who lives a life of meditation.

This *dhyāna-yogī* is further described by Kṛṣṇa as *yata-citta-ātmā*. *Citta* means memory, but here it refers more generally to the *antaḥ-karaṇa*, the mind, which includes memory, usually the predominant factor that disturbs you in meditation. Because your mind continues to operate in meditation, when a sound comes, you are

definitely going to hear it. This is why you withdraw the sense organs to the extent possible — closing the eyes, for example — so that you can be absorbed with the object of meditation. What, then, is left to disturb you? *Citta*, memory — memories from the past. Therefore, *citta* is mentioned here.

Since *citta* stands for the mind in the compound, *yata-citta-ātmā*, the word *ātmā* in this compound is taken to mean *deha*, the physical body, and *yata* refers to both the body and mind being brought under one's mastery. The body is totally relaxed and the mind is absorbed. Whatever problems there may be, they are taken care of, which is all a part of meditation. Thus, *yatacittātmā* is both a name for the *yogī* and a qualification. Whenever a disturbance comes, the body is kept relaxed, and whenever a memory comes, the mind is brought back again to the object of meditation, all of which *Kṛṣṇa* discusses later.

### MEDITATION REQUIRES FREEDOM FROM LONGING

Further, if you have to sit in meditation, you have to be a person who is free from longings, *nirāśīḥ*. To sit in meditation means that there should be no pressure from inside; otherwise, you cannot sit. This inner pressure is longing, and *nirāśīḥ*, refers to the one for whom all longings are gone. If you simply close your eyes, and if longings are there in your mind, you will not even be able to keep your eyes closed, let alone sit quietly. And, in no time at all, you will feel the fuming and fretting inside. Just by closing the eyes, all the longings well up. At least with the eyes open, your mind is arrested by the objects you see because there is something going on and that gives you a direction. But if the eyes are closed, then the whole world is within you and the longings will create so much disturbance that you cannot remain sitting.

Whereas the *nirāśīḥ* is dispassionate, free from longing. The *nirāśīḥ* is relatively satisfied with himself or herself and is therefore, a cheerful person. Because the meditator is a person who has been living the life of *karma-yoga*, *Kṛṣṇa* mentions these particular qualifications here, which, according to *Śaṅkara's* definition of *sannyāsa*, are the qualities of a *sannyāsī*.

### WHAT IT MEANS TO BE FREE OF POSSESSIONS

Finally, *Kṛṣṇa* describes the *dhyāna-yogī* as *aparigraha*, one who is free from possessions. *Parigraha* means hoarding or gathering, which can be a big problem. In fact, it is a disease that everyone has to some extent. Because it is so difficult for people to give up things, they keep on gathering. Even if you give them away, you go on gathering more. This capacity to give things up is to be retained always so that you are the boss. The person who is alert to this fact is called *aparigraha* here.

*Śaṅkara* himself questions how the word *aparigraha* could apply to a *sannyāsī*, one who is supposed to be free from gathering things. But even a *sannyāsī* has the

tendency to gather. A person may be alone in terms of other people, but in terms of possessions, he or she may not be *aparigraha*. Therefore, this gathering tendency has to be kept away by continually giving things away.

*Aparigraha* is a very interesting word here. Not only does it mean to be free from gathering things, but also from the longing to gather. This tendency to gather various objects is a common trait of the *saṃsāri* — and an old habit. Because this habit may still be there, and also because things do have a tendency to gather, the *sannyāsī* has to constantly maintain the status of being an *aparigraha*.

After this *Kṛṣṇa* goes on to say that, all the necessary qualifications being there, may one unite one's mind to the object of meditation — *ātmānaṃ yuñjīta*; in other words, may one meditate. Although *Kṛṣṇa*'s advice may look as though it is directed to a *sannyāsī*, it is really for anyone because everyone is *ekākī*, in fact. Even though you may be married and have a family, you are *ekākī*, one who is alone, at least when you close your eyes! Freeing yourself from all duties and roles, you become *ekākī*, whereas if you think of the father you are, the mother you are, or the daughter or son you are, then you are not *ekākī*. It is as though all these people, all these roles, are inside of you. Therefore, to just be yourself, *ekākī*, you drop the roles and their problems when you meditate. You strip yourself to be the simple person you are, whatever that person may be, the one who is meditating, the one called *ekākī*, *dhyāyī*, *yogī*.

## MEDITATION REQUIRES A CERTAIN DISCIPLINE

The next section of this chapter deals with what has to be done by the person striving for this meditation in terms of discipline, *niyama*, beginning with where and how to sit, *āsana*. In this section, *Kṛṣṇa* discusses the eating habits, *āhāra*, of the meditator, saying that one who does not eat at all will have no *yoga*, nor will the one who eats too much. In fact, both of them may have *roga*, disease, instead. Discipline in terms of other activities, *vihāra*, that are conducive to *yoga*, to meditation, are also mentioned by *Kṛṣṇa* in this section.

Meditation itself is a means for the steadiness and clarity of mind that leads to knowledge. But to live a life of meditation also requires a certain discipline, which is considered to be a secondary means or *sādhana* for meditation. The remainder of this section of chapter six is devoted to the accomplishment of this *yoga* — the discipline and its results.

शुचौ देशे प्रतिष्ठाप्य स्थिरमासनमात्मनः ।

नात्युच्छ्रितं नातिनीचं चैलाजिनकुशोत्तरम् ॥ ११ ॥

*śucau deśe pratiṣṭhāpya sthīramāsanamātmanah  
nātyucchritaṃ nātinīcaṃ cailājīnakūśottaram*

Verse 11

तत्रैकाग्रं मनः कृत्वा यतचित्तेन्द्रियक्रियः ।

उपविश्यासने युञ्ज्याद् योगमात्मविशुद्धये ॥ १२ ॥

*tatraikāgraṃ manaḥ kṛtvā yatacittendriyakriyaḥ  
upaviśyāsane yuñjyād yogamātmaviśuddhaye*

Verse 12

शुचौ *śucau* — in a clean; देशे *deśe* — place; स्थिरम् *sthiram* — firm; न अत्युच्छ्रितम् *na atyucchritam* — not too high; न अतिनीचम् *na atinīcam* — not too low; चैल-अजिन-कुश-उत्तरम् *caila-ajina-kuśa-uttaram* — a piece of soft cloth, a skin, and a grass mat layered in (reverse) order; आसनम् *āsanam* — seat; आत्मनः *ātmanaḥ* — for oneself; प्रतिष्ठाप्य *pratiṣṭhāpya* — having arranged; तत्र *tatra* — there; आसने *āsane* — on the seat; उपविश्य *upaviśya* — sitting; मनः *manaḥ* — mind; एकाग्रम् *ekāgram* — one-pointed (absorbed in the object of meditation); कृत्वा *kṛtvā* — making; यत-चित्त-इन्द्रिय-क्रियः *yata-citta-indriya-kriyaḥ* — one who has mastered the mind and senses; आत्म-विशुद्धये *ātma-viśuddhaye* — for the purification of the mind; योगम् *yogam* — meditation; युञ्ज्यात् *yuñjyāt* — may one practice

Having arranged one's seat in a clean place, firm, not too high (and) not too low, (made of) a piece of soft cloth, a skin, and a grass mat layered in (reverse) order, there, sitting on the seat, making one's mind one-pointed (absorbed in the object of meditation), may the one who has mastered the mind and senses practice meditation for the purification of the mind.

In these verses, the word *āsana*<sup>1</sup> is used for the actual seat upon which the meditator should sit. How one sits is also called *āsana*, which *Kṛṣṇa* discusses later. The words, *śucau deśe*, describe the place where one sits, meaning that it should be a clean place. You cannot sit in a garage, for instance, simply because you bought a house that has a garage and you do not have a car to put in it.

The place of meditation must be clean. For every action, everything you want to do, you require an appropriate place. And meditation is no exception. It requires a place that is inspiring and, if not inspiring, at least clean. Thus, *Kṛṣṇa* says *śucau deśe*. In his commentary of this verse, *Śāṅkara* adds that the place should also be quiet, *vivikta*.

A riverside, a mountain, or some wooded area is considered to be clean and quiet because there is usually no one there and the natural surroundings tend to be inspiring. For a place to be inspiring, meaning conducive to meditation, there should be nothing to draw your attention away from meditation and a clean, quiet place meets this

<sup>1</sup> ?

*That on which one sits is called āsana — a seat.*

requirement. In such places, people can observe nature and spend time with themselves. They need not be always meditating, but they can be meditative while watching.

This does not mean that one must say, I have to meditate and therefore, I have to find a mountain or a riverside. By your own action you can make the place clean. Wherever you are, you can make that a place where you can sit quietly. Does this mean that you have to drive away the people who may be there? No, you need not do that; nor can you do it if the people are a part of your life. How, then, you might ask, are you going to meditate?

### YOU CAN ALWAYS FIND A QUIET CORNER IN WHICH TO MEDITATE

You can find a time, early in the morning perhaps, before the others get up, to do meditation. When everyone is sleeping and you are the only one interested in meditation, this is a good time to do it. If others in the house were interested in meditation and also wanted to do it early in the morning, it could be a problem. So, by getting up a little earlier, you have a quiet place. Some quiet corner is always available. Or, if your home is always noisy, you can go to a nearby park or some other quiet place.

When *Kṛṣṇa* says here that one should arrange his or her own *āsana*, he does not mean it in a possessive sense. It is not that you have a particular seat upon which you must sit every day; this is not the emphasis here. Rather, one's *āsana*, one's seat of meditation, is in terms of what is most conducive to meditation. For example, the seat should be positioned firmly, meaning that it should not wobble. The seat may be a bench, a plank, or whatever, but it should be firm, *sthira*. It should not be too high, *na atyucchrita*, a seat from which you could fall, nor too low, *na atinīca*, meaning that you should not sit directly on the ground lest you be bothered by insects and the dampness.

Because the body has a tendency to become very relaxed in meditation, and may even fall asleep, the fear of falling will be there if the *āsana* is too high. Instead of meditating, you will be afraid and then distracted by the thought that you should not be afraid. Similarly, if you sit directly on the ground there may be a fear of being bitten by creepy, crawly creatures, a real concern for those who inhabited the jungle areas of India.

*Na atyucchrita* and *na atinīca* can also be taken in another way. Some people think that if they want to meditate they should go to the higher altitudes, *atyucchrita*, or into a cave below the ground, *atinīca*. But, here *Kṛṣṇa* advises against both locations. Meditation may seem to be very successful at the higher altitudes, like in Gangotri at about 10,000 feet, because the person who meditates will have no disturbance in his or her mind. But this is because the mind cannot think due to a lack of oxygen. We meditate with a thinking mind, not an incapacitated mind.

Therefore, to incapacitate the mind by going to high altitudes is not an accomplishment; in fact, you do not even know what is going on. Arranging one's *āsana*



in too low a place is also a problem for the same reason. There may be no sounds to disturb you in a cave dug into the ground, but, again, there is the problem of the mind not being able to think because the oxygen supply is extremely limited in such places. Therefore, *Kṛṣṇa* says here that one's seat of meditation should not be too high, *na atyucchrita*, nor too low, *na atinīca* — in other words, neither on a mountain top nor under the ground.

### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MATERIALS OF THE TRADITIONAL ĀSANA

*Kṛṣṇa* then mentions one final thing about the *āsana* itself — *caila-ajina-kuśa-uttaram*. *Caila* means a soft cloth; *ajina* is a skin, such as a deer skin or tiger skin used by the ancient sages; and *kuśa* is a grass mat. The word *uttara* completes the compound by referring to the order in which these three materials are to be placed, one over the other. When three materials are given, one needs to know what should be over what because it can be done in several ways.

If, for example, you arrange your *āsana* by first placing a soft cloth on the ground or floor, on top of which you put the skin and then the grass mat, you will not be able to sit there because to sit on a mat made of grass is a problem, I assure you. *Śaṅkara* confirmed here that the order to be followed is the other way around *viparīta* — with the *kuśa* on the bottom, then the *ajina*, on top of which is the soft cloth. Only then is the *āsana* called *caila-ajina-kuśa-uttara*.

All this had to be said because meditation should not be done on the damp ground. In those days, all dwellings had mud floors and the benches or seats were made out of clay. If a person were to sit in meditation on such an *āsana* without these three layers of material, after three months their minds may have bent in the right direction, but their legs would be unable to bend at all, the knees having a tendency to develop arthritis when exposed to dampness. So, to avoid the dampness the *kuśa* was recommended, on top of which was placed a furred skin, like a deerskin, to make the *āsana* warm. Finally, to avoid irritation from the skin, a piece of soft cloth was placed on the top of it.

This does not mean that you must find a deer in order to arrange your *āsana* for meditation. This was simply what was done at that particular time. The skin of a deer was often chosen because the deer is one animal that is considered to be very clean since it will not touch anything that any other tongue has touched. In the Indian religious culture also, this is a very common custom. No one takes a bite of something and then shares it with another person. Only in certain instances will people eat what has already been touched by the tongue of another.

Food that has been offered to the Lord can be eaten, which is not a problem anyway because the Lord has not actually touched it with His tongue. Similarly, food offered to one's forefathers through the *brāhmaṇas* who perform the ritual, called *śrāddha*, is also eaten. The forefathers are invoked in the *brāhmaṇas* and then the

food is eaten by the *brāhmaṇas* who represent the forefathers. Again, the forefathers have not actually touched on the food. Finally, a wife will eat from the same plate as her husband after he has eaten and a *śiṣya* will do the same after the *guru* has eaten. These, then, are the exceptions to eating food that has been touched by others.

I actually tested this trait in deer when I was in a deer park one day. I gave the deer some bananas and they ate them. Then, I put my tongue on another banana and gave it to one of the deer. It sniffed at the banana and walked away. Whether an American deer would be so careful about what it eats, I do not know! It seems to be the nature of the deer. Besides being clean, the deer has enough fur for the skin to be very soft.

There was also a rule about the skin that was to be used for one's *āsana*. It was not to be one that someone gave you or one that had been taken from a deer that had been killed. Some hunters would sometimes kill a deer and try to give the skin to a *sādhu*. Therefore, the *sādhu* had to hunt for a dead deer and ensure that it had died naturally.

Having arranged one's seat of meditation, what is one to do? The verb here is *yuñjyāt*, meaning 'May one practice.' And what is one to practice? Meditation, *yoga*. Why? For steadiness and purification of the mind alone — *ātma-viśuddhaye* — not for anything else. Gaining knowledge of *ātmā* is accomplished only by inquiry, *vicāra*, which requires *ātma-viśuddhi*. The obstructions in the mind that prevent this knowledge from taking place have to be removed. This removal of the obstructions in the mind, *antaḥ-karaṇa-pratibandhaka-nivṛtti*, is done through *dhyāna*, meditation. Therefore, *Kṛṣṇa* says here, 'May one practice meditation for purification of the mind, *yuñjyāt yogam ātma-viśuddhaye*.'

Sitting on the *āsana* described earlier, may there be absorption, *samādhāna*, into the object of meditation. How is this to be done? By making the mind single-pointed, *ekāgraṃ manaḥkṛtvā*. *Agra* means what is in front and refers here to what is to be meditated on, that being one thing alone, *eka*. Thus, *Kṛṣṇa* is saying to bring the mind to the object of meditation and let it be absorbed there.

The person who does meditation is described once again as *yata-citta-indriya-kriya*, one who has mastery over the mind, senses, and their various activities. Because we tend to take this qualification lightly, it is repeated over and over again. And, since it has been repeated so often, we should take it seriously. This means that the senses, which are usually directed outward, are withdrawn, along with all other activities of the mind. And the person who does this is called *yata-citta-indriya-kriya*. Being such a person, may he or she meditate — *yogaṃ yuñjyāt*.

## THE PURPOSE OF MEDITATION

Why should the person meditate? For the purification of the mind — *ātma-viśuddhaye*. In this context, the word *ātmā* refers to the *antaḥ-karaṇa*, the mind, and

not *sat-cit-ānanda-ātmā*, as *sat-cit-ananda-ātmā* is already *viśuddha* and needs no purification.

The word *viśuddhi* can also be taken in a different sense. To be free from the hold of *rāga-dveṣas* is *śuddhi*. *Viśuddhi* can also be in terms of old memories, *kaṣāyas*, that come up unexpectedly in contemplation when the mind is quiet. These memories lie under the surface and are like the decaying organic matter that lies under the water, producing certain gases that bubble up to the surface. A pond can be quiet and clean one minute, but then, if you keep watching, you will suddenly see something coming up — blub... blub... blub. Why do the bubbles come up? Because there is something underneath.

Similarly, the mind is quietened by meditation, which can be either contemplative meditation or purely prayerful meditation. Prayerful meditation is on *Brahman* with qualities, *saguṇa-brahma*, whereas contemplative meditation is on *Brahman* without qualities, *nirguṇa-brahma*. Here, the words are such that you can take them to mean both *saguṇa-brahma* meditation and *nirguṇa-brahma* meditation, as you will see later when the object of meditation, *dhyeya*, is discussed. In fact, meditation includes both because you start with a prayerful meditation and end with contemplative meditation.

## YOUR THOUGHTS NEED NOT DISTURB YOU

When a certain peace, *śānti*, is gained, the mind is composed, tranquil, and in that tranquil mind, various thoughts may occur. These thoughts are to be understood as *kaṣāyas*, memories that may pop up in a quiet mind at any time without any seeming connection or relevancy. When you understand meditation properly, your thoughts will not frighten you. You need not think you are disturbed; you just let the thoughts bubble up and remain a witness.

Generally, when these thoughts come, we take them as ourselves. But here, in the seat of meditation, because you have a certain composure, it is possible for you to discover a distance between yourself and these bubbles of thoughts. So, you are neither disturbed by them, nor do you need to try to avoid them. Just be an observer, a *sākṣī*; understand the thoughts as they are and do not be afraid of them. Let them rise and watch them go away, like so many bubbles on the surface of a quiet pond. This is what *Kṛṣṇa* means here when he said that for purifying the mind, may one practice meditation — *ātma-viśuddhaye yogaṃ yuñjyāt*.

## HOW PRAYER PURIFIES THE MIND

Prayer can bring about *ātma-viśuddhi* because it brings about a certain change on your part — a glad acceptance of what has gone before, or what has happened in your life. Usually we spend our lives fighting against this! This glad acceptance of the past requires a certain intimate acceptance on your part, a prayerful acceptance of what has

already happened. Therefore, prayerful meditation takes care of your *rāga-dveṣas* in terms of the past — what I would have liked to have happened, what I should have done, what should not have happened to me, etc., — all the things that usually bother a person. This, too, is called *ātma-viśuddhi*. And again, the release of various *kaṣāyas* — *saṃskāras* or impressions, that are deep within the person, those unassimilated, undigested, hurtful experiences that are stored in the form of memories — is called *ātma-viśuddhi*.

Identifying oneself with one's thoughts or the physical body, thinking that anything that happens to the body happens to me, is an obstruction, *pratibandhaka*, a great impurity, *aśuddhi*, for the one who desires liberation. This identification has to be removed. Anything that has to be removed, anything that is unclean, is called *aśuddhi*. To eliminate *aśuddhi*, contemplation is helpful. Contemplation is not for *ātma-jñāna*; it is for *ātma-viśuddhi* alone.

## MEDITATION FACILITATES INQUIRY

Since *ātma-jñāna* is *vṛtti-jñāna*, it can only take place by the operation of a *pramāṇa*. *Pramāṇa-vicāra* alone produces *vṛtti-jñāna* and destroys self-ignorance. And, for this *vṛtti-jñāna* to take place, the various *pratibandhakas* that are there, due to *rāga-dveṣas*, *kaṣāyas*, or *viparīta-bhāvanas*, have to be removed, and this removal is taken care of by *dhyāna*, meditation.

Saying that *pramāṇa-vicāra* alone produces knowledge does not mean that you give meditation or prayer a lesser place. There is no lesser place, in fact. Because meditation is for *ātma-viśuddhi*, it occupies an important position in the life of a seeker. Thus, *Kṛṣṇa* says, 'May one do meditation — *yogaṃ yuñjyāt*.'

This is an important point to note because it is commonly thought that *Vedānta* is only a theory and it is *dhyāna*, the practice of meditation, that produces the knowledge. This is not true. *Dhyāna* is for *ātma-viśuddhi*, not for *ātma-jñāna*, even though ultimately it enables *ātma-jñāna* to take place. The knowledge itself depends entirely upon *antaḥ-karaṇa-viśuddhi*, because it depends on a mind that is fit for the knowledge. In making the mind fit for knowledge, *dhyāna* is important. Although there is a certain order involved here in terms of *dhyāna* being necessary for the first step of preparing the mind, *dhyāna* itself does not produce knowledge. The *vṛtti-jñāna* produced by *pramāṇa-vicāra* alone produces knowledge.

Having described the *āsana* and what is to take place while in the seat of meditation, *Kṛṣṇa* then talks about how one is to sit:

समं कायशिरोग्रीवं धारयन्नचलं स्थिरः ।

सम्प्रेक्ष्य नासिकाग्रं स्वं दिशश्चानवलोकयन् ॥ १३ ॥

*samaṃ kāyaśirogrīvaṃ dhārayannacalaṃ sthiraḥ  
samprekṣya nāsikāgraṃ svam diśaścānavalokayan*

Verse 13

प्रशान्तात्मा विगतभीर्ब्रह्मचारिव्रते स्थितः ।

मनः संयम्य मच्चित्तो युक्त आसीत् मत्परः ॥ १४ ॥

*praśāntātmā vigatabhīrbrahmacārivrate sthitaḥ  
manaḥ saṃyamya maccito yukta āsīta matparaḥ*

Verse 14

काय-शिरो-ग्रीवम् *kāya-śiro-grīvam* — body, head, and neck; समम् *samaṃ* — in one straight line; अचलम् *acalam* — without moving; धारयन् *dhārayan* — holding; स्थिरः (सन्) *sthiraḥ (san)* — (being) firm; स्वम् नासिकाग्रम् *svam nāsikāgram* — the tip of one's nose; सम्प्रेक्ष्य *samprekṣya* — (as though) looking at; दिशः च *diśaḥ ca* — and directions; अनवलोकयन् *anavalokayan* — not looking; प्रशान्त-आत्मा *praśānta-ātmā* — one whose mind is tranquil; विगतभीः *vigata-bhīḥ* — one who is free from fear; ब्रह्मचारिव्रते स्थितः (सन्) *brahmacārivrate sthitaḥ (san)* — (being) established in one's commitment to the life of a *brahmicārī*; मनः *manaḥ* — mind; संयम्य *saṃyamya* — controlling; मत्-चित्तः *mat-cittaḥ* — thinking of Me; मत्-परः *mat-paraḥ* — having Me as the ultimate goal; युक्तः *yuktaḥ* — *yogī* (meditator); आसीत् *āsīta* — may he (or she) sit

Holding oneself firm without moving, holding the body, head, and neck in one straight line, (as though) looking at the tip of one's nose and not looking in all directions, being the one whose mind is tranquil, who is free from fear, established in one's commitment to the life of a *brahmacārī*, may (that) *yogī* (meditator) sit thinking of Me, having Me as the ultimate goal.

To hold the body, head, and neck in one straight line means not to bend them in any way — in other words, one should sit erect for meditation. But, even though the body, head, and neck are vertical, you may sway or rock a little; therefore, *Kṛṣṇa* adds the word *acalam*, meaning that the body is to be kept still, and also *sthira*, meaning that one should be very firm in one's seat. This means that, prior to meditation, the legs and feet are placed in such a way that they do not require any kind of change. Thus, there is both stillness and firmness in one's seat of meditation.

### DOES ONE REALLY MEDITATE ON THE TIP OF ONE'S NOSE?

The posture described in this verse brings out a certain attitude or disposition in the person that is conducive to meditation. This posture includes one's gaze also. The expression, 'looking at the tip of one's nose — *samprekṣya nāsikāgram*,' is sometimes misunderstood to mean that one should meditate on the tip of the nose! There are even

two schools of thought on this, one saying you should meditate on the spot between the eyebrows and the other saying that you should meditate on the tip of the nose itself. Because it could be literally taken and therefore, misunderstood, Śaṅkara explains what Kṛṣṇa means by this expression in his commentary of this verse.

In explaining the gaze, Kṛṣṇa says, one ‘*samprekṣya nāsikāgram* — looking at the tip of one’s nose.’ This does not mean that one must sit cross-eyed. Rather, given the position of the eyes as they look out, they naturally fall or converge upon a particular point and that is where they are to remain. This means you neither look up nor down; you look ‘as though’ at the tip of your nose. Therefore, looking at one’s nose is not what is being enjoined here by the expression — *samprekṣya nāsikāgram*; it simply addresses where the gaze should fall. This is explained by Śaṅkara as follows. Śaṅkara says that there is the word, *iva*, understood here. The word, *samprekṣya*, looking, should be understood as ‘as though looking’ — *darśanaṃ kṛtvā iva*. The eyes are not even closed in fact; they just look out in such a way that they do not look directly at any particular object, which is another way of avoiding distractions.

Śaṅkara questions what would happen if the person were asked to look at the tip of the nose. Looking at the tip of the nose, where would the person’s absorption be? At the tip of the nose, of course — which is not what is desired here at all. In contemplation, the mind is to be absorbed in *ātmā* alone and, for this, your mind must be available. If you are busy looking at the tip of the nose, how are you going to make use of the mind to contemplate upon *ātmā*? Therefore, the object of meditation, *dhyeya*, is not the tip of the nose but something entirely different, as we shall see.

Śaṅkara also clarifies Kṛṣṇa’s words, *diśaḥ anavalokayan*, as meaning ‘not looking in any particular direction.’ When you are sitting in meditation, it is possible to look to the left, to the right, to the front, and to the back, as well as up or down. Kṛṣṇa already covered the possibility of looking up and down here by saying, ‘*samaṇ kāya-śiro-grīvaṃ dhārayan* — keeping the body, head, and neck in one straight line.’ Since one can also look to the left and right, why not meditate that way? Because you will develop a pain in the neck. Thus, to avoid such discomforts, the position for meditation was established.

Sitting outwardly in meditation is one thing, but there is also another sitting involved, an inside sitting. This inner sitting is what is meant by the word ‘meditation’ and is what is referred to by the words *mat-cittaḥ* and *mat-paraḥ*.

Having already talked about the place of meditation, the seat itself, and the sitting posture, Kṛṣṇa points out the object of meditation and also the nature of the meditator here. In fact, there are not many verses in the *Gītā* that talk about meditation as such,

whereas the meditator is talked about a lot. If you look at the entire *Gītā*, you will find only one or two other sentences on meditation itself.<sup>1</sup>

The emphasis throughout the *Gītā* is on the meditator. Who it is that meditates is what makes the difference between a successful meditation and an unsuccessful one — a mere act of meditation. The present verse also talks a lot about the meditator, referring to the person as *praśānta-ātmā*, one for whom the *ātmā*, the mind, the *antaḥ-karaṇa*, has gained certain degree of tranquillity.

*Kṛṣṇa* talks about the real *śānti* later, the *śānti* that is gained as a result of meditation and knowledge. In this verse, however, because the person being discussed is a *mumukṣu*, a seeker, the *śānti* talked about is relative, and refers to the degree of tranquillity one has gained by living a life of *karma-yoga*. We know this by the context since, in the previous verses, *Kṛṣṇa* had been talking about the meditator and what he or she had accomplished thus far, all of which is conveyed here by describing the person as *praśānta-ātmā*. The *praśānta-ātmā* is one who has lived a life of *karma-yoga*, who has taken care of his or her *rāga-dveṣas* and is therefore, no longer pressurised by them.

Such a person is free from fear, *vigata-bhī*. There are many varieties of fear. The fear of death, for example, is said to be a very common fear for some people in the seat of meditation. When the body is as relaxed as it is in meditation, we generally go to sleep and there is no fear because there is nobody to be afraid of. But when the body is relaxed and you do not go to sleep, there may be a feeling of going out of the body, which may give rise to the fear of death if what is happening is not properly understood. The physical relaxation itself is as though you are going out of this body. Then, the entire internal defence system sends out an alarm and the person experiences fear.

## DISSOLUTION OF THE DOER IS REALLY RESOLUTION

No matter how old you are, there is a fear in giving up the body even though you know you have to give it up one day. However, what is involved here is the dissolution of the doer, the *kartā*. This means the very subject, the meditator, is resolved, which is a kind of suicide. And because the person does not want to dissolve himself or herself, there is fear. In fact, there is no dissolution; there is only resolution. The resolving of the *ahaṅkāra* is also false because the *ahaṅkāra* is *ātmā*, but *ātmā* is not *ahaṅkāra*. In contemplation the *ahaṅkāra*, the meditator, naturally resolves into *ātmā*.

## THE SOURCE OF FEAR

The meditator is *ātmā*, the meditated is *ātmā*, and the attempt is called meditation. If the attempt is successful, the meditator is gone, having resolved into *ātmā*. Therefore, the means and the end become one and the same. The meditator resolves into the very

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<sup>1</sup> *Gītā* – 6-25

object of meditation as he or she attempts meditation. This is the situation that some people are afraid of because they feel as though they are being decimated or destroyed. Thus, some people see fear where there is no fear at all. They feel as though something is going to disappear and they retain it. In fact, the retention of the *ahaṅkāra* is the only source of fear there is, the *ahaṅkāra* itself being the source of fear.

If the *ahaṅkāra* does not want to quit, naturally there will be some fear. This fear, then, is due to *avicāra*, a lack of inquiry alone. A person who inquires is free from fear and is called *vigatabhī* here.

### FEAR OF TOMORROW

*Vigatabhī* can also be taken as a person who is not afraid of tomorrow, a very common fear. People often ask, 'If I keep on meditating, what will happen to me? Suppose I go into *samādhi* and I don't come out. What will happen then? Or, suppose I get enlightened, then what will happen to me? How will I behave? How will I hold a job?' Because the person being described in this verse is a *sannyāsī*, this fear of tomorrow is not possible. But a meditator need not always be a *sannyāsī*; therefore, he or she may have all these fears.

I read once that a woman approached Swami Vivekananda after a talk he had given and asked, 'Did you say that the ego is to be destroyed?' 'Yes,' he replied. 'But if my ego is destroyed, who will run the house?' she asked. 'Who will do the dishes?' This kind of problem arises because of the use of the word 'destruction.' Destruction of the ego has to be properly understood. The ego is not really destroyed. It remains even for the person who is qualified to talk about it. But it is an enlightened ego. The 'I' is independent of the I-thought, whereas the I-thought is not independent of 'I.' Thus, the I-thought is already nullified. It is only a shadow 'I.' It is not the 'I' itself.

The problem is only in the 'I.' If the I-thought is taken at one time as 'I,' and at other times as Ithought, then 'I' become a yo-yo — now up, now down, now *sukhī*, now *duḥkhī*. Because the person identifies with the conditions of one's mind, the person is subject to *saṃsāra*. To be free of this identification is often described as the destruction of the ego, but if it is not explained in this way, all kinds of problems and fears are possible. However, for the person discussed here, *vigatabhī*, there is no fear of tomorrow or of anything else.

### THE LIFE OF A BRAHMACĀRĪ

The *vigatabhī* can also be called *brahmacāri-vrate sthitaḥ*, one who remains with the vows or the commitment of a *brahmacāri*. And what is that commitment that implies living the life of a *brahmacāri*? *Śaṅkara* defines it in terms of service to the teacher, *guru-śuśrūṣā*, eating happily whatever food comes one's way as alms, etc. *bhikṣā-anna-bhuktyādi*. A person with this kind of commitment does not bother about



tomorrow and is called a *brahmacārī*. Since *Kṛṣṇa* is talking about meditation, the context in which the word *brahmacārī* is used here also implies an emphasis on the study of the *śāstra*; therefore, it is assumed that the meditator has done a lot of *śravaṇa* and *manana*.

How to live a life of a *brahmacārī* is also mentioned in this verse. One must withdraw from the various forms of thinking that takes place in the mind, *manaḥ samyamya*. And, because you cannot withdraw from them unless you apply the mind to the *dhyeya*, the object of meditation, *Kṛṣṇa* says here, ‘Thinking of Me, may the meditator sit — *mat-citto yukta āsīta*.’

### THE IDENTITY BETWEEN THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE LORD

*Mat-citta* means one whose mind is in Me, *Parameśvara* — *mayi parameśvare cittaṃ yasya*. The ‘Me,’ of course, is *Kṛṣṇa* as *Parameśvara*. *Parameśvara* has two meanings and is a common expression throughout the *śāstra*. It can mean either the Lord as the cause of the world, *jāgat-kāraṇa*, or the Lord in his essential form, *Brahman*, *paramātmā*.

The word, *paramātmā* is used because the *jīva*, the self, the individual who thinks, ‘I am the *jīva*,’ is equated to *Parameśvara*, even though there seems to be a difference between the two. In reality, there is no difference.

### THE NEED FOR TWO TYPES OF VĀKYAS

The resolution of the seeming difference is *Kṛṣṇa*’s *upadeśa* and the teaching of *Vedānta*. Thus, the *jīva*’s predication as *Parameśvara*, the Lord, is the *upadeśa*, for which there are two types of statements, *vākyas*, in the *vedānta-śāstra*. One kind of *vākya* reveals the nature of *ātmā*, *Parameśvara*, and the other reveals the non-difference between the *jīva* and *Parameśvara*.

The nature of *ātmā* is revealed either by saying that *satya-jñāna-ananta* is *Brahman* or by saying that *sat-cit-ānanda* is *ātmā*. It is the same revelation in that both are one and the same. The words that reveal the nature of the self or the *paramātmā* by implication are always the same. But there is also the equation between the *jīva* and *Īśvara*, the equation itself being the *upadeśa*, the teaching. Thus, there are these two types of *vākyas* — *vastu-svarūpa-para-vākya*, a statement revealing the nature of *ātmā*, and *ekatva-para-vākya*, a statement revealing the identity between the individual and the Lord, such as, ‘You are that *Brahman* — *tat tvam asi*,’ or I am *Brahman* — *ahaṃ brahma asmi*.

How is an identity between the *jīva* and *Īśvara* possible? It is because the *jīva* is *sat-cit-ānanda* and *Parameśvara* is *sat-cit-ānanda*. The *svarūpa* of *ātmā* being *sat-cit-ānanda*, this *jīva-īśvara-aikya-vākya*, the equation stating that the *jīva* and

*Īśvara* are one and the same, is valid. If the *svarūpa* of *ātmā* were not *sat-cit-ānanda*, the equation would have no validity at all. Therefore, both types of *vākya*s are important. The *jīva-īśvara-aiḥya-vākya* can be understood only when the *vākya*s revealing the nature of *ātmā* are available. If such *vākya*s were not there, the equation *vākya* would be meaningless. The *jīva* would be a *jīva* and *Īśvara* would be *Īśvara*.

When we say that the wave is ocean, the water itself must be understood. Then only is the *vākya* talking about the identity of wave and ocean will be meaningful. If someone says to a wave that thinks it is a wave, ‘Hey, you are the ocean!’ the statement will only be understood by the wave if it has the knowledge that *satya* is water. Because of the seeming difference, *upādhi*, one is called ‘wave’ and the other is called ‘ocean.’ In fact, there is no ‘one’ or the ‘other.’ There is only one, water. Therefore, together, both types of *vākya*s do the job.

### KṚṢṆA AS ĪŚVARA, THE LORD

Here, *Kṛṣṇa* uses the first person singular, ‘Me,’ in the sense of *Parameśvara*, the Lord. Whether or not the historical *Kṛṣṇa* is the Lord is not our concern. We are talking about *Kṛṣṇa* who is the Lord because he talks as *Īśvara*. Because the word *Kṛṣṇa* indicates *Parameśvara* alone, whenever *Kṛṣṇa* uses the word *aham*, the first person singular, *Parameśvara* is to be understood. Whether there was such a person as *Kṛṣṇa* who danced and played beautiful music on the flute is besides the point. These accounts are all stories designed to create a certain appreciation of the historical person who walked along the banks of the *Yamuna* as an *avatāra*.

Any wise person can use the word *aham* in the same way. There are such *vākya*s in the *śāstra* in fact — ‘I was *Manu* — *ahaṃ manuḥ abhavam*,’ ‘I am the Sun,’ ‘I am everything’ — all of which are statements that any wise person can make. What happened before, what is here and now, and what is going to come later are all *puruṣa*, *ātmā*, alone, there being nothing separate from this *puruṣa*. And who is the *puruṣa*? The one who knows the *puruṣa* as oneself, as ‘That I am — *so’ham*,’ becomes free from all mortality — *sa iha amṛto bhavati*. He or she is *ātmā*.

There is only one *puruṣa* and that is *ātmā*; thus the *puruṣa* is the one who is everywhere, but available only in the heart. ‘That which is within my heart is *ātmā*’ is an expression that anyone can say; *Kṛṣṇa* is not the only one who can say it. The point being made here is that *Kṛṣṇa* always presents himself either in the sense of *Parameśvara*, the cause of the world, or pure *paramātmā*. Either way it is one and the same.

The word *Parameśvara* here can be taken as *saguṇa-brahma*, meaning *Īśvara*, the Lord, the one who creates, *sṛṣṭi-kartā*, the one who sustains the creation, *sthiti-kartā*, and the one who resolves creation into himself, *laya-kartā*. In this way, *Parameśvara* is the *kartā* and performs these three jobs simultaneously. All three

activities are going on at the same time. At this second, an object is born; as it is born, it is; and as it is, it is gone. It is cyclical and therefore, we do not know which is first, second, or third — is/born/gone; gone/born/is; gone/is/born, or born/is/gone. Nor does it matter because all three occur simultaneously.

Since the whole creation is in time, it is called *mithyā*, time itself being *mithyā*. Is this present second, this micro-second, picosecond, etc., born or is it gone? It is born and, as it is born, it is going. Going, it is born, which means there is no 'birth.' This, then, is the nature of time and everything is in time, which is *mithyā*.

### MEDITATION ON PARAMÉŚVARA

The nature of time is nothing but the trick of the *māyāvī*, another name for the great magician, *Īśvara*, who is the agent, *kartā*, of *sṛṣṭi*, *sthiti*, and *laya*. If you absorb your mind in this *Parameśvara*, it is called *saguṇa-brahma-dhyāna*. To do this, you meditate on the virtues of *Parameśvara*. Thus, for you, *Parameśvara* is one who is all compassion, all mercy, all *ānanda*. Or, *Parameśvara* is the one who is the creator, sustainer, and resolver of everything — *sṛṣṭi-sthiti-laya-kartā*. In this way, any one virtue can be taken in its absolute sense and meditated upon. Or, the meditation can be in the form of a simple prayer — 'Unto that Lord, my salutations – *parameśvarāya namaḥ*.'

The word '*mat*' in the compound, *mat-citta* can also mean *Parameśvara*, the cause of everything — *paraṃ brahma*. And that *Brahman* is *satya-jñāna-ananta-brahma, ātmā*. Here, the one whose mind is contemplating upon the *svarūpa* of the *ātmā*, pure consciousness, is called *mat-citta*. With reference to this *caitanya-ātmā* there are other revealing words also, words that reveal the *svarūpa* of *ātmā* upon which you contemplate. With the help of these words, you contemplate upon the meaning and this contemplation is called meditation.

### MEDITATION IS NOT A TECHNIQUE

The person being discussed in this verse is also called *mat-para*, another word that describes the person in terms of the object of meditation. The person who meditates in order to lower his or her blood pressure may be a *blood-pressure-para* but he or she is definitely not *mat-para*. People meditate for many reasons — for one hundred percent spiritual success or one hundred percent material success. This only proves that nothing is sacred. This also proves that meditation is not properly understood. Meditation is not a technique; meditation is life. Therefore, *Kṛṣṇa* refers to the meditator as *mat-para*, one for whom the Lord, *Parameśvara*, is everything. The mind of such a person will stay with the object of meditation because there is nothing other than *Parameśvara*, *paramātmā*, to be gained. And this is everything. The one for whom what is to be accomplished is that *paramātmā* alone is called *mat-para*, *Kṛṣṇa* says.

*Śaṅkara* adds here that such a person is very careful in terms of the objects that he or she desires. For example, the person does not think of a particular woman or man as the ultimate end, *para*; instead, this person has another *para* in that his or her mind is committed to *Īśvara*, the Lord, as the ultimate end. The *svarūpa* of *Īśvara*, the *paramātmā*, as the ultimate end, *para* is called *parama-pada* and the person who has this as the only pursuit is called *mat-para*.

### THE ULTIMATE END

The expression ‘ultimate end’ can give rise to another problem if its meaning is not properly understood. ‘ultimate end’ does not mean, ‘Ultimately, I will reach that; in the meantime, I have other ends to reach.’ Thus, ‘ultimate end’ is not to be interpreted here as an end to be gained later in time, like after retirement. The ultimate end is the predominant end, meaning there is no other end. All other ‘so-called’ ends subserve this ultimate end. Everything one does is for the ultimate end alone; one even eats to gain this end alone as *Kṛṣṇa* says later.

The study of Sanskrit also serves the same purpose. The study of Sanskrit is not so that you may become a Sanskrit scholar! I study whatever is to be studied as a discipline, as a means to gain access into what is being taught in the *Vedānta-śāstra*. The ‘ultimate end’ here is not to champion the cause of *Īśvara* in any way, although there are self-appointed champions who say they want to propagate *Īśvara*. Surely, *Īśvara* does not need any such help! By the very definition of *Īśvara*, he should be able to achieve whatever he wants to accomplish. He does not want you to champion him at all. If he wants to accomplish something, he can accomplish it without you! Your commitment is only to understand what *Īśvara* is.

*Īśvara*, *paramātmā*, is the only end for the meditator, the *dhyāna-yoga*. His or her mind is lost in Me; he is *mat-citta*, *Kṛṣṇa* says here, speaking as *Īśvara*, the Lord. In the mind of this person who is *mat-citta*, the predominant object is *Īśvara*. Also, by calling the person, *mat-para*, *Kṛṣṇa* conveys the fact that *Īśvara* is something to be accomplished; in fact, *Īśvara* is the only end to be accomplished for this person. Both these words, *mat-citta* and *mat-para* indicate the person's exact understanding of what he or she wants to accomplish, to know.

Further, *Kṛṣṇa* says:

युञ्जन्नेवं सदात्मानं योगी नियतमानसः।

शान्तिं निर्वाणपरमां मत्संस्थामधिगच्छति ॥ १५ ॥

*yuñjannevaṃ sadātmānaṃ yogī niyatamānasah*

*śāntiṃ nirvāṇaparamāṃ matsaṃsthāmadhigacchati*

Verse 15

एवम् *evam* — in this manner; सदा *sadā* — always; आत्मानम् *ātmānam* — the mind; युञ्जन् *yuñjan* — connecting; नियतमानसः *niyatamānasaḥ* — the one whose mind is mastered; योगी *yogī* — the meditator; निर्वाण-परमाम् *nirvāṇa-paramām* — that, which is the ultimate liberation; मत्संस्थाम् *matsamsthām* — that, which is centred on Me; शान्तिम् *śāntim* — peace; अधिगच्छति *adhigacchati* — gains

Always connecting the mind in this manner, the meditator, the one whose mind is mastered, gains the peace, which is centred on Me (which is in the form of an absorption in Me), which is the ultimate liberation.

In this verse, *Kṛṣṇa* mentions the ultimate end to be gained as a result of *dhyāna-yoga*, meditation.

Here, the word *sadā*, ‘always,’ may raise the question, when does the meditator have time for other activities such as eating, bathing, and sleeping? *Sadā* here simply indicates that the person does not waste time, using whatever time is available for this particular pursuit. *Ātmā* here, refers to the mind, which is always connected in this manner — *yuñjan evaṃ sadā ātmānam* — meaning in all the ways already described, starting from finding the place and preparing the seat, etc. — *śucau deśe ... caila-ajina-kuśottaram*.<sup>1</sup> The mind is connected, absorbed, in *Brahman*, which is *Parameśvara*, *paramātmā*, the *svarūpa* of *ātmā*.

And how does one connect the mind to the *svarūpa* of *ātmā*? Through contemplative words, *śabda*, which is why words are so important. Through a word you can connect yourself to *ātmā*. And what kind of words? In contemplation we make use of revealing words, words that reveal the *svarūpa* of *ātmā* and thereby connect the mind to *ātmā*. *Yuñjan* means ‘meditating’ or ‘connecting’ — connecting the mind, the *antaḥ-karaṇa*, to the object of meditation, which in fact is the act of meditating.

In this verse, the person is again described as one who has mastered the mind, one whose mind is tranquil, whose mind is absorbed, *niyatamānasa*. And what does this *niyatamānasa-yogī* gain? Meditating, the person comes to understand properly what is being said. All that is taught becomes clear because there are no obstructions for the person. Therefore, the teaching becomes real and he or she gains *śānti* — *śāntim adhigacchati*.

## THE MEANING OF ŚĀNTI

*Śānti* usually means peace. Does this mean that after doing meditation, all you will get out of it is the same peace that can be gained from a tranquilliser or a shot of something? No, this *śānti* is not that kind of peace; it is *mat-samsthā* and *nirvāṇa* -

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<sup>1</sup> *Gītā* – 6-11

*paramā*. In his commentary, Śaṅkara defined *śānti* as *uparati*, *uparati* meaning resolution or *sarva-karma-sannyāsa*, wherein doership and enjoyership are renounced as discussed at length previously. *Nirvāṇa* means *mokṣa*. Therefore, this is a *śānti* that has its basis in *mokṣa*. It is *mokṣa-śānti* itself.

And what is this *mokṣa-śānti*? There are three types of *śānti*. One *śānti* is where there is no thinking whatsoever, which can be induced so that the frequency of thinking is cut down. Another *śānti* is when you enjoy a *śānti* along with a certain capacity to manage an active mind. This is important because you need the mind in order to think.

The first *śānti*, which is freedom from thinking, can only be temporary and requires a lot of inducements. This *śānti* is that which is there between two thoughts or between two spells of agitation. Whereas the second *śānti* is there when there is a certain distance between yourself and the mind, whatever be the situation. And because of this you are able to manage your affairs with a certain amount of composure.

And the third *śānti* is *mokṣa*, wherein the mind becomes a privilege. Whatever the mind is, it is me, but I am not the mind. This knowledge is the freedom, total freedom. You do not control the mind. You do not take the mind somewhere. Rather, wherever the mind goes, the person always has this knowledge. Then, the person is truly a devotee because, wherever the mind is, there the Lord is for this person.

## KNOWLEDGE-BASED DEVOTION

To express this knowledge-based devotion, there are many stories. One such story is about a great devotee of Lord Śiva. One day he came and found a *sādhu* sleeping with his feet placed on a *liṅga*. For anyone to do such a thing, let alone a *sādhu*, is a desecration. Therefore, the devotee shouted angrily at the *sādhu*, ‘Wake up! How can you dare to put your feet on the *liṅga*!’ To this, the *sādhu* replied, ‘I am very old. I am tired and sleepy. I have no strength to move my feet. Therefore, please put my feet wherever you want. I cannot lift them.’ Then the devotee picked up the *sādhu*’s feet and moved them away from the *liṅga*. But to his surprise, another *liṅga* appeared under the *sādhu*’s feet. Confused, he moved the *sādhu*’s feet again. But wherever he placed them, yet another *liṅga* appeared in that very place! Then he understood that there is no place where the Lord is not. In other words, there is no place to put one’s feet that is not the Lord.

Similarly, wherever the mind goes, it remains in the Lord’s presence. There is no question of getting the mind out of or into anything here. To make this point, a seeker in the *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad* said, ‘It is as though the mind has gone away and, therefore, I am as though meditating.’<sup>1</sup> For the ‘as though’ gone away mind, ‘as though’ meditation is good enough. And, when the ‘as though’ becomes clear to you, then the

<sup>1</sup> ??? ? ?????? ?????? (Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad 4.3.7)?

mind does not go away and therefore, does not require any meditation. This is the *śānti* called *nirvāṇa-paramā śānti*, *mokṣa*, the *śānti* that is one's *svarūpa*, in which there is no coming and going, no degrees or variations, and for which no comparison to anything is possible.

### THE ŚĀNTI THAT IS ONESELF

Because this *śānti* is identical with oneself, *Kṛṣṇa* describes it as *mat-saṁsthā*, meaning *mat-adhīnā*, that which always obtains in the *paramātmā* because *paramātmā* does not move at anytime; it is *kūṭastha*, immutable; it does not get involved with anything, and does not stand opposed to anything either. If there is opposition, there is some rub or resistance, which is *aśānti*. *Śānti* is identical with *paramātmā* in that it is not opposed to thought, it is not opposed to the world, it is not opposed to knowledge, it is not opposed to ignorance, it is not opposed to anything. At the same time, it lends itself to everything. Thus, the meditator gains this *śānti*, this freedom or liberation — *mat-adhīnāṁ śāntim adhigacchati*.

*Nirvāṇa-paramā-śānti* does not depend upon the condition of the mind, whereas the *śānti* that depends on one's mental state is always subject to becoming disturbed. Here, *ātmā* is called *śānta* because it is a description, a *lakṣaṇa*, revealing the nature of *ātmā*. This must be clearly understood. This *śānti* is not something that sticks to *ātmā* as an attribute, like the 'blue' of a blue pot.

An attribute, *viśeṣaṇa*, distinguishes an object from all other objects belonging to the same species. Otherwise, attributes are not required. For example, if all pots were blue, you would not need to use the word 'blue.' Attributes by definition can be perceived. When we say *ātmā* is *śānta*, the *śānti* in *ātmā* is not something that is perceivable but the word itself points out the nature of *ātmā*. Therefore, it is a *lakṣaṇa*, not an attribute of *ātmā*.

### SUPERIMPOSITION AND ITS NEGATION

The conditions of the mind, like agitation, are superimpositions on *ātmā*, which is *caitanya*, consciousness, that which obtains in all conditions and is independent of all conditions, free of all conditions. Words like *śānta* negate the superimposition, revealing the *svarūpa* of *ātmā* as something independent of the *aśānti* that is superimposed upon *ātmā*, when we say *ātmā* is *aśānta*.

Therefore, this *śānti* is not a conditional *śānti*; it is *svarūpa-śānti*. Because it is not conditional, it is called *svarūpa*. *Ātmā* is free from any form of *vṛtti*, thought, even though *vṛttis* are not free from *ātmā*. When the *vṛttis* happen and there is an appreciation of *ātmā* as '*ahaṁ śāntaḥ*,' the *vṛttis* do not disturb the *śānta-ātmā*. This is what is meant by *nirvāṇa-paramā-śānti*, a *śānti* that is purely in the form of knowledge, recognition.

The one who recognises oneself as the *paramātmā*, and understands the *svarūpa-śānti* of *paramātmā* is said to have gained this *śānti* because he or she has gained the knowledge. Such a person is called *yogī* here — not in terms of the eight fold *yoga* called *aṣṭāṅga-yoga*, but purely in terms of the knowledge alone.

In the next verse, *Kṛṣṇa* points out certain other conditions that make a life of contemplation possible:

नात्यश्नतस्तु योगोऽस्ति न चैकान्तमनश्नतः ।

न चातिस्वप्नशीलस्य जाग्रतो नैव चार्जुन ॥ १६ ॥

*nātyaśnatastu yogo'sti na caikāntamanaśnataḥ*  
*na cātiśvapnaśīlasya jāgrato naiva cārjuna*

Verse 16

अर्जुन *arjuna* — O *Arjuna*!; अत्यश्नतः *atyāśnataḥ* — for one who eats too much; तु *tu* — indeed; योगः न अस्ति *yogaḥ na asti* — meditation is not; च *ca* — and; न एकान्तम् अनश्नतः *na ekāntam anaśnataḥ* — not for one who does not eat adequately at all; च *ca* — and; न अतिस्वप्नशीलस्य *na atīśvapnaśīlasya* — not for one who sleeps too much; च *ca* — and; एव *eva* — indeed; न जाग्रतः *na jāgrataḥ* — not for one who is always awake

Meditation is not for one who eats too much or for one who does not eat at all adequately; nor indeed, O *Arjuna*, (it is) for one who sleeps too much or who is always awake.

Here, *Kṛṣṇa* mentions the discipline with reference to eating required for meditation. He does not go into details but simply makes the point that the extremes in terms of the quantity of food eaten were not conducive to meditation. Later, he also talks in a general way about what one should and should not eat from the standpoint of the *sāttvika*, *rājasika*, and *tāmasika* aspects of food.

There is a certain quantity of food that is acceptable to a person and beyond that one should not eat if one wants to be able to meditate. Thus, *Kṛṣṇa* says here that for the overeater or the poor eater, there will be no meditation, no *yoga*, even though there may be *bhoga*, enjoyment, at least for the time being. And, if there is too much *bhoga*, *roga*, disease, may follow just as it may for the one who eats too little. *Yoga* is the opposite of *bhoga* and *roga*. For the one who is a *bhogī* or *rogī*, a life of meditation and contemplation is not possible — *yogaḥ nāsti*. Here ‘meditation’ refers to *saguṇa-brahma-dhyāna* and ‘contemplation’ refers to *nirguṇa-brahma-dhyāna*, as discussed earlier.





In the past, when there was no electricity and people went to bed as soon as it was dark, getting up at 4:00 AM was natural. But now, the situation is quite different. In fact, there are people who wake up, go to work, and live their lives after dark! So, for the one who does not get adequate sleep, who is awake all the time, *jāgrat*, there is no *yoga* because, having so little sleep, the person will be sleepy all the time.

The unfortunate thing here is that both types of people, those who sleep too much and those who sleep too little, end up sleeping. Thus, *Kṛṣṇa* says here, there is no *yoga*, no contemplative life, for either of them. How, then, is this *yoga* to take place and for whom? The answer is given in the next verse.

युक्ताहारविहारस्य युक्तचेष्टस्य कर्मसु ।

युक्तस्वप्नावबोधस्य योगो भवति दुःखहा ॥ १७ ॥

*yuktāhāravihārasya yuktaceṣṭasya karmasu*

*yuktasvapnāvabodhasya yogo bhavati duḥkhaḥā*

Verse 17

युक्त-आहार-विहारस्य *yukta-āhāra-vihārasya* — for one who is moderate in eating and other activities; कर्मसु *karmasu* — with reference to one's duties; युक्त-चेष्टस्य *yukta-ceṣṭasya* — for one who is moderate in effort; युक्त-स्वप्न-अवबोधस्य *yukta-svapna-avabodhasya* — for one who is moderate in terms of sleeping and waking hours; दुःखहा *duḥkhaḥā* — the destroyer of sorrow; योगः *yogaḥ* — meditation; भवति *bhavati* — becomes

For one who is moderate in eating and other activities, who is moderate in effort with reference to one's duties, (and) to one's sleeping and waking hours, (for such a person) meditation becomes the destroyer of sorrow.

Again, this verse names the person and describes the qualifications required for meditation in the same compound. *Yukta* here means 'proper' in terms of having a sense of proportion in all of one's activities.

The person is described here as *yukta-āhāra-vihāra*, one whose eating and other activities are proper; *yukta-ceṣṭa*, one whose activities are proper; and *yukta-svapna-avabodha*, one whose sleeping and waking hours are properly apportioned. In other words, this person follows a certain life of discipline, which in itself is a *yoga*, a *yoga* that destroys the sorrow of *saṃsāra* — *yogo bhavati duḥkhaḥā*.

In his commentary to this verse, *Śaṅkara* explains the compound *yukta-āhāra-vihāra*. He says, anything taken in by you is called *āhāra* — *āhriyate iti āhāraḥ*, which in the present context means food, *anna*. *Vihāra* refers to the moving around that you do in terms of activities, like walking, running, etc. Therefore, the person for whom both of these, *āhāra* and *vihāra*, are proper, meaning that they are done with the proper sense of proportion, is called a *yukta-āhāra-vihāra*. In other

words, they are not allowed to become obsessions, which is always possible — especially in terms of food.

### 'SPIRITUAL' OBSESSIONS

Spending all one's time planning meals, for example, is definitely an obsession. *Āhāra*, food, can take up your entire life; it even becomes a religion for many people. Whereas, for others, some form of exercise becomes a religion. You may eat only junk food and be obsessed with getting it out of your system by doing aerobics for hours every day. In this way, aerobics too becomes a religion. Whole lifetimes are spent exercising. For what? There are people who exercise so much and are so tired afterwards that all they do is eat and go to sleep, only to repeat the same cycle again the next day. No activity should be given this kind of time. Therefore, *Kṛṣṇa* says here, whatever the activity, it should be *yukta*; there should be a sense of proportion. Otherwise, *āhāra* can get you and *vihāra* can also get you.

What you eat and how much you eat can become an obsession and, for a spiritual seeker, eating can become a 'spiritual' obsession! Such a person thinks that eating properly is being spiritual, whereas, in fact, eating properly is a matter of health, nothing else. A demon can eat properly and still accomplish all his demonic activities in a disciplined way. A thief may follow a proper diet and exercise daily, but still he continues to commit crimes. Therefore, *yukta*, is a very important word here, meaning the one who has a sense of proportion in all things.

One who is *yukta-ceṣṭa*, with reference to all activities, *karmasu*, is one who does not waste his or her time fuming and fretting because there is a lot to be done. This person performs each activity deliberately, consciously, one by one. In this way, everything gets done efficiently and in the proper order. *Ceṣṭā* refers to any movement, including those of the hands and legs. The *yukta-ceṣṭa*, therefore, is also a person who does not waste the movements of his or her limbs while performing various activities.

### WHY ONE NEEDS A SENSE OF PROPORTION IN ONE'S ACTIVITIES

We all know what happens if we want to do too many things at the same time. The end result is that nothing gets done. You want to do a certain thing and suddenly you remember something else. So, you leave what you are doing and go to the other activity. Then you remember something else and off you go again. Some people cannot even take a bath, without becoming distracted by other things they want to do at the same time! These people are *ayukta-ceṣṭas*, whereas a *yukta-ceṣṭa* does each thing that is to be done deliberately and consciously. Even the hand movements of the person are done consciously. In fact, this is what the life of a Zen master is all about. Watching his or her every movement, watching what the hands are doing and where they go becomes a form of meditation for the person.

However, one need not go that far, the point being that a sense of proportion in all activities is necessary so that nothing becomes an obsession. There is nothing to be gained from an obsession, but there is something to be gained from being conscious about what you do. What is gained is a sense of alertness. Thus, the word *yukta* means that you are conscious about what you do and you do what is to be done. In this way, there is an inner leisure that enables you to gain knowledge.

### YOU MUST DECIDE FOR YOURSELF WHAT IS PROPER

The person discussed in this verse is also called *yukta-svapna-avabodha*, one for whom there is a sense of proportion with reference to sleep, *svapna*, and waking hours, *avabodha*. Again, please do not ask me how many hours you should sleep. What is proper for one person is not proper for another because the amount of sleep required depends on several factors such as how many hours you slept as a child and your constitution. Sleep for as many hours as you require. The amount of time you sleep can be altered a little, perhaps by half an hour or forty-five minutes. But changing the time you sleep by any more than this is likely to affect your whole day. You will walk around like a zombie and be completely useless! Therefore, follow what your constitution tells you. It knows what it needs and it tells you. And, if it does not get enough sleep, it tells you that also. If, for example, you find yourself always feeling drowsy, this may indicate that you require more sleep.

We must understand that the word *yukta* is used very cautiously here because there is no set rule that applies to everyone all the time. Each person must decide for himself or herself. It is not correct to assume that everyone should sleep a certain number of hours. There are people who require only five hours sleep and others who require six, seven, or eight hours. It all depends on the individual's constitution.

### THE KNOWLEDGE THAT DESTROYS SORROW

Therefore, for the person who has a sense of proportion with reference to waking and sleep, *yukta-svapna-avabodhasya*, there is *yoga* — *yogaḥ bhavati*. And what kind of *yoga* is it? Knowledge alone, the knowledge that destroys sorrow, *duḥkhaḥā*. This knowledge destroys sorrow by shifting the entire vision of the person who is subject to sorrow. This shift in vision is in terms of self-understanding, self-knowledge, seeing one's *svarūpa* as free from sorrow. By negating the doership, the sorrow is taken care of. Thus, the destruction of sorrow is purely in terms of knowledge, *jñāna*, and this knowledge is called *yoga* here.

In his commentary to this verse, *Śaṅkara* emphasises that the word *duḥkha* refers to all kinds of sorrow, *sarva-saṃsāra-duḥkha*. You may say, 'Swamiji, my life is all right, but the people around me are a problem!' This means that your life is not all right. Therefore, commit your life to the pursuit of the knowledge that will destroy all sorrow.

Do not commit yourself to anything else — not to overeating or under eating, sleeping too much or too little, or to exercising a lot or not at all.

### EVERYTHING IN MODERATION

We must have discipline in our lives but in the proper proportions. *Yogāsanas* and *prāṇāyāma*, for example, are useful because they are disciplines. But this does not mean that you should commit your life solely to the practice of *yogāsanas* or *prāṇāyāma*. Nor does it mean that you should neglect such disciplines. In fact, a meditative life includes *yogāsanas* and *prāṇāyāma*. Every seeker follows a certain discipline based on *aṣṭāṅga-yoga*. The point being made here is that whatever discipline is followed must be kept in proper proportion, meaning that there is neither neglect nor over enthusiasm. Everything is to be in moderation and one should not become a faddist, a very common tendency in some people, whatever they take up becomes a religion for them. Because there is something to know, rather than to do, one should not become a faddist, *Kṛṣṇa* is saying here.

A person who is not too inactive, *karmasu yukta-ceṣṭa*, one who is moderate in terms of what is eaten and who does not sleep too much or too little, one who looks after the body properly without becoming obsessive about it, usually enjoys the necessary health to enable him or her to gain self-knowledge.

The human body, *śarīra*, was defined by *Kālidāsa* as the basic means, *sādhana*, for gaining *mokṣa*, health being a basic requirement.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, whatever one must do to maintain proper health, one does, which implies eating, sleeping, and exercising properly. In other words, one should not be negligent about these basic requirements.

### HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE?

Two questions may now arise: What is to be gained by all this and how long will it take? Living a life of discipline, coupled with meditation and contemplation, when can it be said that the person is accomplished? *Samśārīs* always ask this question of ‘when?’ Before they make a commitment, naturally they want to know if such a lengthy, seemingly arduous pursuit is really worth the time and trouble! But here, we say, having gained yourself, you do not gain anything because you are what you are — knowing which is the greatest freedom there is.

All right, you may say, this freedom that implies total self-acceptance and the vision that I am the whole seems to be very desirable. But when will I gain this vision? How long will it take? I want to do it quickly so that I can pick up the threads of my life and continue. Again, we say, this is life. There is no when or anything; there is just life. There is no life other than this; everything subserves this. Whether you do one thing or

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<sup>1</sup> ?????? ?????? ??????

the other, a pursuit like this does not go away from you; it is always right there with you. You have enough material with you — where ever you are, whatever you are doing — to be with yourself. There is a growing clarity about this knowledge, which takes its own time; but it doesn't matter because it is pleasant all the way.

Only when something is unpleasant does the question, ‘How long do I have to do this?’ come up. The pursuit of self-knowledge is not a prison sentence! It is pleasant all the way because it is *ātma-vidyā*, knowledge of oneself, a knowledge that tells you how wonderful you are. No religion does this; religions usually tell you how terrible you are and that you have to be saved. Whereas, this knowledge tells you that you are already saved. Because there is no problem here, the question of ‘when’ does not arise. What must be addressed, however, is the condition of the person who has this knowledge, as we shall see in the next verse.

यदा विनियतं चित्तमात्मन्येवावतिष्ठते ।

निःस्पृहः सर्वकामेभ्यो युक्त इत्युच्यते तदा ॥ १८ ॥

*yadā viniyatam cittam ātmanyevāvatiṣṭhate*

*niḥsprhaḥ sarvakāmebhyo yukta ityucyate tadā*

Verse 18

यदा *yadā* — when; विनियतम् चित्तम् *viniyatam cittam* — the mind, which has gained a certain composure; आत्मनि एव *ātmani eva* — in the self alone; अवतिष्ठते *avatiṣṭhate* — remains; तदा *tadā* — then; सर्व-कामेभ्यः *sarva-kāmebhyaḥ* — from all the objects (of desire); निःस्पृहः *niḥsprhaḥ* — one who is free of longing; युक्तः इति *yuktaḥ iti* — as one who is accomplished; उच्यते *ucyate* — the person is said (to be)

When the mind has gained a certain composure (and) remains in the self alone, when one is free of longing from the objects (of desire), then (the person) is said (to be) one who is accomplished.

The word *viniyata* is defined by *Śaṅkara* here as *ekāgratā*, meaning that the mind, *citta*, has the capacity to remain single-pointedly on the object of contemplation alone without getting distracted. In such a mind, both the object of contemplation and the meditator, the contemplator, become one and the same, there being no separation whatsoever between the two. The mind has gained a certain mastery, a certain contemplative disposition, a composure by itself, in itself, through the disciplines that have already been mentioned as qualifications for gaining such a mind. And this mind abides in *ātmā* alone — *tasmin ātmani eva avatiṣṭhate*, which means that there is no separation between the mind and *ātmā*.

Thus, for the person discussed here, there is no *ātmā* to be contemplated upon because both the contemplator and the contemplated are *ātmā*. Previously, there was ‘as

though' contemplation, whereas now, there is no necessity for the 'as though' contemplation because the self remains in the self alone.

### THE MIND ABIDES IN KNOWLEDGE ALONE

And how does this contemplator's mind abide in *sat-cit-ānanda-ātmā*? How is it located there? Is it like two objects, one sitting upon the other? No, the mind abides in *ātmā* purely in the form of knowledge, clarity. In other words, the meaning of the word 'I' is no more a matter for conjecture and mistaken notions for the person. It is not something that one has to contemplate upon in order to understand it further. This capacity of the mind to remain in *ātmā* is the meaning of the expression, *ātmani eva avatiṣṭhate*, here.

Having given up all one's concerns and anxieties about the various things that are external to oneself, the person is awake to *ātmā*, meaning that the mind always remains or abides in *ātmā* and therefore, is never separated from *ātmā*. For one who has gained this clarity of knowledge about *ātmā*, there is freedom from the longing for all objects of desire; he is *nispṛhaḥ sarva-kāmebhyaḥ*. This freedom is not something that must be gained separately but is a natural condition of having gained the knowledge itself.

### THE RESULT OF KNOWLEDGE IS FREEDOM FROM BINDING DESIRES

We have already seen that the word *kāma* has two meanings — the desire itself and the object of desire. The thought process wherein you want to gain an object is called *kāma* and that which you desire is also called *kāma*. Because the word *kāma* is used throughout the *Gītā* in this two-fold sense, we have to see the context in which it is used to understand its meaning. Here, it means object of desire.

And what are these objects of desire? They can be both seen, *drṣṭa*, and unseen, *adrṣṭa*. *Drṣṭa* is whatever you can accomplish now and is seen by you, whereas *adrṣṭa* is something that is not seen by you, like *puṇya*. *Puṇya* is desirable to you because it brings you something desirable later. In this way, *puṇya* is like currency. You cannot enjoy it in and of itself, but it has a buying power; it can buy objects that you can enjoy. Thus, *puṇya* is an intermediary goal, achieving which you are qualifying yourself, empowering yourself, to accomplish various ends such as comfortable situations, wealth, and power. Because these ends are not seen now, they are called unseen, *adrṣṭa*.

*Kāma*, then can be for either *drṣṭa*, seen objects, or *adrṣṭa*, that which is the result of *puṇya*, *puṇya* itself being *adrṣṭa*. Suppose a man performs a particular fire ritual for the purpose of gaining something here in this world. The ritual itself does not produce the object since what he wants out of the ritual is not the fire! Rather, by performing the ritual, he gains a certain grace of *puṇya*, which removes all the obstacles to his effort to gain what he wants. This is what is called *adrṣṭa*. Naturally, then, there is a desire, *kāma*, for *adrṣṭa* as well as *drṣṭa*.

**THE DEFINITION OF AN ACCOMPLISHED PERSON**

The person discussed here is free from the longing for all objects of desire, both *dr̥ṣṭa* and *adr̥ṣṭa* — *nispr̥haḥ sarva-kāmebhyaḥ*. The longing for all objects, known and unknown, visible and invisible, has gone away. Therefore, the person is said to be one who is accomplished — *yuktaḥ ityucyate* — meaning that the person's contemplation has become successful.

Calling someone accomplished means what? How can being with oneself cause all the longings to go away? The reason one longs for objects is due to not knowing oneself. Therefore, when this self-knowledge has been gained, when the mind abides in the self alone, the person is fulfilled and happy. He or she knows that *ātmā* does not require any improvement for one's security or perfection. Because there is no lack in *ātmā*, the sense of lack is not there for the person. The nature of *ātmā* being *pūrṇa*, full, the whole, there is nothing to improve it; therefore, the person has no longings whatsoever.

**ALL DESIRES COME FROM A SENSE OF LACK**

Whatever desires that may exist in the person's mind are simple desires and are fulfilled. In fact, the desires of such a person are privileges in that he or she has a mind that is privileged to desire, a mind that has this great capacity to desire, and therefore, there is desire. The desire of such a person is born of fullness, not out of a sense of lack. Whereas, for the *ajñānī*, one who does not have knowledge of the self, there is a sense of want centred on 'I.' It is not that the mind is lacking in something or that anything else is lacking in anything. For example, when you say the body lacks, the lack is centred on 'I,' which you identify with the body. The body naturally has its limitations and in that sense it can be said to lack. But, that the body lacks in this way is not the problem; that I lack is the problem, born out of the non-recognition of the *svarūpa*, the nature, of 'I.'

All desires stem from this sense of lack centred on 'I' alone. These are the desires that are binding in nature because their fulfilment is the basis upon which I think I am going to discover some sense of security in myself, some kind of satisfaction from myself. This is why fulfilling one's desires become one's main purpose in life. But, sooner or later, you discover that desires have a knack of breeding like rabbits and you either give up and become a hobo or go crazy. The point here is that desires born of one's sense of lack are endless and, having discovered this fact, your inquiry begins. Therefore, we ask, 'Who am I? 'Am I really seeking something?' 'Why I am seeking?' 'Am I seeking something other than myself or am I seeking myself?'

In fact I am seeking myself, the problem being that I have a sense of lack centred on myself and I want to be free from this lack, This is all I want. If I am a person whose nature is stuck with a sense of lack, then I can never get rid of it. But now and then I see myself free from this sense of lack. Whenever I open my eyes and see something so



beautiful that I also open my mouth and say, ‘Ah!’ I find myself free from any sense of lack. There is a heaven inside me. Whenever I laugh, it is all heaven. Because I have these two versions of myself — one with the sense of lack and one without it — a very valid doubt arises in me. I begin to think that, perhaps I am confused about myself, perhaps my conclusions are wrong. This doubt marks the beginning of one's inquiry.

The person discussed in this verse has come to know the self by means of such an inquiry, accompanied by whatever disciplines that were necessary to prepare the mind so that the knowledge could take place. The mind of this person has no more doubts and is totally awake with reference to *ātmā*. There is no more guesswork or vagueness and the person is naturally free from all longing and attachments. In the next verse, *Kṛṣṇa* uses an oft-quoted illustration to describe the mind of such a person.

यथा दीपो निवातस्थो नेङ्गते सोपमा स्मृता ।  
 योगिनो यतचित्तस्य युञ्जतो योगमात्मनः ॥ १९ ॥  
*yathā dīpo nivāstho neṅgate sopamā smṛtā*  
*yogino yatacittasya yuñjato yogamātmanah*

Verse 19

यथा *yathā* — just as; निवातस्थः *nivāsthaḥ* — protected from the wind; दीपः *dīpaḥ* — lamp; न इङ्गते *na iṅgate* — does not flicker; आत्मनः योगम् *ātmanah yogam* — contemplation of the self; युञ्जतः *yuñjataḥ* — of one who practices; योगिनः *yoginaḥ* — of the meditator; यतचित्तस्य *yatacittasya* — for the composed mind; सा *sā* — this; उपमा *upamā* — illustration; स्मृता *smṛtā* — is cited

Just as a lamp, protected from the wind, does not flicker — for the composed mind of the meditator who practices contemplation of the self, this illustration is cited.

An illustration cannot give you the knowledge of the object for which it is an illustration, but it can bring one's understanding of it a little closer. To say, ‘A water buffalo is like a water buffalo,’ is not an illustration because one's understanding of ‘water buffalo’ is not brought any closer to the object ‘water buffalo’ than it was before the statement was made. Whereas the statement, ‘A water buffalo is like a huge cow,’ gives one a somewhat clearer understanding of what a water buffalo is; it belongs to the cow family and it is huge. When you actually see a water buffalo, you will then know exactly how it differs from a cow. This statement, then, is an illustration, *upamā*.

Similarly, here, the people who have contemplated upon *ātmā*, who know *ātmā*, have likened the mind of a wise person to a flame that is protected from the wind. This mind, they say, does not tremble. This does not mean that it awakens in any way, but, like the flame, there is a continuous flow of light. In fact, a flame is not really a flame; if you could reduce the speed at which the flame rises, you would find that it is moving all

the time. The point being made here is that, in spite of this movement, the flame does not shake at all. Similarly, the well-mastered mind of the *yogī*, the wise person, has a continuous flow of *vṛttis*, thoughts, but it does not tremble for any reason. It does not tremble out of fear, agitation or anything else, meaning that it is never swayed by the situations that confront the person, whatever these may be. And only those who know the mind of a *yogī* can cite such an illustration, *upamā*.

### WHY IS AN ILLUSTRATION NEEDED HERE?

An illustration must be known to both the person citing it and the person to whom it is being cited. And it should be close to that which is to be conveyed. Why was an illustration cited here by those who know the mind of a wise person? Because the one being addressed cannot, at this point in time, envision the mind of such a person, just as a child cannot possibly envision the problems of an adult not yet understanding the adult aspects of life. Suppose a child hears his father saying, ‘Oh, no! The stocks have gone down.’ He sees that his father is unhappy, his mother is unhappy, and everyone around is unhappy, but the child does not understand why the adults are crying. All he wants is one more toy. This is because there are two different minds here altogether. Only when the child becomes an adult will he understand.

An adult mind can be stifled by the child's mind that he or she has carried over into adult mind, but, until a child becomes an adult, his or her mind will have only a child's problems. Even if a person who is twenty-five years old still wants balloons, dolls, and marbles, the person has no real problem, although the other people around may naturally think otherwise! The problem only comes when you are an adult with a child inside craving for all kinds of security and attention. Such a person cannot relate well to another adult who is an adult all the way, meaning a person with a mature mind, a mind that does not pose a problem for the person, for whom the mind is only an instrument. This mature mind is the one that is likened here to a flame for those who cannot envision such a mind.

Something that can be seen or envisioned does not require an illustration. If it is available, it can be shown to the person. For example, I can say, ‘This is a crystal.’ Since I am showing it to you, I need not tell you that crystal is like glass. Because the crystal is available, an illustration is not required. Whereas, if you do not know what a bison is, but you know what a buffalo is, I can tell you that a bison is like a buffalo. Because there is an approximation between the two, your understanding of a bison is a little closer than it was. Similarly, the flame is an illustration to help you understand what the mind of a wise person is like, cited by people who know what it is all about.

In this verse, the words, *yogaṃ yuñjataḥ*, can be taken to refer either to a person who is following *Patañjali's* eight-fold *yoga* called *aṣṭāṅga-yoga* or a person who contemplates upon *ātmā*. *Yoga* itself is the practice, which means that the person

attempts to unite his or her mind with the desirable *ātmā* — *yuñjataḥ yogam ātmanaḥ*. *Śaṅkara* defined *yuñjat* here as one who practices this *yoga*, this contemplation, uniting the mind with *ātmā*, which *Kṛṣṇa* discusses further in the next four verses:

यत्रोपरमते चित्तं निरुद्धं योगसेवया ।

यत्र चैवात्मनात्मानं पश्यन्नात्मनि तुष्यति ॥ २० ॥

*yatroparamate cittam niruddham yogasevayā*

*yatra caivātmānātmānaṃ paśyannātmani tuṣyati*

Verse 20

यत्र *yatra* — when; योगसेवया *yoga-sevayā* — by the practice of meditation; निरुद्धम् *niruddham* — mastered; चित्तम् *cittam* — mind; उपरमते *uparamate* — abides (in *ātmā*); यत्र *yatra* — when; च *ca* — and; आत्मना *ātmanā* — by oneself; आत्मानम् *ātmānam* — oneself; पश्यन् *paśyan* — seeing; आत्मनि *ātmani* — in oneself; एव *eva* — alone; तुष्यति *tuṣyati* — one rejoices

When the mind, mastered by the practice of meditation, abides (in *ātmā*) and when, seeing oneself by oneself alone, one rejoices in oneself ...

Here the word, *ātmā*, in the word *ātmānam* refers to *sat-cit-ānanda-ātmā* — meaning that one sees oneself as *Brahman*. And with what does one see *ātmā* as *Brahman*? By the mind, *ātmanā*, by the *vṛtti*, the thought. And, recognising oneself as *Brahman*, one rejoices in *ātmā*, oneself — *ātmani tuṣyati*. Thus, there are four case endings here for *ātmā*; the second case or accusative, *ātmānam*, meaning ‘oneself’; the third case or instrumental, *ātmanā*, meaning ‘by oneself’; and the seventh case or locative, *ātmani*, meaning ‘in oneself.’ And who rejoices? The *yogī*, the self, *ātmā*, the first case or nominative, the agent of rejoicing. Thus, seeing oneself by oneself, one rejoices in oneself — *ātmanā ātmānaṃ paśyan ātmani tuṣyati*. We will see the implications of this verse in the discussion of the next verse.

The person rejoices in the *ātmā*, the nature of *ātmā* being *ānanda*, free from any sense of lack. Further, *Kṛṣṇa* says:

सुखमात्यन्तिकं यत्तद् बुद्धिग्राह्यमतीन्द्रियम् ।

वेत्ति यत्र न चैवायं स्थितश्चरति तत्त्वतः ॥ २१ ॥

*sukhamātyantikam yattad buddhigrāhyamatīndriyam*

*vetti yatra na caivāyaṃ sthitaścalati tattvataḥ*

Verse 21

यत् तत् *yat tat* — that which (is); आत्यन्तिकम् *ātyantikam* — absolute; बुद्धि-ग्राह्यम् *buddhi-grāhyam* — recognised by the intellect; अतीन्द्रियम् *atīndriyam* — beyond sense perception; सुखम् *sukham* — happiness; यत्र *yatra* — when; अयम् वेत्ति *ayam vetti* — one recognises; च *ca* — and; स्थितः *sthitaḥ* — being well-rooted (therein); तत्त्वतः

*tattvataḥ* — from the truth of oneself; न एव चलति *na eva calati* — one never moves away

(And when) one recognises this absolute happiness, which is recognised by the intellect, which is beyond sense perception and when, being rooted (therein) one never moves away from the truth of oneself...

The *vr̥tti*, thought, by which one recognises an object, and the object of the *vr̥tti* are identical. That is, in order to recognise the object, the *vr̥tti* must necessarily have the object in itself. If I have to recognise a pot, *ghaṭa*, the *vr̥tti* must assume the very form of the pot. Therefore, the *vr̥tti* is called *ghaṭa-vr̥tti*. By the *ghaṭa-vr̥tti* alone, one recognises the object *ghaṭa*, pot.

For the recognition of *ātmā* also, there must be a *vr̥tti*. This *vr̥tti* is created by the *śūtra* and it destroys self-ignorance. And this *vr̥tti* is brought back by the contemplator in *nididhyāsana*. In the recognition of the *svarūpa* of the self, the *vr̥tti* assumes the very *svarūpa* of *ātmā*, without objectifying it. This is not similar to knowing an object such as the pot. In the recognition of the *svarūpa* of the *ātmā* there is only one operation involved; whereas in the objectification of a pot, there are two operations.

One operation is the *vr̥tti* assuming the form of the pot and the second operation is the recognition of that *vr̥tti*, thereby recognising the pot. One is the objectification of the object (by the *vr̥tti*) and the other is the recognition of the *vr̥tti*. The objectifying *vr̥tti* is recognised by another *vr̥tti*, which is the *draṣṭā*, the seer. I become the seer, the knower of the pot. Therefore, this I-thought, the *ahaṃ vr̥tti*, assuming the status of the knower, recognises an object through a *vr̥tti*, the *ghaṭa-vr̥tti*, and says, ‘This is a pot — *ayaṃ ghaṭaḥ*.’

Any piece of knowledge — where there is this peculiar connection, *ātma-anātmā-sambandha*, between the self, the knower, you, and the object that is objectified by that knower — takes place by these two operations. That is, the object is objectified by the *vr̥tti* and you cognise the *vr̥tti*. This is why you can say, ‘This is a pot.’ But, you cannot say, ‘This is *ātmā*.’ Who is there to say it? I am the one who has to say it and, if it were to be so, then, the self, *ātmā*, would become an object of the self who is objectifying it. Therefore, it would become *anātmā*, not *ātmā*, just like any other object of your knowledge.

### SEEING ĀTMĀ IS DIFFERENT THAN SEEING AN OBJECT

Naturally, then, when *Kṛṣṇa* said, ‘seeing *ātmā*,’ in the last verse, some difference was definitely implied. The difference is that in the number of operations involved. Seeing *ātmā* implies only one operation; there is no second operation at all as there is when one sees an object. Only the first operation is there, the *vr̥tti* that objectifies *ātmā*, that assumes the very form of *ātmā*. If I say *ātmā* is pure consciousness,

*kevala-caitanya*, *śuddha-caitanya*, and the recognition of this fact takes place, that recognition implies that the *vṛtti* assumes the very form of consciousness and there is no other object involved. That particular form destroys the ignorance with reference to the *svarūpa* of the *ātmā* and then disappears. This, then, is the only operation that takes place, meaning that there is no second operation in the form of the recognition, ‘This is *ātmā*,’ as there is in the cognition of other objects.

The one operation that does take place is only with reference to one's confusion about oneself, the self-ignorance that was there; that ignorance is destroyed by the *vṛtti*. This is what happens in self-knowledge, in knowing the self, more of which we shall see later.

### WHAT DOES A WISE PERSON HAVE TO REJOICE OVER?

Generally, a person rejoices only when he or she has something over which to rejoice something other than knowing *ātmā*. Some revelling situation is usually there for any rejoicing to take place. But what is there for the person being discussed in this verse to rejoice over? It is the recognition of the absolute happiness that is one's own nature, a recognition by the intellect that is beyond sense perception — *sukham ātyantikam yattad buddhi-grāhyam atīndriyam*.

*Ātyantika-sukha*, Śāṅkara explained in his commentary, is a *sukha*, a happiness, which is absolute — a happiness that is the nature of oneself, *svarūpa-sukha*. This means that it has nothing to do with the *vṛtti*, in reality. It is a particular *vṛtti*, no doubt, but it is not born out of a particular condition external to oneself. The word, *ātmānam*, mentioned in the previous verse is converted here into *ātyantika-sukha*. Seeing the self is recognising the self as *sukha-svarūpa*, one whose nature is absolute happiness, *ātyantika-sukha*. And this recognition takes place in the intellect, in the *buddhi* alone. At the same time, this *sukha* is beyond sense perception — *atīndriya*.

### THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ABSOLUTE SUKHA AND RELATIVE SUKHA

This *ātyantika-sukha* or *ātma-sukha* is something quite different from the pleasure you pick up because of a sense object or a situation, *viśaya-sukha*. Both *ātma-sukha* and *viśaya-sukha* are recognised by the *buddhi*. There is no nasal *sukha* or other *sukha* that is not recognised by the *buddhi*. A *sukha* born out of hearing something pleasant, for example, is always inside, not outside. There is also a *sukha* born of having solved a problem or a riddle for yourself, the kind of happiness that causes you to say, ‘Eureka!’ born of some recognition or a piece of knowledge. This is called *vidyā-sukha*. There is a clarity there, which, to use the language of the *Gītā*, increases your *sattva* disposition. This heightened *sattva* makes the mind more composed — gives rise to a *śānta-antaḥ-karaṇa*. Because knowledge and *sattva* go together, there is *sukha*. Thus, whenever you pick up a piece of knowledge, no matter

how simple or complex, there is some *sukha*, which we call *vidyā-sukha*. But the *sukha* that one picks up by a piece of knowledge is still a relative *sukha* because it is subject to change. A challenge is met successfully, *sukha* is discovered, and then it is gone. If the *sukha* was the result of having unravelled a few knots in a tangled ball of wool, you pick up the yarn again and begin unravelling some more to gain some more *sukha*.

There is also *viśaya-sukha*, a *sukha* born out of fulfilling a desire for a particular object and the experience thereof. An object of desire brings about *sukha* in different degrees. Just the sight of it brings about certain *sukha* and owning it or experiencing it brings about some more *sukha*. Thus, there are levels or degrees of *viśaya-sukha*. Everyone has this kind of *sukha* — even a cat or a dog — whereas *vidyā-sukha* is only for human beings. *Vidyā-sukha* includes any accomplishment and *viśaya-sukha* implies a certain situational gain in terms of a desire fulfilled.

There is also the *sukha* born of *yoga*. *Yoga* includes prayer and meditation in which there is a certain *sukha*. *Prāṇāyāma*, etc., can also bring about some *sukha*. Thus, there are these three kinds of *sukha* — *viśaya-sukha*, *vidyā-sukha*, and *yoga-sukha*. *Vidyā-sukha* and *viśaya-sukha* are experienced by everyone, whereas *yoga-sukha* is experienced by a disciplined person, a *karmayogī*, a prayerful person, a devotee. Because of the person's maturity, a certain *sukha* is there. In the seat of meditation there is a *sukha*. Discipline, health, and so on bring about a certain *sukha*, a satisfaction, all of which is implied by *yoga-sukha*.

Then there is the fourth *sukha*, called *turiya-sukha* which does not depend on any gain, accomplishment, or anything. It is not born out of any particular piece of knowledge that you discover nor any object that you gain; it is just the recognition of yourself alone, because of which there is a *sukha*. This *sukha* is the *sukha* mentioned by *Kṛṣṇa* in this verse, *ātyantika-sukha*, absolute *sukha* — this is also recognised by the intellect, *buddhi-grāhya*, and is beyond sense perception, *atīndriya*.

### THE SUKHA THAT IS YOURSELF

This is where people sometimes commit mistakes. *Atīndriya-sukha*, means that the *sukha* is not due to sense perception. At the same time, every *sukha* is *buddhi-grāhya*, recognised by the intellect. *Viśaya-sukha*, *vidyā-sukha*, and *yoga-sukha* are also *buddhi-grāhya* but not *atīndriya*, whereas this absolute *sukha* is *buddhi-grāhya* and also *atīndriya*, meaning that it is not due to any external situation or internal condition. *Yoga-sukha* also is not born of an external situation, but it is born of an internal situation, while *viśaya-sukha* is born of external situations. But the *sukha* that *Kṛṣṇa* is talking about here is not born of anything. It is yourself.

People naturally want to know what this *sukha* is born of, how can it be brought into being. But this concept of *sukha* being ‘born’ is due to ignorance; it is a *saṃsāri*’s

approach — an approach of the ignorant, the non-discriminating person. Therefore, we have to be very careful here. Absolute *sukha* is *buddhi-grāhya* and, at the same time, *atīndriya*, which means it has nothing to do with sense perception or anything. It is oneself.

When the person, the meditator, the seeker, comes to recognise the *ātma-svarūpa*, *yatra vetti*, what happens? He or she does not slip away from the truth, the truth of *ātmā* as absolute happiness, *ātyantikaṃ sukham — tattvataḥ na calati*. Here *tattva* means the *svarūpa*, the essential nature of a thing — as expressed by the suffix ‘ness.’ There is no appropriate word in English for *svarūpa*. Here, *tattva* is the truth or *svarūpa* of the *ātmā*, which is *ātyantika-sukha-svarūpa*, which is free from any form of limitation, *pūrṇa-svarūpa*. From this, the person never moves away — *na eva calati*.

### THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN RECOGNITION AND EXPERIENCE

This recognition marks the difference between ordinary *yoga*, meaning *aṣṭāṅga-yoga*, and what we are talking about here. You must know this well and not confuse this recognition with the *samādhi* of *aṣṭāṅga-yoga*. *Aṣṭāṅga-yoga* is a discipline which has its own place in preparing the mind for the knowledge to take place. For this reason, you should not think of it as useless or anything. *Aṣṭāṅga-yoga* is a great discipline, but if it is not understood as such, there can naturally be confusion between it and the knowledge of oneself, *ātma-jñāna*, which is the ultimate end, the freedom that everyone seeks.

The *samādhi* that *aṣṭāṅga-yoga* talks about is in terms of experience. In fact, if, as a *saṃsārī*, you have to accomplish anything in this world, that is in the world of *saṃsāra*, *samādhi* is the greatest accomplishment experientially; in this sense, *aṣṭāṅga-yoga* has the last word in terms of *nirvikalpa-samādhi*, a state of absorption wherein there is no second thing at all. The knower, known, and the instrument of knowledge — all three of them — coalesce into one experience lasting for a length of time. Although it does not take away the *saṃsāra*, it is definitely the last word in *saṃsāra*.

*Nirvikalpa-samādhi* is the opposite of deep sleep. In deep sleep there is *nirvikalpa* alright, meaning that the knower-known-knowledge division is not there. But, in the *nirvikalpa-samādhi* the mind is awake, unlike in deep sleep where the mind is sleeping. In both cases, there is *ajñāna*, the difference being that when the mind is asleep there is no *vṛtti*, whereas in *nirvikalpa-samādhi*, the mind is awake, meaning there is *vṛtti*. Therefore, the greatest thing you can have in life is *nirvikalpa-samādhi*, which is why it is the greatest hooker also. It baits people because it is the last thing that you can think of accomplishing in *saṃsāra*, in your life here in this world.

## EXPERIENCE ALWAYS HAS AN END

But *nirvikalpa-samādhi* has an end; it is something you come out of. All that is needed is for someone to drop something in front of you or to start a vacuum-cleaner in the next house. As soon as you become aware of the sound, you are not only out of *nirvikalpa-samādhi*, you may be into anger as well! Why? This is because, *nirvikalpa-samādhi* is something that does not last forever; you will come out of it in time. And, once you are out of it, it becomes a past experience that you then talk to others about — ‘Swamiji, yesterday I had the most wonderful thing happen to me!’ Even the language used to describe the experience is different! But as soon as the thoughts come, or someone begins hammering, or a child begins to cry, or a bug creeps up your leg, real or imagined, it is gone; you have come out of *nirvikalpa-samādhi*.

There are those who will tell you that once you experience *nirvikalpa-samādhi* and you come out of that experience, the world will be different. They also say that you experience the *ātmā* in *nirvikalpa-samādhi*. How can this be? All that happened was that the knower-known-knowledge difference coalesced. All differences disappeared — a desirable experience, no doubt. It is recognised by the intellect, it is *buddhi-grāhya*, and is also beyond sense perception, *atīndriya*. But how has this experience changed the state of your vision? In fact, you may become very sad. Before you knew *ātmā*, you were only sad if you lost some money, some power, some hair, or a relationship. Now, having known the *ātmā*, you have a new item which can be lost and be a cause for sadness — yourself. Previously, you lost certain things but retained yourself, but now you have experienced a much greater loss — the loss of yourself.

Therefore, practitioners of *samādhi* may have a certain sadness — sadness if *samādhi* does not come, sadness even when it comes, because, it does not last. And even if it lasts for some time, there is sadness because it ends. All that can be said is that I was eternal for half an hour! For that period of time, the division between the knower, known, and knowledge that is usually there went away; time itself went away. For half an hour you were free from time, which means you were timeless, eternal. And, after half an hour, you become what? Non-eternal. Even if you have *samādhi* for two days, you become non-eternal. In this way, it is no different than being in a coma for two days and then coming out of it. While in the coma, there was no division whatsoever and the person also did not know what was happening. Therefore, the length of time that one is in *nirvikalpa-samādhi* has no meaning.

## DISCIPLINE IMPLIES A CERTAIN MASTERY OF THE MIND

As a discipline, however, *nirvikalpa-samādhi* is great because, when you gather such an experience, it indicates that you have a certain mastery. Otherwise, you would not have been able to have the experience of *nirvikalpa-samādhi*. Because a certain mastery is involved, *nirvikalpa-samādhi* is considered to be the height of experience



that one can gain; it is like a prize, the end for those who want to gain experience. To say that it indicates a certain *sāttvika-vṛtti* on one's part is fine, but to say that after you come out of *nirvikalpa-samādhi*, you will see the world entirely differently is not correct because how you see the world depends purely on your vision of reality. Having experienced *nirvikalpa-samādhi*, you have to interpret that experience. And to interpret the experience, you must have a *pramāṇa*, a means of knowledge.

Again, then, we come back to *pramāṇa* because you do not interpret an experience in any other way than by what you know. All interpretations depend entirely upon your knowledge, which is dependent on the *pramāṇa* available to you. And all the *pramāṇas* that one has, perception, inference, etc., operate by maintaining a duality — duality of *kartā* – the doer, *karma* – the object of doing, *kriyā* – the act of doing itself, *karaṇa* – the instrument of doing, etc. All these are collectively called as *kāraṅkas*. Retaining the duality alone, one's *pramāṇas*, the various means of knowledge, operate.

Perception, *pratyakṣa*, and inference, *anumāna*, do not swallow the *kāraṅkas*. Only the *āgama*, the teaching, swallows them. It says that you are not the knower, *pramātā*; you are the very essence of the knower, the knowledge, and the object of knowledge, all three of them being one and the same. In this way, the *āgama* resolves the division, which is exactly what this verse is saying. Knowing *ātmā*, not moving from the truth of *ātmā* there is no knower-known-knowledge division for the person. Nor is there any question about when you are going to get out of yourself — because both thought and the object of thought are you, *ātmā*.

## THOUGHT IS YOU

There is no way of getting out of yourself because, with thought, you are and without thought, you are. Whether you are with the world or without the world, it is you all the time. This we shall see clearly later. Because the statement '*tattvataḥ na calati*,' in the verse under study, implies *jñāna*, knowledge, the word *yoga* is not to be taken in its usual sense. It is more *viyoga* than *yoga*, as *Kṛṣṇa* explains a little later. Previously, due to ignorance, there was an association, *saṃyoga* with *duḥkha*, sorrow, taking it to be oneself, which was the problem. *Yoga* means joining, association, and *viyoga* means dissociation from the association. Previously, the person was in association with the body, mind, and senses, which was not a simple association because the person actually took the body-mind-sense-complex to be himself or herself. Then, the person dissociated himself or herself from sorrow by knowledge, which does not imply *aṣṭāṅga-yoga*.

In order to remove any confusion here, *Kṛṣṇa* first says, *tattvataḥ na calati*, and then redefines the word *yoga* in one sentence later in keeping with what he is teaching.

यं लब्ध्वा चापरं लाभं मन्यते नाधिकं ततः ।

यस्मिन् स्थितो न दुःखेन गुरुणापि विचाल्यते ॥ २२ ॥

*yam labdhvā cāparam lābham manyate nādhikam tataḥ  
yasmin sthito na duḥkhena guruṇāpi vicālyate*

Verse 22

तं विद्याद् दुःखसंयोगवियोगं योगसञ्ज्ञितम् ।

स निश्चयेन योक्तव्यो योगोऽनिर्विण्णचेतसा ॥ २३ ॥

*tam vidyād duḥkhasaṃyogavīyogaṃ yogasañjñitam  
sa niścayena yuktavyo yogo'nirviṇṇacetasā*

Verse 23

च *ca* — and; यम् लब्ध्वा *yam labdhvā* — having gained which; ततः अधिकम् *tataḥ adhikam* — better than that; अपरम् *aparam* — other; लाभम् *lābham* — gain; न मन्यते *na manyate* — does not think; यस्मिन् *yasmin* — in which; स्थितः *sthitaḥ* — established; गुरुणा अपि दुःखेन *guruṇā api duḥkhena* — even by a great sorrow; न विचाल्यते *na vicālyate* — is not affected; तम् *tam* — that; दुःख-संयोग-वियोगम् *duḥkhasaṃyoga-vīyogaṃ* — dissociation from association with sorrow; योग-सञ्ज्ञितम् *yoga-sañjñitam* — called by the name of *yoga*; विद्यात् *vidyāt* — may one know; अनिर्विण्ण-चेतसा *anirviṇṇa-cetasā* — with the mind that is not discouraged; सः योगः *saḥ yogaḥ* — that *yoga*; निश्चयेन *niścayena* — with clarity of purpose; योक्तव्यः *yuktavyaḥ* — should be pursued

And, having gained which, one does not think there is any other better gain than that, established in which, one is not affected even by a great sorrow (sorrowful event), may one know that dissociation from association with sorrow, to be what is called as *yoga*. That *yoga* should be pursued with clarity of purpose with a mind that is not discouraged.

The person being discussed here does not slip away from the truth of himself or herself, *ātma-tattva*, because *ātmā* is not some place he or she went to and can return from. When it is said that you go to the abode of *ātmā* and rejoice there, some location comes to mind and the question then becomes, for how long? All kinds of imaginations are therefore, possible. You may think it is like going somewhere as a guest, staying as long as you are entertained, and then, afterwards, coming back. However, when it is clear that remaining with *ātmā* is in terms of knowledge of the *svarūpa* of *ātmā*, conveyed here by the expression, *tattvataḥ na calati*, then there is no question of ever being away from it because remaining does not depend even on memory.

People sometimes ask, ‘Swamiji, suppose I forget the *ātmā*?’ You can forget the words I use to point out the *ātmā*, but you cannot forget the meaning of those words once you have understood it. The meaning of the words is *ātmā*. You can forget *sat-cit-ānanda*, but if *sat* is understood by you, *cit* is understood by you, and *ānanda* is understood by you, how can you forget? The words themselves are only the *lakṣaṇa* of *ātmā*, for revealing the nature of *ātmā*; therefore, they can be forgotten. But the

meaning is you. How can you forget you? You cannot because knowing yourself is not something that is memory-based. Even if you lose your memory in an accident or whatever, it is the same.

### DOES LOSS OF MEMORY NOT AFFECT ONE'S KNOWLEDGE?

People often pose this question also, 'Swamiji, suppose a *jñānī*, a man who already has self-knowledge, has a car accident and loses the use of all his brain cells. His head is so smashed up, he remembers nothing, not even his own name. Isn't his knowledge of *ātmā* also gone?' No, his knowledge is not gone because there was no 'his' knowledge. There was only 'This self is *Brahman* — *ayam ātmā brahma*.' Recognising this fact, he was already liberated. There is only one *mokṣa* and that takes place while living — *jīvanmukti*. *Mokṣa* is a matter of understanding, not of memory. And once you gain this understanding, this knowledge, there is no moving away.

Then, the question may come, 'Swamiji, suppose I do gain *ātmā*. Then what should I do?' Previously, you had many adventures and now you are thinking about having an *ātmā* adventure. Naturally, then, you want to know what your next adventure will be after *ātmā* has been gained. You have been to the Caribbean, to Hawaii, you have scaled mountains, skied the slopes, and you have learned how to roller-skate. All these adventures being over, you say, 'Let me do some *ātmā* adventure; let me see what it is all about,' because there are people who keep talking about it. Wanting to cover everything, you come to *ātmā*.

This wanting to cover everything is a different attitude than that of a *mumukṣu*, of course. Unlike the *mumukṣu*, this person does not want anyone to know more about anything than he or she knows. Perhaps the person had heard the word *ātmā* or *Brahman* at some dinner party and he or she wants to know what it is all about so as not to appear ignorant in this particular area. Suppose, in the process of finding out, this person gets caught in this particular pursuit and gets this *ātma-jñāna*, *ātmā* now being covered, what would the person do next, is the question.

Some people really think like this. They say they have tried this and that and they have tried *Vedānta* also! This verse is for such people. The word 'gain' is used here with just this kind of person in view, the one who always wants to cover all areas. The word, 'gaining,' *labdhvā*, means 'knowing,' *jñātva*. The *jñāna* itself is the gain here because it is *sukha*. This gain is in terms of human ends, *puruṣārthas*, what people go after. Gaining *ātmā*, the person does not think, *na manyate*, that there is anything other, *apara*, that is better than *ātmā*, *tataḥ adhikaḥ*, to gain.

### IS THERE A BETTER GAIN THAN SELF-KNOWLEDGE?

Why is there no better gain, *lābha*? Because a gain is something that should make you better. If you gain something that makes you worse, it is not a gain; it is a problem.

You thought you bought a gain, but instead you bought a problem, just like when you buy a property, the property itself is a great gain, but the litigation against it is the problem. And because you do not know how to get out of the problems, the property is not really a gain; it is only a problem gained.

Gain, then, means that you must feel that you are better off than you were before. If you gain *ātmā*, its *svarūpa* being *ātyantika-sukha*, a *sukha* that is not dependent upon anything because *ātmā* is everything, it is *pūrṇa*, what gain is greater than that? How are you going to better it? By what are you going to better it? Therefore, the person discussed in this verse does not even think there can be another gain. He or she does not say, ‘Okay, I have seen *ātmā*. Now let me look for something else.’ There is no something else; something else is also *ātmā*.

Even if this is accepted, the question may then be asked. Suppose the person does not come out of this gain and go after something else, there being nothing else, what happens if some great tragedy occurs to him or her? Will the person's *ānanda* not be disturbed? No, remaining in that, *yasmin sthitaḥ*, meaning knowledge of *ātmā*, the person is not affected even by some colossal tragedy — *duḥkheṇa guruṇā api na vicālyate*. The word *guru* has many meanings; here it means ‘big’ or ‘heavy’ and is the opposite of *laghu*, meaning ‘easy,’ ‘simple,’ ‘lightweight.’

One may be able to endure a great deal of pain or sorrow without being affected, but suppose a great tragedy happens? Will this person not come out of that *ātmā* in which he or she remains and go somewhere else? No. The person remains in *ātmā*. To come out of *ātmā* and go somewhere else is not possible because somewhere else is also *ātmā*. Therefore, whatever the *duḥkha*, the person remains in *ātmā*, confirming what *Kṛṣṇa* had said previously when he said *tattvataḥ na eva calati*, the person never moves away. Here, he says that this person is not shaken, not affected, by any situation because, for this person, all situations are also not other than *ātmā*.

This *yoga* *Kṛṣṇa* is talking about here, is a *yoga* that is more a dissociation than association. In verse 20, the word *yoga* referred to the practice of contemplation, the object of which is *ātmā* seeing which one rejoices in oneself — *yatra uparamate cittaṃ niruddhaṃ yoga-sevayā*; *yatra ca eva ātmanā ātmānaṃ paśyan ātmani tuṣyati*. This *yoga* is called *jñāna-yoga* because *ātmā* is seen with the mind with the help of knowledge. And, in the wake of this self-knowledge, naturally there is self-rejoicing because self-seeking is no longer there. There is freedom from seeking.

In verse 21, the nature of *ātmā* was said to be absolute happiness, recognised by the intellect and yet beyond sense perception — *sukham ātyantikaṃ yat tad buddhi-grāhyam atīndriyam*, knowing which one remains in oneself, never moving away from the truth of oneself — *vetti yatra na ca eva ayaṃ sthitaḥ calati tattvataḥ*. The truth of oneself is absolute happiness, *ānanda*, whereas all other happiness always depends upon a mental condition. Ordinary enjoyments, *bhogas* depend upon our

external condition plus our mental condition. Some external object must be available in a certain situation and in a form that is desirable.

Even if the external situation is available, you may not be in the mood for it. Therefore, it has to wait for you to be in a better mood. You may have bought a particular tape of music that you generally love — but not today. The music has to wait for you to enjoy it until you are in the mood for it. This is because the *sukha* that is born of an external condition depends upon two situations — the external condition itself and a conducive internal, mental, condition. Whereas the *svarūpa-sukha* that we are talking about does not depend upon either. Rather, it is born out of the recognition of the self being free from any sense of limitation.

*Kṛṣṇa* then points out that the person who recognises this *svarūpa-sukha* never comes out of it because there is nothing better to be gained — *yaṁ labdhvā ca aparāṁ lābhaṁ manyate na adhikaṁ tataḥ*. This gain in the form of self-knowledge is also called *yoga*. It is not a challenge that, once achieved and no longer holding your interest, has to be followed by another challenge. Looking for greater and greater challenges is based on the desire to prove oneself, to prove that one exists, for which one has to do something adventurous, something different, something new, something challenging. Only then does one feel alive and not like an old piece of furniture. This feeling is what keeps people going, in fact. Because they have to live within themselves, a challenge can become so important that they sacrifice everything for it. If a person does not feel that he or she is a ‘somebody,’ naturally the person has to create some challenge or other in order to feel, ‘I exist,’ ‘I am somebody,’ etc.

## THE RESOLUTION OF ALL SEEKING

Having gained, *ātmā*, then, would I still have to create new challenges for myself? No, because gaining *ātmā* is a gain, gaining which there is no better gain. The person does not move from the truth of oneself — *tattvataḥ na calati*, meaning that the seeking after challenges is resolved. This resolution is the gain in fact.

All seeking can be reduced to self-confusion. Therefore, the resolving of the self-confusion is the resolving of the very seeking itself. In this resolution, the seeker and the sought become one and the same, which was what *Kṛṣṇa* meant in verse 22, when he said, ‘And, having gained that *ātmā*, one does not think that there is any other better gain — *yaṁ labdhvā ca aparāṁ lābhaṁ manyate na adhikaṁ tataḥ*.’

And if a big tragedy should occur, what happens to the person? *Kṛṣṇa* covers that also. He says, ‘Firmly established in that *ātmā*, he (or she) is not disturbed even by great sorrow — *yasmin sthitaḥ duḥkhena guruṇā api na vicālyate*.’ Therefore, there is no question of getting out of *ātmā*. No external situation is going to affect the person, nor will the person become tired of himself or herself and get out. Moving away from something can take place either by slipping away from it, or by withdrawing from it, or

by something else coming and disturbing you. But fullness cannot be disturbed in any way. Neither the world nor anything else can disturb fullness. Fullness accommodates every event that can take place in one's life. Also, fullness is not something that one can get out of because it is oneself.

Therefore, knowing all that has been discussed in the previous three verses, there is no coming back from the *sukha* that is *ātmā*. The gain of it, the joy of it, the fullness of it, the freedom of it — all that has been pointed out — is called 'yoga.' 'Yoga-saṅgītam,' *Kṛṣṇa* says. Thus, he gave us a new way of looking at the word 'yoga.'

### ANOTHER DEFINITION FOR YOGA

The root *yuj*, from which the word 'yoga' is derived, has two meanings — *yojana* and *nirodha*. *Yojana* means connecting or uniting two things. Thus, when two things are put together it is *yoga*. Whereas, *nirodha* means control, stopping, mastering, which is how *Patañjali* defined *yoga* in the second *sūtra* of the *yoga-śāstra* — *yogaḥ citta-vṛtti-nirodhaḥ*, meaning 'yoga is the mastery of one's thinking processes,' indicating that *yoga* is a discipline by itself. Since both meanings for the word 'yoga' are used in the *Gītā*, we have to see from the context whether the word is used in the sense of union or control.

Here, originally there seems to be union of the mind with *ātmā*. The mind contemplates upon *ātmā*; therefore, *ātmā* becomes the *dhyeya*, the object of contemplation. The mind is the one that becomes united with the object of contemplation, *ātmā*, and the attempt to unite the two is called *yoga*, which is the sense we generally get from the word 'yoga.' It implies two different things coming together, just as two people come together in marriage, a connection, *sambandha*, of some kind, whatever the nature of the connection may be.

### WHAT IS JOINED TOGETHER CAN ALSO FALL APART

Now, whenever two things come together, there is a tendency for them to fall apart also. Therefore, they have to be kept together somehow. If two people are involved, the tendency is for them to move away from each other, each one going off in opposite directions. Similarly, two pieces of material tied together will stay together only as long as that which binds them lasts. Once the binding factor wears out, the two pieces of material will fall apart.

Here, too, the mind can move away from *ātmā* if it is attracted by some external object. It can be disturbed by a *vṛtti*, a thought, for which there is an object, for which you are given senses, etc. And if your senses do not operate, your memory is always there. Your memory is good enough to provide you with the whole world! Because of memory, the mind will never find itself wanting in terms of objects to think about. Therefore, the sense of connection between the mind and *ātmā*, conveyed by the word

‘yoga,’ makes it seem that the mind, contemplating on *ātmā*, will come away from *ātmā*. Because the word ‘yoga’ has this intrinsic problem, *Kṛṣṇa* redefines it here in an opposite sense. This redefinition is called *viparīta-lakṣaṇa*, meaning that the word is used in its limited sense and then the limitations are knocked off by redefining it. In fact, because words have to be used, the whole teaching is like this. A particular word is used and then its limitations are knocked off to reveal its absolute sense which is *ātmā*.

### YOGA: DISSOCIATION FROM ASSOCIATION

Until now, *Kṛṣṇa* uses the word *yoga* in its limited sense. And, here, he knocks off the limitations. In fact, he knocks off the very word itself by presenting *yoga* in a different way. He defines *yoga* as *saṁyoga-viyoga*. *Samyoga* has the same meaning as *yoga*, union, the prefix ‘sam’ conveying the sense of being very well united. When the prefix ‘sam’ is replaced with the prefix ‘vi,’ the resultant word is *viyoga* which conveys exactly the opposite meaning — that of dissociation. *Samyoga* means ‘association,’ and wherever there is association, there can be dissociation, which is the meaning of *viyoga*. In either case, the word *yoga* remains, one prefix being replaced by the other to create the opposite meaning.

For this reason, prefixes, *upasargas*, are very important in Sanskrit. In English also, prefixes can be used in this way, as in ‘declinable’ and ‘indeclinable,’ for example, where a negative prefix is used to arrive at the opposite meaning of the word. Similarly, the prefix ‘vi’ added to ‘yoga’ points out the negative aspect or the absence of *yoga*. In this way, *Kṛṣṇa* is saying that the *yoga* we are talking about here is more a dissociation than an association.

All that was said before in terms of *yoga* — how to sit, how to live one's life, etc. — all the disciplines that were advised earlier, are for the sake of which *yoga*? For the *yoga* being discussed here in the previous three verses. May one know that, *taṁ vidyāt*. May one know that *yoga* as what? As *duḥkha-saṁyoga-viyoga*, as the dissociation from the association with sorrow. This is what *Kṛṣṇa* calls ‘yoga’ here and this is the *yoga* that is to be known — *yoga-saṁjñitaṁ taṁ vidyāt*.

Association with *duḥkha* means association with pain, with sorrow. Anything undesirable is connected with *duḥkha* — there is *duḥkhena saṁyogaḥ*. And this union or association with *duḥkha* is no ordinary association; it is a very well-entrenched association. Because this association with sorrow is not ordinary, *Kṛṣṇa* uses the word *saṁyoga* here. No one wants to have *duḥkha*, but the *yoga* with it, the union with it, is so complete that, although you want to get out of it, you cannot. Even though no one wants sorrow, everyone is subject to it. Since we do not want to be sad, why do we become sad? It is not that one wants to get into a state of sadness, but then there is *yoga* with sadness and that *yoga* seems to be *saṁyoga*, a connection that is very difficult to pull out of. In fact, you cannot pull out; there is no way of pulling out.

### WHY IS SORROW SO WELL ENTRENCHED?

People have been trying to pull out of *duḥkha-saṃyoga* but are not able to. Why not? Because it is the *duḥkhi*, the sad person, who wants to pull out of *duḥkha*. The very person who wants to pull out of *duḥkha* has created the *duḥkhi* by taking himself or herself to be limited and therefore, there is association with sorrow. Being associated with *duḥkha*, how can he or she pull out?

‘I am a human being, I am a mortal, I am a man, I am a *brāhmaṇa* or a *kṣatriya*, I am young, I am old, I am only this much,’ — for the *duḥkha*, the one associated with sorrow, this is exactly what ‘I’ is. The person thinks of himself or herself as limited, small, a *saṃsāri*, one who is subject to pain and sorrow. That very *aham*, ‘I,’ the ego, by its very standing, is doomed. Its very standing is on *duḥkha*, on a sense of limitation. In fact, it is nothing but the sense of limitation. Therefore, all you have to do to be sad is to remember yourself!

You just need to remind yourself of how limited you are. What happens sometimes is that you forget yourself because the *saṃsāra* has so many fascinating objects that can take your attention away from yourself for the time being. That is when you forget yourself, when you laugh and pick up those gleaming moments of joy. Then, afterwards, you come back to remember yourself. And that is enough to make you sad!

Whenever I forget myself I am fine and, whenever I remember myself, I feel sad because of the ‘I’ that I am. Therefore, *duḥkha-saṃyoga* is my self-identity. Because I identify with the body-mind-sense-complex, which is limited, I take myself to be limited and I say, ‘This is me.’ If this is me, then of course I am *duḥkhi*. Fortunately, however, this is not me.

When I say ‘This is me,’ then I want to get rid of myself. But how can you get rid of yourself? Wherever you go, you are there very much. This is why, wherever you go, you carry your *duḥkha* with you. You do not even need a situation to cause you *duḥkha*; you just go and it will be there with you. Furthermore, you will contribute your *duḥkha* to others, even if you go to a place where everyone is laughing. Sitting in a corner, you will create *duḥkha* in that place because you have brought *duḥkha* with you. This, then, is the nature of a *saṃsāri*. It is not something unique to a given person. Every *saṃsāri*, wherever he or she goes, is going to create *duḥkha* in that place, because he or she is a *duḥkhi*. Then this is *saṃyoga* — the union between *ātmā* and *anātmā* — *ātmā-anātmā-saṃyoga*.

The word, *duḥkhi* reveals an ‘I,’ a person. And that person is separate from what causes the person sorrow, *duḥkha*. The person is what we call *ātmā* and what causes the person *duḥkha* is *anātmā*. And between this person, this *ātmā*, and *anātmā*, there is *saṃyoga*. How did the person get this *saṃyoga*? *Ātmā*, as we have seen, is pure *caitanya*, consciousness. Its nature is consciousness. It does not have any kind of



attribute. If *ātmā* had any attribute, it would stick there always and you would not be able to know anything new. The nature of *ātmā*, consciousness, then, does not have any particular attribute. This being so, how is it that, this consciousness has *saṃyoga*? How is that, between *ātmā* and *anātmā* there is *saṃyoga*?

### IGNORANCE MAKES THE IMPOSSIBLE POSSIBLE

Consciousness has no *saṃyoga*, in fact. *Saṃyoga* is possible because of ignorance, *avidyā*. By definition, ignorance is capable of making the impossible possible. *Avidyā* is capable of doing anything; it can even make a snake out of a rope and mirage water out of a desert. Ignorance can do all these things because, there is a lack of knowledge. This means that the connection between *ātmā* and *anātmā*, *ātma-anātmā-sambandha*, is brought about purely by *aviveka*, the lack of discriminative knowledge. Therefore, that there is *duḥkha-saṃyoga* is established.

When *duḥkha-saṃyoga* is established, and I understand this *saṃyoga*, then, the next step is to find the way to withdraw from this *duḥkha*. But, because the connection itself is born of *avidyā*, there is no physical withdrawal possible. The association with *duḥkha* being born of a lack of discrimination, dissociation from the association that *Kṛṣṇa* refers to here as *duḥkha-saṃyoga-viyoga* can only be by knowledge. Association with *duḥkha* is due to a self-loss, a self-confusion, and therefore, a self-not-self identity. That is resolved by discriminative knowledge. In other words, I have to know that *ātmā* is *ātmā* and *anātmā* is *anātmā*, but that *ātmā* is not *anātmā*. Therefore, there is nothing separate from me.

If *ātmā* and *anātmā* were two separate entities enjoying the same reality, then there could be no *mokṣa*. Any inquiry would just bring in one more item because of which one would feel separate. *Ātmā* would be one entity sitting somewhere and the many *anātmās* would be something different. Again, you would have the same problem, but you would be extending it to include the separate entity called *ātmā*.

### THERE IS ONLY ĀTMĀ

Unfortunately, or fortunately, *anātmā* is never separate from *ātmā* at any time. No thought can exist apart from consciousness that is *ātmā*. While one depends upon the other, the other does not depend upon it. *Viyoga* means seeing *ātmā* as distinct from *ātmā*. Now you have a situation wherein *duḥkha-saṃyoga* itself is not there — unless you take the thought or any other *anātmā* as ‘I.’ This is because *anātmā* is not distinct from *ātmā*. This, then, is the *yoga* of *duḥkha-saṃyoga-viyoga*, which is more a dissociation than an association, the binding material could go away, but since it is a dissociation, there is no possibility of the mind coming away from *ātmā*.

Whatever you are bound to can go away, which is what happens with any happiness that depends on time and various other conditions. When the conditions

change, any experience, whatever it is, is gone. Therefore, anything experiential is definitely dependent upon or associated with conditions, and it will go away. But if it is not experiential, if it is more a dissociation from your false association, it will not go away. This dissociation is what is called dissociation by knowledge — *jñānena viyogaḥ*. There is nothing physical about it. Because *anātmā* is *ātmā*. You cannot pull *ātmā* away from *anātmā*. Nor is there any necessity to do so because *ātmā* is in no way involved with *anātmā*. This recognition, this knowledge, which is more a dissociation than an association, is what *Kṛṣṇa* calls *yoga* here. ‘May one know that dissociation from the association with sorrow is *yoga* — *taṃ duḥkha-saṃyoga-viyogaṃ yogaṃ vidyāt*,’ he says.

### THE BINDING FACTOR IS IGNORANCE

If an association with someone or something is a legal association, then you can only become dissociated from it legally. And if the association is physical, the dissociation will also be physical. If two physical objects are brought together, they can be separated by removing whatever binding factor that closed the physical distance between them in the first place. Here, the binding factor between *ātmā* and *anātmā* is *avidyā*, ignorance. The binding factor being *avidyā*, what removes the association is *vidyā*, knowledge.

That *yoga*, that *duḥkha-saṃyoga-viyoga*, from which there is no question of loss, beyond which there is nothing greater, which is an end in itself, which is yourself, is not an association. It is more a withdrawal from *duḥkha*; and therefore, it is easy, just as it is easier to drop something than to lift it. The only problem here is that the dropping happens to be the dropping of ignorance, dropping all one's false notions about oneself, which is not easy to do. It is not just a matter of surrendering them unto the Lord, as some would have us think.

### ERRONEOUS NOTIONS CANNOT BE SURRENDERED

It has been said that in the present age, *Kali Yuga*, devotion is the easiest path. You simply surrender to the Lord and He will take care of everything. But what do you surrender? Whom do you surrender? Since everything belongs to the Lord, who are you to surrender anything? This is like my taking your coat and then telling you that I am surrendering it to you. There is no surrendering here. Then what are you going to surrender? And where does it go? Whatever is surrendered does not go anywhere. It all just remains there as it is.

If you surrender something to the Lord and he says, ‘Thank you,’ picks it up, and goes away, then you may have surrendered something. But he does not pick up anything; therefore, you do not surrender anything. And who is it that surrenders? ‘Myself,’ you say. But how are you going to surrender yourself? This only means that you want to

surrender, perhaps because you think your ego is a little bloated and needs to be kept in check by performing acts of surrender. But who is this 'I' that has to surrender? I cannot surrender the 'I.' There has to be another 'I' to surrender this 'I.'

The 'I' that wants to surrender is the *ahaṅkāra*, the ego. It is a false entity; it is not *aham*, 'I,' *ātmā*. The *ahaṅkāra* is a notion and it cannot go away unless you falsify it. This falsification of the ego is what is called *jñāna*, knowledge, and surrender as well. The *yoga* discussed here is also the same. That is the *yoga* that has to be undertaken — *sa yogaḥ niścayena yuktavyaḥ* — meaning that it definitely has to be practised by you.

Dropping notions about oneself is difficult because ignorance is involved. At the same time, it is easy because all you have to do is destroy the ignorance. The destruction of ignorance is only difficult if your mind is not prepared. Trying to make a two-year-old child understand that one plus one is two does not work because the child's mind is not yet prepared, whereas once the child has undergone the necessary preparation, it is very easy.

### LIVING INTELLIGENTLY PREPARES THE MIND

Similarly, if you are already cheerful, it is easy for you to understand that you are *Brahman*, that you are the whole. *Saṃsāra* can give you this preparation; it can make you a fairly cheerful person — if you live very intelligently. But, *saṃsāra* also gives you *duḥkha* and, if you come to *Vedānta* to remove this *duḥkha*, *Vedānta* will just become another pain in your neck. *Vedānta* is meant for a cheerful person because, to understand you are *ānanda*, you have to be fairly cheerful. Thus, *Vedānta* is not an answer for the ordinary sorrows of *saṃsāra*, which is why there is *karma-yoga*, which includes *aṣṭāṅga-yoga* and other such disciplines.

### SELF-KNOWLEDGE IS THE ONLY PURSUIT THAT SOLVES THE PROBLEM

Nor does one have to have all the qualifications — *viveka*, *vairāgya*, *śama-dama*, etc., and *mumukṣutva* in full measure. Such people exist only on paper. Living a life of *karma-yoga* means living a religious life, not a secular life. A prayerful life prepares the mind for the knowledge that is *Vedānta*. In the wake of this knowledge, all the notions about oneself get dropped. Therefore, it is easy and it is difficult. And it has to be done — *yuktavyaḥ*. If it is difficult, you had better go for it because there is nothing more appealing, more inspiring. And, if it is easy, where is the difficulty? Go for it also. There is nothing more attractive or more purposeful because the whole pursuit is for me and is the only one that solves the problem.

And how is this knowledge to be pursued? *Niścayena* — by understanding what is real and what is unreal, by knowing with certainty that this clarity is to be gained by me by *viveka*, discrimination. Further, *Kṛṣṇa* says, '*anirviṇṇa-cetasā* — by a mind (*cetasā*) that is not dejected, frustrated, tired (*anirviṇṇa*), by a mind that is not

indifferent, afflicted, or discouraged.’ Can you understand all this without becoming discouraged? Of course you can because it is more a dissociation, *viyoga*, from sorrow. Therefore, there is nothing to discourage you on any score. There is nothing greater either, so, what is there to be discouraged about? Even if it were discouraging, there is nothing else available, so, what are you going to do? Thus, without being discouraged, *anirviṇṇa-cetasā*, and with a singleness of purpose, *niścayena*, this *yoga* should be undertaken by you, *yogaḥ yuktavyaḥ*.

In fact, we are always trying to get rid of sorrow, to drop *duḥkha-saṃyoga*. We are constantly searching for *duḥkha-saṃyoga-viyoga*. This, then, is the *yoga* that gets rid of the sorrow. Thus, *Bhagavān* uses the word ‘*yoga*’ here in the sense of *viyoga*, about which he talks further in the verses to come.

स ? ल्पप्रभवान् कामांस्त्यक्त्वा सर्वानशेषतः ।

मनसैवेन्द्रियग्रामं विनियम्य समन्ततः ॥ २४ ॥

*saṅkalpaprabhavān kāmāṃstyaktvā sarvānaśeṣataḥ*  
*manasaivendriyagrāmaṃ viniyamya samantataḥ*

Verse 24

शनैः शनैरुपरमेद् बुद्ध्या धृतिगृहीतया ।

आत्मसंस्थं मनः कृत्वा न किञ्चिदपि चिन्तयेत् ॥ २५ ॥

*śanaiḥ śanairupamed buddhyā dhṛti-grhītayā*  
*ātmasaṃsthaṃ manaḥ kṛtvā na kiñcidapi cintayet*

Verse 25

स ? ल्प-प्रभवान् *saṅkalpa-prabhavān* — born of thought; सर्वान् *sarvān* — all; कामान् *kāmān* — desires; अशेषतः *aśeṣataḥ* — totally; त्यक्त्वा *tyaktvā* — giving up; मनसा *manasā* — by the mind; एव *eva* — alone; समन्ततः *samantataḥ* — completely; इन्द्रिय-ग्रामम् *indriya-grāmam* — the group of sense organs and organs of action; विनियम्य *viniyamya* — withdrawing; धृति-गृहीतया *dhṛti-grhītayā* — endowed with perseverance; बुद्ध्या *buddhyā* — with the intellect; शनैः शनैः *śanaiḥ śanaiḥ* — slowly, slowly; उपरमेत् *uparamet* — may one resolve (the mind); आत्मसंस्थम् मनः कृत्वा *ātma-saṃstham manaḥ kṛtvā* — making the mind abide in the self; किञ्चित् अपि *kiñcit api* — anything else; न चिन्तयेत् *na cintayet* — may one not think of

Giving up totally all desires, which are born of thought, completely withdrawing the group of sense organs and organs of action by the mind alone, with the intellect endowed with perseverance, may one resolve the mind (in *ātmā*). Making the mind abide in the self, may one not think of anything else.

In verse 23, we saw that *yoga*, which means ‘union,’ was defined as dissociation, *viyoga*, from one's association *saṁyoga* with *duḥkha*. In other words, in the present context, the union is more a dissociation than an association — dissociation from *duḥkha*, meaning dissociation from one's identification with the body-mind-sense-complex — *kārya-karaṇa-saṅghāta*. Dissociation from this identification, which takes place by knowledge alone, is called *yoga* — *yoga-saṁjñitam*. This, then, is the *yoga* that has to be pursued, *sa yogaḥ yuktavyaḥ*, *Kṛṣṇa* says.

*Kṛṣṇa* also says that this *yoga* can be pursued without the mind being afflicted by any sense of despair or discouragement, *anirviṇṇa-cetasā*. This is because it is more a dissociation than association. The pursuit of knowledge is not like climbing Mount Everest; it is more like dropping a rock that you are holding in your hand. Because it is more dropping than climbing, it is not as difficult as one might think. It is simply a question of dissociating oneself from one's own identity of being only so much. Thus, there is no cause for despair.

Having summarised what he had said before in this way, *Kṛṣṇa* begins to discuss the same topic again. Why? Because this *yoga* is something that has to be pursued, certain problems tend to arise; therefore, *Kṛṣṇa* emphasises certain points again and again. In the verse under study, he presents the same topic in a slightly different form, repeating two statements made several times before.

## THE BASIS OF ALL DESIRES

First, there is the complete giving up of that from which all desires are born — he says, ‘*saṅkalpa-prabhavān sarvān kāmān aśeṣataḥ tyaktvā*.’ We have seen how *kāma* can refer to either a desire itself or to the object of desire. Here, *kāma* means the desire for objects, the source of which is *saṅkalpa*. From *saṅkalpa* alone, desire is born. *Saṅkalpa* is a thought such as, ‘May this be for me,’ ‘May this come to me,’ etc., which immediately turns into a desire. This source of all desire, *saṅkalpa* is what is given up totally *aśeṣataḥ*. Therefore, renunciation here is in terms of the *saṅkalpa*, the basis of the desire, and not for the desire itself.

*Saṅkalpa* is one simple thought and because that thought is capable of becoming a desire, *saṅkalpa* is said to be the root of all desire. Desire is that which the mind returns to over and over again. *Saṅkalpa* comes and then goes away, but once it becomes a desire, the desire has to be fulfilled. Therefore, *saṅkalpa* is what has to be dealt with.

*Saṅkalpa* is dealt with by analysing the thought itself. For instance, the thought, ‘May this come to me,’ is analysed. By this particular inquiry, *vicāra*, *saṅkalpa* is dealt with.

The desires themselves need not be dealt with. *Saṅkalpa* alone is the problem and therefore, it is the only thing that has to be dealt with. If you deal with the *saṅkalpa*,

‘May I have this or that,’ desires are not a problem at all. They become only fancies because they are not backed up by *sañkalpas*. The backing up of a desire is only from your *sañkalpa*, ‘May I have this,’ which slowly becomes, ‘I should have this.’ Once this *sañkalpa* has turned into ‘I should have this,’ then you have had it! Therefore, the *sañkalpa* is to be analysed.

### WITHDRAWING THE SENSE ORGANS

*Kṛṣṇa* also repeats here that the group of senses are to be completely withdrawn by the mind alone, *manasā eva*, meaning by a mind endowed with discrimination. The common meaning for *grāma* is village, which does not work here. Therefore, we go for its other meaning, *jāta*, group, meaning the group of sense organs and organs of action, *indriyāṇi*. *Indriya-grāmaṃ viniyamya*, means putting these *indriyās* in their place, which is to withdraw them from their respective fields of activity. Again, then, we have here a piece of advice, to be followed, with reference to the mind while sitting in meditation. And that is, seated in meditation, let the mind be brought back to the object of meditation. *Kṛṣṇa* talks about this later.

Withdrawing the sense organs or putting them in their places means that they do not go towards their various sense objects because the *sañkalpas* have been taken care of. Because they are withdrawn from all activity, this withdrawal is described here as total, *samantataḥ*.

What is said in verse 24, is intended to cover all that was said before about how to sit in meditation — the posture, the gaze, etc. — and is completed in verse 25.

*Dhṛti* means firmness and also *dhairya*, courage, which imply care and wisdom as well. *Dhṛti-grhīta*, here, means that the *buddhi* is endowed with courage, firmness, and wisdom, meaning discrimination, *viveka*. With this kind of *buddhi*, then, the mind is made to abide in *ātmā*, which we shall come back to later.

The use of repetition in this verse, ‘*śanaiḥ śanaiḥ*,’ meaning ‘slowly, slowly,’ is typical of Sanskrit. And what does one do slowly, slowly? May one resolve, *uparamet*, the mind, meaning oneself, in this particular way — by making the mind abide in *ātmā*, without thinking of anything else — *ātmā-saṁsthaṃ manaḥ kṛtvā na kiñcit api cintayet*, thinking only of *ātmā*, the object of meditation.

In this verse, two things have to be understood — what are this courage and discrimination that are required and what does it mean to place the mind in *ātmā*, the object of meditation, *dhyeya-viṣaya*. What kind of placing is involved here? Is the mind to be placed in *ātmā* like one places an orange in a basket? Or is the mind to be placed on top of *ātmā* perhaps? If ‘*ātmā-saṁsthaṃ manaḥ kṛtvā*’ is not properly understood, making the mind abide in *ātmā* becomes a very big problem. But once

'*ātma-saṁsthaṁ manaḥ kṛtvā*' is clearly understood, there is no problem and *dhṛti* also becomes clear.

## DEFINITION OF ĀTMĀ

In the expression, *ātma-saṁsthaṁ manaḥ kṛtvā*, what does *ātmā* mean? It is that wherein another thing is not heard, *yatra anyat na śruṇoti*, as the *Chāndogya-śruti* points out. It is that wherein another thing is not seen, *yatra anyat na paśyati*, wherein another thing is not known, *yatra na anyat vijānāti*.<sup>1</sup> The *śruti* also reveals *ātmā* as one that is free from all attributes, *nirviśeṣa*, and that is purely in the form of *caitanya*, consciousness, alone — *cinmātra-svarūpa eva*.

Then, again, *ātmā* is presented as one that is the seer but not the seen — *draṣṭā na tu dṛśyam*, the hearer but not the heard — *śrotā na tu śrutam*, the knower but not the known — *vijñātā na tu vijñeyam*, the thinker but not the thought — *mantā na tu mantavyam*. This is how the nature of *ātmā* is defined by the *śāstra*.

Given this definition of *ātmā*, how can I place the mind upon *ātmā*? How can I even think about *ātmā*? To think of *ātmā* means that *ātmā* becomes the object of my thought, which contradicts what the *śruti* says. Therefore, I cannot think of *ātmā* and that is why it is said in the *Taittirīyopaniṣad* that, having not gained *ātmā*, all the words come back, along with the mind — *yato vāco nivartante aprāpya manasā saha*. It is as though the mind and the words join forces and go after *ātmā*, only to return without it, having found it too tough a nut to crack! Unfortunately, this is how *ātmā* is sometimes presented.

## HOW CAN ĀTMĀ BECOME AN OBJECT OF ONE'S MEDITATION?

Still, how is one to place the mind upon *ātmā*? How can *ātmā* become an object of one's meditation? There is no way of placing the mind upon *ātmā* because the mind is *ātmā*. It is not that one takes the mind to *ātmā* and, having had the mind sitting upon it for some time, *ātmā* eventually yields because of the mind's pressure, etc. Some translations have taken this verse to mean this way and therefore, can be very misleading.

In the expression *ātmā eva idaṁ sarvam*, *ātmā*, oneself, is defined as 'all this is *ātmā* alone.' '*Idaṁ sarvam*' implies the knower, *jñātā*, the knowledge, *jñāna*, and the object of knowledge, *jñeya*. *Sarva*, meaning 'all,' means all three with nothing left out. Within this *sarva* is the seer, the object seen, and seeing — *draṣṭā*, *dṛśya* and *darśana*, the hearer, the object heard, and hearing — *śrotā*, *śruta* and *śravaṇa*, etc., all of which come under *jñātā*, *jñāna* and *jñeya*, knower, knowledge, and that which is known.

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<sup>1</sup> *Chāndogyaopaniṣad* – 7.24.1

Any object, anything that is there, is *jñeya*, an object to be known alone. Even what is unknown is known and is therefore, included under *jñeya*. Thus, we deal with these three, *jñātā*, *jñāna*, and *jñeya* alone. *Jñātā*, the knower, is non-separate from *ātmā* because *jñātā* is *ātmā* alone. And, although we may clearly see the fact that the *jñātā* is *ātmā*, we still think of *jñāna* as belonging to *ātmā*, saying ‘This knowledge belongs to me. This is my knowledge.’ I have the knowledge of a particular object, a tree. The tree is the object of knowledge and the *vṛtti*, the knowledge itself, belongs to me. Therefore, I take myself to be different from this knowledge whose object is the tree.

### THE KNOWER, KNOWLEDGE, AND KNOWN ARE ONE

This notion is nullified here by recasting it into an entirely different mould altogether. And what is this mould? *Jñātā*, *jñāna*, *jñeya* — all three are made into one *ātmā*. Everything is myself alone — *ātmā eva idaṃ sarvam*. *Jñātā* is *ātmā*, *jñāna* is *ātmā*, and *jñeya* is also *ātmā*.

The example that is always used here is the dream. In dream, there is a knower of the dream, there is a known dream world, and there is knowledge of the dream itself. And these three are nothing but one light, *vyotiḥ*, one consciousness, *caitanya*. Consciousness alone is the knower, known, and the knowledge in dream. All three of them are nothing but one *caitanya-ātmā* alone.

In terms of the dream, this is very clear to you. Getting up, you understand that the dream knower, the dream known, and the dream knowledge all resolve into you again. Therefore, *jñātā* is nothing but consciousness, knowledge, is nothing but consciousness, and *jñeya* is also nothing but consciousness.

Defined in this way, we understand that consciousness is as though qualified or limited by the status of being a knower — *jñātr-avacchinna-caitanya*. We can refer to this as knower-consciousness, knowledge-consciousness, and known-consciousness, there being no knower, knowledge, or known apart from consciousness. Can a known object ever be separate from consciousness? It cannot. When the known object is, consciousness is. When the known object is not, consciousness still is. You can destroy the object, but you cannot destroy the is-ness.

### NOTHING IS SEPARATE FROM EXISTENCE

Thus, with reference to the nature of existence, there is a two-fold argument, one in terms of existence itself and the other in terms of knowledge. In terms of existence, no object is apart from what is existent. For example, when you say, ‘The table is’ or ‘The chair is,’ the ‘is-ness’ that is there is qualified by the object — the name and form, *nāma-rūpa*, called table or chair. Further, if you analyse what a chair is, you find that the chair does not have any existence of its own; only the wood out of which the chair is made has an existence. And, if you analyse the wood, you find that it also has no



existence; only the pulp from which the wood is made has existence. Similarly, the particles that form the pulp has existence, whereas the pulp does not. If you keep on shifting in this way, you find that existence always remains.

Only that which is self-existent can be called existence, *satya*, which is nothing but consciousness, *caitanya*. Consciousness alone is self-evident and everything else is evident to the self. Anything that you come to know, everything that you question, is all for the knower, the person who is using the *pramāṇas*, the various means of knowledge, to ascertain the validity or the veracity of a particular object or statement of proof. Whereas, the existence of the very knower requires no proof. The knower must be a self-evident person. But who is this knower?

There is a part of the knower that is known to me. I know that I am the seer of the pot, *ghaṭa-draṣṭā*, for which there is a thought aspect, an adjective, *viśeṣa*, for the consciousness that is 'I.' The thought aspect is an adjective and the substantive is nothing but *ātmā*, consciousness. Therefore, for the knower there is consciousness, for the knowledge of course consciousness is present, and for the known also consciousness, — the self-existent aspect of consciousness — is present. All three — knower, known, and knowledge — are non-separate from the presence of consciousness. Appreciation of this fact is what is meant here by *ātma-saṁsthāṁ manaḥ kṛtvā*.

## REDIRECTING THE MIND TO THE VERY BASIS OF THOUGHTS

This appreciation enables me to see the mind, whereas, previously, the mind was always engaged in thinking about this and that. The mind will still think about a variety of things, but now my attention is not upon what I see because I turn it away from the thoughts themselves and direct it to the very basis of the thoughts. This turning the attention is what is called *dhyāna*, contemplation. You turn your attention from the object of thought, whatever it may be, to the basis of thought.

The basis of thought is consciousness, whereas the object of thought can be anything, for example, a tree. The object of a tree-thought is the tree and the basis of the thought is consciousness. Therefore, the tree-thought is not separate from consciousness, the tree is not separate from consciousness, and the knower of the tree-thought is not separate from consciousness, all three being nothing but consciousness, *ātmā*.

This very appreciation is also a thought. And what does this thought do? It simply destroys the ignorance that the three are separate and then it resolves. By not thinking of anything else but the oneness of all three, it resolves. Therefore, *Kṛṣṇa* says here, 'May one not think of anything else, *na kiñcit api cintayet*.' In fact, there is nothing else because everything is *ātmā*.

The point being made here, of course, is not to move away from the appreciation of *ātmā* as non-separate from everything else because if you think of something else,

this appreciation will go. One can also appreciate that a certain object is a tree and that he or she is someone who is looking at the tree, which is true. But, then, the tree, the thought of the tree, and the *ātmā*, the one who looks at the tree, are all one and the same. Turning one's attention to the basis of these three is the appreciation, the contemplation, being referred to in this verse.

In order not to think of anything else, you require *dhṛti*, wisdom which is gained by exposing the *buddhi* to the teaching. Only with the insight gained, with the help of the knowledge alone, can one practice this contemplation. *Dhṛti* also implies courage here because contemplation requires a certain steadiness, firmness, or commitment in order to understand that knower, known, and knowledge are one and the same, given that our orientation has always been that they are separate.

### SEEING THE FACT REMOVES THE OBSTACLES

Because the orientation that they are one is against our experience, there will naturally be some obstruction in appreciating this fact. Until it becomes clear, we can assume that there is some obstacle, which will be taken care of by seeing the fact. Therefore, we do not worry about the obstacles; we simply keep on attempting to see, for which courage, firmness, and commitment are necessary.

To emphasise this point, *Śaṅkara* defined, *śanaiḥ śanaiḥ* – slowly, slowly, here as, *na sahasā*, meaning ‘not immediately.’ When he said, *ātma-saṁsthaṁ manaḥ kṛtvā*, it does not mean that you immediately turn your mind to some object called *ātmā*. *Ātmā* is not something you can put the mind into or on; the mind itself is *ātmā*. There is no job to be done here; there is simply an appreciation. Therefore, a certain inner care is involved, wherein a contemplative atmosphere is created. In this atmosphere, recognition takes place for which no will whatsoever is involved. Slowly, slowly, during the period of time in which contemplation takes place, you take to *ātmā*.

### NO WILL IS REQUIRED IN CONTEMPLATION

In meditation, will is only with reference to sitting and other preparations; once these are taken care of, the will does not do anything. In fact, will is the problem and therefore, has to be surrendered to the contemplation itself. The contemplation takes over your will, so to speak. The mind becomes as though possessed. You, as a person, the contemplator, are possessed by that very contemplativeness. Therefore, no will is required here.

What will do you require to appreciate something beautiful? None; the very will gets resolved in the appreciation of that which is beautiful, that which is inspiring. What will is there when you have a love for something? Whatever will there is, just resolves.

Similarly, in contemplation, you do not push your will in order to gain *ātmā*. You do not grind your teeth, roll up your sleeves, sit in your seat of meditation, and say, 'Today I am going to get that *ātmā*.' There is no such thing. It is not like wanting to do something or gain something that the world has to offer. If you want to do a particular job, for example, you can assert your will and get it done, but you cannot sit down, crush your eyelids together tightly, and say that you are going to get the *ātmā*. All that you will get is a headache! A person who tries to gain *ātmā* by using his or her will, will not gain *ātmā* because the person is *ātmā*.

Therefore, first one creates contemplativeness, which is taken care of by one's exposure to the teaching. You must know what you are aiming at, conveyed here by *ātmā-saṁsthaṁ manaḥ kṛtvā na kiñcit api cintayet*. Let the appreciation of *ātmā* take place in the mind, either by contemplating on the non-separation of knower-known-knowledge or by taking a particular expression such as 'satya-svarūpoham — I am the truth of everything,' and meditating upon it. This is a contemplation that is in keeping with the teaching.

Nothing new, no new knowledge, is created here. Rather, your mind is brought to focus on what is already understood, again and again. This, then, is the meaning of the two expressions in this verse — *ātmā-saṁsthaṁ manaḥ kṛtvā na kiñcit api cintayet*. Having said this much, *Kṛṣṇa* adds a little more.

यतो यतो निश्चरति मनश्चञ्चलमस्थिरम् ।

ततस्ततो नियम्यैतदात्मन्येव वशं नयेत् ॥ २६ ॥

*yato yato niścarati manaścañcalamasthiram*

*tatastato niyamya itadātmanyeva vaśaṁ nayet*

Verse 26

चञ्चलम् *cañcalam* — always in a state of flux; अस्थिरम् *asthiram* — unsteady; मनः *manaḥ* — the mind; यतः यतः *yataḥ yataḥ* — for whatever (reason); निश्चरति *niścarati* — goes away; ततः ततः *tataḥ tataḥ* — from that (reason); एतत् *etat* — it (the mind); नियम्य *niyamya* — bringing back; आत्मनि *ātmani* — with reference to the self; एव *eva* — alone; वशम् *vaśam* — into one's own hands; नयेत् *nayet* — may one bring

For whatever reason the unsteady mind, always in a state of flux, goes away, bringing it back from that, with reference to the self alone, may one bring (the mind) into one's own hands.

Here, the mind is being dealt with, because it is the mind that is to be placed in *ātmā*, and it is the mind that has to contemplate upon *ātmā*. And also it is the mind, *manas*, that goes away — *niścarati*. For the mind, *Kṛṣṇa* uses two words — *cañcala* and *asthira*.

*Cañcala* means that the mind is always in a state of flux. This is in fact the nature of the mind. This is how the mind is made and it is good that it is made so. Otherwise, you would become stuck in one thought. And, the mind being *cañcala*, it is also *asthira*, meaning that it is not at all steady. Always being in a state of flux, the mind is not steady, not firm. Thus, both words, *cañcala* and *asthira*, qualify each other — being in flux, the mind is not steady — *cañcalatvāt asthiram*, and being unsteady, the mind is in flux — *asthiratvāt cañcalam*.

### THE MIND ITSELF IS NOT A PROBLEM

*Kṛṣṇa* further describes the mind here by saying that it goes out, *niścarati*. That it goes out is not a problem; it is natural. Because the mind's nature is *cañcala* and *asthira*, it goes away from the chosen object of meditation for whatever reason, *yataḥ yataḥ*. You hear something, the sound of a bird perhaps, and you go along with the sound. You recognise it as the warble of a particular bird, and then you try to identify the kind of bird and so on. Or someone says something and off the mind goes. You do not even need the outside world for the mind to go away; there is a whole world right in your head. Is this not why we have gathered so many lifetime experiences — so that we can sit back and enjoy thinking about them? Even from inside then, all the birds warble; all the people you have ever known do this and that. Therefore, we have enough reasons for the mind to behave as it does.

For whatever reason the mind goes away from the object of meditation, and from that reason, from that situation, disciplining it, *niyamya*, you bring it back. Here, *Śaṅkara* gives an excellent piece of advice on how to do this. You do not try to pull it back; rather, you look at the very object to which the mind went. Let that itself be your object of attention for the time being. And what do you find?

Does it exist independent of consciousness, *ātmā*? Does it continue to exist if you question it in this way? No, you find that it becomes *mithyā* and you get back to *satya*, the truth of it, which is yourself.

The entire Veda talks about the subject, object, action, instruments of action, and so on. And then, in the last chapter, it says that all that was said so far is not true, that it is all *mithyā*. By looking into the very thought that took you away, the very object that took you away from the object of meditation, the thought itself, along with its object, is converted into *mithyā*, simply by seeing the truth of it. Therefore, *Kṛṣṇa* says that, one should bring the mind back into one's own hands — *vaśaṃ nayet*. As it moves away from you, may you bring it back to the object of meditation, meaning may you return to the contemplation of *ātmā*.

No force is used here. You just look at whatever took your mind away, thereby converting the object of distraction into the object of meditation. In other words, your attention is turned from the distraction to the very *vastu* itself — to consciousness.

Therefore, you have no problem. What object is going to distract you? By the strength of this practice of meditation, *dhyāna-yoga*, the mind resolves in *ātmā*. There is no question of distraction or false identity for the person. The mind remains as a mind alone and, therefore, does not pose any problem.

In the next verse, *Kṛṣṇa* discusses the results of such meditation:

प्रशान्तमनसं ह्येनं योगिनं सुखमुत्तमम् ।

उपैति शान्तरजसं ब्रह्मभूतमकल्मषम् ॥ २७ ॥

*praśāntamanasaṃ hyeṇaṃ yoginaṃ sukhamuttamam*  
*upaiti śāntarajasaṃ brahmabhūtamakalmaṣam*

Verse 27

प्रशान्त-मनसम् *praśānta-manasam* — one whose mind is tranquil; शान्त-रजसम् *śānta-rajasaṃ* — one whose impurities have all resolved; अकल्मषम् *akalmaṣam* — one whose life is free from all defects; ब्रह्म-भूतम् *brahma-bhūtam* — one who has become *Brahman*; एनम् *enam* — this; योगिनम् *yoginam* — meditator; हि *hi* — indeed; उत्तमम् *uttamam* — the most exalted; सुखम् *sukham* — happiness; उपैति *upaiti* — reaches

Indeed, the most exalted happiness reaches this meditator whose mind is tranquil, whose impurities have all resolved, whose life is free from all defects, who has become *Brahman* (through knowledge).

Here, *Kṛṣṇa* says that the most exalted happiness, *uttama-sukha*, reaches the person as a result of contemplation. This *sukha* is such that it cannot be compared with any happiness or joy that we know. It is a fullness, *pūrṇatva*, that is the very *svarūpa* of *ātmā*.

In any moment of joy or happiness, the seeker-sought difference is resolved, there being nothing but *ātmā* even though there is an object or situation involved. Take music, for example. The music is there, the person enjoying the music is there, and the appreciation of the music in the form of thoughts, *vṛttis*, is also there. In this music *sukha*, the division between these three is resolved; the differences between knower, knowledge, and known experientially coalesce into one whole experience, called *sukha*. And what makes the experience whole? *Ātmā* whose nature is oneness, consciousness, makes it *sukha*.

*Sukha* is a word that we already know; therefore, it can be used as a definition, a *lakṣaṇa*, to point out the *svarūpa* of *ātmā* as the wholeness, the limitlessness, that stands undivided between an object and oneself. This undivided whole that is oneself, *ātmā*, is pointed out here by the word *sukha*. Therefore, it cannot be ordinary *sukha*, the *sukha* we know in moments of joy. It is not comparable to anything we know because it is *ātyantika-sukha*, absolute *sukha*, *uttama* or ultimate *sukha*, a *sukha* that is the very nature of *ātmā*, *svarūpa-sukha*.

### AND WHO QUALIFIES FOR ABSOLUTE SUKHA?

And whom does this *uttama-sukha* reach? The person who meditates upon *ātmā* described here as *praśānta-manas*, *śānta-rajās*, *brahma-bhūta* and *akalmaṣa*. Again, as we have seen before, these words describe the person and, at the same time, reveal the results of practising *dhyāna-yoga* and the qualifications required by a person before the knowledge can be gained.

A person who is *praśānta-manas* is one whose mind is resolved, tranquil, for whom the mind poses no problem. Therefore, this *uttama-sukha* reaches him or her. The person is also *śānta-rajās*, one for whom all the impurities, *rajās*, are resolved. *Śaṅkara* defines such impurity as the fascination for things that are totally false, *mohādi-kleśa*, based on one's *rāgas* and *dveṣas*. Whereas the person being described here is one who is no longer in the hands of *rāgas* and *dveṣas*, which is why he or she is *akalmaṣa*.

*Kalmaṣa* means a defect in terms of *adharmā*, *pāpa*. Therefore, one whose pursuits in life are not improper is referred to as *akalmaṣa*. Such a person can become *brahma-bhūta*, one who has the *niṣcaya*, the definite knowledge that *Brahman* is everything — *idaṃ sarvaṃ brahmaiva*. And, because *Brahman* is everything, I am that *Brahman* — *tat brahma aham asmi*. *Brahman* being everything, I am everything — *aham idaṃ sarvam*. Knowing this, the person is *brahma-bhūta*. And this *brahma-bhūta*, who is *akalmaṣa*, *śānta-rajās*, and *praśānta-manas*, gains *uttama-sukha*, *ānanda*, it being the *svarūpa* of *ātmā*. Because of the knowledge of *ātmā*, this *sukha* as though reaches the person.

### DOES SUKHA REACH THE PERSON OR DOES THE PERSON GAIN SUKHA?

In this particular verse, *uttama-sukha* is the subject of the sentence and the person it reaches is the object. Generally, we think of *uttama-sukha*, *ānanda*, as something that must be gained, but here it is said that it reaches you, which is a different thing altogether. You become the object and *ānanda* becomes the subject, the agent of the action of reaching. Thus the question may arise, does *ānanda* reach me or do I reach *ānanda*?

In fact, either way is correct, as we shall see in the next verse:

युञ्जन्नेवं सदात्मानं योगी विगतकल्मषः ।

सुखेन ब्रह्मसंस्पर्शमत्यन्तं सुखमश्नुते ॥ २८ ॥

*yuñjannevaṃ sadātmānaṃ yogī vigatakalmaṣaḥ*

*sukhena brahmasaṃsparsamatyantam sukhamasṅnute*

Verse 28

एवम् *evam* — in this manner; सदा *sadā* — always; आत्मानम् *ātmānam* — the mind; युञ्जन् *yuñjan* — connecting; विगतकल्मषः *vigata-kalmaṣaḥ* — free from the conflicts born of *adharmā*; योगी *yogī* — the meditator; सुखेन *sukhena* — easily; ब्रह्म-संस्पर्शम् *brahma-saṁsparśam* — (born of) contact with (recognition of) *Brahman*; अत्यन्तम् *atyantam* — absolute; सुखम् *sukham* — happiness; अश्नुते *aśnute* — gains

The meditator, free from the conflicts born of *adharmā*, always connecting the mind in this manner, easily gains absolute happiness (born of) contact with (recognition of) *Brahman*.

In the previous verse, the *kartā*, the subject, was *uttama-sukha* and the object, *karma*, was the *yogī*, the meditator, who receives the *sukha*. Whereas, in this verse, the *kartā* is the *yogī* and the object gained is *atyanta-sukha*, *atyanta* being a synonym for *uttama* to complete the metre. Why does *Kṛṣṇa* say that this *sukha* reaches the *yogī* in one verse and that the *yogī* gains it in the next? Does this mean there is some confusion about who is the *kartā*, and who is the *karma*? No. He expresses the result of contemplation in both senses in order to resolve whatever confusion there may be, in fact.

By saying *uttama-sukha* reaches the *yogī*, the *yogī* becomes an object. Now, does that mean that *ānanda* comes and overwhelms the person? If so, there is a problem. It means that the meditator is drowned in the *ānanda*. In other words, the *ānanda* got the person! When one looks at it this way, the person seems to be an object, which is not so. The person is the only subject in the world; therefore, he or she cannot be the object. To make this clear, *Kṛṣṇa* also puts it the other way, saying that the *yogī* gains *ānanda*, *uttama-sukha*, which means that the difference between *kartā* and *karma* is not there.

### RESOLVING THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE SUBJECT AND OBJECT

There is really no difference between *kartā* and *karma*, just as there is no difference between a river and the ocean at the point where the river reaches the ocean. You cannot tell whether the ocean receives the river or the river reaches the ocean. In the confluence of river and ocean, you will find that the river is all salt for miles. Therefore, it looks as though the ocean is entering the river. Who is the *kartā* then? Who is the *karma*? We do not know. Sometimes we say the river reaches the ocean and at other times we say the ocean reaches the river.

Similarly, here, the *kartā*, the one who gains the *ānanda*, does not see an *ānanda* other than himself or herself. Therefore, the object and the subject are one and the same — *kartā eva karma*. This is unlike any other thing; it is the knowledge of oneself. Thus, these two verses are to be read together.

In the present verse, *ātmānaṃ yuñjan* means connecting or uniting the mind. The word *evam*, meaning ‘in this manner,’ indicates what the mind is to be connected to, meaning that it is united with the knowledge that *ātmā* alone is indeed everything — *aham eva idaṃ sarvam*. And, uniting the mind with the object of contemplation, the meditator gains *atyanta-sukha*, *uttama-sukha*.

The person is called a *yogī* here to indicate that his or her contemplation is successful. The *yogī*, the meditator, is one who is free of all obstacles. Again, this person is further described as one who is free from *adharma*, from all *puṇya* and *pāpa*, *vigata-kalmaṣa*, because how one lives one's life is very important to the success of one's meditation. A successful meditator is one whose daily life is free from *adharma*. Living according to ethical values renders the person free from obstacles, in the form of conflicts. A *vigata-kalmaṣa* is one whose life is free from the conflicts born of *adharma*. And that *vigata-kalmaṣa*, that *yogī*, gains *atyanta-sukha*.

#### ATYANTA -SUKHA IS NOT EXPERIENTIAL

As has already been said, *atyanta-sukha* is a *sukha* that is not comparable to the degrees of *sukha* that you gather. This is where people make mistakes and talk about eternal bliss, etc. This *sukha* is not eternal bliss; it is one's nature, *svarūpa*.

To refer to *svarūpa-sukha* as bliss means that it is experiential. Then, comes the question, what is eternal bliss and how can I get it? If it is something that you gain and that only lasts for a period of time, how can you call it eternal bliss? If it is something experiential, there is no *jñāna*, no knowledge, there. Then what is this *atyanta-sukha*? The verse itself defines it as *brahma-saṃsparśa-atyanta-sukha*, a *sukha* that is born out of recognising *Brahman*, contacting *Brahman*.

Whenever you touch something pleasant, the *sukha* you get is called *sparśa-sukha*. Does this mean that by contacting *Brahman*, by hugging *Brahman*, you will gain *atyanta-sukha*? No. *Brahman* is not an object available for hugging. *Brahman* is a word used by the *śāstra* for revealing oneself as the whole. Because of the knowledge that *ātmā* is *Brahman*, there is *sukha*, called *brahma-saṃsparśa-sukha*, a *sukha* born of the contact of *Brahman* meaning the recognition of the self as *Brahman*. This *sukha* belongs to *Brahman*; it is the very nature of *Brahman*, in fact. Therefore, it is called *svarūpa-sukha*.

*Svarūpa-sukha* is not a *sukha* that is experiential. It is the *sukha* that is recognised as the nature, *svarūpa*, of every form of *sukha*. In any form of *sukha* that you get, the *sukha* is because of *svarūpa-sukha*, the wholeness that is the nature of *Brahman*. Born out of the knowledge that the self is *Brahman*, the meditator is said to gain this *svarūpa-sukha*.



## BLISS ALWAYS COMES TO AN END

In his commentary to this verse, Śaṅkara says that *atyanta-sukha* is that which does not come to an end. If this *sukha* were bliss, it would come to an end because any experience has a limit. Therefore, bliss is a finite *sukha*, not *atyanta-sukha* that transcends all limits — the limits of time or degrees. Such limits do not exist for the *sukha* that is one's very nature because *svarūpa-sukha* can never be experiential *sukha*.

For *sukha* to be experiential, there must be a particular condition of the mind and that condition will always change because it is within time. Since it is within time, experiential *sukha* is non-eternal. But, in every *sukha*, there is a *svarūpa*, a truth, and that truth is the nature of *ātmā*, which is free from any form of limitation. This limitlessness, wholeness, *pūrṇatva*, implied by the non-separation of the knower from all that is known, the firm understanding that, '*sarvam aham asmi*,' is the *svarūpa-sukha*, referred to in these two verses as *uttama-sukha* and *atyanta-sukha*. And, being the very *svarūpa* of *ātmā*, it cannot come to an end. As long as *ātmā* is there, *sukha* is there, and *ātmā*, being beyond time, is eternal.

## NO EFFORT IS REQUIRED TO GAIN SVARŪPA-SUKHA

And how is this *sukha* gained? We always ask this question because, generally, the more one does in the world, the more one gains. The more you work on something, the greater the result. This being a rule very well known to us, how much should one do to gain infinite *sukha*? Infinite *karma*? No. The logic that we have for finite situations in this finite world does not work here. In fact, if *karma* were infinite, you could not even blink because blinking, like any action, is finite. Therefore, if you had to do infinite *karma*, you would do no *karma* at all!

In fact, no *karma* is involved in gaining *atyanta-sukha*, as Kṛṣṇa indicates here by the word *sukhena*, meaning 'easily,' without tears, without sweat, because this *sukha* is yourself. The self is *Brahman* and *atyanta-sukha* is born out of the recognition of this fact. Naturally, then, it is gained easily, *sukhena*.

Generally, in order to gain *sukha*, we have to do something that almost always involves some *duḥkha* also. For example, if you see a man packing and you ask him where he is going, he may say, 'I am going to Hawaii.' When you ask him why, he will say, 'To get some *sukha*.' On the way to the airport, he runs into a traffic jam and becomes upset — *duḥkha*. On arriving at the airport, there are more problems — and more *duḥkha*. At the Hawaii airport, he finds that his baggage did not come — *duḥkha*. Even at the hotel, there is *duḥkha* for him because the travel agency did not book a room for him as arranged. All the way, then, there is *duḥkha* — and for what? Just to gain a little *sukha*, to get some sun. And everyday he is there, it rains! On the day the sky clears, he has to catch a plane; his holiday is over.

This, then, is what we call *alpa-sukha*, so much effort, so much invested, and so much *duḥkha* for a little *sukha*. Whereas, here, how much effort is required, how much *duḥkha* is there, for *atyanta-sukha*? All the way it is pleasant. Pleasantly, *sukhena*, the person discovers. The very inquiry is pleasant because the *śāstra* says you are the whole. It does not say that you are an idiot or a sinner, etc. It says that you are everything and that not seeing it is idiocy. Therefore, listening to the *śāstra* is very pleasant indeed. No one else tells you that you are everything, that you are the whole. Only the *śāstra* accepts you totally. The prophets and great *gurus* do not accept you. Your father and mother, having their own ends to accomplish through you, certainly do not accept you. Parents always want their children to be something other than what they are. Thus, no one accepts you totally except the *śāstra*.

### THE VISION OF THE ŚĀSTRA

No theology accepts you either. Every theology condemns you and then tells you that it will save you. Everyone wants to save you, it seems; everyone wants to be a saviour to others. All religions and theologies are meant only for this purpose because, in their eyes, you are condemned, whereas the *śāstra* says, ‘*tat tvam asi* — You are That.’ It does not say, ‘*tat tvam bhaviṣyasi* — You will become That.’ When the *śāstra* says, ‘*tat tvam asi*,’ it is total, absolutely total. It is not even a matter of acceptance; it just points out that you are the whole. Because this is its vision, the *śāstra* could not condemn you, even if it wanted to!

You are the only *satya* that is in the creation; there is nothing else, everything else being *anātmā*, dependent upon the *ātmā* alone. You are the only one who is self-existent, *svataḥ siddha*, and everything else is dependent upon the self-evident being that you are. Therefore, you are always totally accepted by the *śāstra* — at the beginning and at the end also. In the beginning, *śāstra* says *mokṣa*, liberation, is yourself, *mokṣa* being in the form of knowledge of *ātmā* alone. The very starting point, then, is that you are already free, even though you do not know it. Therefore, the subject matter of the *śāstra* is something that is already established, *siddha-viṣaya*, and gaining this knowledge is a gain of something that is already gained, *prāptasya prāptiḥ*, not the gain of something not yet gained, *na tu aprāptasya prāptiḥ*. To begin this way is very pleasant indeed and the journey itself is also pleasant.

Other kinds of *sukha* require effort and may not always be pleasant. Even going to heaven requires a lot of effort, according to the *śāstra*. You have to spend a lot of time performing certain rituals properly, for which a lot of tears have to be shed, literally, since you have to sit before a fire to perform the rituals. Suppose, after having shed all these tears, you go to heaven, you gain heaven *sukha*. How long will you enjoy this *sukha*? Heaven *sukha* is also comparative *sukha*, heaven being just another place in which you cannot stay forever. There comes a time when you have to leave. Therefore,

*sukha* that one gains in heaven is *anitya-sukha*, non-eternal *sukha*, that requires a lot of effort to gain.

### ALL DESIRES ARE FOR ĀTMĀ ALONE

But, here, there is no effort; it is all *sukha*. This may seem a little silly or overly simplistic, but that is how it is. When you do a right-about-turn, your entire logic also reverses. Generally, all our desires are for *anātmā*, not for *ātmā*. Even heaven, *svarga*, is *anātmā*, not oneself, not I. Whenever you say, I am going to reach somewhere or gain something, the object to be gained or reached is *anātmā*, like heaven, money, or anything that you want.

All the *anātmās*, are for *ātmā* alone. To gain *sukha* is for *ātmā*, for my happiness, for my welfare, for my experience of something, I want this or that, I want to go here or there — all of which are *anātmā* for the sake of *ātmā*. Thus, there is always this connection between *ātmā* and *anātmā*, and as long as the connection is a desirable one, there is some kind of *sukha*, but it is always *anitya*, non-eternal.

It is this *anātmā-icchā*, desire for *anātmā*, that you give up and, in its place, you choose *ātmā-icchā*. *Anātmā-icchā* and *ātmā-icchā* are opposites and are, therefore, two different things. *Ātmā-icchā* is the right-about-turn, wherein you have a desire for the very *ātmā* itself. Being a right-about-turn, the logic that was applicable to *anātmā-icchā* is not applicable at all to *ātmā-icchā*, *ātmā* being accomplished already. *Ātmā* is; you are not going to create a new *ātmā*.

### ĀTMĀ IS ETERNALLY PRESENT

Nor are you going to polish the *ātmā*. It is not that *ātmā* is covered and needs to be cleaned up so that its original colour will shine through. *Ātmā* is never coloured; it is always self-shining, *nitya-prasiddha*. Because it is eternally present, it is never covered by anything. The only covering possible, if the word is to be used at all, is ignorance. And ignorance is not something that is scraped off; ignorance just goes in the wake of knowledge, which is why *Kṛṣṇa* says that, without effort, the meditator gains the *sukha* that is his or her nature.

A *sukha* that is born out of contact with *anātmā* is *anitya*, non-eternal, whereas the *sukha* born out of the knowledge of *Brahman* is *nitya*, eternal. *Ātmā* contacting *Brahman* means yourself contacting *Brahman* in terms of recognising *Brahman*. Thus, *saṁsparśa* is used here only to point out that this is not like any other *sparśa*, meaning ‘contact’ the context here being that the recognition that *ātmā* is *Brahman* takes place, because of which one gains *nitya-sukha* without any effort.

In this verse, it is said that the *jīva* recognises and gains the *sukha* and in the previous verse it was said that the *sukha* reaches the *jīva*. *Kṛṣṇa* explains it in this way

because the *jīva* is *sukha-svarūpa*. There is no *kartṛ-karma* difference because there is no *kartā* and no *karma*; there is only *ātmā*. Nor is there any reaching. There is only the dropping of ignorance and error, which is why it can be explained either as *sukha* reaching the person or the person reaching *sukha*. *Ānanda* approaching the *yogī* and the *yogī* gaining *ānanda* are one and the same.

### THERE IS ONLY ONE TRACK — JÑĀNA

In all of this, one must be very clear that *yoga* is not something independent of knowledge. There is no *yoga* track by which you come to gain this *sukha*. Nor is there a *karma* track, *bhakti* track, or any other track, each track leading to the goal. There is only the track of *jñāna*. Here in this chapter, *yoga* is *dhyāna*, the track of *jñāna*, consists of knowledge, alone. To pursue knowledge, you can follow all kinds of *yoga* — *aṣṭāṅga-yoga*, *karma-yoga*, etc. These disciplines will definitely be useful because you have to become a *vigata-kalmaṣa*. Therefore, you have to live a life of *dharma*, which implies a certain attitude called *karma-yoga*. This attitude includes *bhakti*, prayer, devotion, etc., all of which are useful for gaining *jñāna*.

In this pursuit one uses whatever is required, but the track is one and the same. There is no other track. Since this is how it is, what else can you do? *Ātmā* is *Brahman* and the problem is one of ignorance. Thus, the only track open to us is knowledge. The knowledge of the oneness of *Brahman* is the end result of the practice of contemplation. Therefore, let there be no confusion about there being any other track. The *yoga* discussed in the *Gītā* has its results in *jñāna* alone. It begins with *jñāna* and ends with *jñāna*.

Before contemplation, *nididhyāsana*, there is *śravaṇa*, listening to the vision of the *śāstra* that says *ātmā* and *Brahman* are one. Therefore, *nididhyāsana* is to make this vision clear of any obstacle.

Further, *Kṛṣṇa* says:

सर्वभूतस्थमात्मानं सर्वभूतानि चात्मनि ।

ईक्षते योगयुक्तात्मा सर्वत्र समदर्शनः ॥ २९ ॥

*sarvabhūtasthamātmānaṃ sarvabhūtāni cātmani*

*īkṣate yogayuktātmā sarvatra samadarśanaḥ*

Verse 29

योग-युक्तात्मा *yoga-yukta-ātmā* — one whose mind is resolved by this contemplation; सर्वत्र *sarvatra* — everywhere; समदर्शनः *sama-darśanaḥ* — one who has the vision of sameness; आत्मानम् *ātmānam* — the self; सर्व-भूतस्थम् *sarva-bhūtastham* — abiding in all beings; सर्वभूतानि *sarva-bhūtāni* — all beings; च *ca* — and; आत्मनि *ātmani* — in the self; ईक्षते *īkṣate* — sees

One whose mind is resolved by this contemplation, who has the vision of sameness everywhere, sees the self abiding in all beings and all beings in the self.

Here, *Kṛṣṇa* says that the *yogī*, the meditator, sees the self, *ātmānam īkṣate*, meaning that he or she knows the self. And what self does this person see? Everyone knows oneself as a person having a history, a biography, which is identical with the physical body and the experiences one has had.

This body is connected to some other bodies and therefore, there is a brother, sister, son, daughter, or someone else. Generally, then, this self that is known is connected to a given physical body, as a person who abides in that body.

Whereas the *yogī* being discussed in this verse recognises himself or herself as the self that abides in all beings — *sarva-bhūtastham ātmānaṃ paśyati*. And it is not just that; all the beings have their being in himself or herself alone — *sarva-bhūtāni ca ātmani*. Thus, *ātmā* runs through everything and, at the same time, everything is in *ātmā*. And who is it that sees this? *Yoga-yukta-ātmā*, one whose mind is resolved by contemplation, who has achieved success in this contemplation.

### THE SAMENESS THAT IS IN EVERYTHING

Such a person is also *sarvatra sama-darśanaḥ*, one who sees the sameness, *sama* that is *ātmā*, in everything. In other words, there is an appreciation, a vision, of that which is always the same in all beings. In all beings, in everything, there is something without any special attribute, *nirviśeṣa*, and there is something peculiar to each, *viśeṣa*. We see this *nirviśeṣa* and *viśeṣa* in different types of golden ornaments — chains, bangles, rings, and so on. In all of them there is one thing that is *nirviśeṣa* — gold; while the particular form such as chain, etc., is *viśeṣa*.

Although gold is also an attribute, this example illustrates the point being made here. With reference to all these chains, bangles, and rings, there is something common in all of them, something *nirviśeṣa*, something that is the truth, *satya*, of all of them — gold. There are many *viśeṣas* — all the various names and forms, *nāma-rūpa*. The attributes, chain, bangle, ring, etc., have their existence in the *satya*, gold.

Similarly, all *nāma-rūpas* have their basis, their truth, their existence, *satya*, in *ātmā*, i.e., *Brahman* and that *ātmā*, *Brahman* I am. The one who knows the *nirviśeṣa*, that is free from attributes, the *satya* in everything, *sarvatra*, that, which lends its existence to all names and forms, is called *sarvatra sama-darśanaḥ*. Wherever the person looks, he or she sees *Brahman*.

### CONTEMPLATION IS THE APPRECIATION OF WHAT IS BEING SAID HERE

There is no real looking implied here. What is meant is that, for this person, there is no ignorance about the self. The vision of the person is that the self is in all beings and all beings are in the self. This vision, the vision of *Vedānta*, described in its entirety in this verse and the next two verses, is what is referred to as the knowledge. In fact, these three verses lend themselves to contemplation because contemplation is primarily the appreciation of what is being said here.

The meaning of the word ‘I,’ is not exactly as we understand it to be. It is not this physical body-mind-sense-complex. When you say, ‘This is my body, my mind, my senses,’ you become someone who abides in the body-mind-sense-complex. For this, you require no special knowledge; in fact, it is very common for people to take themselves in this way. And, not only do you take yourself to be someone who abides in the body-mind-sense-complex, you also take the body, mind, and senses to be yours, which is why you say, ‘This is my body, my mind, my senses.’

Similarly, when you say, ‘I am fat,’ the body itself becomes the ‘I.’ When you say, ‘I am restless,’ the mind becomes the ‘I,’ and when you say, ‘I am tired,’ the *prāṇa* becomes the ‘I.’ This makes it possible for us to have two situations here — either the physical body itself is *ātmā* or *ātmanā* abides in the body. Both are being negated here. This *ātmanā* that you talk about is the *ātmā* that abides in all beings — *sarva bhūtastha*, not just in one *bhūta*, in one body.

### HOW CAN I RECOGNISE ĀTMĀ WHEN IT IS NEVER AN OBJECT?

And how do you appreciate this *sarva-bhūtastha-ātmā*? Since *ātmā* never becomes an object, you cannot see it like you can see the string that runs through different beads, thereby holding them together. Because you can see both the beads and the string, you can say that the string is *sarva-bhūtastha*, the beads being all the *bhūtas*. The string is not just in one bead; it runs through all the beads. Even if the beads are of different shapes, colours, and value, all of them are run through by one string. Here, both the beads and the string are objects. Both of them are *anātmā*.

Although this illustration is used to explain *sarva-bhūtastha-ātmā*, like any illustration, it is subject to defect. The defect here is that both the beads and the string are *anātmā*. As an object perceived by you, the string is *anātmā*, and so are the beads. Even if the string is not seen by you because the beads are strung so closely together, you can infer that the string is there. Thus, the string is an object inferred by you. Whether an object is perceived or inferred, either way it is an object known by you and is, therefore, *anātmā*.

But, here, how does the one who recognises the *ātmā* in all beings, recognise it? I recognise the various beings, but if I recognise in all of them one *ātmā*, *ātmanā* becomes

an object of recognition. *Ātmā* can never be recognised as an object. How, then, is this statement, *sarva-bhūtastham ātmānam īkṣate*, to be understood?

*Ātmā* is only one and that is 'I.' There is no other *ātmā* because everything else is *anātmā*. If we define *ātmā* as one thing referred to as the first person 'I,' then everything that is evident to this *ātmā* becomes *anātmā*. Therefore, is there not some difficulty here? How am I to recognise *ātmā* in all these *anātmās*?

This problem arises because this *ātmā* that I recognise as myself is not only in my physical body. It is not in any one physical body alone. When you associate it with one body, it becomes *ahaṅkāra*, the 'I' notion. It becomes the *jīva*, the individual. Then you go one step further and recognise the *jīva* as pure *caitanya*, pure consciousness, alone. Then everything else in the world, all the beings, all the minds, etc., have their being in that consciousness, which has no particular location.

### CONSCIOUSNESS, *ĀTMĀ*, IS NOT LOCATED ANYWHERE

If consciousness had a location, then it would be located only in living beings. In other words, consciousness would be here in one living being and at another place in another living being. Then how would we recognise the one that is present in all these beings? Between two beads we can see or infer there is string; this is how we know that the string obtains in space also. But if consciousness had a particular location, how could we recognise it? There is no way to recognise consciousness, *ātmā*, except by understanding that it has no location. It is not located anywhere.

Location itself is always in terms of spatial inquiry. The very concept of location is based upon the various forms that you see abiding in a space context. You see one object existing in one place, 'place P,' another object existing in 'place P<sub>1</sub>,' and between them there is space. Therefore, you say, 'This object is located here and that object is located there.' The location for two objects not being the same, you ask where particular objects are located or from where a certain person comes, etc.

A physical body definitely has a location; it has to be located. Even concepts have their own location. And, if you analyse the location of all these, you will find that they exist within the framework of time and space alone. All concepts, time-space concepts and objects within time-space concepts, exist where? That in which they are located is *ātmā*, consciousness, called *sarva-bhūtastha-ātmā*, the self or the truth of all beings.

### TIME AND SPACE ALSO HAVE THEIR EXISTENCE IN *ĀTMĀ*

Why? Because *ātmā* is not located in any one particular place. To understand this is to have an appreciation of *nirviśeṣa-caitanya*, attribute-free consciousness, which is the *svarūpa*, the nature, of *ātmā*. *Nirviśeṣa-caitanya* is not located in time or space because time and space are not absolutes existing parallel to *ātmā*. Time and space have

their existence in the being that is *caitanya*. Consciousness, *cit*, is the being, the existence, *sat* — *sat* is *cit*, *cit* is *sat*. And in this *sat-cit-ātmā*, all beings have their existence.

Consciousness has no particular location in living beings because, wherever there is a mind, consciousness is manifest there and where there is no mind, consciousness is not manifest. There is nothing more to it than that. Therefore, manifest consciousness is seen as though it is a conscious being. A thought, a certain response on the part of the person, is manifest and from this you may say that the person has consciousness. In fact, this is not the way to look at it. The object of such an inference is *anātmā*. Whatever you infer is *anātmā* alone.

The *caitanya* has no location whatsoever; in *caitanya* everything is located. If this is understood, then wherever there is a being, the being has its being in the self. The self is the basis, *adhiṣṭhāna*, for all beings. All beings have their *adhiṣṭhāna*, their basis, in the self alone. Therefore, the self runs through any being that you think about and that being is sustained, vivified, by this same self alone. In this way, *ātmā* becomes the *adhiṣṭhāna*, the basis, for any *bhūta*. Being limitless, *ātmā* is not bound by time or space. And, in this limitless consciousness alone, all beings have their being, their existence. Each one of them has its *adhiṣṭhāna*, its basis, in *ātmā* and therefore, in ‘I,’ *aham*. *Aham*, *ātmā*, is not the self of any one being; it is the self that abides in all beings — *sarva-bhūtastha-ātmā*.

### THE RESOLUTION OF ALL BEINGS INTO THE SELF BY KNOWLEDGE

The other statement in this verse, ‘*sarva-bhūtāni ca ātmani ikṣate*,’ is also important. It means ‘and (the meditator) sees all beings in the self.’ How? This is what is meant by resolution. To understand this, let us look at the different types of resolution or dissolution, called *laya* or *pralaya*.

One type of *laya* is called *nitya-laya*, the resolution that takes place daily when you go to sleep. Everything is resolved into yourself — all your projections, your experiences, the world and all its beings — all of them resolve into yourself alone in sleep. This is called *nitya-laya*, daily dissolution.

Then there is *mahā-pralaya*, cosmic dissolution, referred to by the expression *sṛṣṭi-sthiti-pralaya*, the creation, sustenance, and dissolution of the world itself. This type of *laya* is like deep sleep but with reference to the total, the cosmos, rather than to a given individual. Nothing is really lost in these two types of dissolution since everything is merely in its unmanifest condition and when it manifests again it is just as it was before. When you come back from sleep, you are as you were before and everything else comes back in the same form also. Similarly, after *mahā-pralaya*, the creation also comes back exactly as it was before and can therefore, be considered an extension of the



deep sleep condition alone. Because these manifest and unmanifest conditions form a cycle, nothing is really lost.

From a manifest condition to an unmanifest condition is called *pralaya*, dissolution or resolution; and from the unmanifest condition to a manifest condition is called *sr̥ṣṭi*, creation. And the continual change that the manifest form undergoes is called *sthiti*, sustenance, wherein the same manifestation seems to appear but with certain changes. *Sthiti* is not a stationary condition; it is time-bound and always changing. Everything is always in a state of flux, but still recognisable.

Even though constantly changing, the same mountain is recognised by you, the same sun, the same moon. Meeting an old friend after ten years, you recognise the person in spite of the changes that have taken place in each of you. If, moment to moment, things were to change in such a drastic way that you could not recognise them at all, there would be continuous dissolution, *pralaya*, and no *sthiti* at all. Continuous dissolution and continuous creation is meaningless. There is, then, a recognisable *sthiti*, sustenance, in spite of the changes taking place.

The sun itself is imploding all the time and thus is not exactly the same sun that you just saw a minute before. It may run out, too. In the same way, nothing remains the same; everything is constantly changing. There is creation, *sr̥ṣṭi*, constant change within itself, *sthiti*, and dissolution, *pralaya*. This *sr̥ṣṭi-sthiti-pralaya* cycle is nothing but the manifestation and unmanifestation of consciousness, *ātmā*.

## MOKṢA IS ALSO DISSOLUTION

A third type of *pralaya* is called *atyanta-pralaya*, total dissolution, and is what we call *mokṣa*. *Atyanta-pralaya* or *mokṣa* does not involve any kind of disappearance. You look at the same object and resolve it in the appreciation of its cause, the truth of the object, *satya-vastu*. For example, when you see a thousand pots all born of clay, you resolve all of these objects by appreciating clay as the *satya* of every pot. Then there is *mahā-atyanta-pralaya*.

When all names and forms, with their various distinct features, go into a state of unmanifest condition, it is called either *laya* or *pralaya*. This means that it is either *nitya-laya* or *mahā-pralaya*. Whereas, here, without changing any object, things are as they are, but at the same time, they are envisioned by you as non-separate from the cause, *brahma-ātmā*. This particular vision is unfolded in this verse by the words — *sarva-bhūtāni ca ātmani īkṣate*.

*Vedānta* reveals the cause, *kāraṇa*, of everything as *satya* and the effect, *kārya*, as *mithyā*. This particular analysis is therefore, called *kāraṇa-kārya-vāda*, cause-effect analysis. In fact, there is no real *kāraṇa* or *kārya* because one of them becomes *mithyā*. This means that the status of being a *kāraṇa* is also incidental. Everything that is here is

*satya-brahma* alone. Knowing this, you look at the world, the same world, with a different *buddhi*. You look at it as the *puruṣa*, ‘I,’ the cause. Therefore, the entire creation is only in terms of subtle and gross bodies — *sūkṣma-sthūla-śarīras*. These alone are created, whereas *ātmā*, being timeless, is not created. Uncreated, *ātmā* is the truth of everything, *satya-vastu*, the basis, *adhiṣṭhāna*, of any creation that may be there. *Ātmā* is the very basis for the vision implied by the words in this verse — *sarva-bhūtastham ātmānaṃ sarva-bhūtāni ca ātmani ikṣate*.

Here, a problem can arise. Wherever there is *adhiṣṭhāna*, a confusion is possible between the basis, *āśraya*, and the based *āśrita*. For example, when I say, ‘On the rope is a snake’ or ‘On the gold is a chain,’ you may think that the snake is actually lying on the rope or the chain is actually sitting on top of the gold. This would mean that the rope and the snake, or that the gold and the chain are two different things, when in fact they are not. This is just a way of describing something wherein there are apparently two objects, but in fact, there is only one. When we talk about the snake on the rope, or the chain on the gold, one object is the *adhiṣṭhāna*, the basis, and the other is something that is based, dependent on this, *adhiṣṭhāna*, basis.

#### BETWEEN ĀTMĀ AND THE WORLD THERE IS NO BASIS-BASED RELATIONSHIP

Thus, we see that this basis-based relationship generally implies two different things. Here too, the *jagat*, the world, all the beings, *sarva-bhūtāni*, are based upon *ātmā*; and this is called *sarva-bhūtastha-ātmā*, the *ātmā* that is the *adhiṣṭhāna* for all beings. Even so, this is not a basis-based relationship. Such a division is not there because all the *bhūtas* are non-separate from *ātmā*, which is why *Kṛṣṇa* says here, *sarva-bhūtāni ātmani ikṣate*. The person, the *sarvatra sama-darśī* — the one who sees the *sama, ātmā*, in everything — recognises all beings as non-separate from the *paramātmā*, just as he or she sees the clay in the pots and the gold in the chains.

Seeing all beings, time, space, everything, in *ātmā* is called *atyanta-pralaya*, a dissolution of the difference between objects and their cause. *Atyanta-pralaya* is not the dissolution of the world; it is the dissolution of the difference between the world and its *kāraṇa*, a difference born out of pure *ajñāna*, ignorance. This difference, division, is resolved in the vision that, whatever that is here is non-separate from *ātmā* that is *Brahman*.

यो मां पश्यति सर्वत्र सर्वं च मयि पश्यति ।

तस्याहं न प्रणश्यामि स च मे न प्रणश्यति ॥ ३० ॥

*yo māṃ paśyati sarvatra sarvaṃ ca mayi paśyati*  
*tasyāhaṃ na praṇaśyāmi sa ca me na praṇaśyati*

Verse 30

यः *yaḥ* — the one who; माम् *mām* — Me; सर्वत्र *sarvatra* — everywhere (in all beings); पश्यति *paśyati* — sees; मयि *mayi* — in Me; च *ca* — and; सर्वम् *sarvam* — everything (all beings); पश्यति *paśyati* — sees; तस्य *tasya* — for him (or her); अहम् *aham* — I; न प्रणश्यामि *na praṇaśyāmi* — am not remote; सः *saḥ* — he (or she); च *ca* — and; मे *me* — (from) Me; न प्रणश्यति *na praṇaśyati* — is not remote

The one who sees Me in all beings and sees all beings in Me, for him (or her) I am not remote and he (or she) is not remote from Me.

The vision of *ātmā* given in the previous verse is restated, using a different language, in the first line of this verse. The earlier expression, '*sarva-bhūtastham ātmānam*,' is put into the first person here — the one who recognises Me in all beings, *yaḥ mām paśyati sarvatra*.

'Me' does not, of course, refer to the person, occupying the driver's seat of *Arjuna's* chariot, named *Kṛṣṇa*. Seated in the chariot, the person, *Kṛṣṇa*, seems to have a definite location and, yet, when talking to *Arjuna*, he refers to himself as one who is everywhere, *sarva-bhūtastha-ātmā*. Wherever there is a *bhūta*, a being, it has its being in Me alone. This 'Me' is *ātmā*.

Thus, by replacing the words '*sarva-bhūtastha-ātmānam*' with *mām*, meaning *Īśvara*, *Kṛṣṇa* quietly brings out the non-difference between *Īśvara* and the individual, *jīva*. The one who sees Me, *Īśvara*, in all beings, meaning as the *adhiṣṭhāna*, the basis, of all beings, knows himself or herself to be that same *Īśvara*, *paramātmā*, being non-separate from *ātmā*.

*Kṛṣṇa* also says here that everything is in Me alone — *sarvaṃ ca mayi eva*. I am the *kāraṇa*, the cause, for everything. I am the *adhiṣṭhāna* for everything, the basis for everything. Thus, the person being discussed here recognises himself or herself in all beings and all beings in the self alone. The only difference between this verse and the previous verse, then, is that the word *ātmā* has been replaced by the first person, *mām*, 'Me.' Between the 'Me' in the present verse and *ātmā* in the previous verse, there is no difference whatsoever. One who sees *ātmā* in everything and everything in *ātmā* recognises *Īśvara*, 'Me,' in everything and everything in 'Me.' I am the one who is the basis of all beings and in me all the beings have their being their existence.

### CAN ĪŚVARA BE A SEPARATE ENTITY?

Between *Īśvara*, *Kṛṣṇa*, and *jīva*, the individual, there is no difference whatsoever. Is there another *Īśvara*? Since *Īśvara* is everything, how can he be separate from consciousness, *caitanya*, that is the *ātmā*? If *caitanya-ātmā* is limitless, i.e., *Brahman*, then, there is no way another being called *Īśvara* can be standing separately

somewhere. If this were the case, *Īśvara* would become just another guy! Then there would be a difference between *jīva* and *Īśvara* that could never be resolved.

There are various contentions in terms of *Īśvara*, the Lord, and the individual, which have to be analysed to see if there is any truth in them. Suppose you say, as some do, that the Lord is everywhere and I am a fraction of that Lord. Does this mean that all these fractions together make the Lord? If not, what does it mean? Which is the fraction, please tell me. Is your physical body the fraction? Is your mind the fraction? Or is *ātma-caitanya* the fraction? And, in all of this, what is dependent on what? What is the reality of what?

What is the reality of this physical body, this mind, etc.? When you analyse them all, you find only one existence, *satya*, and the *svarūpa* of this *satya* is nothing but *paraṃ brahma*, which is *caitanya-ātmā*. When the *śāstra* talks of *Īśvara*, it is from one particular standpoint. All that is there is *Parameśvara* alone; *jīva* is also just a standpoint. Only from a particular standpoint is there a difference between *jīva* and *Īśvara* — from the standpoint of the *upādhi*, there is *jīva* and there is *Īśvara*. The resolution of the two takes place only in the appreciation of the essential *paramātmā*, the *satya-vastu*.

Therefore, when the Lord says, ‘I am the Lord — *aham īśvaraḥ*’ and the *jīva* says, ‘I am an individual — *aham jīvaḥ*,’ the *aham* is common and the difference is *mithyā*, meaning that it is entirely dependent upon *satya*. The problem is the difference because, being dependent upon *satya*, *mithyā* is not another thing. The whole *jagat* is *mithyā*, depending upon the *satya-vastu* for its existence, and the *satya-vastu* is what is referred to by everyone as ‘I,’ *aham*. Therefore, anyone who says ‘I,’ including a mosquito, is *paraṃ brahma* alone. You are not ‘I’ and *paraṃ brahma*, you are only *paraṃ brahma*.

Even the person who does not know is *paraṃ brahma*. The statement, *tat tvam asi*, means you are *paraṃ brahma* right now; it is not something that you become later. *Śruti* does not say, ‘Ye shall become.’ It says, ‘That thou art — *tat tvam asi*.’ This sentence is possible only when the self is already *Brahman*, which is the vision unfolded in the previous verse and restated in the first line of the present verse; the one who sees Me in all beings and all beings in Me — *yaḥ māṃ paśyati sarvatra, sarvaṃ ca mayi paśyati*.

This person is one who has the vision of the oneness of *ātmā*. Seeing *ātmā* in all beings and all beings in *ātmā* is the vision.

## THE RESULT OF THE VISION

And what is the result of this vision? Here, *Kṛṣṇa* uses the first person. Here the first person indicates that *Kṛṣṇa* is talking as *Īśvara*. He says, ‘For the person having

this vision, I will not become remote — *tasya ahaṃ na praṇaśyāmi*,’ meaning that, ‘I will no longer be something known only indirectly to the person.’ Why? Because *Īśvara* is *ātmā*. I do not become an indirect object of worship that is sitting somewhere. I do not become someone who is away from the person, because, *Īśvara* is oneself, *ātmā*.

And not only that — the person also does not go away from Me — *sa ca me na praṇaśyati*. I do not become remote for the person and the person does not go away from Me. This fact was already there, but previously the person did not know it. And now he or she knows. This is not something that just happened because of some interference on the part of the Lord. It was true before and it is true now. All that has happened is that the person did not know it before and now he or she knows. The person now sees himself or herself in all beings and all beings in the self. A person of this vision never goes away from Me, meaning there is no distance between Me and the person. Neither the person goes away from me nor I go away from the person. I do not become remote for the person and he or she does not become remote for Me.

This means that previously there was a certain remoteness and *Īśvara*, *paramātmā*, was something that was sought after. *Īśvara* was someone whose grace was invoked, etc. Now all the prayers and rituals have paid off. The payoff is the vision that between *jīva* and *Īśvara* there is no difference. The difference is all resolved. This is what is meant here by the statement — *tasya ahaṃ na praṇaśyāmi*. I do not become something that is away for this person nor is the person away from Me.

The Lord is usually presented as though he is behind a veil, and that, he can see us but we cannot see him. Therefore, the Lord is someone who always seems to be looking into your private affairs. But, here, in this verse, *Kṛṣṇa* is saying that the Lord has no veil or cover, that prevents you from seeing him. Ignorance is the only veil there is and that covering has already been removed. Therefore, there is no obstacle; there is only one vision, the vision of the *para-ātmā*, the whole. Everything resolves into this one *ātmā* alone.

## I AM EVERYTHING

Elsewhere, *Śaṅkara* says, ‘In half a verse I shall explain what has been said before by millions of words and texts — *ardha-ślokena pravakṣyāmi yaduktam grantha-koṭibhiḥ*.’ And, having already used one half of a verse to say this much, he completes the verse by saying, ‘*Brahman* is *satya* and the whole world, *jagat*, is *mithyā* — *brahma satyaṃ jagat mithyā*,’ and ‘*Jīva* is non-separate from *Brahman* — *jīvaḥ brahmaiva na aparāḥ*’ This means that the body, mind, and senses are also *mithyā*. And the *jīva* that is other than the physical body, mind, and senses, that is *ātmā*, is *Brahman*. This means that, I am everything — *idaṃ sarvam aham asmi*.

This vision, then, is the vision that resolves the difference between the *jīva* and *Īśvara*, which is why *Īśvara* is never remote from you nor are you ever away from Him.

There is no difference other than what is caused by ignorance. Ignorance being removed, all that is there is one flame of consciousness in which everything exists — everything that is inquired into, everything that is not inquired into, the known and the unknown, all exist in *ātmā*, alone. The *ātmā* of *Īśvara* and the *ātmā* of the *jīva* is one and the same *ātmā* whose *svarūpa* is consciousness. This consciousness, this *ātmā*, alone is self-existent, the whole, which is *Īśvara*, which is the *jīva*.

Further, *Kṛṣṇa* continues:

सर्वभूतस्थितं यो मां भजत्येकत्वमास्थितः ।

सर्वथा वर्तमानोऽपि स योगी मयि वर्तते ॥ ३१ ॥

*sarvabhūtasthitam yo māṃ bhajatyekatvamāsthitaḥ*

*sarvathā vartamāno'pi sa yogī mayi vartate*

Verse 31

यः *yaḥ* — the one who; एकत्वम् *ekatvam* — oneness; आस्थितः (सन्) *āsthitaḥ (san)* — having gained; सर्व-भूत-स्थितम् *sarva-bhūta-sthitam* — abiding in all beings; माम् *mām* — Me; भजति *bhajati* — gains (the vision); सः योगी *saḥ yogī* — that *yogī*; सर्वथा *sarvathā* — in whatever way; वर्तमानः *vartamānaḥ* — remaining; अपि *api* — even; मयि *mayi* — in Me; वर्तते *vartate* — abides

The one who gains (the vision), having gained the oneness of me abiding in all beings, that *yogī* abides in Me whatever he (or she) does.

This verse continues to discuss the person who has the vision of the oneness of *ātmā* in all beings, who knows that *ātmā* is himself or herself alone, and is therefore, not separate from *Īśvara*. Such a person knows himself or herself to be *Īśvara* in fact. All this is restated here.

‘*Māṃ sarva-bhūta-sthitam yo bhajati*’ — this refers to the one who gains the vision, i.e., the one who has this vision of *Īśvara* as that, which abides in all beings. Therefore, the self is non-separate from *Parameśvara*. The vision that is gained is in terms of the oneness of *ātmā* — the oneness of *ātmā* that is never divided, that is the undivided whole. And the one who recognises *Īśvara* in this undivided form, *ekatvam āsthitaḥ*, the one who gains this vision of *Īśvara*, that *yogī*, however he or she may live, remains with *Īśvara* — *sarvathā vartamānaḥ api saḥ yogī mayi vartate*. Thus *Kṛṣṇa* says, ‘The person remains in Me alone.’

This verse answers the question of whether, having gained the vision, it can ever be lost. I am often asked, ‘Swamiji, suppose a person gains this vision, is it not possible that living in the day-to-day world of duality, the person can lose the *ātmā*? ‘No!’ *Kṛṣṇa* says here. Whatever the person does, whatever happens to the person, seeing, hearing, talking, walking, in whichever way he or she happens to live, whether as a *brahmacārī*, a *gṛhastha*, or a *sannyāsī*, whether a man or a woman, young or old — *sarvathā*

*varṭamānaḥ api* — the vision remains. The stage of life the person is in or the profession he or she happens to be pursuing is all because of the person's *prārabdha*. In fact, there is nothing wrong for the person and there is nothing right either.

### FOR THE PERSON WHO HAS THE VISION, ŚĀSTRA IS NO LONGER APPLICABLE

Whatever the *śāstra* says with reference to *dharma* and *adharmā* no longer applies to the person who is above *dharma* and *adharmā*. This must be clearly understood. The person is free and therefore, called *mukta*, *nitya-mukta*, one who is always free. This free person never goes away from Me. Never again do I become remote for the person because one can never be away from oneself.

Even now, I am not away from the truth of myself, *sat-cit-ānanda-ātmā*. Only ignorance can keep me away and, for the person being discussed here, ignorance is gone. Therefore, wherever the person is, whatever he or she is doing — *sarvathā varṭamānaḥ api* — the person remains in Me, oneself, alone — *mayi varṭate*. There is no moving away from Me for the person who is a *jīvan-mukta* i.e., living, the person is liberated. This liberation, *mokṣa*, is the *phala*, the result of this vision, this knowledge of *ātmā*.

### WHEN YOU 'BELIEVE' IN ĪŚVARA, HE IS REMOTE

The conclusion here, then, is that *Īśvara* is not something remote from oneself — *Īśvaraḥ na parokṣaḥ*. *Parokṣa* is what is inferred, believed, or presumed. You have a presumption that there is an *Īśvara*, which amounts to a belief because there is no verifiable proof. And, as long as existence of *Īśvara* is simply a belief, *Īśvara* is remote, something that exists for you indirectly, i.e., *parokṣa*, because it is a belief.

Similarly, if you say that a tree exists, but you do not directly see it, it is *parokṣa*. For example, by seeing smoke, you can assume there is fire, even though the fire is not directly seen by you. Any object whose existence is arrived at by you through inference is called *parokṣa*, indirectly known, for you.

Whereas anything that is sensorily perceived — anything you see, hear, smell, taste, or touch — is called *pratyakṣa*. When I hold up a piece of crystal, knowing it is crystal it is *pratyakṣa* for me, but for you it will be *parokṣa* if you do not know whether it is crystal or glass. You can infer it is crystal until you feel the weight of it and then you will know. The point to be understood here is what is directly perceived is called *pratyakṣa* and what is indirectly arrived at is called *parokṣa*.

*Īśvara* cannot be *pratyakṣa*. If *Īśvara* could be directly perceived, it would mean that he is other than yourself — *anātmā*. *Īśvara* cannot be *anātmā* because he can never be an object for you. *Anātmā* is entirely dependent upon *caitanya*, *ātmā*. If *Īśvara* were to become *anātmā*, he would be *mithyā* and you, being *ātmā*, would become *satya*! Because *Īśvara* cannot be *anātmā*, he can never become *pratyakṣa*, an

object of your perception. Nor can he be inferred, inference being based on perception. Still, you believe that *Īśvara* exists, which means *Īśvara* is *parokṣa*.

The person who believes that *Īśvara* exists is called an *āstika*, one who believes. And, for the *āstika*, there is a *pramāṇa*, a *śāstra*, through which he or she comes to understand, comes to believe, that *Īśvara* exists. And because you believe, you give validity to the means of knowledge, the *śāstra*, even though what is said is not verifiable. Because some supporting logic is available, you accept that *Īśvara* exists — and this belief, this acceptance, is *parokṣa-jñāna*, indirect knowledge.

### SELF-KNOWLEDGE IS IMMEDIATE KNOWLEDGE

But the knowledge being discussed in this verse is not *parokṣa-jñāna*. The one who has gained the knowledge of *ātmā* is the one who has gained the knowledge of oneself. Such a person concludes, ‘I am everything. There is nothing separate from me.’ Here, when the Lord says, ‘Me,’ what is implied is pure consciousness, *caitanya*, which is *paraṃ brahma*, *satya-jñāna-ananta-brahma*, and everything else is dependent upon that. And this *satya-jñāna-ananta-brahma*, is *ātmā*, oneself. Because there is no difference between *Īśvara*, *Brahman*, and myself, I never become *parokṣa* to him; nor does he become *parokṣa* to me. This is what we call *advaita*, the non-difference, *abheda*, between *Īśvara*, and the *jīva*. This identity between the *jīva* and *Īśvara*, *jīva-īśvara-aikya*, was pointed out in the previous verse also.

*Śaṅkara* also points out in his commentary of the previous verse that *ātmā* never becomes *parokṣa*, *Ātmā* is always free, *nitya-mukta*. There is no bondage for *ātmā* because there is nothing other than oneself; therefore, *Kṛṣṇa* says, ‘The person remains in Me alone — *mayi eva vartate*. This means that once ignorance is no longer there, there is no question of the knowledge being lost.

Knowledge of oneself, *ātma-jñāna*, is not memory-based. Only knowledge that is memory-based can be forgotten. Whatever you have, you can always lose. Memory is for me, *ātmā*. Because memory is something I have, I can lose it. But, here, what is known is myself alone. The self-ignorance I had before is gone in the wake of knowledge wherein the self is equated with *Brahman*. Once gained, this knowledge is never lost.

Unless *ātmā* becomes *parokṣa*, there is no question of the wise person being away from Me and *ātmā* can never become *parokṣa* because it is *nitya-aparokṣa*, it is always directly known by you. Whether you are a confused person, a discriminating person, or a *jñānī*, *ātmā* is never *parokṣa*. *Samśāra* is directly known by the person; it is not something that is inferred. It is an experience for the person and, therefore, *aparokṣa*. As a *saṃsārī*, *ajñānī*, ‘I am’ is *aparokṣa*; and as a *vivekī*, *jñānī* also ‘I am’ is *aparokṣa*. Therefore, *ātmā* is *nitya-aparokṣa*, always self-evident.



Being *nitya-aparokṣa*, *ātmā* is *nitya-mukta*, always liberated. Knowledge makes the person recognise the fact of being ever liberated. This is why the person is also called *jīvan-mukta* — living, the person gains the knowledge that is liberation. Once this knowledge has been gained, let the person do whatever he wants, perform *vaidika-karma* or not, teach or not teach. Let the person be in any stage of life and perform any action, he or she is still with Me alone. Even, for the sake of argument, if such a person were to commit murder, the person would not be away from Me because he or she is not a doer.

The next question, of course, is ‘Could such a person commit such actions?’ ‘No!’ says *Kṛṣṇa* in the next verse. Wrong action is not possible for the person.

आत्मौपम्येन सर्वत्र समं पश्यति योऽर्जुन ।

सुखं वा यदि वा दुःखं स योगी परमो मतः ॥ ३२ ॥

*ātmaupamyena sarvatra samaṃ paśyati yo'rjuna*

*sukhaṃ vā yadi vā duḥkhaṃ sa yogī paramo mataḥ*

Verse 32

अर्जुन *arjuna* — O *Arjuna*!; यः *yah* — the one who; सर्वत्र *sarvatra* — everywhere; सुखम् वा *sukham vā* — either pleasure; यदि वा दुःखम् *yadi vā duḥkham* — or pain; आत्म-औपम्येन *ātma-aupamyena* — taking oneself as an example (basis); समम् *samam* — the same; पश्यति *paśyati* — sees; सः *sah* — that; योगी *yogī* — *yogī*; परमः *paramaḥ* — the most exalted; मतः *mataḥ* — is regarded

If one who, taking oneself as an example (basis) in all situations sees either pleasure or pain as the same, that *yogī*, O *Arjuna*, is regarded as the most exalted.

Here, *Kṛṣṇa* obviates the problem of whether the wise person can perform any action of *adharmā*, by showing that there is no way of his doing that. For such a person, *ātmā*, oneself, is the *upamā*, the example. The self itself becomes the example — *ātma-aupamyam*.

One who is oneself as an example sees that which is equal in all beings, *sarvatra samaṃ paśyati*, as being equal to oneself alone. The person does not look upon others from any other matrix except himself or herself alone. With reference to all beings, the vision is equal, the same. One looks upon others as oneself alone on the basis of the example of oneself. This is one meaning. There is also another meaning, which we shall see later.

In the second line of the verse, the vision of sameness is pointed out in terms of happiness and pain, *sukhaṃ vā duḥkhaṃ vā*. My happiness, *sukha*, my welfare, is highly desirable to me and, therefore, I go for it, which is the same for everyone. Every being is equally interested in its own *sukha*. Therefore, ‘I’ become the matrix, the basis,

for my interaction with other beings. Similarly, *duḥkha* is what is not desirable for me or for anyone else either.

### THE BASIS OF DHARMA

Here you can see how *dharma* itself is born. The very basis of *dharma* is the universal mutual expectation of people. What I expect of others is what others expect of me. If what is desirable, *sukha*, for me is desirable for others and what is undesirable, *duḥkha*, for me is undesirable for others also, then there is a common basis, which is what is meant by *dharma*.

Having the vision of sameness in all beings, then, the person discussed here does not do what is not desirable. Therefore, what *Kṛṣṇa* said in the previous verse, ‘Whatever the person does, he (or she) remains in Me — *sarvathā vartamānaḥ api mayi vartate*,’ is further explained here. What was said there could be misunderstood to mean that a *jñānī* could do things that are *adharma* and yet he remains in *Īśvara*. Therefore, answering the question, ‘Will such a person do actions that are considered to be wrong, *adharma*?’ *Kṛṣṇa* says ‘No!’ It is not possible because what is good for the *jñānī* is good for others too. And what is bad for the *jñānī* is bad for others also. If the *jñānī* does not like getting hurt, then he or she is not going to hurt anyone else. In this way, non-injury, *ahiṃsā*, becomes natural to the *jñānī*.

Even for a *vivekī*, a simple, mature person, *ahiṃsā* is a very common *dharma*. And, for a *jñānī*, one who has lived a life of *dharma* and who has deliberately pursued and gained the knowledge, *dharma* becomes spontaneous, very natural.

If you look at any crime, like hurting another person, or any kind of action considered to be *adharma*, behind it there is always a small ego. Every ego is small, in fact. A big ego is also small, any ego being just a bubble filled with air. Whether the bubble is big or small, it is nothing but air. That is all there is to this ego business, just so much air. Ego itself is a false entity and this false entity is behind every crime, large or small.

### THE NATURE OF THE EGO

And what kind of ego is this? The ego of an insecure person, an insecure ego that has fear and greed. Because it has fear and greed, it is insecure; because it is insecure, it is frightened. A frightened person or a greedy person can perform actions that are not very committed to *dharma*. In fact, all unbecoming actions stem from the insecure ego and no ego is secure. Because the nature of ego is isolation, there is duality, *dvaita*.

In the *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad*, it is said that wherever there is duality, there will be fear — *dvitīyād vai bhayaṃ bhavati*.<sup>1</sup> A similar statement is found in the *Taittirīyopaniṣad* conveying the same sense — *udaram antaraṃ kurute atha tasya bhayaṃ bhavati*.<sup>2</sup> The original duality is the duality between the individual, *jīva*, and *Īśvara*, the Lord — *jīveśvara-dvaita* — meaning that *Īśvara* is something other than myself. This *dvaita* makes you small. If *Īśvara* is everything else, you become whatever is left out. Naturally, then, you become small. Everything else is infinitely large and you are small. And, once this original *dvaita* is there, there is the *dvaita* between one individual and another — *jīva-jīva-dvaita* and between the *jīva* and the world — *jīva-jagat-dvaita*.

Now, if the duality between *jīva* and *jīva* and between *jīva* and *jagat* is real, then the duality between *jīva* and *Īśvara* is also real. Why? Because, if the *jīva-jīva-dvaita* and the *jīva-jagat-dvaita* are real, there must be an *Īśvara* other than this *jagat*. Then that *Īśvara* is just another guy, like any other *jīva*, and between him and the other *jīvas*, including myself, there will be a difference. Also, between all these *anātmās* and myself there will be difference. All the way, then, there is difference, there being *dvaita* between the *jīvas*, the *jagat*, and *Īśvara*. If there is *dvaita* between the *jīvas*, between the *jīva* and the *jagat*, and between the *jagat* and *Īśvara* — if there is *dvaita* between these three — then your isolation is established. Mortality is established, imperfection is established, inadequacy is established all of which are accompanied by fear, greed, pain, sorrow, etc.

### EGO IS IGNORANCE-BASED

Since ego implies isolation, behind every crime there is ego. But the *yogī Kṛṣṇa* is talking about is the one who has pricked the bubble of this ego. The bubble, ego, is no longer there; one ocean alone is there. Ego is ignorance-based, ignorance of *ātmā*. Once the ignorance of *ātmā* is gone, all that remains is one *ātmā*, which is *paraṃ brahma*. There is no ego anymore. And, when the ego is not there, where is the question of the person doing anything improper? The person abides in *Īśvara* alone — *mayi eva vartate*. But for the sake of argument, you can say that the person can do anything he or she likes. Even though the person still does various things, whatever these may be or however they are done, the person remains in me alone. This is *śāstra*.

When the Lord says, ‘remaining in Me alone,’ it means that the person is never separate from him — in other words, the person and the Lord are one and the same. A person who has this equal vision everywhere has no necessity to do things that are not in keeping with *dharma*. The person naturally sees that what is *sukha* for him or her is

<sup>1</sup> *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad* – 1.4.2

<sup>2</sup> *Taittirīyopaniṣad* – 2.7.1

also *sukha* for others and what is *duḥkha* for him or her is *duḥkha* for other people as well.

But will the person who has this vision not compromise it in any way? After all, most people understand that what makes them happy or unhappy affects others in the same way, but still they do not always behave according to *dharma*. Suppose something becomes so important to this person, is it not possible that the vision will be set aside, temporarily at least? In fact, this problem will not arise because, for the person who has this vision, there is no notion that ‘I am limited.’ There is knowledge that the same *ātmā* is in all beings and all beings are in oneself, *ātmā*, alone. The ego for this person is *bādhita*, sublated. It is no more taken as real.

Therefore, this person is one for whom *ahiṃsā* is natural, which is in fact the spirit of *sannyāsa*. A person who has this clear vision of *ātmā*, *samyag-darśana-niṣṭha*, who is naturally, spontaneously, given to *ahiṃsā*, who no longer needs to practice *ahiṃsā* deliberately because it is his or her very nature, is described here as the most exalted, *parama*, among *yogīs*.

## A SECOND INTERPRETATION OF THE VERSE

We can look at this verse in another way using the option offered by the word ‘*vā*’ as ‘or,’ by adding this *vā* (or) to *sukha* and *duḥkha* — *sukhaṃ vā yadi vā duḥkham*. Here, situations are categorised in a two-fold way, those producing *sukha* and those producing *duḥkha*, both of which the wise person looks at equally — *samaṃ paśyati*. This means that, for the person, *sukha* and *duḥkha* are the same. Why? Because he or she looks at them both with the example of himself or herself alone. *Ātmā* being the example, the basis of measurement, the matrix of judgement, the person sees that which is equal in both *sukha* and *duḥkha*.

How is this possible? Because the person understands the nature of *ātmā* as fullness, wholeness, and from this basis, he or she looks at *sukha* and *duḥkha*. Both are within that fullness alone. This does not mean that the person does not meet with situations producing *sukha* and *duḥkha*. The point being made here is that the person looks at all situations, even the *duḥkha* of death, from the basis of *ātmā* alone. Because the person knows oneself, *ātmā* as fullness there is no ripple of reaction whatever the situation. To put it another way, when *sukha* comes, the person's fullness does not increase and when *duḥkha* comes, the fullness does not decrease, meaning that the person is always with *Īśvara* — *mayi eva vartate*. There is no situation which is going to take the person away from *Īśvara*.

This, is the connection with the previous verse where it was said, ‘Whatever the person does — *sarvathā vartamaṇḥ api*.’ There is no question of the person ‘being away from Me, *Īśvara*’ or ‘forgetting Me, *Īśvara*,’ because of any situation involving

*duḥkha* or *sukha*. Why? Because *ātmā* is the example, the basis, *upamā* for the person — the *ātmā* that is *aham*, ‘I.’

Previously, it was pointed out that *ātmā* is *Parameśvara*, *paramātmā*. Therefore, *paramātmā* is the *upamā*, the example, for the person who comes to bear upon all situations with the fullness that is the nature of *ātmā*. This particular interpretation is in keeping with the example of the river and the ocean in the second chapter of the *Gītā*.

The verse says:

आपूर्यमाणमचलप्रतिष्ठं समुद्रमापः प्रविशन्ति यद्वत् ।

तद्वत्कामा यं प्रविशन्ति सर्वे स शान्तिमाप्नोति न कामकामी ॥ ७० ॥

*āpūryamāṇamacalapratiṣṭhaṃ samudramāpaḥ praviśanti yadvat  
tadvatkāmā yaṃ praviśanti sarve sa śāntimāpnoti na kāmakāmī* (2-70)<sup>1</sup>

*Apūryamāṇa* means fullness, that which is completely filled from all sides, like the ocean, *samudra*. *Acala* means that the ocean remains in its own glory and does not move around. *Pratiṣṭha* is that which is well rooted, meaning the ocean is well rooted in its own glory.

And, into this ocean, waters enter — *āpaḥ praviśanti*, from different directions. Is the ocean affected in any way by this event? Does the oceanness increase? No. And if no waters enter for a time, because of drought, etc., the oceanness also does not decrease. Oceans do not dry up; nor do they overflow. Such situations simply do not occur.

## FULLNESS DEPENDS ON NOTHING

This example is a good one in terms of the fullness that is the nature of *ātmā*; the example holds water in other words! Whether the waters enter or do not enter, the ocean always remains the same. It is always oceanness because oceanness does not depend upon any other source of water to be ocean. Similarly, here, the *yogī*, a wise person, who is *ananta*, does not depend for his or her fullness upon a given situation. Whatever happens, *sukha* or *duḥkha*, the person sees them both equally; therefore, he or she remains tranquil — *sa śāntim āpnoti*. Whatever objects, *kāmas* enter, from whatever direction, through the gates of the five sense organs, they do not disturb the person at all, just as the ocean is not disturbed by the waters.

Whereas, the person who is a desirer of various objects, *kāmakāmī*, who is dependent upon their presence or absence for his or her happiness, is likened to a pond. If too much water comes in the form of rain or floods, you do not see the pond at all, and if there is no rain, it dries up altogether. Similarly, the *kāmakāmī* is like a yo-yo; if something desirable comes along, he or she goes up and if it is something undesirable,

<sup>1</sup> Refer to page 379, Vol. 1

the person goes down. However, for the *yogī* discussed here, there is no yo-yo because he or she remains with Me, the self, alone. Whatever the tragedy, even if it meets the classical orthodox definition of a genuine tragedy, the person remains the same. This is the *yogī Kṛṣṇa* is discussing here in keeping with the previous verse.

Thus, there are two interpretations possible here; the *yogī* remains the same in any situation, whether it be *sukha* or *duḥkha*, and the *yogī* looks upon others as he or she looks upon himself or herself. This being so, the person will not perform a wrong action. To treat others as you would have them treat you is applicable to everyone, in fact. Every human being is supposed to live this way, what to talk of a *yogī*!

### TO HURT OTHERS IS TO BE HURT IN THE PROCESS

No one can hurt another without getting hurt in the process, even though it may sometimes seem to be otherwise. We see this even in tennis matches. You begin with 'love' and then you fight to win. And, when you do win, you are ecstatic. On the way to the net to shake hands with your opponent, you jump up and down and throw your racket into the air. You are very happy — until you see the other person's sadness in having lost! Then, all your joy goes. Do you know why? Because no human heart was ever made that cannot empathise with a person who is sad.

You know what it is to be on the other side of the net because you, too, have had days like that. Therefore, you cannot but pick up the other person's sadness immediately. Why? because, you can never hurt another without getting hurt in the process. It is just not possible. We think that there are criminals who have so hardened their hearts that they can automatically do harm to others, but this is not true. Even psychopaths have their spells of empathy because of how the human heart is.

### INSECURITY IS THE PROBLEM

That you cannot hurt another without being hurt in the process is a fact for which there is a very simple rule: all human beings must follow what we call the order of *dharma*. This is the common basis for everyone, although it is not commonly pursued because of a fundamental insecurity. This fundamental insecurity is the human problem. The insecure person acts in unbecoming ways because there are priorities for the person, based on likes and dislikes. Wherever these priorities are, there will be confusion in terms of values, unless the person frees himself or herself from the sense of being small. The person who does this sees the sameness in all beings always — *sarvatra samam paśyati*. It is very clear to such a person that whatever is good for himself or herself, is good for others also. This, then, is the *yogī* whom *Kṛṣṇa* praises here.

Even a mature person who tries to follow *dharma* will breach it now and again because some priority or other will always be there. Thus, you find that there is legitimate criticism, legitimate hurting. Because you cannot always take the hurt,

sometimes you will hurt back, and this is considered to be legitimate in human interaction. Only a *jñānī* is able to view *sukha* or *duḥkha* in the same manner and, therefore, only a *jñānī* can be free. This is why, with reference to all people, he or she is considered to be the most exalted — *sa yogī paramo mataḥ*.

Thus, we have these two ways of looking at the verse — the first in keeping with the *śāstra* and the other in terms of behaviour. One refers to the vision of the person and the other is expression in one's interaction.

This much having been said, the topic of *dhyāna-yoga*, meditation, contemplation, is complete. In fact, *Kṛṣṇa* has actually covered the topic twice, in two different ways. Thinking that he had done a good job *Kṛṣṇa* may have sat back a bit. Seeing that *Kṛṣṇa* had finished, *Arjuna* thinks it is a good time to ask a question, and does so in the next two verses. These verses make the nature of *Arjuna's* problem very clear.

अर्जुन उवाच ।

योऽयं योगस्त्वया प्रोक्तः साम्येन मधुसूदन ।

एतस्याहं न पश्यामि चञ्चलत्वात्स्थितिं स्थिराम् ॥ ३३ ॥

*arjuna uvāca*

*yo'yaṃ yogastvayā proktaḥ sām्यena madhusūdana  
etasyāhaṃ na paśyāmi cañcalatvātsthitim sthirām*

Verse 33

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

मधुसूदन *madhusūdana* — O Slayer of *Madhu!* (*Kṛṣṇa*); त्वया *tvayā* — by you; साम्येन *sām्यena* — as sameness; यः अयम् योगः *yaḥ ayam yogaḥ* — this *yoga*; प्रोक्तः *proktaḥ* — which was talked about; एतस्य *etasya* — of this; स्थिराम् *sthirām* — steady; स्थितिम् *sthitim* — state (vision); चञ्चलत्वात् *cañcalatvāt* — due to agitation; अहम् *aham* — I; न पश्यामि *na paśyāmi* — do not see

*Arjuna* said:

This *yoga* that you have talked about as sameness, O *Kṛṣṇa*, I do not see its steady vision due to agitation.

Here, *Arjuna* presents his problem, saying that this vision of sameness that *Kṛṣṇa* had just talked about was not as simple as it seemed, given the condition of his own mind. He describes his mind as agitated, *cañcala*. In fact later he is going to say, 'agitation is mind.' Because of this agitation, *Arjuna* does not think that, there is any such thing as a steady vision of sameness and, even if there were, it would be very difficult to deal with his mind in order to gain such a vision.

*Arjuna* presents a problem that everyone can identify with, one that is very common for anyone who has a mind. What *Kṛṣṇa* had taught thus far seemed to have

gone into *Arjuna's* head, but still he has a very valid doubt. For him, the whole teaching seems to boil down to two things — the mind that is composed and steady is the proper receptacle for this knowledge and the knowledge had to be clear. This clarity could perhaps be gained easily by proper inquiry, etc. — if the mind were composed and steady. Therefore, *Arjuna's* question relates to the means for making the mind steady.

He finds his mind very turbulent. He also says that, it has its own roots. This proves that what is considered to be modern psychology can also be found in the *Gītā*. The mind does not seem to follow any rational way of operating. One may reason very clearly about how silly the mind can be, but still it has its own roots and its own modes of thinking. Therefore, *Arjuna* is asking, in a sense, whether there is a means, *upāya*, for making this mind steady enough to gain the knowledge.

### HOW DOES ONE GAIN THE MIND THAT CAN GAIN THE VISION?

Introducing *Arjuna's* question, *Śaṅkara* indicates that the *yoga Kṛṣṇa* has been discussing thus far, that is, seeing the sameness in everything, has the status of being difficult to gain. Seeing that it is thus difficult to gain — *yathoktasya samyag-darśana-lakṣaṇasya yogasya duḥkha-sampādyatām ālakṣya* — *Arjuna* wants to know the ways and means of gaining a mind that will easily assimilate this knowledge. That which is common in everything, the truth of everything, is called *samyag-darśana* or *ātma-darśana*, the vision of the sameness that is *Brahman*, that is *ātmā*. Because this vision is gained through the mind, *Arjuna* wants to know how to gain that particular frame of mind through which the knowledge could be gained.

*Arjuna* addresses *Kṛṣṇa* as *Madhusūdana*, meaning the destroyer of *Madhu*, the name of a particular demon *Kṛṣṇa* had slain. *Madhu* also means honey and is another name for the ego, *ahaṅkāra*, in Sanskrit. Everyone loves his or her own ego and wants to fatten it up, it seems. As a teacher, then, *Kṛṣṇa* was capable of destroying the *ahaṅkāra*, the false ego, with right knowledge. That is why *Arjuna* addresses him as *Madhusūdana* here.

*Arjuna* wants *Kṛṣṇa* to know that he does not think he could have this abiding vision of sameness. Occasionally, he might gain a little insight, but he knows that his mind does not remain steady for very long. Not only does *Arjuna* not see how this vision could remain steady, but he also knows the reason. It is because, his mind is always in a state of agitation — *cañcalatvāt*. Because his mind was always in this state, he does not see the possibility of an abiding vision. The mind seems to have its own logic, its own roots, and even though he might gain some knowledge, that knowledge seems to have its own quarters, with no connection between the two. Naturally, then, *Arjuna* wants to know what could be done about this.



Further, *Arjuna* says:

चञ्चलं हि मनः कृष्ण प्रमाथि बलवद् दृढम्।

तस्याहं निग्रहं मन्ये वायोरिव सुदुष्करम् ॥ ३४ ॥

*cañcalaṃ hi manaḥ kṛṣṇa pramāthi balavad dṛḍham*  
*tasyāhaṃ nigrahaṃ manye vāyoriva suduṣkaram*

Verse 34

कृष्ण *kṛṣṇa* — O *Kṛṣṇa*!; हि *hi* — as we all know; मनः *manaḥ* — mind; चञ्चलम् *cañcalam* — is agitated; प्रमाथि *pramāthi* — tyrant; बलवत् *balavat* — strong; दृढम् *dṛḍham* — well-rooted; अहम् *aham* — I; तस्य *tasya* — of it; निग्रहम् *nigraham* — control; वायोः इव *vāyoḥ iva* — like the wind; सुदुष्करम् *suduṣkaram* — too difficult (impossible) to do; मन्ये *manye* — think

As we all know, *Kṛṣṇa*, the mind is ‘agitation,’ a strong, well-rooted tyrant. I think of it as impossible to control as the wind.

Using a rather long compound, *Śaṅkara* defines *Kṛṣṇa* here as *bhakta-jana-pāpādi-doṣa-ākarṣaṇaḥ*, one who removes, *ākarṣati*, all the limitations, *doṣa*, such as sins, etc., *pāpādi*, of people who are his devotees, *bhakta-janas*. This, then, is why the Lord is called *Kṛṣṇa* in the *Gītā*.

The words *pramāthi*, *balavat*, and *dṛḍha* are attributes of the mind that *Arjuna* talks about. Not only is the mind *cañcala*, it is also a tyrant, *pramāthi* — that which shakes one up. To say that the mind is agitated is not enough. In fact, the mind is agitation.

The mind has the capacity to bring one's senses, body, reason, everything, under its control; it just takes charge of everything. One's reason does not seem to have any say over this mind. For instance, no one volitionally wants to become sad, but one is sad. No one wants to be angry, but one is angry. Emotions like sorrow and anger are all conditions of the mind and seem to have a hold over the person. One's culture, upbringing, status, and knowledge do not seem to have any say when one is angry.

In fact, one's culture seems to be totally forgotten and an entirely new language emerges — one that is not found in any dictionary! This language, although generally understood by everyone, since everyone uses it occasionally, is usually kept suppressed. Culture implies language, but when a person becomes angry and uses such unbecoming, unexpected language, the person's culture is gone. No matter how refined and cultured, no matter how manicured and pedicured, all the culture the person has ever cultivated is nowhere to be seen in moments of anger.

The person's knowledge also is not available at such times. Everyone knows very well that sadness does not produce a desirable result. The sadder one is the more

problems one has. No one has solved any problem through sorrow. This is all very clear, very rational, as *Kṛṣṇa* himself had said when he first began his dialogue with *Arjuna* saying, ‘You grieve for those who should not be grieved for and yet you speak words of wisdom — *asocyān anvaśocastvaṃ prajñāvādān ca bhāṣase.*’

Everyone knows this and other people tell you also. But sadness seems to be something that does not take your permission. If it did, you would definitely not give it. Who wants to be sad? Only when permission is sought is there a question of you granting it or not

### SADNESS IMPLIES A CERTAIN TYPE OF THINKING

Sadness means there is a particular type of thinking going on; without thinking, you cannot be sad. Sadness is not like hunger, thirst, or sleep. Without thinking you become hungry, without thinking you go to sleep — especially after a big meal. And, in the morning, without thinking you are as hungry as a wolf. So, to be hungry you do not have to think, whereas to be sad you do. In fact, to be sad, angry, hateful, agitated, depressed, frustrated, you need to think a lot.

The mind is very much present, but, at the same time, it does not take your permission. This implies two people here, one who is cultured, highly educated, highly sophisticated, and very considerate, and whose language, style, demeanour, and decorum are quite different from the other person, the angry person. This person seems to have a parallel life, occupying the same mind and the same place, but this person seems to have his or her own roots and definitely seems to be in charge. And when this person takes charge, everything is gone. This is what is called *pramāthin* here, a tyrant that can disturb and take control of the body, mind, senses, everything.

One may now ask, ‘If it takes charge like this, why not take control of it with some other greater force? After all, if someone wants to control you, you can also control that person. All you require is to reinforce yourself properly with enough weapons, enough strength. Then you can regain control. But this kind of reinforcement does not work here. Whatever strength I manage to muster for myself to control this *pramāthin* is not adequate. The other always seems to be stronger. It controls me and it is strong, *balavat*. Its hold is so strong that I cannot wrench myself away from its control. I cannot even wriggle out of it. Nor can anyone else get out from under it either.

*Arjuna* describes the mind as *dṛḍha* here, meaning that it keeps one under its control, just like the silk that winds around the worm, keeping it inside the cocoon until it grows adequately to come out. *Dṛḍha* also can be translated as well rooted. This mind has its own roots that seem to be so deep that nothing is strong enough to uproot it. Storms generally uproot things, but this mind cannot be uprooted by any storm. No amount of brainstorming can do it.

## THE MIND HAS ITS ROOTS IN CHILDHOOD

The mind has its roots in childhood and has picked up all kinds of problems from childhood onwards. As a child, one's perceptions are limited. And, to those perceptions, others are added along the way. Thus, there is a certain core personality with a lot of added embellishments. Together, they seem to be a person, someone, who is altogether different, whom we call the mind, the psychological mind. It is this psychological mind, the emotional mind, that *Arjuna* is talking about here, the mind that is *dr̥ḍha*, the well-rooted mind that controls everything. To control such a mind, *Arjuna* says, is something he considers to be very difficult to do — *tasya ahaṃ nigrahaṃ manye suduṣkaram*.

*Duṣkara* means 'difficult' and *suduṣkara* means 'very difficult.' *Arjuna* compares any attempt to control the mind with trying to catch the air in one's hand — *vāyoḥ iva suduṣkaram*. The air is not available for catching; therefore, to control it is impossible. Even if he tries to trap the mind somewhere, like one can trap air, he can not do it because the mind would always be outside of the trap he set for it. It would just look at him, teasing him almost.

Is this not what happens? You think you have given the mind a job to do, like chanting a *mantra*, 'Come on, turbulent mind, chant! OK?' Then you think that the mind is doing it — until you find that it is outside somewhere! The mind may have taken you so far away that you do not know how long you were there or remember what you were doing before. Somewhere, the mind trips you up and then takes you for a ride. It is so elusive that you cannot even set a trap for it. This is why the mind is compared to a monkey.

## STRESS NEED NOT BE A FACTOR OF AGITATION

Therefore, to have to do something with this mind is no small job, *Arjuna* said. And he lived in an era where stress was not the concern it is today, since the society was not under so much pressure as it is today. *Arjuna* had a lot of leisure and did not have all the hurry that we have today. But, still, he had a mind, albeit a very cultured mind, that was *cañcala*. And if *Arjuna's* mind was *cañcala*, you can imagine what the mind of his cousin *Duryodhana* must have been like. *Arjuna*, at least, had no conflicts because he did not live a life of *adharmā*. He always lived a clean life, an unquestionable life, which meant that he slept well because he did not nurse any guilt inside. Whereas *Duryodhana* was a guilty person from head to foot, with all the conflict that goes with a life of *adharmā*.

*Arjuna* was a man given to a life of *dharma*, right conduct and right values, and great achievements also. Thus, there was nothing for him to smart or feel spiteful about. He was successful in all his pursuits and had a lot of titles showered upon him. In other

words, he was a master of his age, a man who, on any given day, could be proud of his life and his achievements. Everyone in the society looked up to *Arjuna*, even before the great war of *Mahābhārata* took place. He was a versatile person, a man of music, dance, archery, and other disciplines of knowledge. He was a great warrior and also a prince. But, even with all these qualifications, *Arjuna's* mind was *cañcala*.

### ARJUNA'S PROBLEM IS UNIVERSAL

If *Arjuna's* mind was nothing but agitation, what about those minds given to the modern phenomenon called stress? Something happens in Iran and, having read about it in the morning paper, you are already upset before you even have your shower! Anyone living in today's world, where the input is so much, can identify with *Arjuna's* problem and ask the same question. The problem is very well known, as *Śaṅkara* also confirms. In *Arjuna's* time the question was relevant. In *Śaṅkara's* time it was relevant. And today it is relevant. In fact, the nature of the mind being what it is, it will always be relevant. Therefore, one has to know the ways of the mind by paying attention to it and gain a certain mastery.

In the next verse, *Kṛṣṇa* answers *Arjuna's* question about how to manage the mind:

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।

असंशयं महाबाहो मनो दुर्निग्रहं चलम् ।

अभ्यासेन तु कौन्तेय वैराग्येण च गृह्यते ॥ ३५ ॥

*śrībhagavān uvāca*

*asaṁśayaṁ mahābāho mano durnigrahaṁ calam*

*abhyāsena tu kaunteya vairāgyeṇa ca grhyate*

Verse 35

श्रीभगवान् *śrībhagavān* — Lord *Kṛṣṇa*; उवाच *uvāca* — said;  
महाबाहो *mahābāho* — O Mighty-armed! (*Arjuna*); असंशयम् *asaṁśayam* — no doubt;  
मनः *manaḥ* — mind; दुर्निग्रहम् *durnigraham* — very difficult to control; चलम् *calam* —  
agitated; तु *tu* — but; कौन्तेय *kounteya* — O Son of *Kuntī*! (*Arjuna*); अभ्यासेन  
*abhyāsena* — by practice; च *ca* — and; वैराग्येण *vairāgyeṇa* — by objectivity; गृह्यते  
*grhyate* — is mastered

*Śrī Bhagavān* said:

No doubt, O Mighty-armed (*Arjuna*), the agitated mind is very difficult to control. But, O Son of *Kuntī*, by practice and objectivity, it is mastered.

Here, *Kṛṣṇa* first addresses *Arjuna* as 'O Mighty-armed! — *mahābāho*.' Being a great warrior, *Arjuna* was of course considered to be mighty. But his might, his strength,

should include his mastery over his mind. One's strength may be useful for knocking the heads of others, but it is not enough to take care of one's own silly mind. *Kṛṣṇa* confirms this here by saying, *asaṁśayam*, 'no doubt,' indicating that there was no doubt that the mind is restless and difficult to master.

Who says the mind is not restless? To recognise that the mind is restless is to have won half the battle. Suppose someone tells me that his or her mind is agitated and I say that getting agitated is not good at all, that it does not solve anything and therefore, do not get agitated. All that will happen is that the person will become more agitated! What use is such advice? It is not as though the person wants to get agitated. Therefore, this particular advice is useless. Telling someone not to get agitated does not help at all. Whereas, if one accepts agitation as the nature of the mind, half the battle is won.

### ACCEPTANCE IS THE FIRST STEP

In the programme of recovery sponsored by Alcoholics Anonymous, the first step is for the person to say that he or she has no power over alcohol. This has to be accepted first; otherwise, there is no hope of recovery. The same thing is true with everything, not just alcohol. I have no power over anger. I have no power over this restless mind. When I accept this, then half the battle is won.

*Kṛṣṇa* accepts this one great psychological fact — that the nature of the mind is agitation. One does not try to remove the agitation; one simply accepts that it is agitation. Do not get agitated over agitation, thinking that it is something you are going to solve. Also, do not think that your mind is something peculiar, because, it is not. Any mind is agitation. Agitation is the nature of the mind because the mind has to change, it is meant to change. Try to imagine a mind that has a constant thought. A constant thought means that you cannot see anything else. Ten miles ago, you saw one tree, and still the tree is right in front of you! Nothing else is there, no car, no person, nothing. You would not even survive with such a mind.

The mind must necessarily change. Just as in a movie, the frame must always be changing at a certain speed for you to be able to see objects, movement, etc., here too, the mind has to keep changing all the time so that you can see. This is why the mind is called *kṣaṇika*. One particular thought is always *kṣaṇika*, meaning that it does not even last for a second. Just to say the word 'second,' involves so many parts, so many frames, so many changes — all of which are *kṣaṇika*. This is the nature of the *vṛtti*, the thought. Even to recognise this fact, the mind has to be *kṣaṇika*.

Since the nature of the mind is *kṣaṇika*, naturally it is going to change. Therefore, *Kṛṣṇa* says, 'There is no doubt about it, *Arjuna*, the mind is *cala*, *cañcala*, restless.' The word *cala* also means agitation. 'And, being *cala*, it is very difficult to control — *manaḥ durnigrahaṁ calam*,' he said. In other words, he agrees with what *Arjuna* has said about the mind, that it is as difficult to have mastery over the mind as over the wind.

By repeating what *Arjuna* has said, he is saying that the nature of the mind should be accepted as such. Accept the fact that the mind is agitation, that it has its own roots, that it has its own logic, and that therefore, it is never illogical.

We always think the mind is illogical, but that is not correct. The mind does have its own logic. If we suddenly think of something, we think that the thought has come from nowhere. But it has not come from nowhere; it has come from somewhere, meaning there is some logic for it. But, why, when nothing has happened outside, when everything is calm, do I suddenly have this thought? This simply means that outside situations are not required for a thought to occur. We have enough going on inside for this to happen! Why, for example, in the midst of meditation, do I suddenly think of okras? And why, when I am talking and wanting to come up with some funny word, did this word 'okra' come to me? There must be some logic for it. The point here is that whatever suddenly occurs in your head has its own logic.

### **THERE IS NOTHING ILLOGICAL IN THE WORLD**

There is nothing illogical in this world; there is always some logic. Originally, of course, everything is illogical, but then, afterwards, it is all logical. Within the illogical, we find there is a logic. That is, we understand that when something occurs, there is some reason for it. We must understand, then, that the mind is like this; this is its nature.

Does this mean that I should leave the mind as it is? We could say, 'Yes; the mind is agitation. Forget about it. Do not worry about it.' The problem, however, is that when the mind is agitation, I am agitation. Therefore, we have to learn to discover the distance between the mind and 'I.' This is the whole trick here, which is why *Kṛṣṇa* tells *Arjuna* that the mind can be mastered by practice and objectivity — *abhyāsenā tu kaunteya vairāgyeṇa ca gṛhyate*.

### **CARING FOR THE CHILD WITHIN**

By addressing *Arjuna* here as *Kaunteya*, meaning the son of *Kuntī*, *Kṛṣṇa* is indicating that the child was still there in *Arjuna*, which is where the mind has its own roots. This child has to be taken care of by the person. Therefore, there is double child care. When you were a child, someone else took care of you, but now you have to take care of your inner child. The first child care is done by one's parents or certain other adults, whereas this child care must be done by the person. Everyone nurses a child inside and that child has to be taken care of; everyone has to do it.

There is always a child who was disappointed in his or her perceptions, 'My mother does not like me. My father hates me.' These were the child's perceptions and, because of the behaviour of the people involved, they have some validity. This is why the child remains inside the person. There is always a crying child, a weeping child, down below, which is why the mind suddenly takes off — especially when you reach the

age of 35 years and over. This is the time that all the disappointments of the child come out one by one. And if you begin to study *Vedānta*, they all come out!

Studying *Vedānta* means that you look at yourself. Previously, you were doing other things. Looking at yourself is the first thing that must be done here, which is when the child comes out. When else will this child be taken care of? It has to be taken care of; it has to be addressed. Otherwise, you become seventy-five years old and are still a child. This, then, is the point *Kṛṣṇa* is making here by calling *Arjuna*, as *Kaunteya*. First, he refers to *Arjuna* as an adult, *mahābāho*, and then asks him to take care of the child by addressing him as *Kaunteya*.

*Kṛṣṇa* then tells *Arjuna* how this is to be done, saying that by practice and objectivity the mind can be mastered — *abhyāsena vairāgyeṇa ca gr̥hyate*. And what is this practice, *abhyāsa*? The practice is the practice of *yoga* just discussed by *Kṛṣṇa*, through which a certain distance is gained between your mind and yourself. This distance enables you to look at yourself positively, to see yourself exactly as you are, to see what the nature of ‘I’ is. In this way, you come to understand that every thought is you, no doubt, but that you are free from thought. Seeing this particular fact more and more, seeing it inside very clearly, is what is meant by *abhyāsa*, practice. Seeing this particular situation — thought being ‘I,’ while ‘I’ is not any thought — is what is called *nididhyāsana*. And doing the same thing again and again is called *abhyāsa*, which enables you to gain mastery over your mind — *abhyāsena gr̥hyate*.

## PRACTICE OF JAPA

Here the practice, *abhyāsa*, of *japa* can also be included. Because the mind's nature is not predictable, what your next thought will be is also not predictable. It can be anything. And, since the next thought can be anything, since you cannot predict what it will be, you create a predictable situation. Then only can you understand how the mind moves, etc. In this way, you get to have a certain hold over the mind, over the thinking process itself. This is why the mental repetition of a given *mantra*, a meaningful name, word, or sentence, called *japa*, is a must and is never given up, even by a *sannyāsī*.

## THE USEFULNESS OF A MANTRA

A *brahmacārī* has a *mantra*, a *gr̥hastha* has a *mantra*, a *vānaprastha* has a *mantra*, and a *sannyāsī* also has a *mantra*. There is no one who is without a word that is meaningful, either chosen by the person or given to that person. A particular *mantra* is important because it gives you a certain hold. That is why *japa* of some sort is common to all traditions; it gives you this particular capacity of knowing exactly what is going to happen next. It is the only situation where the mind is predictable.

Even when you find yourself dwelling upon a particular object, you do not know what your next thought is going to be. And when you decided to dwell upon a given

object, to inquire into it, you are not very clear about how the inquiry is going to proceed. Whereas, here, repetition being what it is, you have a definite occupation. This gives you a handle over the mind so that when it moves away, you understand what is happening, and again, and again, you bring it back to the object of meditation.

Here, *ātmā* is ‘as though’ the object of meditation in order to make the mind abide in the *ātmā* — to make the mind *ātma-saṁstha*. This *abhyāsa*, this practice, is the meditation that is in keeping with the teaching.

The repetition itself is called *abhyāsa*. Even in Sanskrit grammar, *abhyāsa* means duplication. Because of this *abhyāsa*, you learn the ways of the mind; you come to have some insight about it. In this particular *abhyāsa*, even the object of distraction becomes an object of meditation, as discussed earlier. Wherever the mind goes, there I turn my attention — *yatra yatra mano yāti tatra tatra samādhayaḥ*. This turning the attention from one thing to another becomes contemplation in which the attention moves from the object to the very basis of the object, *ātmā*. Therefore, there is no real distraction.

### CONTEMPLATION IS APPRECIATION OF A FACT

In this way, the distance between the thought and the self becomes very clear. ‘The thought is this; thought is not everything; thought is imbued with the self’— this becomes very clear. And, if I turn my attention towards the self, it becomes contemplation. I appreciate the self as independent of the thought. The more you appreciate this fact, thought becomes purely a role; it is not taken as everything. This is the distance that we come to know, a distance that does not imply physical distance or a particular condition of the mind. It is insight, appreciation itself, and this appreciation becomes the reality. This, then, is the practice that *Kṛṣṇa* says would enable one to master the mind.

### WHY THE MIND WANDERS

The second means for making the mind abide in itself, mentioned here by *Kṛṣṇa*, is *vairagya*, objectivity. Why does the mind go here and there in the first place? The mind goes elsewhere purely due to lack of interest. The nature of the mind is to go wherever there is some kick, wherever there is something more interesting. Some interest must be there and towards that it goes. Thus, without your trying to dwell upon anything in particular, the mind naturally goes towards the objects that it finds more interesting.

The mind goes towards an object of love and towards an object of pain also, since pain means that something requires attention. These are the two places towards which the mind goes without any effort on your part. Why? Because one is interesting and the other requires attention. In an object of love there is a certain joy, a certain pleasantness, to which the mind naturally goes. And, towards any object that hurts you or has hurt you,



the mind also goes quite naturally. One is positive, whereas the other, being something that requires attention, is negative.

Objects of pain can be taken care of by *abhyāsa*, whereas *vairāgya* is with reference to objects of love. By *abhyāsa*, a certain distance can be developed between oneself and the pain, although this may take some time. *Vairāgya* is mentioned here separately because the source of all desires for happiness and security is what we call *śobhanādhyāsa*, meaning that you superimpose certain attributes upon various objects in the world, and then think these will bring you happiness and security. That a particular object is going to make me more secure is one such attribute. Or, by achieving this or that, I am going to be different; I am going to become somebody. I am going to be acceptable to myself and to others, first to others and thereby to myself.

### WHY WE SEEK ACCEPTANCE FROM OTHERS

This seeking acceptability from others is nothing but self-acceptance, self-acceptance through others. Why should anyone accept you? So that you can accept yourself. Therefore, seeking the acceptance of others can always be reduced to self-acceptance. Whether you seek the acceptance of others or you seek self-acceptance, it amounts to self-acceptance alone. Thus, either you seek acceptance through others or you yourself understand that you do not accept yourself and try to find out whether the self is acceptable, which is the real way of dealing with the problem in fact.

Seeking self-acceptance, then, we superimpose certain attributes upon certain objects, thinking that a particular object is capable of giving something more than it can really give. Superimposing attributes that do not belong to the objects is what we call *adhyāsa*. When what is superimposed, *adhyasta*, is something positive, according to your thinking, it is called *śobhanādhyāsa*, meaning that which is very pleasing, for which there is a certain enchantment and infatuation. This infatuation or obsession is nothing but a superimposition, *śobhanādhyāsa*.

### THE MEANING OF VAIRĀGYA, OBJECTIVITY

The absence of *śobhanādhyāsa* is what is meant by *vairāgya*. *Vairāgya* enables one to separate the objective attributes of any object from the subjective superimpositions one may have placed upon it. When superimposed attributes are understood as attributes that are superimposed, the object is reduced to its own status.

To think, for example, that the absence of money makes you a nobody is not true. The absence of money makes you money-less, that's all. This is a fact — the absence of money makes you money-less. Money-less, I cannot buy things, is another fact, which can be followed by still more facts. That you cannot buy is true and that you cannot buy on credit is also true, since you have no money to pay later. Even if you buy on credit

and do not pay it back, the time will come when you cannot buy on credit either. Who is going to give you credit if you do not pay? Endlessly, then, one can talk about facts.

But, that I am a nobody is not a fact; it is a superimposition. The feeling of being a nobody is something very intimate because one has a stereotype of success, a conditioning that takes place by growing up in a society where money is respected with awe and wonder. In such a society, a person's success is talked about only in terms of money. To value money in this way is meaningless really. Any Mafia Don, any mercenary or hit-man, may also have a lot of money. Just because a person has money does not mean that the person is successful. Nevertheless, this is the orientation of some societies in the world.

There is also another orientation that to be money-less is something wonderful. This orientation holds that without money one should be able to live one's life. Therefore, the person who lives without money, even a beggar who lives in the streets, is highly praised. This orientation is equally silly. Both orientations place a value on money, which is a problem. The problem is not the money itself; money is just money. It is neither the problem, nor the solution, although money can solve some problems, like anything else. Even a toothpick can solve certain problems.

#### **THE SUPERIMPOSITION IS NOT DELIBERATE**

Therefore, to think that money is the source of the problem is not correct. There is a superimposition here, which is not deliberately done by a person, but is something innate in a psyche that is exposed to a certain value structure obtaining in a given society, causing the person to place an attribute on money that is not really there. This superimposition, *śobhanādhyāsa*, has to be neutralised by looking at money as money is, nothing more. To say that money has no value is just another *adhyāsa*. You are seeing something that is not true. Similarly, if you add something more to money than is really there, it is also *adhyāsa*. Reducing the objects to their own status is enough. By doing this, you will find in yourself a certain dispassion, which is *vairāgya*.

A person is dispassionate in the sense that he or she is objective in his or her judgements. *Vairāgya* is understood more in terms of objectivity. Unless we understand its meaning clearly, there will be more problems. It does not mean that there are no desires. To think so means that every desire becomes a new source of problems! We are not creating ideals here, which would only further distance ourselves from ourselves. Therefore, we must be careful not to pick up any further confusion here. *Vairāgya* means to be free of the longing that implies superimposition, *śobhanādhyāsa*. And this is accomplished by neutralising the *śobhanādhyāsa*, thereby judging situations properly.

## NEUTRALISING THE SUPERIMPOSITION

Any object of liking can become an object of obsession, sooner or later, and therefore, a problem. There are books being written today about people who love too much, meaning they cannot love at all. Because they cannot keep an object of love in its proper perspective, it becomes a problem for them. The object of love can consume a person so completely that it becomes an obsession, leading to attempts to control, vying for position, etc.

To neutralise a *śobhanādhyāsa*, one has to understand the difference between the objective value and the subjective imposition of values upon the object. And how is it possible to see this difference? *Śaṅkara* defined *vairāgya* here as the capacity to repeatedly see the limitations in both the seen and unseen objects of enjoyment, meaning here and in the hereafter — *vairāgyaṃ nāma dr̥ṣṭa-adr̥ṣṭa-bhogeṣu doṣa-darśana-abhyāsāt vaitr̥ṣṇyam*.

Limitations here refer to what a given object can and cannot give. Any object has some virtues, *guṇas*, and some defects, *doṣas*, or limitations. Therefore, one must see these limitations clearly. For example, money can buy, but it cannot make you enjoy. Seeing this is what makes you dispassionate. And, once you are dispassionate, then your relationship with money is proper. It is an objective relationship, which is what we are talking about.

## SEEING THINGS AS THEY ARE

The capacity to look at things as they are is called objectivity. There is no judgement involved here, just an understanding of things as they are. This objectivity is especially important in terms of our subjective values because we do not know the objects of these values as they really are. We are not concerned here with the physical structure of objects, only with the value we superimpose upon them.

When I look at a given object, I see that there are a lot of projections involved. Therefore, I see these projections for what they are and I deal with them. By separating them in this way, I can look more objectively at how the object is going to make my life any better than it is now. Doing this again and again is *abhyāsa* and seeing the limitations of the objects is *vairāgya*. Repetition is essential because the subjective value does not go away just like that. This is because the value is something that is not deliberately imposed upon the object by you.

## OBJECTIVITY AND SUBJECTIVITY

Suppose you buy a piece of bronze, thinking it is an antique. In fact, it has been oxidised to make it look very old. An ear has been cut, the nose poked, and some scratches put on it to make it look as though it has fallen down a few times. All of this

has been deliberately done to increase its value. And you buy it, thinking it is an ancient piece. And when you realise that it is not an antique, you are disappointed and experience a sense of loss. Now, what did you lose here? Only the subjective value that you had superimposed on it. The bronze does have a certain objective value. Thinking it is an antique, you had placed a subjective value on it. That subjective value has little or nothing to do with the objective value of the object. To think of a simple piece of bronze as something great is purely subjective, nothing more.

People do the same thing with blue jeans, buying new jeans that have been made to look old. These jeans may even come with patches! Why? To make it look as though you have been around, for which you are prepared to pay a higher price. Again, this is purely a subjective value. From this we can understand the difference between the objective and subjective value of an object.

Previously you looked at the piece of bronze as an antique and now, knowing it is not an antique, you look at it as bronze. The object itself is the same as when you bought it — it had no ear then and it has no ear now! Only in your look is there a change. For all you know, it may be an antique. Perhaps the person who told you that it is not, wants to take it off your hands and sell it for a fortune! If this were to happen, you would feel like a fool — if you find out, of course. In the realm of subjective value, anything is possible.

The point I am making here is that if the vision of the object as an antique goes away, then the attitude you will have is dispassion towards the object. If it is an antique, it is an antique — there is no problem. You simply look at it as an antique. That, society has jacked up the price because of the subjective value placed upon it, need not concern you at all. Whereas if you are an antique collector, everything about you becomes antique!

There are people who want to collect and own certain objects to the point that it becomes an obsession with them. They call it an investment, but they will not part with it. For something to be an investment, you have to be able to sell it, but they will not sell because they have developed such an attachment for the object. There is no investment here; there is only a new problem that has been created. Only when the antique *buddhi* goes away, when the person can look at the object objectively, can there be *vairāgya*.

### **VAIRĀGYA IS KNOWING THAT AN OBJECT IS JUST AN OBJECT**

When a subjective value superimposed upon an object is gone, then the object is just the object. This holds for all objects. That there is *śobhanādhyāsa*, a superimposition that has taken place naturally, an extra attribute that does not really exist in the object, has to be recognised. Therefore, again and again, I see the object as it is. And, in the wake of this knowledge, the superimpositions go.

This does not mean that you need to continually remind yourself, ‘This is not an antique, this is not an antique.’ Such a *japa* you need not do. But, with reference to money, power, and the acceptance of others, *abhyāsa* and *vairāgya* are both necessary. Seeing the limitations of objects and situations, over and over again, is very important if one is to master the mind. Repetition is necessary because the superimposition is not a deliberate thing; it is not a mistake that you have made by taking something to be more valuable than it is. If it were a mistake, a one time correction is adequate. Then there is objectivity. But, here, it is not by a one time mistake that there is superimposition. It is by your being what you are, a psychological being, very firmly rooted in terms of your concept of success.

All concepts of success and *vairāgya*, dispassion, are within the range of psychology alone. *Vairāgya* is nothing but the emotional growth of the person. Growth is strictly in terms of understanding the limitations of an object or situation, again and again, until the superimposition falls apart. Then the world does not have a hold over you. Otherwise, the mind runs towards certain objects naturally because they have been given such importance by the society.

There is a certain pain involved with reference to certain old objects — what you could not get before, what you have lost in the past — which can cause problems in the mind. Whereas, if *vairāgya* is there, the old failures, those things that were sources of some pain for you, fall apart and new objects also do not have any hold over you. This is what is meant by seeing the limitations, *doṣa-darśana*, again and again, thereby bringing about a cognitive change, which frees the mind to a greater extent.

By *abhyāsa* and *vairāgya*, then, the mind can be mastered, *manaḥ gṛhyate*. The mind that is always chattering, always preaching, the mind that is in the form of agitation because it is away from the *dhyeya*, the object of meditation, *ātmā*, this mind, this agitation, that is so difficult to master, can be mastered. But you cannot simply sit there and expect the mind to take care of itself. You have to pay some attention to it, as *Kṛṣṇa* says here.

असंयतात्मना योगो दुष्प्राप इति मे मतिः ।

वश्यात्मना तु यतता शक्योऽवामुमुपायतः ॥ ३६ ॥

*asaṁyatātmanā yogo duṣprāpa iti me matiḥ*

*vaśyātmanā tu yatatā śakyo'vāptumupāyataḥ*

Verse 36

असंयत-आत्मना *asaṁyata-ātmanā* — by the one for whom the mind is not mastered; योगः *yogaḥ* — *yoga*; दुष्प्रापः *duṣprāpaḥ* — difficult to gain; इति *iti* — thus; मे *me* — My; मतिः *matiḥ* — vision; तु *tu* — whereas; वश्यात्मना *vaśyātmanā* — by the one whose mind is mastered; यतता *yatatā* — by the one who makes effort; उपायतः

*upāyataḥ* — with the proper means (i.e., practice and objectivity); अवामुम् शक्यः  
*avāptum śakyaḥ* — (it) can be gained

*Yoga* is difficult to gain for the one by whom the mind is not mastered. This is My vision. Whereas it can be gained by the one whose mind is mastered, who makes effort with the proper means (i.e., practice and objectivity).

One who does not practice meditation, *abhyāsa*, and who does not have objectivity, *vairāgya*, is called *asaṃyata-ātmā* in this verse, meaning that the mind is not brought under control. And can the mind be brought under control? Yes, *Kṛṣṇa* says, but with difficulty — it is *duṣprāpa*. Furthermore, unless the mind is mastered, it is not possible to gain the *yoga* being discussed here, the capacity to see the sameness that exists in all beings and in which all beings exist. What *Kṛṣṇa* says here is his vision, *mati*, which is not the same as an opinion since it is not something that can be contended and dismissed.

By the practice of *abhyāsa* and *vairāgya*, the mind is brought into one's own hands, which is why the person who can do this is also called *vaśya-ātmā* here. Such a person is always alert. Alertness is something that should always be with you, not something practised for a period of time. For example, you cannot say that you practised alertness for six years and it was very good, just as you cannot say you practised breathing for six years. It is not as though you give up breathing after having practised it for some time; it is your very life. Alertness is the same. By such a person who continues to maintain this alertness, *yatatā*, by the one who has a certain mastery over his mind, *vaśyātmanā*, it is possible to gain the vision of sameness, *yogaḥ avāptuṃ śakyaḥ*.

## NOT SOMETHING TO BE DONE

*Kṛṣṇa* mentions in this verse that this *yoga* is gained by a particular means, *upāyataḥ*. And what is that means, *upāya*? *Abhyāsa* and *vairāgya* are the means for gaining this vision, as *Kṛṣṇa* had already told *Arjuna*. Because *abhyāsa* and *vairāgya* are the means, *Arjuna's* gaining the *yoga* was no longer in *Kṛṣṇa's* hands, because *Kṛṣṇa* has already covered the subject matter. Now, this is something that has to be done and it is up to *Arjuna* to do it. He has to pay attention to his mind. *Kṛṣṇa* had said everything he could say. There was nothing more to be taught, only something to be done. *Vairāgya* and *abhyāsa* would take care of any problems, any obstructions to gaining the knowledge. This is why *Kṛṣṇa* does not say very much about the doing of it.

When there is something to be discussed, like the *vastu*, *brahma-ātmā*, then one can talk indefinitely, which is what *Kṛṣṇa* does and which is why there are eighteen chapters of the *Gītā*. But, here, there is something to be done now by *Arjuna*; therefore, *Kṛṣṇa* leaves it at that. You will find that *Kṛṣṇa* talks a lot about *ātmā*, about the wise

person, about the vision, but when it comes to meditation, which is to be done, there are only a few verses because it is something to be done.

Wherever there is something to be done, *Kṛṣṇa* states it briefly and adequately, and then continues on. Whereas, wherever something is to be unfolded, he goes on and on because it is something that has to be understood, not something that has to be done.

In the next verse, *Arjuna* presents another problem, which is purely an imagined problem.

अर्जुन उवाच ।

अयतिः श्रद्धयोपेतो योगाच्चलितमानसः ।

अप्राप्य योगसंसिद्धिं कां गतिं कृष्ण गच्छति ॥ ३७ ॥

*arjuna uvāca*

*ayatiḥ śraddhayopeto yogāccalitamānasaḥ*

*aprāpya yogasaṁsiddhiṁ kām gatiṁ kṛṣṇa gacchati*

Verse 37

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

कृष्ण *kṛṣṇa* — O *Kṛṣṇa*!; श्रद्धया *śraddhayā* — with faith in the *śāstra*; उपेतः *upetaḥ* — endowed; अयतिः *ayatiḥ* — one of inadequate effort; योगात् *yogāt* — from *yoga*; चलितमानसः *calita-mānasaḥ* — one whose mind wanders away; योगसंसिद्धिम् *yoga-saṁsiddhim* — success in *yoga*; अप्राप्य *aprāpya* — not gaining; काम् गतिम् गच्छति *kām gatiṁ gacchati* — to which end does he (or she) go

*Arjuna* said:

O *Kṛṣṇa*, not gaining success in *yoga*, to which end does the one who is endowed with faith in the *śāstra* (but) whose effort is inadequate, and whose mind wanders away from *yoga* go?

Just look at *Arjuna's* question. Suppose there is a man who has renounced all *karmas*, meaning *vaidika-karmas* and *laukika-karmas*, all the spiritual, social, and family duties that he is allowed to give up if he takes to a life of renunciation, *sannyāsa*. Why does anyone give up all this? In the hope of what? In the hope of gaining this *yoga*, the vision of *ātmā* in all beings and all beings in *ātmā* (*samadarśana*), he gives up all types of *karma*. This particular vision was the end in view when the person, *Arjuna* was talking about, became a *sannyāsi*.

As a *sannyāsi*, he denied himself the various pleasures that can be picked up by living in the society and became a *bhikṣu*, a person who lives on alms. He has no money and does not know from where his next meal will come — that is, he lives on whatever comes his way. But, although he does not have the pleasures that a life of *saṁsāra* would have given him, renunciation is a good investment because he is going to get the

great vision, liberation, *mokṣa*. It was for the sake of *mokṣa* alone that he gave up the other three human pursuits security, *artha*, pleasure, *kāma*, and *dharma*.

### A CERTAIN EFFORT IS ALSO REQUIRED

This person has great *śraddhā* in the vision of the *śāstra* and the possibility of his gaining the knowledge of himself, *ātmā*, being *Brahman* is definitely there. He knows that this knowledge is the *mokṣa* that he seeks. In the hope of gaining this knowledge, he has taken to the life of *sannyāsa* and continues to be a *sannyāsī*. In time, however, having not yet gained the knowledge, he becomes frustrated. He may have started his pursuit when he was very young and now he is old. Something has prevented him from gaining the knowledge. The teaching may not have been proper or, perhaps, he did not have enough inspiration. Or the problem may have been from the past, some backlog, some obstacle, from the past. Having reached this point, although he still has *śraddhā*, he is now an *ayati*, meaning that he does not have adequate effort.

*Yati* means a person of effort, one who has the capacity to make right effort, which is why a *sannyāsī* is called a *yati*. The person has a direction and is committed to a life of renunciation in pursuit of self-knowledge. But the *sannyāsī Arjuna* was talking about cannot be called a *yati*; he has become an *ayati* because adequate effort is not there and he does not know what it is, and is incapable of that effort.

That the effort is not adequate is very clear. Why? Because the problems continue. Things are not very clear to the person and therefore, he is *ayati*. He may have studied and done a lot of meditation. But all that he has accomplished is to become more aged, tired, and frustrated, *calitamānasa*. *Arjuna* wanted to know what would become of this tired, frustrated *sannyāsī*? He has *śraddhā* and therefore, he wants this knowledge. But things are not clear to him at all. Now *Arjuna's* doubt is, 'What would be his lot if he dies away before gaining the knowledge?' Therefore, *Arjuna* asks, 'What does he gain *Kṛṣṇa* — *kāṃ gatiṃ kṛṣṇa gacchati*?'

We know very well what his lot in this life is. He has neither the joys of *saṃsāra* nor the joy of *mokṣa*. The small pleasures of *saṃsāra* are denied to him and also the pleasures of heaven, since he gave up all the *karma* that would earn him such pleasure in the hope of gaining *jñāna*. And he does not get *jñāna* either! What then? Is he just left hanging somewhere or what?

A person who performs no *karma* obviously cannot gain the results of *karma*; therefore, there is no *karma-phala* for him. Instead of performing *karma*, he spent his time sitting with his eyes closed, but nothing happened inside — except sleep perhaps. And nothing can be accomplished by sleep! Dreaming or day-dreaming at least gives a person some kick, but what does sleep give? Nothing. Therefore, the *ayati* has not picked up any of the simple joys of *saṃsāra*. Nor has he picked up any *punya* for the next life; much less has he gained the knowledge that is liberation.



## DOES THE PERSON JUST FIZZLE OUT?

Will he become like a cloudlet that has become separated from a body of clouds, will he just disappear, fizzle out? Is this kingdom lost and the promised kingdom as well? For the *sannyāsī* of inadequate effort who has died, *mokṣa* is gone and *saṃsāra* is also gone, there being no accrued *puṇya*. With both of them gone, what will happen to him? Where will he go?

Of course, this was an imagined situation on *Arjuna's* part. He was not himself a *sannyāsī*, but perhaps he planned to become a *sannyāsī*. This did seem to be on his mind, as we saw earlier in the *Gītā*. In any case, *Arjuna* wants to know exactly what would happen to the *sannyāsī* who did not gain the vision. Although this was not *Arjuna's* immediate problem, his question was a relevant one in terms of understanding what the *śāstra* has to say about *sannyāsa* and *karma-yoga*. *Arjuna* knew *Kṛṣṇa* to be the all-knowing *Īśvara* and therefore, qualified to remove this particular doubt. No one else was equal to *Kṛṣṇa*; only he could answer this question, which was not a simple one, dealing as it did with what happens after one's life, as we know it, comes to an end.

Therefore, *Arjuna* says, 'Please tell me, *Kṛṣṇa*, where does such a person go who has not gained success in *yoga* (in the form of gain of knowledge) — *aprāpya yoga-saṃsiddhiṃ kāṃ gatiṃ kṛṣṇa gacchati?*' When knowledge is gained, *mokṣa* is gained. Therefore, knowledge is called a means for *mokṣa*. Thus, between the knowledge and *mokṣa* there is a connection, a connection of 'means and end' — *sādhana-sādhya-sambandha*.

*Arjuna* wants to know what happens to the person who, having *śraddhā* in the vision, renounces everything and lives a life of *yoga* but does not gain the knowledge that is *mokṣa*. Having denied himself the pleasures of *saṃsāra* and also those of the other world, the person has been performing this *yoga*, this meditation, for a long time and now he is very old and is dying away. He has given up all hope of gaining anything more in this life, let alone the knowledge that he has pursued for so long. What will happen to him? Will he not be completely destroyed?

*Arjuna* puts this question to *Kṛṣṇa* in the next verse:

कच्चिन्नोभयविभ्रष्टश्छिन्नाभ्रमिव नश्यति ।

अप्रतिष्ठो महाबाहो विमूढो ब्रह्मणः पथि ॥ ३८ ॥

*kaccinnobhayavibhraṣṭaśchinnābhramiva naśyati*

*apraṭiṣṭho mahābāho vimūḍho brahmaṇaḥ pathi*

Verse 38

महाबाहो *mahābāho* — O Mighty-armed! (*Kṛṣṇa*); ब्रह्मणः पथि *brahmaṇaḥ pathi* — in the path (knowledge) of *Brahman*; विमूढः *vimūḍhaḥ* — the one who is deluded; अप्रतिष्ठः *apraṭiṣṭhaḥ* — one who is without any support; उभयविभ्रष्टः *ubhaya-vibhraṣṭaḥ* — one

who has fallen from both; छिन्न-अभ्रम् इव *chinna-abhram iva* — like a cloudlet torn asunder; कच्चित् न नश्यति *kaccit na naśyati* — is he not destroyed?

Deluded in the path (knowledge) of *Brahman*, is one who has fallen from both, being without any support, not destroyed, O Mighty-armed (*Kṛṣṇa*), like a cloudlet torn asunder?

The person being discussed here is the same *sannyāsī* described previously by *Arjuna* as *ayati* one whose effort has not been adequate to gain the knowledge that is *mokṣa*. *Ubhaya-vibhraṣṭa* refers to the one who has fallen away from both life-styles, *karma-yoga* and *sannyāsa*. This person has given up, fallen away from the way of life called *karma-mārga* or *karma-yoga*. This *karma-yoga* is a life of activity in which one also pursues the knowledge. The purpose of this lifestyle is to make one ready eventually to pursue knowledge by taking to a life of *sannyāsa*. Because he has slipped away from *karma-mārga*, the person is called *vibhraṣṭa* with reference to the *karma-mārga*. And, the life of renunciation, *yoga-mārga*, *brahmaṇaḥ panthā*, for which he gave up *karma-mārga*, has also proved to be abortive, fruitless. Therefore, in both, he is the loser; from both he has fallen away —he is *ubhaya-vibhraṣṭa*.

Having fallen away from both, where will he go now? He cannot go back to *karma-mārga* because he is perhaps too old to do anything. Besides, it is not proper to go from *sannyāsa* to *karma-mārga*. Nor does he have any enthusiasm to do so because he knows the *anityatva* of it all. Any enthusiasm he may have had for a life of *saṃsāra* as an *avivekī*, one without discrimination, is all gone and he does not have the satisfaction of being a *jñānī*, a wise man, either. Therefore, he is *ubhaya-vibhraṣṭa*, hanging somewhere in the middle, with no place to go. He cannot identify with the wise *sannyāsīs* nor with the ordinary people.

Not only does he have no place, no group to identify with, he is also deluded *vimūḍha*. He either feels he has made a mistake or he feels confused about whether he is a *jīva*, an individual, or *paraṃ-brahma*. Since this doubt remains, he has not accomplished anything by having taken to this path, this pursuit of the knowledge of *Brahman*.

## THERE IS NO PATH TO BRAHMAN

*Śaṅkara* clarified the meaning of the word *pathi* – in the path, in his commentary of this verse by adding the word *mārga*, thereby indicating that the life-style of *sannyāsa* is what is implied here. There is no ‘way,’ no ‘path,’ to *Brahman* as such; you are *Brahman*. And to gain this knowledge of *Brahman*, there is a pursuit, the pursuit of knowledge. And in this pursuit, the *sannyāsī* under discussion is deluded, *vimūḍha*. Thus, ‘deluded in the path of *Brahman*’ means that in gaining the knowledge of *Brahman*, in the pursuit of that knowledge, he is still confused, still deluded.

Does such a person not destroy himself, *naśyati na kim?* Asking this question, *Arjuna* compared the destruction to that of a cloudlet that has separated itself from a large body of clouds, *chinna-abhram iva*. Not wanting to wait for the big body of clouds perhaps, this cloudlet separates itself in its haste to reach the Himalayas where it can sit on top of the mountains and not be disturbed. Instead, somewhere in the middle of India, tossed about by the howling winds, it just disappears, fizzles out.

So too, this person had dropped out of conventional society in his attempt to reach *mokṣa* quickly. He may even have gone to sit in the rarefied air of the Himalayas, but instead of becoming a true *sannyāsī*, he became a dropout, just like the cloudlet. Does he not destroy himself in the same way that the cloudlet does?

Just as a cloudlet that remains with the large body of clouds can travel along and enjoy the view, so too, you can attach yourself to the main body of society and have some of the joys that such a life has to offer. The cloudlet that is prepared to travel at the same slow speed as the big body of clouds can look down at the mountains, up at the stars, and be protected by the winds of destruction. Otherwise, it gets destroyed.

#### IF THERE IS NO STRUCTURE, YOU CAN BECOME ANYTHING

Similarly, when you hurry ahead, you can become completely lost in the process because you have left the structure behind. *Sannyāsa* means just that — no structure. You can become anything. Without a structure, without any particular mode of life, nothing to pressure you into doing anything, you can become lazy also.

As a *sannyāsī*, you can also become lazy. When you are hungry, you can go for *bhikṣā* and then lie down back again without doing anything. The life of *sannyāsa* gives you this kind of licence. No one is going to question you. Society is not going to question you. And, since there is no work for you to do, there is no employer or employee. There is also no father or mother to worry about you, which sometimes keeps people on track. If the *sannyāsī* once had a wife and children, he has given them up also. Therefore, none of the societal norms are there for the *sannyāsī*. Nor is there any religious norm because the person who takes *sannyāsa* is absolved from performing all the *karmas* enjoined by the Veda. Therefore, there is no problem; you can be anything you want, even a hippie!

Thinking that such a person destroys himself, *Arjuna* asks *Kṛṣṇa* to clear his doubt with reference to the fate of the *ubhaya-vibhraṣṭa*.

एतन्मे संशयं कृष्ण छेत्तुमर्हस्यशेषतः ।

त्वदन्यः संशयस्यास्य छेत्ता न ह्युपपद्यते ॥ ३९ ॥

etanme saṁśayaṁ kṛṣṇa chettumarhasyaśeṣataḥ  
tvadanyaḥ saṁśayasyāsyā chettā na hyupapadyate

Verse 39

कृष्ण *kr̥ṣṇa* — O *Kṛṣṇa*!; मे *me* — of mine; एतत् *etat* — this; संशयम् *saṁśayam* — doubt; अशेषतः *aśeṣataḥ* — totally; छेत्तुम् *chettum* — to eliminate; अर्हसि *arhasi* — you should; हि *hi* — for; त्वदन्यः *tvadanyaḥ* — other than you; अस्य संशयस्य *asya saṁśayasya* — of this doubt; छेत्ता *chettā* — the remover; न उपपद्यते *na upapadyate* — is not there

You should eliminate this doubt of mine totally, O *Kṛṣṇa*. For, other than you, there is no one who can be the remover of this doubt.

*Arjuna* knows that there was no one else who could answer his question. Only the all-knowing *Kṛṣṇa*, as *Īśvara*, could answer it because only *Īśvara* knows what will happen to the *sannyāsī* after he dies away from this life without gaining knowledge of the self.

*Chettā* means the one who cuts or removes. Here it refers to the one who removes the doubt. *Kṛṣṇa*, then, was the hit-man for the doubt — in fact, the only possible hit-man. He alone was capable of eliminating *Arjuna*'s doubts totally. Anyone else would have to say, 'This is what the *śāstra* says.' Whereas, *Kṛṣṇa* is the one who initiated the *śāstra* itself, as he said at the beginning of the fourth chapter. 'I gave this eternal knowledge to *Vivasvān* who gave it to *Manu*, who gave it to *Ikṣvāku* — *imaṁ vivasvate yogaṁ proktavān aham avyayaṁ, vivasvān manave prāha manurikṣvākave'bravīt*.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, *Kṛṣṇa* as *Īśvara* knew what it was all about. He also told *Arjuna* earlier that they had a number of births before, but only he, *Kṛṣṇa*, knew these births while *Arjuna* did not — *bahūni me vyatītāni janmāni tava cārjuna tānyahaṁ veda sarvāṇi na tvaṁ vettha parantapa*.<sup>2</sup>

From this, *Arjuna* concludes that *Kṛṣṇa* knows what happens to a soul after death and therefore, is the right person to talk about it. *Arjuna* is praising his *guru* here, saying that there was no one equal to *Kṛṣṇa*, no one who could eliminate his doubt totally. In other words, no one else is qualified to answer his question.

Had *Arjuna* not asked this question, the *Gītā* would have ended three verses ago. But, because *Arjuna* asks the question, *Kṛṣṇa* begins talking again.

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।

पार्थ नैवेह नामत्र विनाशस्तस्य विद्यते ।

न हि कल्याणकृत् कश्चिद् दुर्गतिं तात गच्छति ॥ ४० ॥

<sup>1</sup> *Gītā* – 4-1

<sup>2</sup> *Gītā* – 4-5

*śrībhagavān uvāca*

*pārtha naiveha nāmutra vināśastasya vidyate  
na hi kalyāṇakṛt kaścīd durgatiṃ tāta gacchati*

Verse 40

श्रीभगवान् *śrībhagavān* — Lord *Kṛṣṇa*; उवाच *uvāca* — said;  
पार्थ *pārtha* — O Son of *Prthā!*; तस्य *tasya* — for him (or her); विनाशः *vināśaḥ* —  
destruction; इह *iha* — here; न एव विद्यते *na eva vidyate* — indeed is not; न *na* — nor;  
अमुत्र *amutra* — in the hereafter; तात *tāta* — O My son! (*Arjuna*); हि *hi* — because;  
कश्चित् *kaścīd* — any one; कल्याणकृत् *kalyāṇakṛt* — the one who performs good actions;  
दुर्गतिम् *durgatiṃ* — bad end; न गच्छति *na gacchati* — reaches

*Śrī Bhagavān* said:

Indeed, O Son of *Prthā* (*Arjuna*), there is no destruction for him (or her),  
neither here nor in the hereafter, because any one who performs good  
actions never reaches a bad end.

Again, the person being discussed in this verse is that *sannyāsī*, that *yogī*, who  
was referred to previously as *ubhaya-vibhraṣṭa*, one who had fallen from both  
*karma-mārga* and *yoga-mārga* for the reasons we have already seen. In fact, the person  
is not *ubhaya-vibhraṣṭa* because, here, *Kṛṣṇa* says that there is no falling as such.

For the *sannyāsī* who has not completed the job properly, destruction is not there,  
*vināśaḥ na vidyate*, either here in this world, *iha*, or in any other world, *amutra*. Why?  
Because this person, although an *ayati*, has *śraddhā* in the *śāstra*. Having *śraddhā*,  
there can be no loss for him in this life and, therefore, the life of *sannyāsa* is not a bad  
investment. He knows what it is all about. Because he has *śraddhā*, there is no question  
of his being frustrated or sad in this world. He will simply continue to pursue the  
knowledge, pleasantly, happily, until he gains it. And, if *śraddhā* were not to be there,  
the person would naturally think that he had made a mistake. Thinking so, he would  
always go back. In either case, then, the problem of his being sad for what he has  
undertaken would not be there for the person.

‘Nor will there be a problem later, i.e., after death, *amutra*,’ *Kṛṣṇa* says. He will  
come back to a situation that is conducive to the continuation of his pursuit of the  
knowledge that will give him *mokṣa*. Thus, *Kṛṣṇa* assures *Arjuna*, that destruction is  
definitely not there for him — *vināśaḥ tasya na vidyate*.

## THE SANNYĀSĪ NEVER COMES TO A BAD END

Destruction here can only mean that the person comes back to a life that is worse  
than before, meaning that he gains a worse birth, a lower birth, than the one he  
previously had. But this will not happen, *Kṛṣṇa* says. There will be a higher birth, a  
better birth, because the person has lived a good life, he is a *kalyāṇakṛt*. *Kalyāṇa* means

*mokṣa* and this person has taken a step towards *mokṣa* by living the life of *sannyāsa*. The *kalyāṇakṛt* is not a drop-out or a hippie. For the sake of *mokṣa*, which implies an understanding of *Īśvara*, the person has given up everything. And, being a *kalyāṇakṛt*, the person does not come to a bad end — *durgatiṃ na gacchati*.

Anyone, *kaścit*, who has done good action, charitable action, does not gain an undesirable end. At the worst, such a person, just proceeds from birth to birth, depending on the accumulated *karma* that precipitates a new body. But, once a person makes a step for the sake of *mokṣa*, whatever he or she has done before has already paid off. The moment the person turns his or her attention towards himself or herself, there is no going back.

### TAKING CARE OF ANĀTMĀ IS FOR ĀTMĀ ALONE

Generally, a person only goes after *anātmā*, not *ātmā*. For example, the physical body being *anātmā* how to take care of it is also *anātmā*. How to take care of my mind is with reference to *anātmā*. How to take care of my money, power, family is all with reference to *anātmā*. How to take care of my future, meaning my next body, is also regarding *anātmā*. Like this, everyone is interested in taking care of *anātmā* alone — and struggles to do so constantly!

In fact, all this taking care of *anātmā*, is only for taking care of *ātmā*. Taking care is not for the sake of *anātmā*. You do not take care of the body for the body's sake; it is for your sake, *ātmā's* sake. Therefore, you take care of the *anātmā*, for the sake of *ātmā* and, in the process, you totally neglect the *ātmā*! This, indeed, is the wonder and we call it *māyā*.

The moment a person begins to question whether he or she is doing the right thing, *ātmā* is being taken care of. And this does not take place in everyone. To ask, 'What is this *ātmā* that is so anxious to take care of *anātmā*' is to question *ātmā* itself and is for *ātmā's* sake, for one's own sake, alone. The person who begins to pay attention to *ātmā*, whether successful or not, has already traced his or her way back. To question what is considered to be normal is to discover that the normal is abnormal. Such a person has made a step towards *mokṣa* and therefore, he or she is *kalyāṇakṛt*.

*Kalyāṇa* means 'auspicious.' Therefore, *mokṣa* is *kalyāṇa*. Marriage is also called *kalyāṇa* because it marks the end of the *brahmacarya* stage of life and the auspicious beginning of the *gṛhasthāśrama* which will finally prepare one for *mokṣa* — the most auspicious. *Mokṣa* is the ultimate *kalyāṇa* and marriage is a *sādhana*, a means for gaining the grand finale called *mokṣa*.

## CHANGING THE COURSE OF KARMA

Therefore, anyone who has made a step towards *mokṣa* is called *kalyāṇakṛt*, whether the person is a *karma-yogī* or a *sannyāsī*. Both of them are *kalyāṇakṛts* alone because some action has been taken for the sake of *mokṣa*. Thereafter, progress is assured. Any *karma* waiting to take the body of a frog, a celestial, or anything else is all subjugated and no longer has any chance to express itself. Once the person is *kalyāṇakṛt*, the entire order, the entire flow, changes. Whereas, if you are simply going along with the flow, then all the accumulated *karmas* have the same chance. But when a particular set of *karmas* exerts more pressure for expression, then it has a greater chance of getting fulfilled.

Once you have changed the course, the order has to change. Therefore, for the person who has *śraddhā*, all other *karmas* have to wait and the one for pursuing the knowledge proceeds. And how long will the others have to wait? Until the person gains *kalyāṇa*, *mokṣa*. And once *mokṣa* is gained, all *karmas* disappear. They are finished for good; they do not exist at all. Therefore, to question whether one is a *kartā* is no ordinary question. Assuming one is a *kartā*, one performs good and bad actions. But, here, the very *kartā* is questioned. One asks, ‘Am I a *kartā*?’ This, then, is the question that makes one a *kalyāṇakṛt* and, having asked it, no one reaches a bad end.

*Kṛṣṇa* addresses *Arjuna* here as *tāta*, a name used affectionately for either a father or a son in recognition of the closeness between them. A father is one who protects himself in the form of his son, the son being as good as himself. When the son is happy, the father is happy. When the son grows up nicely, the father feels that he too has grown nicely. If the son is successful, the father also feels successful. Like this, whatever happens to the son happens to the father in that, it very much affects him. Therefore, there is no distance between the son and the father. For this reason, they are both called *tāta*.

Here, *Arjuna* is not *Kṛṣṇa*’s son. But he is a father in the sense that a creator can be called ‘father,’ *janaka*. There is the father who creates a body for you — *deha-janaka*, and a father who creates wisdom in you — *vidyā-janaka*. Because the wise person who is a teacher, *ācārya*, is one who gives you a complete rebirth in the form of wisdom, he is called ‘father.’ Therefore, the author of the body and the author of the knowledge are called *tāta* — ‘father.’

The word *tāta* is used for a son as well as for a disciple, *śiṣya*. *Arjuna* is not *Kṛṣṇa*’s son, but he is his *śiṣya*, and a *śiṣya* is like a son — equal to a son. Therefore, *Kṛṣṇa* affectionately addresses him here as *tāta*, telling him that the *sannyāsī* who has *śraddhā*, but who does not gain the knowledge, does not come to a bad end. In the next verse, *Kṛṣṇa* begins his explanation about what does happen to this person.

प्राप्य पुण्यकृतां लोकानुषित्वा शाश्वतीः समाः ।

शुचीनां श्रीमतां गेहे योगभ्रष्टोऽभिजायते ॥ ४१ ॥

*prāpya puṇyakṛtāṃ lokānuṣitvā śāśvatīḥ samāḥ*  
*śucīnāṃ śrīmatāṃ gehe yogabhraṣṭo'bhijāyate*

Verse 41

योग-भ्रष्टः *yoga-bhraṣṭaḥ* — one who has fallen from (did not succeed in) *yoga* ; पुण्यकृताम् *puṇya-kṛtām* — belonging to those who do good actions; लोकान् *lokān* — worlds; प्राप्य *prāpya* — having gained; शाश्वतीः समाः *sāśvatīḥ samāḥ* — countless years; उषित्वा *uṣitvā* — having lived (there); शुचीनाम् *śucīnām* — of the people committed to *dharma* ; श्रीमताम् *śrīmatām* — of the wealthy (and cultured); गेहे *gehe* — in the home; अभिजायते *abhijāyate* — is born

Having gained the worlds belonging to those who do good actions (and) having lived (there) for countless years, the one who did not succeed in *yoga* is born in the home of the wealthy (and cultured) people who are committed to *dharma* .

Both the here, *īha-loka*, and the hereafter, *paraloka*, are covered in this verse. *Puṇya-kṛtām loka* refers to the worlds, *lokas* gained by *puṇyakṛts*, *puṇya-karmakṛts*, those who have lived a life of *dharma*, performing good actions that produce *puṇya*. And, having gained these worlds, *prāpya puṇya-kṛtāṃ lokān*, how long does this person live in those worlds? For countless number of years — *sāśvatīḥ samāḥ*, *Kṛṣṇa* says. That is, he will live there for a very long time.

It must be remembered that the person being discussed here is the same *yoga-bhraṣṭa* mentioned earlier, one whom *Arjuna* thought would lose both worlds by not having succeeded in the pursuit of *yoga*, meaning the knowledge that is *mokṣa*. In fact, the person is not a *bhraṣṭa* at all because there is no falling here, as was mentioned before. *Kṛṣṇa* uses the word *yoga-bhraṣṭa* here because, in *Arjuna's* mind, the person had fallen somehow. Therefore, *Kṛṣṇa* wants to negate any kind of falling with reference to this person by telling *Arjuna* that the person he thought of as *yoga-bhraṣṭa* is born, *abhijāyate*, into surroundings that are conducive to the pursuit of this knowledge.

*Kṛṣṇa* describes these surroundings with the words, *śucīnāṃ śrīmatāṃ gehe*, meaning in the house of a person of wealth and culture who is also committed to *dharma* — therefore, called a *śuci*. The word *śrīmat* suggests wealth and abundance of comforts, etc. By the word *śuci*, culture is emphasised here because there can be an abundance of wealth in a home where, for example, the father is a Mafia don. Such a house is not conducive to the pursuit of knowledge; it is more like a prison than a home with its high spiked walls and sentries posted everywhere. In such circumstances, wealth itself becomes a prison. This kind of wealth, then, is not referred to here, the point being made by the word *śuci*.



## ONE'S SURROUNDINGS SHOULD BE CONDUCTIVE

The words, 'śucināṃ gehe,' implies a family that has a value for values, a value for living a life of *dharma*. This, then, is the kind of family into which the *yoga-bhraṣṭa* is born, *Kṛṣṇa* says. In these conducive surroundings, the person will pick up certain values. To be born into such a family is not easy and is to be recognised as a great advantage since a person can also be born into a place with some handicap or other. To have a father or mother who is an alcoholic is considered to be a wrong start. A wrong start, however, does not mean that there is nothing to be gained. Perhaps the person can exhaust something, which makes it a good start since all's well that ends well.

What is to be appreciated here is that to get out of a wrong start is very difficult. Whereas, where the start is conducive, then the person's pursuit of *mokṣa* can proceed. In the very beginning of his life, he will show the signs of a *sannyāsī* because he has to fulfil what he has started. The conducive surroundings enable him to live a life of prayer and think constantly of *Īśvara*. Thinking always of *Īśvara*, he looks into what *Īśvara* is, questions what the truth of everything is, what the cause of everything is — all of which is thinking of *Īśvara*, *īśvara-smaraṇa*.

From this we can see that there is no such thing as a bad lot for the person either in terms of this life or in the hereafter. Even coming back to this life, he picks up the thread and continues. And to facilitate his pursuit, his birth will be in a better place, meaning that it will be more conducive for gaining the knowledge.

*Kṛṣṇa* then mentions another possibility for the person who had not yet gained the knowledge.

अथवा योगिनामेव कुले भवति धीमताम् ।

एतद्धि दुर्लभतरं लोके जन्म यदीदृशम् ॥ ४२ ॥

*athavā yogināmeva kule bhavati dhīmatām*

*etaddhi durlabhataram loke janma yadīdṛśam*

Verse 42

अथवा *athavā* — or; धीमताम् *dhīmatām* — of people who are wise; योगिनाम् *yoginām* — of *yogīs*; एव *eva* — indeed; कुले *kule* — in the family; भवति *bhavati* — is born; यत् *īdṛśam* जन्म *janma* — this birth of this kind; हि *hi* — indeed; लोके *loke* — in the world; एतत् *etad* दुर्लभतरम् *durlabhataram* — this (is) very difficult to gain

Or he is indeed born into the family of wise *yogīs*. A birth such as this is indeed very difficult to gain in this world.

We have seen that there is no such thing as a bad lot, *durgati*, for a *yogī*, a *sannyāsī*, who has the desire to know the self. Anyone who has taken a step towards knowing oneself has already initiated a process of unwinding oneself from *saṃsāra*.

You wind yourself in *saṁsāra* by *karma* without even questioning whether you are a *kartā*, a doer or not. Then, within the *saṁsāra*, retaining the doership centred on the self, you try to accomplish various ends. And these ends are accomplished on the basis of the desire for something other than *ātmā*, all of which we saw earlier.

But, here, you are questioning the very *svarūpa* of *ātmā*. You may not know whether you are a *kartā* or not, but at least you are questioning, you are inquiring into it. By asking, ‘What is *ātmā*?’ you are not taking whatever *ātmā* is for granted. Generally, people only try to avoid the *duḥkha* that results from the limitations and bondage experienced by the *kartā*, the subject, without ever questioning the subject itself. Therefore, all their activity is only to bring about something desirable. This kind of life is called *saṁsāra*.

### **SAMŚĀRA IS A DISEASE AND NO ONE GOES FOR THE CURE**

*Samśāra* is a disease and no one goes for the cure. But, once you pay attention to the very subject and ask, who is this subject, what is this ‘I,’ etc., then you have initiated an auspicious desire – *śubhecchā*, a desire for *ātmā* – *ātma-icchā*, that has to result in *mokṣa*. Thus, *Kṛṣṇa*’s assurance that there is no way that the person will come to a bad end. He also gave *Arjuna* a little inside information, as it were — ‘The one you call *yoga-bhraṣṭa*, *Arjuna*, just picks up the thread in his next birth and continues his pursuit of knowledge.’ The person’s prayerful life itself produces certain *puṇya*. And because of that *puṇya*, the person gains a pleasant stay in the hereafter followed by rebirth in a situation conducive to his pursuit of knowledge.

The idea being conveyed here is that if there is a life after death, a world other than this one, that world will be good for the person. All experiences there will be happy experiences. Therefore, even in the hereafter, there is no such thing as a bad lot for the person. And, having enjoyed the result, the *puṇya*, of his prayerful life in the hereafter, he then comes back to this earth with an *adhikāri-śarīra*, a body that is qualified to gain the knowledge, meaning that the person returns as a human being. He will not come back in a lower form but will definitely be born as a human being into a set-up that is conducive for his pursuit. Therefore, there is no question of a bad lot anywhere.

Any physical body is called *yoni*, *yoni* meaning ‘womb,’ of which there are three types — *deva-yoni*, a celestial body; *manuṣya-yoni*, the body of a human being; and *adho-yoni*, the body assumed by lower-life beings. *Manuṣya-yoni* is the incarnation in which a physical body enjoying a free will is assumed, meaning a human body or its equivalent, here or anywhere else. A person need not be born on this particular planet necessarily, but in some set-up or other he will be born.

Here, *Kṛṣṇa* describes the set-up into which the person under discussion will be born as the home of a person who is highly cultured and wealthy, and at the same time, righteous — *śucināṁ śrīmatāṁ gehe*. There may be wealth, but there will also be

culture. And, if there is no wealth, there will definitely be a lot of culture. The family will also be highly ethical and committed to living a life of values. In this way, the person does not have a false start, a start that is handicapped in any way, and therefore, can easily pick up the thread of his pursuit of the knowledge.

### EVEN BETTER IS TO BE BORN INTO A FAMILY OF YOGĪS

Or, *Kṛṣṇa* goes on to say, that the person can be born into the family of a *karma-yogī*, a *mumukṣu*. A father can be a cultured person, a religious person, and perhaps a wealthy person, without being a *karma-yogī*. Even to be born into such a family gives a person a good chance to gain the knowledge that is *mokṣa*. But, if the person is born into the house of a *karma-yogī*, he has an even better chance, is the point *Kṛṣṇa* is making here.

In this verse, *yogīs* refer to *karma-yogīs* since *sannyāsīs* do not have families. And these *karma-yogīs* are also well-informed people, *dhīmatas*. Because the word ‘*dhīmatām*’ is used here, the father can be either a *jñānī* or a *mumukṣu*. The very least he will be is a *mumukṣu*. In either case, from childhood onwards, the person picks up certain values and has no problem taking to his pursuit again without any hindrance whatsoever. In other words, he will not need to work through problems related to his past, etc., because there is no problem.

In his commentary of this verse, *Śaṅkara* took the family of *yogīs* to mean a family in which there is a lack of wealth, he said ‘*daridrāṇāṃ yogināṃ kule*’ but where the father is a *yogī*. A poor man can also be a beggar and to be born into such a home implies all kinds of problems. Whereas, here, the father is a *karma-yogī* and also a well-informed person who has no wealth whatsoever. He is a *paṇḍita*, a *brāhmaṇa*. There is no such thing as a rich *brāhmaṇa* because, to be a true *brāhmaṇa*, the person must have no wealth. Therefore, *Śaṅkara* was actually praising poverty here.

To be born as a human being there has to have been some *puṇya* and *pāpa*. The poverty of the person will exhaust all his *pāpas* and his *puṇya* will be available for *yoga*. In this way, the person can take to the *yoga* track, the *jñāna* track, without any let or hindrance. This is why *Śaṅkara* said that it is better to be born into a family of *karma-yogī* who may not be rich than to be born into a rich family that has a lot of culture.

Riches have a way of getting into your head and creating certain complexes that become problems. Poverty can also create complexes, it is true. Both inferiority complex and superiority complex are problems that have to be dealt with. But, if you are born into a family where there may not be riches but where the parents are *yogīs*, there is no problem. Because they are *yogīs*, the value structure is sound and the person does not have a complex that ‘I am poor.’ Even though there is no money, he does not think of himself as a poor person. Instead, he thinks of himself as a blessed person. To have the

parentage where both parents feel blessed to be what they are, even though they have no money, is the right parentage. The point being made here is that if there is money, that is fine, but if there is no money, it is better — provided, of course, the parentage is proper.

### WHY TWO DIFFERENT KINDS OF FAMILIES?

Why does *Kṛṣṇa* mention two different kinds of families in these two verses? Should not every *yoga-bhraṣṭa* be born into the same kind of family? No; the family one is born into depends upon the person's *karma*, their accrued *punya* and *pāpa*, and everyone's *punyas* and *pāpas* differ. These *punya-pāpas* determine where a person is born, who his parents are, whether there is money or no money, etc. Wherever the person is born, however, he retains his *yoga-saṁskāras*, those impressions, those tendencies, that he had gathered before; in other words, he comes along with his previous impressions, in the form of potential tendencies, which often manifest very early in life. A baby who cries all the time may become a musician and the child who destroys everything in sight may become a civil engineer. Let's see!

These tendencies are what we call *saṁskāras* and they manifest in your life without your cultivating them. This is why two children who are born to the same parents are so different. One child has certain tendencies and the other child has other tendencies. One child goes for music and the other for art because of their *saṁskāras*. These *saṁskāras* are what is meant by *prārabdha-karma*, the *karma* that results in a certain body being born into a given situation and having a particular set of experiences. The *saṁskāras* have to manifest themselves and they do so through certain professions, etc. *Yoga-saṁskāras* are the same; they will be there in the psyche of the child whether he is born into a cultured family committed to *dharma* or into the family of *karma-yogī*.

Therefore, the criterion is not to be born into a particular kind of family. This does not come into the picture at all because there is no necessity for it. Wherever the person is born is fine because he is born with the *yoga-saṁskāras*. However, certain opportunities are necessary so that the *yoga-saṁskāras* that manifest will not be overwhelmed by *adharmā-saṁskāras*, which is also possible. Because wrong tendencies can be gathered as a child, these can overpower the *yoga-saṁskāras* you had previously gathered. In order for the *yoga-saṁskāras* to manifest naturally in the form of a serious pursuit of knowledge on the part of a person who was previously a *yogī*, the 'born-again' *yogī* should not be overpowered by a life of *adharmā*, wrong values, false values, etc. Therefore, it is important for this person to have the proper set-up to pick up the thread and continue from where he left.

### A SEEKER CAN BE BORN ANYWHERE

These two verses do not imply that everyone who takes to this pursuit has to be born in one of these two places either in a rich, cultured family or in a family of

*karma-yogīs*. That is not the point here. The point is that those who desire self-knowledge are born everywhere. But we are not talking about all seekers here; we are talking specifically about people who were *sannyāsīs* or seekers before and did not accomplish what they had set out to accomplish before they died away. These are the people whom *Arjuna* thought of as fallen people because they seem to have lost both worlds, the world of *saṃsāra* and the worlds produced by performing *karma*, and they did not gain the *yoga*, the vision of sameness. Therefore, in response to *Arjuna*'s concern, *Kṛṣṇa* tells him here that they are born in a set-up where there is no obstacle to their pursuit of knowledge.

The *yoga-saṃskāra* will always be there; once the person directs his or her attention there, the *yoga-saṃskāra* never dies. But it can be overpowered by *adharmā*. And, even if it is overpowered by *adharmā*, provided the person realises it, the *adharmā* can be exhausted, purified, by living prayerfully. In this way, whatever *adharmā-saṃskāra* are there are all exhausted; you are rid of them for good. Then the *yoga-saṃskāra* comes up again and the person continues.

And, to pick up this thread naturally, without any obstacles whatsoever, the person has to be born into a certain environment. For example, an environment, where the father is seriously studying *vedānta-śāstra* and the mother is always talking about it, is a wonderful start indeed. As a child, I used to hear such talk constantly. For instance, if I asked my mother for something before going to bed, she would never say, 'I will give it to you tomorrow.' Instead, she would say, 'If you get up tomorrow, then I will give it to you.' This is a wonderful thing 'if you get up' means 'if you survive.' And my mother was not the only person saying this; every other mother in India did the same thing. It is the culture. There are no promises, only the attitude, 'If we survive, we shall see.' This means that, from childhood onward, you accept the fact that you do not have complete control over things.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF AN ATTITUDE OF ACCEPTANCE

Control is a problem. Because you want to control, all the problems come. Whereas, if you accept that there can be many a slip between the cup and the lip, that there are certain things that you have no control over, then there is an attitude towards life that is very healthy. You do what you can and you are ready to take what comes. To have this attitude from childhood is a very good start, whatever other problems there may be. If everything else is also conducive, if there is education, values, and communication, it is a very wonderful start indeed.

Such a start is what *Kṛṣṇa* is referring to in these two verses. First, he says that to be born into the highly cultured and ethical family of a rich man is great. And then he says that there is another birth that is even greater, meaning rarer, more difficult to accomplish — a birth enjoying the parentage of well-informed *karma-yogīs*.

Well-informed *yogīs* are those who know they are *yogīs*, which means they are *mumukṣus*. They know they are seeking knowledge, that they have to gain knowledge to gain *mokṣa*. To be born to parents of such wisdom, to have a birth of this nature — *yat idr̥ṣaṃ janma*, is very difficult to gain in this world — *etat hi durlabhataraṃ loke*, *Kṛṣṇa* says here, definitely more difficult than being born in a rich man's family, which is also difficult. Having gained the parentage of *yogīs*, however, the situation is much better, much more conducive, than the other, there being absolutely nothing to stop the person from pursuing *yoga* further.

### RICHES ARE USUALLY ACCOMPANIED BY A CERTAIN EGO

The saying that a rich man can pass through the gates of heaven as easily as a camel can pass through the eye of a needle is not directed at the riches themselves. However, along with riches, there is usually a certain ego; therefore, there is no humility. A rich man thinks he can buy anything, accomplish anything. This is the problem; the riches themselves are not the problem.

Further, *Kṛṣṇa* says:

तत्र तं बुद्धिसंयोगं लभते पौर्वदेहिकम् ।

यतते च ततो भूयः संसिद्धौ कुरुनन्दन ॥ ४३ ॥

*tatra taṃ buddhisamyogaṃ labhate paurvadehikam*  
*yatate ca tato bhūyaḥ saṃsiddhau kurunandana*

Verse 43

तत्र *tatra* — there; पौर्वदेहिकम् *paurva-dehikam* — what existed in a previous body; तम् *tam* — that; बुद्धिसंयोगम् *buddhisamyogaṃ* — connection through the intellect; लभते *labhate* — gains; कुरुनन्दन *kurunandana* — O Joy of the *Kuru* family! (*Arjuna*); च *ca* — and; ततः *tataḥ*; भूयः *bhūyaḥ* — further than that (gained previously); संसिद्धौ *saṃsiddhau* — for success (in *yoga*); यतते *yatate* — strives

There, he gains a connection through the intellect with that which existed in his previous body and strives for further success (in *yoga*) than that (gained previously), O Joy of the *Kuru* family!

*Tatra* refers to either of the two families referred to in the previous two verses, the cultured, *dhārmika* family of the wealthy man committed to *dharma* or the family of *yogīs*. There, the person picks up the thread of what existed in his previous life when he was a *sannyāsī*.

Previously the person enjoyed a particular body and, in that body, he began a life of *yoga*, a pursuit of knowledge which he did not gain before he died away. Now, in the present body, his *buddhi* connects itself to what existed before — *taṃ buddhi-samyogaṃ labhate paurva-dehikam*. What kind of a connection is this? Is it

something like spaceships docking? No. The connection with what existed before means that the person picks up the thread from where he left behind in a previous birth and continues to gain greater success.

And then what happens? The person again becomes a *sannyāsi*, a *yati*, and because of the previous *saṁskāras*, makes an even greater effort to gain more than he gained before, *tātaḥ bhuyaḥ*. Why? For success in *yoga*, *saṁsiddhau*, to gain the knowledge that is *mokṣa*.

*Kṛṣṇa* uses *Arjuna*'s words again here. *Arjuna* had asked, '*Kṛṣṇa*, having not gained success in *yoga*, what end does the person reach — *aprāpya yoga-saṁsiddhiṁ kām gatiṁ Kṛṣṇa gacchati?*' Answering *Arjuna*'s question, *Kṛṣṇa* talks about the same *saṁsiddhi*, success in *yoga*, which is in the form of self-knowledge. For gaining that *saṁsiddhi*, the person can make further effort because he has the *buddhi-saṁyoga*, the connection with the *saṁskāras* he had before.

#### THE CONNECTION WITH THE PAST IS BY MEANS OF THE INTELLECT

This is why, wherever there is a man studying the *śāstra*s, generally at least one of his children will show an interest at a very young age. This child will go and sit with the father and will not be interested in things that children are usually interested in. Why? Because there is a connection with the previous tendencies, *pūrva-saṁskāras*, through the intellect.

*Arjuna* was addressed as *Kurunandana* here, *Kuru* being the name of the family into which *Arjuna* was born. *Kurunandana* means the joy of the *Kuru* family. *Kṛṣṇa* perhaps uses this name here to remind *Arjuna* of the advantages of this present birth.

Further, *Kṛṣṇa* says:

पूर्वाभ्यासेन तेनैव हियते ह्यवशोऽपि सः ।  
जिज्ञासुरपि योगस्य शब्दब्रह्मातिवर्तते ॥ ४४ ॥  
*pūrvābhyāsenā tenaiva hriyate hyavaśo'pi saḥ*  
*jijñāsurapi yogasya śabdabrahmātivartate*

Verse 44

तेन पूर्व-अभ्यासेन *tena pūrva-abhyāsenā* —by this previous practice; एव *eva* —alone; अवशः अपि *avaśaḥ api* — even helplessly; सः *saḥ* — he; हियते हि *hriyate hi* — is indeed carried away; योगस्य *yogasya* — of *yoga*; जिज्ञासुः अपि *jijñāsuḥ api* — even as one who is desirous of the knowledge; शब्दब्रह्म *śabda-brahma* — the Veda; अतिवर्तते *ativartate* — goes beyond

By this previous practice alone, he is carried away helplessly. Even as one who is desirous of the knowledge of *yoga* goes beyond the Veda — that is beyond the *karma-kāṇḍa* of the Veda.

Here, *Kṛṣṇa* intends to remove any doubt about whether the person would gain the knowledge once he began the pursuit. ‘Suppose, just suppose, he does not gain the knowledge. What will happen to him?’ is the question dealt with here. Suppose he gets caught up in Sesame Street<sup>1</sup> as a child and then later gets lost on the 42nd Street,<sup>2</sup> what then? After all, there are no end to the streets in life that one can get lost on. Suppose the person gets lost in this way, then, how do the *yoga-saṁskāras* stand a chance?

These hypothetical situations have no chance of occurring, *Kṛṣṇa* says here. Even if the person is not interested in this *yoga*, even if he wants to avoid it, it will keep popping up for him because the *saṁskāra* is there. No matter how hard he tries to avoid it, he will be taken away by it, helplessly — *avaśaḥ api hriyate*. Why? Because of his previous practice itself, by the pursuit of *yoga* that he had undertaken before — *tena pūrva-abhyāseṇa eva*. He need not do anything now to become a seeker; the old pursuit is enough to carry him along.

The word *avaśa* here implies that he has no control over the matter. He is absorbed by the *yoga*, taken away by it, pulled into it by the previous practice — even if he is not interested!

But, he is interested in it; in fact, he is interested in nothing else. He wants to know what it is all about. And, even if he is not that interested, even if he is only mildly curious, this *yoga* will keep popping into his head and he will want to know what self-knowledge is, what all the talk about enlightenment means, and so on.

Even a simple, curious desire is enough, *Kṛṣṇa* says here, for him to be above the Veda, to transcend the Veda, i.e., the *karma* portion of the Veda — *śabda-brahma ativartate*. It will cause him to give up all the *karmas* again, become a *sannyāsī*, and continue his pursuit of the knowledge.

Nothing will interest him except the subject matter known as *Vedānta*. Nothing else, none of the means and ends discussed in the Veda, will interest him at all. In other words, in no time this person will discover *vairāgya*, dispassion, because it is natural for him.

## ONCE SELF-INQUIRY HAS BEGUN, THERE IS NO GOING BACK

*Kṛṣṇa* answers *Arjuna*’s question by telling him that once you have started to inquire into the self, there is no going back. Nor is there a bad end of any kind; there is

<sup>1</sup> A popular TV serial in the United States.

<sup>2</sup> A street in Manhattan, New York, famous for its night clubs, etc.



only a continuous pursuit until what is to be gained — self-knowledge — is gained. Until then, the pursuit is never stopped, is never affected, in any way. This, then, was an assurance. *Kṛṣṇa*'s words are the *pramāṇa* here. Although there is some supporting logic, the words alone are the *pramāṇa*, there being no other way of proving them to be right or wrong.

In the next verse, *Kṛṣṇa* describes the ultimate result of this pursuit.

प्रयत्नाद्यतमानस्तु योगी संशुद्धकिल्बिषः ।

अनेकजन्मसंसिद्धस्ततो याति परां गतिम् ॥ ४५ ॥

*prayatnādyatamānastu yogī saṁśuddhakilbiṣaḥ*  
*anekajanmasaṁsiddhastato yāti parāṁ gatim*

Verse 45

तु *tu* — whereas; प्रयत्नात् *prayatnāt* — by means of the will; यतमानः *yatamānaḥ* — one who makes effort; योगी *yogī* — the *yogī*; संशुद्ध-किल्बिषः *saṁśuddha-kilbiṣaḥ* — the one who is cleansed of all impurities; अनेक-जन्म-संसिद्धः *aneka-janma-saṁsiddhaḥ* — accomplished in many births; ततः *tataḥ* — then; पराम् *parām* — ultimate; गतिम् *gatim* — end; याति *yāti* — gains

Whereas the *yogī* who makes an effort by means of the will (and who), cleansed of all impurities, is successful after many births. Then, he (or she) gains the ultimate end.

In this verse, *Kṛṣṇa* picks up from where he left off when he had been talking about *yoga* and the *yogī* before *Arjuna* asked his question. Having defined *yoga* as the vision of sameness in all beings, he now talks about the *yogī* who has this vision, first referring to him as *yatamāna*, a person who is making effort. The word *prayatna* also means effort. *Śaṅkara* clarifies the use of these two words here, saying that *prayatna* refers to the will of the person, meaning that there is great will on the person's part because what is to be gained is very difficult to accomplish. It is against all odds, so to speak. Thus, '*prayatnāt yatamānaḥ*' refers to the one who is making effort with his or her will.

The *yogī* discussed here is also the one for whom all the impurities have been removed, cleansed — *saṁśuddha-kilbiṣa*. These impurities are the *rāga-dveṣas*, the *pāpas* and their psychological outcome like guilt, etc. The person who has cleansed himself or herself from all of them, by living a life of *karma-yoga* is *saṁśuddha-kilbiṣa*. This purification is not something that is accomplished in one lifetime, *Kṛṣṇa* says. It has taken many births to remove these impurities.

**TO BE A SEEKER IS NO ORDINARY ACCOMPLISHMENT**

Even to have gained the *upādhi*, the body, of a seeker, a *mumukṣu*, to have the desire for *mokṣa*, is itself not an ordinary accomplishment. It has taken many births to come to this pursuit. The many births, *aneka-janma*, is only with reference to the past because now the person is studying the *Gītā*. Therefore, the person being addressed here is called *aneka-janma-saṁsiddha*, one who has taken many births to come to the point of wanting to inquire.

The desire for liberation itself is something born out of *aneka-janma*. The proper *antaḥ-karaṇa*, the mind, and the proper *upādhi*, body, has to be gained for gaining this knowledge — all of which has now been accomplished by this person after many births. In each *janma* the person gathered a little bit of *yoga-saṁskāra*, the *saṁskāra* that is conducive to the pursuit of knowledge.

Gathering adequate *yoga-saṁskāra* over many births is a little like becoming a millionaire after you have gathered coupons for a long period of time. Even at the cost of money, you gather this kind of *saṁskāra*, which is an entirely different type of wealth. The person under discussion here has amassed *yoga-saṁskāra*; he went on gathering it and accumulating it like some great miser until, finally, the *puṇya* gathered makes him an *aneka-janma-saṁsiddha*. Therefore, *tataḥ*, having prepared himself in this way, the person is qualified for the knowledge.

We can also take *saṁsiddha* here to mean one who has clear knowledge, since the person is said to be a *saṁsuddha-kilbiṣa*, one whose mind is pure and who has gained *saṁsiddhi*, the vision of sameness. This clear knowledge is the result of a number of *janmas* in which the *yoga-saṁskāra* was gathered. Having this clear knowledge, then, the person is called *aneka-janma-saṁsiddha*.

**AN END THAT NEVER ENDS**

Knowledge being *mokṣa*, the person is also said to have gained the most exalted end — *parā gati*. Every end comes to an end, but *mokṣa* is an end that does not come to an end. It is the one end from which one does not return. After all, any end that comes to an end is not really an end; it is only a lap, a circular lap. You keep moving around in the circle of *saṁsāra*, not getting out. All that happens is that you keep coming back to the same point. To distinguish *mokṣa* as an end from which, there is no coming back, the word ‘end,’ *gati*, has an adjective here — *parā*, the most exalted end. *Mokṣa* is the end that is gained by one who pursues self-knowledge and it is an end from which there is no return.

Therefore, *Kṛṣṇa* tells *Arjuna* to be a *yogī* in the next verse.

तपस्विभ्योऽधिको योगी ज्ञानिभ्योऽपि मतोऽधिकः ।

कर्मिभ्यश्चाधिको योगी तस्माद्योगी भवार्जुन ॥ ४६ ॥

*tapasvibhyo'dhiko yogī jñānibhyo'pi mato'dhikaḥ*  
*karmibhyaścādhiko yogī tasmādyogī bhavārjuna*

Verse 46

योगी *yogī*— a *yogī*; तपस्विभ्यः *tapasvibhyaḥ* — to those who live a life of meditation; अधिकः *adhikaḥ* —superior; ज्ञानिभ्यः *jñānibhyaḥ* — to the scholars; अपि *api* — even; अधिकः *adhikaḥ* — superior; योगी *yogī* — a *yogī*; कर्मिभ्यः च *karmibhyaḥ ca* — and to those who perform action; अधिकः *adhikaḥ* — superior; मतः *mataḥ* — is considered; तस्मात् *tasmāt* — therefore,; अर्जुन *arjuna* — O *Arjuna*!; योगी भव *yogī bhava* — be a *yogī*

A *yogī* is considered superior to those who live a life of meditation, superior even to the scholars, and superior to those who perform action. Therefore, O *Arjuna*, be a *yogī*!

Here, *adhika* means *utkr̥ṣṭa*, the best, the most exalted, in terms of what a person has to be. *Kṛṣṇa* has already defined the most exalted person as a *yogī*, a definition that he repeats in the next verse, as we shall see. In the present verse, this *yogī* is described as one who is superior to all the *tapasvīs*, those who perform various kinds of meditation, and to all the *karmīs*, meaning those who perform the enjoined *vaidika* rituals.

Both types of people, *tapasvīs* and *karmīs*, are *mumukṣus* and are in no way being condemned here. In fact, they are people who engage in their respective activities for the sole purpose of becoming the *yogī* who is the most exalted of them all, the one who either pursues *dhyāna-yoga*, contemplation on *ātmā* as *Brahman*, or who has already accomplished it, having gained this knowledge. Such a *yogī* is definitely superior to these two types of people, said here.

## SCHOLARSHIP ALONE DOES NOT GIVE ONE THE VISION

The *tapasvī* is not one who has to find a particular end; rather, the very *tapas* has to resolve into this *yogī* alone. Thus, it can be said that the *yogī* is superior to the *tapasvī* — *tapasvibhyaḥ adhikaḥ yogī*. In the same way, the *yogī* is superior to the scholars — *jñānibhyaḥ adhikaḥ yogī*. Here the word *jñānī* refers to the one who knows the Veda. They can recite it and they may even know the meaning of the words. However, one does not gain the knowledge, the vision of the Veda, by mere scholarship alone. There has to be a commitment to this knowledge and its pursuit for there to be any possibility of gaining the vision of sameness in all beings.

Since this verse is about a *yogī* who already has the knowledge, scholarship that is talked about here must necessarily exclude *Vedānta*. Therefore, *jñānī* has to be taken as someone other than the *yogī* under discussion. Śāṅkara clarifies this point in his commentary to this verse by referring to *jñānīs* as those who have scholarship, *pāṇḍitya*, with reference to the meaning of the Veda, *śāstrārtha*, specifically the first portion of the Veda — the *pūrva-mīmāṃsā-śāstra*. We can also include the *vedānta-śāstra* here since scholars can know the meaning of the words without understanding that it is the meaning of themselves. However, *vedānta-śāstra* would usually not be included here because the verse itself is *vedānta-śāstra*. These scholars, then, are those who have scholarship in all the other *śāstra* but the *vedānta-śāstra*, and their scholarship has to pay off in the form of this *yoga*, a *yoga* characterised by clear vision of the *vastu*, the truth of everything. Already having this vision, the *yogī* is said to be superior to the scholars — *jñānibhyaḥ adhikaḥ yogī*.

### THEREFORE, BE A YOGĪ

The *yogī* who is understood to be superior to the scholars and to the *tapasvīs* is also thought to be superior to those who perform rituals, the *karmīs* — *karmibhyaḥ ca adhikaḥ yogī*. Therefore, what does *Kṛṣṇa* tell *Arjuna* to become? ‘Be a *yogī*, *Arjuna* — *tasmāt yogī bhava arjuna!*’ *Kṛṣṇa* says here. Having been given this advice, what was *Arjuna* to do? Based on everything *Kṛṣṇa* has just said, this *yogī* is a *sannyāsī*, one who gives up everything and sits in meditation. Does this not mean that *Arjuna* has to do the same?

Originally, *Kṛṣṇa* had asked *Arjuna* to get up and fight, explaining that *karma* was better for him than *sannyāsī*. Whereas, now, *Kṛṣṇa* is telling him to become a *yogī*, a *sannyāsī*. What does *Kṛṣṇa* mean by all of this? Again, then, *Arjuna* was confused.

### FIRST A KARMA-YOGĪ, THEN A YOGĪ

The point *Kṛṣṇa* is making here is that first one lives a life of *karma-yoga* in order to gain a mind that is prepared for the knowledge. Then one becomes a *yogī*, a *sannyāsī*. In other words, you have to become a *yogī* after being a *karma-yogī*. This is what *Kṛṣṇa* means when he says, ‘Be a *yogī*, *Arjuna!* — *yogī bhava arjuna.*’

‘*Yogī*’ here means one who is firmly established in the clear vision *samyag-darśana-niṣṭhā*, which means a *sannyāsī*. ‘Become that *sannyāsī*, *Arjuna,*’ *Kṛṣṇa* is saying. ‘You need not give up your *karma* or anything. Running away is not going to help you in anyway. You must work towards becoming that *yogī* who has the clear vision. Therefore, become that *yogī!*’

Why does *Kṛṣṇa* compare this *yogī* to other *yogīs* here? Once the word *yogī* is mentioned, all kinds of ideas come to mind. Therefore, which *yogī* should I become, becomes the question. Because everyone wants to become the best person, the most

exalted person, *śreṣṭha-puruṣa*, *Kṛṣṇa* compares the *yogī* with the *tapasvīs*, the *paṇḍitas*, and the *karmīs*. Having said that the *yogī* is superior to all of them, he urged *Arjuna* to become that most exalted *yogī*.

*Kṛṣṇa* defines *yoga* here in the sixth chapter of the *Gītā* as *duḥkha-saṃyoga-viyoga*, dissociation from association with sorrow. The verse presently under study has to be understood in the context of this definition and in terms of everything *Kṛṣṇa* has said previously. The sameness of vision, seeing oneself in all beings and all beings in oneself, is all part of what he has said.

That the *yogī* discussed here is one who has this vision is made very clear in the next verse.

योगिनामपि सर्वेषां मत्तेनान्तरात्मना ।

श्रद्धावान् भजते यो मां स मे युक्ततमो मतः ॥ ४७ ॥

*yogināmapi sarveṣāṃ madgatenaantarātmanā*

*śraddhāvān bhajate yo māṃ sa me yuktatamo mataḥ*

Verse 47

यः *yaḥ* — the one who; श्रद्धावान् *śraddhāvān* — has *śraddhā*; मत्तेन *antārātmanā* — with a mind (*antarātmā*), absorbed in Me; माम् भजते *mām bhajate* — contemplates upon Me; सः *saḥ* — he; सर्वेषाम् योगिनाम् *sarveṣām yoginām* — among all the *yogīs*; अपि *api* — even; युक्ततमः *yuktatamaḥ* — the most exalted; मे मतः *me mataḥ* — (this is) my vision

The one who has *śraddhā*, who with a mind absorbed in Me, contemplates upon Me, he is the most exalted among all *yogīs*. (This is) My vision.

*Kṛṣṇa* knows that there were many kinds of *yogīs*, but he is not talking about any of them here. For *yogīs* who meditate on various deities, there is a certain duality in that they take themselves to be different from that upon which they are meditating. Therefore, they retain their sense of *kartā*, doership, and, as doers, they do various types of *yoga*. Although these meditators are all laudable, they are not the *yogī*. *Kṛṣṇa* is pointing out here the most exalted among *yogīs* — *yoginām api sarveṣāṃ yuktatamaḥ*.

The *yogī* being discussed is the one who contemplates upon *Kṛṣṇa* as the *Īśvara* — *yaḥ māṃ bhajate* — not on a particular deity. Such a person meditates on the one who is everything, the one who is the cause of the world, *jagat-kāraṇa* and who is not separate from the *jīva-ātmā*. The mind of this *yogī* is totally absorbed in this *Parameśvara*. Therefore, *Kṛṣṇa* says, '*madgatena antarātmanā māṃ bhajate*.' In effect he was saying 'I am he; he is I.' It means that, for this person, there is no separation between himself and *Īśvara*. For this reason, then, the person is considered to be the most exalted among *yogīs*.

**THERE ARE NOT TWO YOGĪS HERE**

Here *Kṛṣṇa* is not comparing the *yogī* with the *yogī* in the previous verse; he is simply describing that same *yogī* further. If this point is missed, as it sometimes is, certain problems in understanding can arise. The *yogī* under discussion is the one who was said to be superior to those who meditate, superior to the scholars who know the Veda, and superior also to those who perform rituals. And why is this *yogī* superior? Because, contemplating on the *Parameśvara*, the *para-ātmā*, alone the mind of the person is completely resolved. Having gained this identity, the person is said to be accomplished in *yoga*.

The previous verse actually completed this chapter on meditation, but *Kṛṣṇa* wants to briefly restate exactly what *yoga* is. The identity between *Parameśvara* and the *jīva* is *yoga*. And who gains this *yoga*? The one who has *śraddhā*, *śraddhāvān*, gains this *yoga*. *Śraddhā* is the attitude born out of the appreciation that the *śāstra* is the means for gaining the knowledge that is *mokṣa*. Such a person gains the knowledge by meditating on *Parameśvara* until the identity between the *jīva* and *Parameśvara*, as revealed by the *śāstra*, is clear. Having gained this knowledge, the person is a *yogī*, the most exalted of human beings, there being no one superior to this *yogī*.

With this verse, then, the sixth chapter comes to an end.

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 ???

*om tatsat. iti śrīmadbhagavadgītāsu upaniṣatsu brahmavidyāyāṃ  
 yogaśāstre śrīkṛṣṇārjunasaṃvāde dhyānayogo nāma  
 ṣaṣṭho'dhyāyah*

In the *Bhagavadgītā*, which has the status of *Upaniṣad*, having the knowledge of *brahman* and *karma-yoga* as its subject matter, in the dialogue that took place between Lord *Kṛṣṇa* and *Arjuna*, this is the sixth chapter, entitled 'The Topic of Contemplation.'

**ABABABABAB**

## A SUMMARY OF FIRST SIX CHAPTERS

With the completion of the sixth chapter, the first *ṣaṭka* — a group of six chapters — of the *Gītā* is over. Although the same topic, '*tat tvam asi*,' runs through all eighteen chapters, there is a marked difference between each of the three groups, as you will see when we take up the seventh chapter. '*Tat tvam asi*' is an equation that can be looked at in terms of these three groups of six chapters, each group called a *ṣaṭka* in Sanskrit. In the first *ṣaṭka*, the meaning of the word *tvam* is analysed, in the second *ṣaṭka*, the meaning of the word *tat* is analysed, and in the third *ṣaṭka*, the meaning of the word *asi*, which equates *tvam* and *tat*, is analysed. Thus, the three groups of six chapters deal predominantly with *tvam-pada-artha*, *tat-pada-artha*, and *asi-pada-artha*, respectively.

The six chapters that we have seen so far talk about *tvam*, 'you,' as a person with *dharma-adharma* conflict. In the first chapter, *Arjuna* was presented in a tight situation, wherein his affections conflicted with the call of duty. One's duty is one thing and one's affections are quite another. And *Arjuna* found himself more moved by the love and affection he had for the elders of his family than by his duty.

As long as your duty does not come into conflict with your affection, it is easy to perform your duties. And, if your call of duty is so pronounced that your affection does not overpower it, you can still heed to the call and do your duty, meaning that you make your affection subserve the duty. However, there are also occasions where the affection gets the better of the duties, resulting in a conflict. This happens because you cannot dismiss duty just like that; it is something that you know is to be done; nor can you dismiss your affections just like that. The very fact that you sometimes go by your feelings proves that they are equally powerful and are capable of completely overpowering you occasionally, which is what happened to *Arjuna*.

### ARJUNA'S PREDICAMENT

*Arjuna* had a legitimate argument for wanting to get out of this particular situation because it was one in which a lot of blood would be shed. Since killing was involved, *Arjuna's* problem definitely had a valid basis. His entire predicament, leading to an action on his part, was presented in the first chapter by *Arjuna* himself. And, after he had finished, he sat back in the chariot, prepared to give up the battle. This was the action.

He had come to the battlefield armed and ready to fight. He had even asked *Kṛṣṇa* to take him to a spot where he could see those against whom he would be fighting. Until

then, there was no problem. But, when he saw the people involved, he became different; only then did the problem arise. Only when one faces a situation can one understand the implications, and *Arjuna* saw the implications of this particular situation immediately. He saw that he had to fight against *Droṇa* and *Bhīṣma*, and he tried to tell *Kṛṣṇa* that this was not proper.

This, then, was *Arjuna's* predicament, the predicament of 'you,' *tvam*, the individual, the *jīva*, who is subject to emotions, to right and wrong, *dharma* and *adharmā*, and also to sorrow, *śoka*. *Arjuna* represented anyone who gets into a conflict and ends up in a state of sadness. Because *Arjuna* wanted to be free of this sadness, he talked to *Kṛṣṇa*. And this talking helped him not to get out of sorrow but to discover, in the process of talking, a problem that is more chronic to the human condition than the acute problem that was right there in front of him.

In front of *Arjuna* was the problem of having to fight this particular battle, whereas the more chronic problem was the human problem, 'I am subject to sorrow,' which is also a 'you,' *tvam*, problem. This is discerning the problem, discovering in oneself a desire for freedom from the original problem of sorrow. *Kṛṣṇa* had the knowledge that could make one free. *Arjuna* knew this fact, but he had not drawn upon it earlier because he had no interest in it before.

The first few years of *Arjuna's* life had been spent gathering valour, marrying, and so on. Later, of course, he got involved in all the problems that resulted in his going to the forest, where he spent thirteen years with no time for anything but survival and thinking about how to settle accounts with *Duryodhana*. With every thorn he removed from his foot, while walking in the forest, *Arjuna* was reminded of the hurt rendered by *Duryodhana*, whose scheming ways were responsible for his having to suffer in the forest in the first place. Therefore, *Duryodhana* was a much bigger thorn for *Arjuna* than any of the thorns he had to remove from his feet.

*Arjuna* had been born with a golden spoon in his mouth but, still, he had to suffer this period of exile. The presence of his wife, *Draupadī*, in the forest was also a reminder of the account to be settled with *Duryodhana*, especially since she had decided not to tie her hair until the insult she had suffered had been avenged. Thus, her flowing hair would definitely have been a constant reminder to *Arjuna* about the need to get even with *Duryodhana*. Naturally, then, *Arjuna* had no time no chance, to think about *ātmā*, *Brahman*, or anything.

### ARJUNA'S LOT IS EVERYONE'S LOT

What is to be understood here is that *Arjuna's* lot is the lot of any human being whose mind is possessed, seized by, certain situations. This is all the meaning of *jīva*, individual, the meaning of the word 'you' — *tvam-pada-ārtha*. That I am hurt is 'you.' That I am subject to sorrow is 'you.' That I am called upon to do certain duties, having



been born as a person into certain situations, is also ‘you.’ And that I am not able to fulfil these duties is ‘you,’ as well. Why am I not able to fulfil them? Because my affections are different from my duties, which is also ‘you.’ Therefore, all problems are ‘you-problems’ alone.

*Arjuna* recognised this problem in the battlefield when he saw all the implications of the impending war. He knew that no one really wins a war, that both sides are always losers. Even if you have victory, the loss is very big. That *Arjuna* saw this very well was clearly demonstrated when he said, in so many words, ‘Even though, I may get back the kingdom and have all kinds of comforts and enjoyments at my command, they would all be stained with the blood of such great people as *Bhiṣma* and *Droṇa* — *rudhira-pradigdhā-bhogas*. If, in order to buy this pleasure, I have to kill all these people, what a cost it is!’<sup>1</sup> This clearly shows that *Arjuna* thought that the battle was not a worthwhile activity on any grounds.

Having concluded that the battle was not worthwhile, his next thought was, ‘What, then, is worthwhile?’ If you cannot see anything worthwhile, you get frustrated and become a drop-out. Dropping out itself is due to frustration, the frustration that comes from realising that what is commonly pursued is not worthwhile. Nothing else being very clear, the person may just drop out of everything altogether and, taking a guitar in hand, live the nomadic life of a wandering musician. A drop-out can become a simple hobo also — all because of frustration.

Here, *Arjuna’s* frustration was not due to a psychological problem. The problem was much more than that. *Arjuna* was a man of valour, a man of courage, culture, and education — a man who was highly worshipped by everyone. Because he was already known as a great man, he no longer needed to prove himself on the battlefield or elsewhere. He did not come from a dysfunctional family to have psychological problems. He was a normal person whose life was functional all the way. In fact, since he was a prince and a worthy person as well, he had grown into much more than an average person. Even so, *Arjuna* was a person — which is what people tend to forget.

## REGAINING THE KINGDOM WAS NO LONGER IMPORTANT

*Arjuna* was a human being with affections and, because of these affections, he could not see anything worthwhile about fighting. Therefore, he could not avoid the question, what is it that is worthwhile? *Arjuna* knew the answer to this question because he was born into a culture that had a value for self-knowledge. That was why his father had gone to the forest, in fact. *Arjuna* also had known other people who pursued this knowledge. But, even though he knew such knowledge existed, he had not been drawn to it previously for the reasons we have already seen. Now, however, he found that he had

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<sup>1</sup> *Gītā* – 2-5

no reason to fight, that regaining the kingdom and all that went with it would not solve the problem.

If *Arjuna* had not known about the knowledge, he would have had no place to go and nothing worthwhile to pursue. But he did know there was a direction. He knew the problem could be solved by gaining *śreyas*, *mokṣa*, and that there was no other way of solving it. He also knew that, to gain the knowledge, he had to become a *śiṣya*, a disciple, which meant he had to have a teacher. Knowing *Kṛṣṇa* as he did, *Arjuna* knew that he would find no better teacher anywhere. Therefore, he said to *Kṛṣṇa* straightaway, ‘I am your disciple. Please teach me all that is to be taught, so that, I may gain *śreyas* — *yat śreyayaḥ syāt niścitaṃ brūhi tanme śiṣyayaḥ te ahaṃ śādhi māṃ tvāṃ prapannam.*’<sup>1</sup>

*Arjuna’s* problem is to be understood within the meaning of the word ‘you,’ *tvam-pada-artha*, because the conflict belongs to ‘you,’ *tvam*, alone. There is no problem whatsoever for *Brahman*, *Īśvara*, as we shall see in the second *śaṭka* of the *Gītā*, which talks of the *tat-pada-artha*. *Īśvara*, has no problem; the individual, *jīva*, has the problem and the individual has the *jijñāsā*, the desire for knowledge.

Until now, *Arjuna’s* life had been worthwhile; even though it required a battlefield, it had helped him. And, here, on the battlefield he had a desire for the knowledge. No one else on the battlefield had this desire, it seems, least of all *Duryodhana*. Fortunately, for *Arjuna*, *Kṛṣṇa* was also on the battlefield. *Arjuna* could talk to *Kṛṣṇa*, and, because he was ready for this knowledge, *Arjuna* found a teacher in *Kṛṣṇa*. How do I know *Kṛṣṇa* was a teacher? Because he taught *Arjuna*; he did not say, ‘Shut up and fight!’ and leave it at that. Although, *Kṛṣṇa* did say something similar to *Arjuna* in order to encourage him to do his duty, he taught him. If he had not, there would be no *Gītā*. Instead, *Kṛṣṇa* could have responded to *Arjuna’s* request to teach him by giving *Arjuna* whatever psychological pep talk it would take to get him to fight. But *Kṛṣṇa* did not do this; with utmost seriousness, he began teaching *Arjuna*.

First, *Kṛṣṇa* told *Arjuna* that there was no reason for sorrow — *aśocyān anvaśocaḥ tvam* — and then proceeded to prove it in the remaining chapters of the *Gītā*. He told *Arjuna* that the wise people do not subject themselves to sorrow, whereas he, *Arjuna*, is subject to sorrow, in spite of talking words that smacked of wisdom. *Kṛṣṇa* was as much as telling *Arjuna* here that he was not as wise as his words would indicate. He did this, so that, *Arjuna* would listen to what he had to say. From the second chapter onwards, then, *Kṛṣṇa* taught *Arjuna* what the nature of *tvam* and *tat* is, and then talked about the connection between the two.

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<sup>1</sup> *Gītā* – 2-7

## 'TAT TVAM ASI' IS VEDĀNTA

*Tvam* means 'you,' which means 'I' for each person. Therefore, the nature of 'I' is the meaning of the word *tvam* in the *mahā-vākya*, *tat tvam asi*. *Vedānta* is nothing else but '*tat tvam asi*,' the statement that reveals the identity between the *jīva* and *Brahman*. In the first six chapters of the *Gītā*, *Kṛṣṇa* analysed this *tvam-pada*, the word 'you' meaning 'I,' and all that is connected to it. And how did he begin? By saying that *ātmā* is neither the subject, *kartā*, nor an object, *karma*.

To subject oneself to sorrow, one should be either a *kartā*, the subject, or *karma*, an object. But, *Kṛṣṇa* said, the *ātmā* is not subject to objectification; therefore, it can never be destroyed. Since *ātmā* is not even available for anyone to look at, where is the question of doing something to it? Time, *kāla* itself cannot approach the *ātmā* and no other means of destruction can make *ātmā* the subject of its destructive measures. *Ātmā* is therefore, definitely not an object, *karma*.

Here, it might be said that *ātmā* is not an object, perhaps it is the subject, *kartā*. No, *Kṛṣṇa* said, it is neither a direct doer nor an indirect doer of any action. Therefore, it is free from *kartṛtva*, doership. It has neither doership nor enjoyership, nor does it have the status of being an object to anything else. All that is there is *ātmā*, *Kṛṣṇa* said, *ātmā* that is free from everything and therefore, free from sorrow.

When *Arjuna* asked him to describe a wise person, *Kṛṣṇa* told him that a person of wisdom is one who is happy without there being any reason. Knowing the nature of *ātmā*, the *svarūpa* of *ātmā*, such a person is free from any limitation, being identical with *Brahman*, *Īśvara*. Here, the topic being *tvam-pada-artha*, *Kṛṣṇa* mentioned the identity of *tvam* with *Brahman*, the *tat*, of the *mahāvākya*, *tat tvam asi*, but did not go into the meaning of *tat* at length, as he did in the second group of six chapters dealing with *Īśvara*. Because *tvam-pada-artha* is equated to *tat-pada*, a proper analysis of the meaning of *tat* is also necessary to complete the unfoldment of the equation, *tat tvam asi*.

If the individual is indeed *Brahman*, this knowledge has to be gained. Therefore, *Arjuna* had a doubt about what he should do. Should he just go with *karma* or take to a life of *sannyāsa*? Since knowledge would deliver the goods, he naturally thought he should go for the knowledge, but in the process of discussing this with *Kṛṣṇa*, he was advised to do what was to be done. *Kṛṣṇa* supported his advice with a number of arguments, saying that from any standpoint — from the power standpoint, the pain standpoint, or the duty standpoint — there was nothing that really barred *Arjuna* from doing what was to be done here and now. All this was discussed in the body of the second chapter. And, because *Arjuna* had a natural doubt, there is a third chapter, again covering *tvam-pada* alone.

## IF KNOWLEDGE LIBERATES, WHY DO KARMA AT ALL?

In the third chapter, *Arjuna* asked why he should not take to knowledge, which for him amounted to taking to the life of *sannyāsa*, if knowledge is what liberates? For him, *sannyāsa* and knowledge were identical. He acknowledged that if he were interested in anything other than knowledge, then of course he should do *karma*. But he was not interested in anything else. Therefore, he thought that he should take *sannyāsa* and pursue knowledge.

*Arjuna* knew that taking *sannyāsa* was the only way to be absolved from performing his various duties, that it was a ritual to release you from all rituals and all other duties as well. In other words, it is the final ritual. Once this ritual is over, there are no more roles to play and you are free to pursue knowledge alone. To *Arjuna*, then, this seemed to be the most desirable thing to do because he was no longer interested in the kingdom; he was only interested in *mokṣa*. It seemed to be the only course open to him and, therefore, he thought it correct.

While telling *Arjuna* that he should do his duty, *Kṛṣṇa* also made sure that *Arjuna* understood that knowledge alone liberates, that only the one who knows is free, and so on. Naturally, then, *Arjuna* wanted to know and to know thoroughly. From his question, however, it was very clear that he had some insight, but that his understanding of *karma* and *sannyāsa* was not at all clear. This was why he kept asking *Kṛṣṇa* to tell him which was better, *karma* or the pursuit of knowledge.

It seemed to *Arjuna* that *Kṛṣṇa* was contradicting himself, praising knowledge as the means for liberation and, at the same time, asking him to fight. Because *Arjuna* was confused, he asked *Kṛṣṇa* to decide which would be better for him. Would *karma* give him *mokṣa* or would *jñāna* give him *mokṣa*?

## THE TWO-FOLD LIFE-STYLE

In order to clear up *Arjuna's* confusion, *Kṛṣṇa* began again, saying that he himself had introduced this two-fold life-style in the beginning — *loke asmin dvividhā niṣṭhā purā proktā mayā anagha jñāna-yogena sāṅkhyānām karma-yogena yoginām*.<sup>1</sup> One is called *jñāna-yoga* or *nivṛtti-mārga* and the other is called *karma-yoga* or *pravṛtti-mārga*. In *jñāna-yoga*, one withdraws (*nivṛtti*) from all activities to pursue knowledge and, in *karma-yoga*, one performs activities (*pravṛtti*) with the right attitude and pursues knowledge also. These same two life-styles are also found in the first two verses of the *Īśāvāsyopaniṣad*.

Having told *Arjuna* all this, *Kṛṣṇa* described *karma-yoga*, repeating what he had already said in the second chapter. He told *Arjuna* that *karma-yoga* is a means for

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<sup>1</sup> *Gītā* – 3-3

*mokṣa*, that it is not something opposed to *mokṣa*, nor is it opposed to *sannyāsa*. Rather, it is another way of gaining *mokṣa*, a way that is available for those who are not prepared to live the life of a *sannyāsī*.

The life-style known as *sannyāsa* is not an easy one. Why? Because, in *sannyāsa*, you do not have a field wherein you can express yourself, and being able to express yourself is what helps you to mature, Therefore, it is preferable to be in the field, the world, and live a life of relationship within it. Relationship means playing various roles in the world whereby you get rid of your *rāgas* and *dveṣas*. This is why *Kṛṣṇa* talked about *karma-yoga* predominantly in the third chapter. And who is this *karma-yoga* for? Not for *Īśvara*. It is for the *jīva*, *tvam-pada-artha*.

### KṚṢṆA AS ĪŚVARA

Then, *Kṛṣṇa* told *Arjuna* that what he had been telling him had been coming down throughout the ages. He had given this vision to humanity through the great sages, a few of whom *Kṛṣṇa* named at the beginning of the fourth chapter. Many kings knew it and all the *ṛṣis* knew it. Even so, it is not easily available, which is why *Duryodhanas* are so many. On hearing this, *Arjuna* had a problem.

*Kṛṣṇa* had said that he had taught those who had lived at the beginning of the creation, like *Vivasvān*, etc. How could this be? *Kṛṣṇa* was his contemporary. What was he talking about? Therefore, he wanted to know who this *Kṛṣṇa* really was? In reply, *Kṛṣṇa* told him that they both had had a number of births, and that he, *Kṛṣṇa*, knew all of his births, whereas *Arjuna* did not — *bahūni me vyatītāni janmāni tava ca arjuna tāni ahaṃ veda sarvāṇi na tvaṃ vettha parantapa*.<sup>1</sup> In other words, if *Arjuna* knew himself, he would be as free as *Kṛṣṇa*.

*Kṛṣṇa* then told *Arjuna* that he, *Kṛṣṇa*, was not an ordinary *jīva*, and that he was an incarnation of *Īśvara* — in other words, an *avatāra*. Even though he was available empirically in human form, he did not subject himself to the empirical rules of reality and therefore, he was not born of *karma*. He was born because of the prayers of the people. In fact, he was not even born. Knowing he is never born, he simply assumed a body.

### RENOUNCING THE DOER

He also told *Arjuna* that this was not only true for *Kṛṣṇa* but that it was true for *Arjuna* as well. If *Arjuna* knew he was only assuming a body, that only a form is born, that he is never born, he would be the same as *Kṛṣṇa*. One has to know that ‘I,’ *ātmā*, is never born. This is what is meant by *jñāna-karma-sannyāsa*, the renunciation of *karma* through knowledge. *Kṛṣṇa* then defined *jñāna-karma-sannyāsa* as giving up

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<sup>1</sup> *Gītā* – 4-5

*kartṛtva*, doership. And this giving up of *kartṛtva* is not an action; it is a fact that has to be understood. *Ātmā* is already given up in the sense that *ātmā* is already and always was free from doership. Knowing *ātmā* as being free from doership is *jñāna-karma-sannyāsa*, whereas in *karma-sannyāsa*, *karma* is given up but the doer is still there giving up the *karma*.

You may tell everyone that you have given up all your *karmas*, that you are a *sannyāsī*, but it is the *kartā* that says this and this *kartā* has to be dealt with — even if you take to a life of *sannyāsa*. The person who says, ‘I have done the last ritual,’ is the *kartā* and that *kartā* is the one who has to be given up. Therefore, *Kṛṣṇa* told *Arjuna* that doership is what has to be given up.

Strictly speaking, only the person who is able to see actionlessness in the midst of all activities — *karmaṇi akarma yaḥ paśyēt* — can be called a *sannyāsī*. This person is a *jñāna-karma-sannyāsī*, one who gives up all action by knowledge, by knowing that *ātmā* is not the doer. To make this even clearer, *Kṛṣṇa* said that the fire of knowledge, *jñāna-agni* destroys all *karmas*.

Although *Arjuna* was getting the knowledge from *Kṛṣṇa*, still *Kṛṣṇa* told him, as part of the teaching, to gain the knowledge with the help of a teacher who knows. Approach such teachers, *Kṛṣṇa* said, and they will teach you. Having said all of this, again he told *Arjuna* to get up and take to *karma-yoga* — *yogam ātiṣṭha uttiṣṭha*.<sup>1</sup> Why? Because *karma* can only be given up in terms of knowledge and *karma-yoga* would prepare him for that knowledge. Therefore, it is not *karma-sannyāsa* that is important, but *jñāna-karma-sannyāsa*, and the difference between the two is to be clearly understood here.

Having again been told to take to *yoga*, *Arjuna* asked the same question, using different words, ‘You praise *sannyāsa* and you also praise *yoga*, *Kṛṣṇa*. Of the two, please tell me, once and for all, which one is better — *sannyāsaṃ karmaṇāṃ Kṛṣṇa punaryogaṃ ca saṃśasi yat śreyāḥ etayoḥ ekam tat me brūhi suniścitam*.’<sup>2</sup> Here, *Arjuna* was saying that now he did not think that *Kṛṣṇa* was praising both *sannyāsa* and *karma*, but that he still had a problem. He still wanted to know which one would give him *śreyas*.

From this, we see that *Arjuna* was still beating the same drum, still harping on the same string of doubt. Therefore, once again, *Kṛṣṇa* told him that both life-styles give *mokṣa*, but because *sannyāsa* is not as simple as giving up all of one's activities, the life of *sannyāsa* cannot be of any use to a person who is not prepared for it. Contemplativeness does not come by sheer will alone; in fact, the will does not come into it at all.

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<sup>1</sup> *Gītā* – 4-42

<sup>2</sup> *Gītā* – 5-1

## IS THERE REALLY A CHOICE?

*Kṛṣṇa* was telling *Arjuna* here that he could take to *sannyāsa* if he wanted to, that no one could stop him. But whether he would be a *sannyāsī* in temperament, in disposition, was anyone's guess. Whereas *karma-yoga* would in no way deny him the knowledge. In time, he would reach *Brahman* — *yoga-yuktaḥ muniḥ brahma na cireṇa adhigacchati*.<sup>1</sup>

*Kṛṣṇa* went on to say that the one who is endowed with *yoga* is one whose mind is purified and therefore, there is mastery over the sense organs. This is the preparation needed for the knowledge to become very clear to the person. Then, the person knows that the self is the self of all beings and all beings are in the self. Once a person recognises this fact, then, even though he or she performs action, the person is not affected by the action, which is renunciation of action by knowledge.

Therefore, what one is aiming for is to become a knower of the truth, a *tattvavit*. And, to become a *tattvavit*, there is a choice of life-style, but it is really not much of a choice. In other words, if you prefer to live a life of *sannyāsa*, thinking it will be more convenient than a life of *karma-yoga*, then you had better become a *karma-yogī*, *Kṛṣṇa* was saying. Whereas, the moment you think you do not require *sannyāsa*, then you can become a *sannyāsī*. That's how it is; *sannyāsa* will stick with you if you are ready. But if you are not ready taking to the life-style itself will not make you a *jñāna-karma-sannyāsī*. Because this point has to be understood, *Kṛṣṇa* kept talking to *Arjuna*. Otherwise, he would simply have told him that he was unfit for *sannyāsa*.

## KARMA-YOGA AND THEN SANNYĀSA IS THE ORDER

*Kṛṣṇa* was not saying there is no *sannyāsa*. He was saying there is *sannyāsa*, which is what *Arjuna* found so confusing. But *Kṛṣṇa* was not confusing *Arjuna*; he was educating him. He wanted *Arjuna* to see the difference between *karma-sannyāsa* and *jñāna-karma-sannyāsa*, because his question arose from confusion. He looked at *karma-yoga* and *sannyāsa* as black and white. In fact, there is no black and white here; nor is there any grey. Both *karma-yoga* and *sannyāsa* are equally efficacious, the only difference being that you have to be ready for a life of *sannyāsa*. This preparation is possible by living a life of *karma-yoga* before becoming a *sannyāsī*.

If you take to *sannyāsa* before you are ready, then, as a *sannyāsī*, you will still have to make yourself ready. This is a very difficult thing to do — a little like becoming a professor and then becoming qualified in your subject matter. This is not an easy situation — especially for your students! Similarly, if you take to *sannyāsa* before you are ready, you are a *sannyāsī* in name only. To become a *sannyāsī* in the true sense of the word in such a situation is not impossible, but it is certainly very difficult.

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<sup>1</sup> *Gītā* – 5-6

Therefore, *Kṛṣṇa* wanted *Arjuna* to understand that the real meaning of *sannyāsa* is giving up action in terms of knowledge alone. There is no literal giving up here. By knowing you are not a doer, you give up doership, and then you are free. In the meantime, *Kṛṣṇa* said, just do what is to be done, without being excited or restless about what you are doing or not doing, and in time, this knowledge, this *sannyāsa*, will be gained. And whom is the *sannyāsa* for? Is it for *Īśvara* or for the *jīva*? Again, it is for the *jīva* alone.

## MEDITATION

At the end of the fifth chapter, *Kṛṣṇa* introduced the topic of meditation, the predominant subject matter of the sixth chapter. The meditation discussed here can be taken as that which invokes the grace of the *Īśvara*, *saguṇa-brahma*, or contemplation on *ātmā* that is *Brahman*, *nirguṇa-brahma*. Both interpretations are possible because both are meant for *jñāna*.

Meditating on *Īśvara* is meant for grace and that grace is also necessary for *jñāna*. With that grace, one gains a teacher and thereby the knowledge that is *mokṣa*. And if you have already done that, if you have a teacher and have done *śravaṇa* and *manana*, then you can live a life of contemplation, meditation — *nididhyāsana*. How one sits in meditation was also pointed out in this chapter. Again, we see that all this — the meditation and what precedes it — is for the *jīva* alone.

Thus, the first six chapters are about the *jīva*, the meaning of the word ‘you,’ the *tvam-pada-artha*, and everything that concerns this ‘you.’ What the individual has to do as a *karma-yogī*, that *karma-yoga* is a way for this person to prepare the mind for gaining the knowledge, that there is knowledge to be gained, that there is *sannyāsa* also — all this are relevant to the *tvam-pada-artha* alone. The nature of this *tvam*, *ātmā*, was revealed as being free from being either a subject, *kartā*, or an object, *karma*, and was equated to *Īśvara*, *tat-pada-artha*.

Because *tvam* and *tat* were equated in the analysis of the meaning of the word *tvam*, *Īśvara*, *tat*, has to be also analysed. Who is this *Īśvara*? How can I be *Īśvara*? Because there is this doubt about the validity of the equation, *Īśvara* is analysed in the next six chapters. Even though every chapter talks about the equation, the predominant topic of these next six chapters is *Īśvara*, the Lord.

## THE BASIS OF ARJUNA'S FEAR

For example, in the eleventh chapter, *Arjuna* gained a cosmic vision of the Lord with the grace of *Kṛṣṇa*. But, although *Arjuna* gained this vision, it was not total because he did not include himself in it. And, because he makes this distinction between himself and the whole, there is fear.



*Arjuna's* fear was so great when faced with the cosmic vision of *Īśvara* that he begged *Kṛṣṇa* to revert to his human form. He found the old form, the one with the whip in hand, much easier and more pleasant to deal with, where as in the cosmic form, the whole world was being devoured by *Kṛṣṇa*. All the beings that one could possibly imagine were between the molars of this *Īśvara*. Hanging there, in the jaws of *Īśvara*, in the jaws of time, all the *jīvas* were being ground to powder, as it were. *Arjuna* saw all of this. Naturally, then, he was very frightened. Why? Because he excluded himself from the cosmic vision, meaning that he excluded himself from the whole! And because of that he was overwhelmed by that whole.

Concluding the second *ṣaṭka*, called *Īśvara-ṣaṭka*, *Kṛṣṇa* talked about devotion to *Īśvara*, *īśvara-bhakti*, the topic of the twelfth chapter. The third *ṣaṭka*, the remaining six chapters of the *Gītā*, begins with *Kṛṣṇa* telling *Arjuna* that between him, *Arjuna* and *Īśvara* there is an identity. This identity is represented in the *mahāvākya*, 'tat tvam asi,' by the word *asi*, and is analysed in the last six chapters — what is this identity, what brings it about, etc., are analysed. Again, *Kṛṣṇa* went into the means for this knowledge, the values, and a variety of other topics. This is because, although the identity between the *jīva* and *Īśvara* exists, it is not recognised. Therefore, the means that are to be used to bring this identity about, in terms of knowledge, is discussed from the thirteenth chapter onwards.

In this way, then, the three words, *tat*, *tvam*, and *asi*, are each analysed in the three *ṣaṭkas*. We have already seen the first six chapters, dealing with the *tvam-pada*. Now, from the first verse of the seventh chapter onwards, we will see the second group of six chapters, the topic of which is *tat, Īśvara*.

## CHAPTER 7

### JÑĀNA AND VIJÑĀNA

#### INTRODUCTION

The last verse of certain chapters of the *Gītā* can seem out of context and therefore an interpolation. But if you look at the verse from the standpoint of what is going to come it proves to be a building block, a connecting link. In the fifth chapter, for instance, we had a couple of verses introducing meditation, the topic of the next chapter. In the sixth chapter, *Kṛṣṇa* says in the second last verse; ‘*tasmāt yogī bhava* — therefore, be a *yogī*.’ That statement sums up the *yoga* of meditation. But another verse follows and in this last verse there is a building block. It contains a *praśna-bīja*, a seed of a question, but not an explicit question. Let us look into the verse.

योगिनामपि सर्वेषां म?तेनान्तरात्मना ।

श्रद्धावान्भजते यो मां स मे युक्ततमो मतः ॥ ६-४७ ॥

*yogināmapi sarveṣāṃ madgatenāntarātmanā*

*śraddhāvānbhajate yo māṃ sa me yuktatamo mataḥ* (6-47)

Here *Kṛṣṇa* says, ‘By the one whose mind is absorbed in Me, the Lord, *madgatenā antarātmanā*, the one who worships Me, he is the most exalted among the *yogīs*.’ This is the seed for two obvious questions.

1. How does the *yogī* become the one whose mind is absorbed in *Īśvara*?
2. What is the nature of *Kṛṣṇa*, the Lord?

Such a doubt is possible because this has not been explained in detail so far.

The questions are detected by *Bhagavān* and he answers them in the chapters that follow — ‘*īdṛśaṃ madīyaṃ tattvam*, this is the nature of Myself, this is how one is absorbed in Me.’

#### UNFOLDMENT TO TAT-PADA BEGINS

In the first six chapters of the *Gītā*, the meaning of the word *tvam*, you the *jīva*, in the *mahāvākya*, *tat tvam asi*, was unfolded in detail. Now in the following six chapters, the word *tat*, the cause of everything, the Lord, is the predominant topic.

With a desire to unfold this, *Śrī Bhagavān* says:

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।

मय्यासक्तमनाः पार्थ योगं युञ्जन् मदाश्रयः ।

असंशयं समग्रं मां यथा ज्ञास्यसि तच्छृणु ॥ १ ॥

*śrībhagavān uvāca*

*mayyāsaktamanāḥ pārtha yogam yuñjan madāśrayaḥ*

*asaṁśayaṁ samagraṁ mām yathā jñāsyasi tacchṛṇu*

Verse 1

श्रीभगवान् *śrībhagavān* — Lord *Kṛṣṇa*; उवाच *uvāca* — said;

पार्थ *partha* — O *Pārtha*!; मयि *mayi* — in Me; आसक्तमनाः *āsaktamanāḥ* — the one whose mind, *manaḥ*, is *āsakta*, committed; मदाश्रयः *madāśrayaḥ* — having surrendered to Me; योगम् युञ्जन् *yogam yuñjan* — uniting oneself to *yoga* (*karmayoga*); यथा *yathā* — in which way; असंशयम् *asaṁśayam* — without any doubt; समग्रम् *samagram* — in totality; माम् *mām* — Me, *Īśvara*; ज्ञास्यसि *jñāsyasi* — you will know; तत् *tat* — that way; शृणु *ṣṛṇu* — please listen

*Śrī Bhagavān* said:

O *Pārtha*, please listen to the way in which you will know Me totally, without any doubt, by taking to *yoga*, with a mind committed to Me and having surrendered to Me.

With the word *mayi* in the verse, *Bhagavān* introduces himself as the topic of this and the subsequent chapters. *Mayyāsaktamanāḥ* — *mayi*, in Me, *āsaktamanāḥ*, a person whose mind is committed. The one who has such a commitment is called *mayyāsaktamanas*. *Madāśrayaḥ* — the one whose *āśraya*, basis, is Me, *Parameśvara*. He is the one for whom *Parameśvara* is the only *āśraya*.

In his commentary, *Śaṅkara* explains the meaning of *madāśraya* as follows. A person becomes a desirer with reference to a desired end. To accomplish it he adopts a means appropriate to that end and that means is called *āśraya*. A ritual, like daily *agnihotra* is an *āśraya* for gaining the *puṇya* to go to heaven. So, the person is called *agnihotrāśraya*.

Now to accomplish *mokṣa* which *āśraya* should you have? The Lord says you should be *madāśraya*, *īśvarāśraya*, the one whose *āśraya* is *Īśvara*. Generally one resorts to *Īśvara* for some other end. But here, the end he is committed to is *Īśvara* himself which is expressed in the word *mayyāsaktamanas*. The *īśvarāśraya* wants *Īśvara*. In other words, he wants to be free from being a *jīva*. That is called *mokṣa*.

*Parameśvara* becomes the very end and also the means. Giving up all other means, *Śaṅkara* continues, the one who seeks only *Parameśvara* as the *āśraya*, in

order to gain *Parameśvara*, becomes a *mayyāsaktamanas*. He is the one whose mind is committed only to Me because for him the means is Myself. I am the means; I am the end. These words are all to be explained in the chapter.

### IN SEEKING PARAMEŚVARA THE END AND THE MEANS ARE THE SAME

Here he is seeking knowledge, knowledge of the whole. This seeking is very peculiar because you can gain the whole by a means which is other than the whole. Since the whole is always whole, the only means of gaining it is to know that I am the whole. There is no other way. Therefore, the end and the means, in the final analysis, become one and the same.

If the means is separate from the end, the end is going to be a limited one, appropriate to the means. If the whole is the end, the only means will be the whole; it cannot be less than that. Therefore, there are no means and end here. That is why it is said that the wise man's track leaves no footprints. We want to follow the track of a wise man, a man who has followed a path and reached the end, wisdom. It is said that following the track of a wise man is like following the footprints of a bird in the sky. What footprints does the bird leave behind as it flies? Such are the footprints left behind by the wise man. The idea is that the means and the end are one and the same. There is no track between time and the timeless, between finite and infinite, between the part and the whole, between *jīva* and *Īśvara*.

Having defined the seeker as one who is totally committed to the pursuit of *Parameśvara*, *Kṛṣṇa* continues. *Asaṁśayaṁ samagraṁ māṁ yathā jñāsyasi tacchṛṇu. Yathā* – in which way, *jñāsyasi* – you will know, *māṁ* – Me, *Īśvara*, *samagram* – in totality, *asaṁśayam* – without any doubt, as a whole, as the one who is everything, the one who is endowed with all glories like strength, power, overlordship etc., *tat* – about that way in which you will know Me, *śṛṇu* – please listen. By what means, following which trail of thinking you will recognise Me in totality, to that means, please listen.

This verse introduces what is going to come, not only in this chapter but in those to follow. These second six chapters deal primarily with *Parameśvara*. And there is one more verse of introduction here.

ज्ञानं तेऽहं सविज्ञानमिदं वक्ष्याम्यशेषतः ।

यज्ज्ञात्वा नेह भूयोऽन्यज्ज्ञातव्यमवशिष्यते ॥ २ ॥

*jñānaṁ te 'haṁ savijñānamidaṁ vakṣyāmyaśeṣataḥ*  
*yajjñātvā neha bhūyo'nyajjñātavayamaśiṣyate*

Verse 2

इदम् ज्ञानम् *idam jñānam* — this knowledge; सविज्ञानम् *savijñānam* — along with knowledge that is immediate; ते *te* — to you; अहम् वक्ष्यामि *aham vakṣyāmi* — I will

tell; अशेषतः *aśeṣataḥ* — without anything being omitted; यत् ज्ञात्वा *yat jñātvā* — knowing which; इह *iha* — in this world (or in the *śāstra*); भूयः अन्यत् *bhūyaḥ anyat* — any other thing that is more than this; ज्ञातव्यम् *jñātavyam* — to be known; न अवशिष्यते *na avaśiṣyate* — does not remain

I will teach you without any omission, this knowledge, along with immediate knowledge, knowing which, there is nothing more than this remaining here to be known.

### VIJÑĀNA IS DISTINGUISHED FROM JÑĀNA

*Idaṃ savijñānam*, this immediate knowledge, knowledge for which the subject matter is Me, *Parameśvara*, the cause of everything and who is everything, *te*, to you, *vaḥśyāmi*, I will tell, *aśeṣataḥ*, without anything being omitted.

What kind of knowledge is this? When *jñāna* and *vijñāna* are mentioned together, it means that *vijñāna* is something a little different from *jñāna*. *Jñāna* can mean immediate knowledge but because he says *jñāna* with *vijñāna*, the *jñāna* is a little less than *vijñāna*. Here, *vi* means *viśeṣa*, distinctive. Therefore, *vijñāna* is immediate knowledge and *jñāna* is indirect knowledge.

*Kṛṣṇa* says, 'I will give you this *jñāna* with *vijñāna*. For me it is a reality and therefore, what I teach you is something that I see. It is not merely what I have heard. This is what I see and what I see I am teaching you.' Because of that these words have *prāmāṇya*, the capacity to produce the same knowledge, the same vision in you. Once you see, you have *vijñāna* and you are left with no doubt, no vagueness. This is one meaning.

Another meaning would be, 'I will teach you this knowledge in a manner that will make it immediate for you, not indirect.' Again we understand that this knowledge is something to be gained only as immediate, direct, knowledge, not as indirect knowledge. Generally knowledge of *Parameśvara* is understood to be indirect. We tend to think of *Parameśvara* as someone unknown. One devotee said, '*yādṛśosi māhādeva tādrśāya namo namaḥ* — O *Bhagavan*, I don't know how you are, what you are, where you are. So, in whichever form you are, I salute you again and again.' This person has a feeling, a sense, that there is a God. But how he is, what he is, he doesn't want to conclude. It is a prayer which has some faith but at the same time, a certain vagueness and doubt. Perhaps that is the right prayer. We tend to make conclusions about *Īśvara*. He plays it safe. In effect he asks *Īśvara*, 'Please fill in all the qualifications you require to define yourself.' It is like addressing a letter, 'To Whom it May Concern.' The one who receives the letter has to think, 'It is addressed to me.'

Here, however, it is just the opposite. *Kṛṣṇa* says, *īśvara-jñāna* need not be *parokṣa*, indirect. It can be *aparokṣa*. Only *aparokṣa-jñāna* of *Īśvara* is *mokṣa*. *Parokṣa-jñāna* is useful for offering prayers etc. But the final result of the prayer is this *aparokṣa-jñāna*, the immediate knowledge of *Parameśvara*. With any other understanding you will be omitting yourself from *Parameśvara* and thereby editing him. Minus you *Parameśvara* is only another *anātmā*, not *ātmā*. And if he is other than you, he becomes located somewhere. So, there is someone called *jīva* in the heart and another person called *Īśvara* out there somewhere in the vast space. This is duality. Anything other than me is *anātmā* and since only *ātmā* is conscious, *anātmā* is inert. It cannot reveal itself to me, the conscious being. If *Īśvara* is other than me, he is inert — and still we say he is *sarvajña*. It is all lip service. But here *Kṛṣṇa* says, I will teach this immediate knowledge in its entirety without anything being left out.

### PRAISE OF KNOWLEDGE — KNOWING THIS ONE THING EVERYTHING IS KNOWN

Then to draw our attention, and to complete the thought, he praises this knowledge. *Yajñātva* – knowing which, *iha* – in this world or in the *śāstra*, *bhūyaḥ* *anyat* – anything else which is more than this, *jñātvayam* – to be known, *na avaśiṣyate* – is not there at all.

Generally when you know one thing, even though you know that one thing there is always something else to know. In fact, even within that one thing there are a lot of areas to be known. But here he says you will know only one thing knowing which you will know everything. And that one thing is Me, he says. Know Me and you will know everything because I am everything.

But, one may ask, ‘How can I know everything? I am capable of knowing only a few things.’ And *Kṛṣṇa* says that there is no *jñātvaya vastu*, i.e., something that really deserves to be known. After knowing this, nothing remains that deserves to be known. In this entire world only one thing is *satya*, and once you know *satya*, *mithyā* becomes naturally evident. What is *mithyā* is *satya* but *satya* is not *mithyā*. We discussed this in detail while dealing with the verse — *nāsato vidyate bhāvaḥ*.<sup>1</sup>

What is reckoned here as something to be known makes the difference in life. To know the *svarūpa* of *Īśvara* is to know everything. And the one thing that is real, *satya* happens to be the *svarūpa* of *Īśvara* which is yourself. That is why it is possible to shed your ignorance about the fact. You are a self-evident being whose *svarūpa* is *satya*. The knowledge of *satya*, the *ātmā*, is knowledge of everything. To know that is to know that everything is Me while I am independent of everything.

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<sup>1</sup> *Gītā* – 2-16

When you take the self as something different from everything, you find that everything else keeps colliding with you. The whole world becomes an impediment which you somehow have to surmount. This is how one looks upon the world. And this *aham*, opposed to the world, is to be understood as *sarva-ātmā*, the self of everything; it is *Parameśvara*. *Kṛṣṇa* is going to prove that *aham* is *paramātmā* — that ‘I’ is everything. Later he says, ‘I am *Brahman*, the cause of the whole creation, the *tat-pada-artha* and you are that *Brahman*.’ And then he will say, ‘The one who knows Me as the self is the one who is not separate from Me. He knows everything.’

In other words, *Śaṅkara* says here, knowing this there is no longer anything to be known in order to achieve something. The end that is to be achieved for a human being is achieved; nothing remains. He says further that the one who knows the truth of *Īśvara* becomes all-knowing. There is no other knowledge that can make this claim. Every other form of knowledge is only of a given thing which is *mithyā*. Here, the knowledge is of that thing which is everything. Therefore, all you have to know is that one thing. This is the secret of this knowledge.

Lord *Gaṇeśa* knew this secret. Lord *Śiva* had a certain partiality for *Gaṇeśa*. And his younger son, *Subrahmanya*, was always complaining, ‘Why are you so fond of *Gaṇeśa*’ etc. So, Lord *Śiva* gave them both a test. He asked each of them to go around this entire world and come back. Now *Subrahmanya* thought, ‘This is a wonderful chance for me to prove how great I am.’ He was confident because he had a fine vehicle, a peacock. And he knew that *Gaṇeśa* was a slow-moving guy with a huge stomach and had only a mouse for a vehicle. Now if he gets up on this vehicle when is he going to return? That poor mouse cannot even move. And so, *Subrahmanya* knew that he was going to win and he set off on his peacock. But when he returned after his big trip, he found that *Gaṇeśa* already had the prize in his hand.

Surprised, he asked, ‘How could you finish before me on your mouse? Where did you go?’ Then Lord *Śiva* said, ‘Do you know what he did? He went around me and *Pārvatī*.’ *Subrahmanya* went all over the universe and *Gaṇeśa* just went round the Lord. And when Lord *Śiva* asked *Gaṇeśa* what he was doing, he said, ‘You asked me to go around every place. You are everything. Therefore, I go around you.’ And here it is the same thing; knowing this, there is nothing left out.

This simple story tells us that the Lord is everything and knowing his *svarūpa*, which is oneself, upon which the whole world exists and by whom the whole world is sustained is knowing everything.

Praising the knowledge of the one that is to be known, *Kṛṣṇa* presents its rarity.

मनुष्याणां सहस्रेषु कश्चिद्यतति सिद्धये ।

यततामपि सिद्धानां कश्चिन्मां वेत्ति तत्त्वतः ॥ ३ ॥

*manuṣyāṇāṃ sahasreṣu kaścidyatati siddhaye  
yatatāmapi siddhānāṃ kaścinnām vetti tattvataḥ*

Verse 3

सहस्रेषु *sahasreṣu* — among thousands; मनुष्याणाम् *manuṣyāṇām* — of human beings; कश्चित् *kaścit* — a rare person; यतति *yatati* — makes effort; सिद्धये *siddhaye* — for *mokṣa*; यतताम् अपि सिद्धानाम् *yatatām api siddhānām* — even among (these) seekers who are making effort; कश्चित् *kaścit* — one person; माम् वेत्ति *mām vetti* — knows Me; तत्त्वतः *tattvataḥ* — in reality

Among thousands of people, a rare person makes effort for *mokṣa*. Even among those seekers making effort, (only) a rare person comes to know Me in reality.

### THIS KNOWLEDGE IS RARE IN TERMS OF ITS RESULT

Śaṅkara says that since this knowledge has an extraordinary result, *mokṣa*, it is difficult to gain. The difficulty lies in the very uniqueness of this knowledge and it is this that accounts for its rarity.

Generally knowledge itself is not an end. It is made use of for an end to be gained later. But here, upon knowing this there is nothing more for you to know, to gain, meaning you no longer have any *puruṣārtha*. In the choice of *mokṣa*, the results of the other three *puruṣārthas* — *dharma*, *artha*, and *kāma* — are included because in choosing *mokṣa*, you choose the whole. *Mokṣa* means freedom — freedom from the pursuits of *dharma-artha-kāma* — since it includes what is essentially achieved by any one of them. But *mokṣa* is not included in any one of them, or in all three of them put together. And this result, *mokṣa*, is identical with knowledge. The *jñāna* itself is the end. Because of this unique nature of the result, this knowledge becomes a rarity.

### THIS KNOWLEDGE IS RARE IN TERMS OF ITS DIFFICULTY TO GAIN

This particular knowledge is also rare because it is difficult to gain. Any knowledge is difficult when one is not prepared and easy when one is. The nature of knowledge is such that it can be either difficult or easy. Easy is not even the word. You open your eyes and see a flower; it is neither easy nor difficult. All you require is eyesight and immediately the knowledge is gained. So, if a person is prepared, knowledge is simple; if not, it is not that simple. And the preparation for this knowledge is difficult. Therefore, the knowledge is called *durlabhatara*, most difficult!

How difficult it is, *Kṛṣṇa* points out by saying, ‘*manuṣyāṇāṃ sahasreṣu kaścit yatati siddhaye.*’ ‘*Sahasreṣu manuṣyāṇāṃ kaścit*’ — this is a typical Sanskrit expression. In English we have an equivalent expression — one in a million. *Sahasreṣu* means among thousands, among thousands of people. A qualified recipient, *adhikārī*, is



required for any knowledge to take place. The *adhikāris*, those who are qualified to gain this knowledge are all human beings, *manuṣyas*. This is the general qualification. Then, among these thousands of human beings who are capable of this knowledge – *manuṣyāṇām*, only one of them, the rare one – *kaścit*, makes effort – *yatati*. He makes effort for the purpose of *siddhi*, *mokṣa*. In general, *siddhi* means success. But success in a human life is *mokṣa*, so, he says ‘*siddhaye* — for *mokṣa*.’

### AMONG THOUSANDS, ONE GIVEN PERSON SEEKS ĀTMĀ

Why does he say, *kaścit yatati*, one person makes effort when all human beings are active? Because, everyone makes effort; but for things other than oneself, for *anātmā*. When one is not happy with oneself, one has to keep oneself in good humour. To do this one has to pursue a few desirable things.

But here it is different because one questions why one is unhappy with oneself, ‘Am I unhappy by nature or am I just taking myself to be so?’ Seeking an answer to this question is *ātma-icchā* — a desire to know oneself. If one wants to know the *ātmā*, he's not seeking anything else for the sake of *ātmā*. For the sake of *ātmā*, *ātmārtha* alone, he seeks *ātmā*; for the sake of himself, he seeks himself. This is the difference.

Self-knowledge is for self-freedom. This is something one has to know and yet it doesn't strike people as a possibility. Therefore, *Kṛṣṇa* says, *kaścit yatati siddhaye*. Among all the human beings, there is a given person, a rare person, *kaścit*, who makes effort for the purpose of *mokṣa* — *yatati siddhaye*.

### AMONG THE SEEKERS, ONE GIVEN PERSON KNOWS THE REALITY

Further, he says among these people who are making effort – *yatatām api siddhānām*, here is a rare person – *kaścit*, who knows me – *mām vetti*, in reality – *tattvataḥ*.

*Siddhas* are people who have become successful. Here he says among the successful people, only one fellow knows me. Then what about the others who are also called successful by you? Don't they know you? If not, how can you call them successful? Therefore, *siddha* here is only a seeker. Being an adjective to *yatatām*, *siddhānām* means – among the people who make effort for *siddhi*. The one who does so is considered a *siddha* already. Why? Because once he makes an effort, he will reach his end. *Kṛṣṇa* has already said anyone who makes effort for *mokṣa* does not come to a bad end — *na hi kalyāṇakṛt kaścit durgatiṃ tāta gacchati*.<sup>1</sup> So, keeping *mokṣa* in view as the result of their efforts, he calls a seeker *siddha* here. We also use words in this way. For example, a medical student is called a doctor even though he has only

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<sup>1</sup> *Gītā* – 6-40

completed two years of college. And it is accepted because he is going to become a doctor later.

Therefore, Śaṅkara considers those who are making effort for *mokṣa* to be *siddhas*, because they are going to become *siddhas*, if not in this life, later. Among them there is one who now, at this time, knows Me, *kaścit mām vetti*. Here Kṛṣṇa uses the present tense. One person knows Me; others are in the process of knowing Me.

Spiritual seekers are of many varieties. But you can't call them all *siddhas*. Only those who engage themselves in the pursuit of the knowledge of the *svarūpa* of *Parameśvara*, are the *siddhas*. And they are very few. Why is this so? *Adhikāritva*, qualification is necessary. It is like marathon running. A lot of people start but finally one person reaches the destination.

Kṛṣṇa says all this not to frighten *Arjuna*, but to enthuse him. If someone tells you that among thousands, one person really chooses to know and among those people who choose to know, one person knows, then even before you start you will think, 'I have no chance!' But Śaṅkara looks at the whole thing as something that is meant to create interest in *Arjuna's* mind. Why? Because the knowledge that Kṛṣṇa is going to unfold is something that is very important. So, this verse is to draw *Arjuna's* attention, and not to discourage him.

Having drawn *Arjuna's* attention by these three introductory verses which only mention the topic, *Bhagavān* now starts the description of *Īśvara*. We will see the verses later; now let us just see the meaning.

### LORD KṚṢṆA REVEALS HIMSELF AS THE TWO-FOLD CAUSE OF CREATION

There are two *prakṛtis*. The word *prakṛti* means that which has the essential capacity to create. *Prakṛti* is also called *kāraṇa*, the cause. Kṛṣṇa says, 'I have two *prakṛtis*; one is *svarūpa-prakṛti*, and the other is *svabhāva-prakṛti*.

#### SVARŪPA-PRAKṚTI

One *prakṛti* is the cause of everything; the truth of everything, without which nothing is possible. This is called *svarūpa* or *parā prakṛti*. *Svarūpa*, is that which makes something what it is. For example, ice is cold and that coldness is its *svarūpa*. You cannot remove it and still have ice. And here similarly, *ātmā* cannot give up its nature, consciousness. Consciousness is the *svarūpa* of *ātmā*; it is not a quality, an attribute of *ātmā*. There is no other person there for whom consciousness is an attribute. In fact that 'I' itself is in the form of a conscious being alone. Therefore, consciousness is the *svarūpa* of the *ātmā*. It is not an attribute of *ātmā*.

And if consciousness is the *svarūpa* of *ātmā*, there are a few other facts we recognise about consciousness. It is *satya*; it is *ananta*, etc. From the various

standpoints of our knowledge about the world, we say this consciousness is *satya*. That means everything else is not *satya*; this consciousness alone is *satya*. It is not that we are refusing to accept another *satya*. There is only one *satya*; that is *ātmā*. Generally, we think that what exists is *satya*. Here, we take that existence itself to be consciousness. And because it is *satya* it is *ananta*, without limit. *Satyam jñānam anantaṃ brahma* is *ātmā*. This is the *prakṛti* of everything. Here you must understand *prakṛti* as the cause of everything, *sarvasya kāraṇam*. Therefore, it is called the *svarūpa-prakṛti*.

#### SVABHĀVA -PRAKṚTI

Then there is another *prakṛti* which we call *svabhāva-prakṛti* or *aparā prakṛti* consisting of the five elements, both subtle and gross. It is divided into cause, *kāraṇa*, and effect, *kārya*. Because the effect, *kārya* is not separate from the cause, the *kārya* is also called *prakṛti*. Therefore, we have the expression *kārya-prakṛti*. A physical body consisting of the five elements is also *kārya-prakṛti* as are the sense organs, the mind, and *prāṇa*s. In other words, anything created, anything put together is a *kārya-prakṛti*. *Kārya* here is anything that is produced, anything put together. If we look at this *prakṛti*, this is also called *māyā*, *avyakta*, or *mūla-prakṛti*. This *prakṛti* is the *upādhi* from which the whole creation has come. And the *upādhi* is for *paramātmā*. Therefore, *sat-cit-ānanda-ātmā* becomes the real cause, *svarūpa-prakṛti*, for this entire world and *māyā* is the *svabhāva-prakṛti* or *kārya-prakṛti*.

Now where does this *māyā* have its being? Is it in the product or in *Brahman*? It is in *Brahman*. It cannot be elsewhere because the product itself is *mithyā*. So, this *māyā* has its being in *Brahman* — *brahma-āśrayā hi māyā*. *Brahman* is *satyam jñānam anantam* which is *ātmā*. That *Brahman* is the *āśraya* for *māyā* and its products.

In this chapter, Lord *Kṛṣṇa* first talks about *kārya* or *aparā prakṛti*. Then he says there is another *prakṛti*, *parā prakṛti*, that is the real cause, without which there cannot be any creation. The real cause means that which supplies the existence, and without which there is no creation possible. He says, ‘The truth of the whole creation, the real cause, is my *svarūpa*. And you are that *svarūpa*. That is the real *prakṛti* and therefore, what you have to know is that real *prakṛti* which is *Īśvara* in reality. You have to know these two types of *prakṛtis*, and know that the *svarūpa* or *parā prakṛti* without which there is no creation at all, is yourself. I am you. In fact, I am the cause of everything and I am you.’ This means you are the cause of everything as *satyam jñānam anantaṃ brahma*.

Then next question you'll ask, will be, ‘How can I be the cause? How can I be *Īśvara*?’ If you say you are a *jīva*, you'll continue to be a *jīva*. You'll never become *Īśvara*. An individual is an individual; he is not going to become *Īśvara*.

And if you say, 'I am *Īśvara*,' then the problem is, where is this 'I' placed? That has to be understood. Therefore, in the verses that follow, *Kṛṣṇa* unfolds the two types of *prakṛti* to prove that *Īśvara* is everything and his *svarūpa* is you.

भूमिरापोऽनलो वायुः खं मनो बुद्धिरेव च ।

अहंकार इतीयं मे भिन्ना प्रकृतिरष्टधा ॥ ४ ॥

*bhūmirāpo'nalo vāyuh kham mano buddhireva ca*

*ahaṅkāra itīyaṃ me bhinnā prakṛtiraṣṭadhā*

Verse 4

भूमिः *bhūmiḥ* — earth; आपः *āpaḥ* — water; अनलः *analaḥ* — fire; वायुः *vāyuh* — air; खम् *kham* — space; मनः *manaḥ* — mind; बुद्धिः *buddhiḥ* — intellect; अहंकारः एव च *ahaṅkāraḥ eva ca* — and indeed the doership, the 'I'-sense; इति *iti* — thus; इयम् मे प्रकृतिः *iyam me prakṛtiḥ* — this my *prakṛti*; अष्टधा *aṣṭadhā* — in an eight-fold way; भिन्ना *bhinnā* — is divided

Earth, water, fire, air, space, mind, intellect and indeed the sense of doership — thus this *prakṛti* of mine is divided in an eight-fold way.

The two-fold *prakṛti*, mentioned in the introduction to this chapter is the cause of this entire world. In this chapter they are called *parā* and *aparā prakṛtis*. *Parā prakṛti* is the ultimate cause without which there is no effect possible. Then the immediate cause is called *aparā prakṛti*, in other words, *māyā* and all that is immediately born of *māyā*. Because subtle elements are the causes for the gross elements which come later, they are mentioned first here as *aparā prakṛti*.

*Iyam*, this entire world, is my *prakṛti*, *me prakṛti*, divided in an eight-fold way, *aṣṭadhā bhinnā*. *Aṣṭa* is eight; *aṣṭadhā* is eight-fold. Here he tells us what are the eight-fold subtle constituents beginning with the earth, *bhūmi*, as a *tanmātra*, a subtle element. *Tanmātra* means *tat mātra*, that alone is there. In grossification, each element combines with the other four elements. But in the subtle form, such a combination has not taken place; so, they are called *tanmātras*. Each element has its own *guṇa* which we experience sensorily. For instance the earth has its own *guṇa*, smell, and so, the smell-*tanmātra* is what is referred to here as *bhūmi*. Similarly, the taste, *rasa-tanmātra* is water, *āpaḥ*; form-*tanmātra* is fire, *agni*; touch-*tanmātra* is air, *vāyu*, sound-*tanmātra* is space, *kham*.

## PRAKRIYĀ — A TEACHING MODEL

Using a particular model like this to teach the nature of the creation is using a *sṛṣṭi-prakriyā*. A *prakriyā* is a particular discussion which is useful for understanding the vision. The intention of using any *prakriyā* is only to point out that there is nothing

other than *paraṃ brahma*. So, the intention of a *prakriyā* dealing with creation, *sṛṣṭi*, is not to reveal the creation but to establish that there is nothing other than *Brahman*.

Like the *sṛṣṭi-prakriyā*, there are many other *prakriyās*, teaching models, such as *avasthā-traya-prakriyā*, an analysis of the three states of experience, *pañca-kośa-prakriyā*, an analysis of the five levels of one's experience of oneself, and *dr̥k-dr̥śya-prakriyā*, subject-object analysis to distinguish *ātmā* from *anātmā* and later prove that *anātmā* is not separate from *ātmā* because it is *mithyā*. The five elemental model of this universe is a part of the creation or cause-effect *prakriyā*, *sṛṣṭi-prakriyā* or *kāraṇa-kārya-prakriyā*. We find this *sṛṣṭi-prakriyā* in many *Upaniṣads*.

### SṚṢṬI-PRAKRIYĀ — ANALYSIS OF CREATION IN CHĀNDOGYOPANIṢAD

In the sixth chapter of *Chāndogyopaniṣad*, the sage *Uddālaka* tells his son, *Śvetaketu*, that before the creation of this world there was only one thing. It was *sat*, existence, *advitīya*, non-dual, and there was nothing except that. *Advitīya* because there was no other *sat-vastu* like itself nor was there any *vastu* unlike itself and in itself there were no parts. It was one, non-dual. Since there was no difference within itself nor was there any differentiating factor, it is a part-less whole.

Mentioning this *sat-vastu* in his opening statement, *Uddālaka* talks about the creation of the elemental world from this *sat-vastu*. He mentions only three elements, the elements which have form, *mūrta-bhūtas* — *agni* – fire, *āpaḥ* – water, and *pṛthivī* – earth. The two elements without a form, *ākāśa* and *vāyu*, are not mentioned. The purpose was only to show that having come from *sat-vastu*, they don't have a being of their own apart from the *sat-vastu*. In fact, the creation is non-separate from its cause like the pot is non-separate from the clay.

Finally he says, ‘O *Śvetaketu*, that *sat-vastu* is *ātmā*.’ Everything else is created. The body is created; the mind is created; the senses are created. But what is not created is *ātmā*. And that is *sat-vastu* which was existent even before creation. Even now it is *sat-vastu*, uncreated *ātmā*. And therefore, *tat tvam asi* — ‘you are that.’ From nine standpoints he points out that the *vastu* is always the same. Before and after the creation it is the same; that *ātma-vastu* did not undergo any change. Now, even though it is *upādāna-kāraṇa*, material cause, it is *upādāna-kāraṇa* in terms of *māyā*. Without undergoing any change itself, the *sat-vastu* manifests in the form of this world with the *śakti* of *māyā*. And the creation, being purely *nāma-rūpa*, is *mithyā*. The truth of the creation, the *sat-vastu* is you, *ātmā*. So, to create this vision that you are the *sat-vastu* and the world is non-separate from the *sat-vastu*, we have a *sṛṣṭi-prakriyā*.

### AVASTHĀTRAYA-PRAKRIYĀ — ANALYSIS OF THE THREE STATES OF EXPERIENCE IN MĀṆḌŪKYOPANIṢAD

Similarly, we find the *avasthā-traya-prakriyā* in *Māṇḍūkyopaniṣad*. The first verse says all that is, all that was, and all that will be is but *om-kāra*. Each individual letter of *om* was made to stand for something. *A-kāra* represents waking, the waker and the waking world. *U-kāra*, the dreamer and the dream world, *ma-kāra* the sleeper and the sleep experience. All three of them are shown to be non-separate from the same *ātmā*, which itself is neither the waker consciousness, nor is it dreamer consciousness, or sleeper consciousness. And it is not the consciousness in between waking and dream consciousness nor is it all consciousness, or unconsciousness. Naturally what remains after negating all this is consciousness as such. All other things qualify that consciousness. And this is the nature of yourself; that is called *caturtha*. It is neither waker, dreamer, nor sleeper. Therefore, *caturthaṃ manyante sa ātmā sa vijñeyaḥ*<sup>1</sup> — what is looked upon as *caturtha*, the fourth, that is the real *ātmā*. It is all three and is itself independent of all three. It doesn't undergo any change and is the *ātmā* in all three states. That has got to be known. This is the *avasthā-traya-prakriyā* discussed in the *Māṇḍūkyopaniṣad*, which is discussed in other *Upaniṣads* as well.

### PAÑCAKOŚA-PRAKRIYĀ — ANALYSIS OF THE FIVE LEVELS OF EXPERIENCE OF ONESELF IN TAITTIRĪYOPANIṢAD

In *Taittirīyopaniṣad* there is a *pañcakakośa-prakriyā*. It begins with the physical body, *anna-rasa-maya*, which is like a cover, *kośa*, because everyone mistakes it for *ātmā*. It is born out of the essence of the food that is eaten, *anna-rasa*. The assimilated form of food is *anna-rasa-maya*. The affix *mayaḥ* means modification, *vikāra*, so, *anna-rasa-maya* is a modification of the essence of food. We generally conclude that the body is *ātmā*. Therefore, *śruti* points out that there is another *ātmā* which is more interior, subtler. This is *prāṇa*. *Śruti* then describes the physiological function, *prāṇa-maya*. If you think this is *ātmā*, *śruti* leads you further to another *ātmā*, *mano-maya* and from *mano-maya* to *vijñāna-maya*, the doer, then from *vijñāna-maya* to *ānandamaya*.

*Sukha*, happiness is also experienced in different degrees because of shades of difference in *vṛttis*. So, within that *ānandamaya*, *priya* is the first stage of happiness. Something that is pleasing or desirable to you is sighted; that is *priya*. Then what is desired is possessed by you; this is *moda*. The third stage in which it is experienced by you is called *pramoda*. These are degrees of *ānanda*, all of which are particular modes of thought, *vṛtti-viśeṣas*. But in all the three, *priya*, *moda*, and *pramoda*, what is present is *ānanda*. And that *ānanda* is myself. That is *Brahman*.

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<sup>1</sup> *Māṇḍūkyopaniṣad* – 7

## TANMĀTRA-PRAKRIYĀ — A TYPE OF SRṢṬI-PRAKRIYĀ

Here, *Kṛṣṇa* uses the *tanmātra-prakriyā*. *Tanmātra*, as we have seen, means the five subtle elements. These five subtle elements undergo a process of grossification whereby each element shares half of itself with the other four. Therefore, each gross element is five-fold and has one eighth of each of the other elements. For example, *sthūla-ākāśa* is one half *sūkṣma-ākāśa*, one eighth *sūkṣma-vāyu*, one eighth *sūkṣma-agni*, one eighth *sūkṣma-āpaḥ* and one eighth *sūkṣma-pṛthivī*. Thus every gross element is five-fold and because it is formed of these five-fold elements, the world itself is called *prapañca*, five-fold, in Sanskrit. This *prapañca* was originally *tanmātra*. Only that alone, *tat-mātra*, was there. In other words, in *ākāśa*, *ākāśa* alone was there; in *vāyu*, *vāyu* alone; in *agni*, *agni* alone; in *āpaḥ*, *āpaḥ* alone; in *pṛthivī*, *pṛthivī* alone. In the *sūkṣma* form they don't have these five-fold combinations, therefore, they are called *tanmātras*.

These *tanmātras*, *ākāśa*, *vāyu*, *agni*, *āpaḥ*, *pṛthivī*, have been listed in the reverse order in this verse. If they are listed as space, air, fire, water, earth, it is in the order in which they were created, *srṣṭi-krama*. But because *Arjuna* is now looking at the already created, the *srṣṭi* that is there, the elements are listed beginning with *bhūmi*. These five elements have many synonyms. Here *pṛthivī*, the earth, is called *bhūmi*; *agni*, the fire, is called *anala*;<sup>1</sup> *ākāśa* is called *kham*. All the five of these elements are to be understood here as subtle, i.e., *sūkṣma*, because they are mentioned as the cause here.

Then *manas*, *buddhi*, *ahaṅkāra* are also added to these elements. Since they are all products, they have to be looked at from the causal level. The five subtle elements with these three are the eight-fold cause for this entire *jagat*.

The cause of the mind is *ahaṅkāra*. So, in this verse, the word *manas* stands for *ahaṅkāra*; the word *buddhi* stands for *mahat-tattva*; the word *ahaṅkāra* stands for the unmanifest, *avyakta*. *Kṛṣṇa* wants to point out all the causes and he arranges them in the order that is generally discussed elsewhere. *Ahaṅkāra* is mentioned last because *avyakta*, the unmanifest is the primary cause with reference to the creation.

It is *upādāna-kāraṇa*, the material cause for the creation. While *Brahman* does not undergo any change, the *upādāna-kāraṇa* undergoes all the change and is therefore, looked at as *pariṇāmi*, that which undergoes modification.

Then there is a new problem. If you say *Brahman* is the cause, then *Brahman* must undergo some change in order to become the creation. Yes. As *pariṇāmi-kāraṇa* it does and that change takes place only in the *māyā-upādhi*. Only from the standpoint of *māyā* is it *pariṇāmi-kāraṇa*; from the standpoint of itself it is *vivarta-upādāna-*

<sup>1</sup>*Alaṅ na vidyate yasya — the one who never says enough (in terms of fuel)*

*kāraṇa* ; It doesn't undergo any change. The material cause itself is analysed as a cause that undergoes change and as that which doesn't undergo any change. *Satyam jñānam anantaṁ brahma* cannot undergo change. The *avyakta*, the *māyā* , alone undergoes changes.

Lord *Kṛṣṇa* says that, this *māyā-śakti* itself has become this eight-fold cause for the entire creation. So, in an eight-fold way this *māyā-śakti*, which is non-separate from Me, is the cause for everything. *Māyā* is not a parallel reality; it is the Lord's own *śakti*. And in an eight-fold way, it becomes the *prakṛti* for the creation. This is called *aparā prakṛti*. The other *prakṛti*, *parā prakṛti*, is the *svarūpa*, the *svarūpa* of *ātmā*.

अपरेयमितस्त्वन्यां प्रकृतिं विद्धि मे पराम् ।

जीवभूतां महाबाहो ययेदं धार्यते जगत् ॥ ५ ॥

*apareyamitastvanyāṁ prakṛtiṁ viddhi me parām*

*jīvabhūtāṁ mahābāho yayedam dhāryate jagat*

Verse 5

महाबाहो *mahābāho* — O Mighty armed! (*Arjuna*); इयम् अपरा *iyam aparā* — this (*prakṛti*) (is) lower; तु *tu* — whereas; इतः अन्याम् *itaḥ anyām* — the one that is other than this; मे पराम् प्रकृतिम् *me parām prakṛtim* — my higher *prakṛti* (my very nature); जीवभूताम् *jīva-bhūtām* — that which is the essential nature of the individual; विद्धि *viddhi* — please understand; यया *yayā* — by which; इदम् जगत् *idam jagat* — this world; धार्यते *dhāryate* — is sustained

O Mighty armed, (*Arjuna*), this is (my) lower (*prakṛti*). Whereas, please understand the one other than this, my higher *prakṛti* (my very nature), which is the essential nature of the individual, by which this world is sustained.

## WHAT HAS BEEN DESCRIBED SO FAR IS APARĀ (SVABHĀVA) PRAKṚTI

*Iyam*, this *aparā prakṛti* is the *prakṛti* which is the cause for everything created. This should not be taken as myself. It is *aparā prakṛti*, a lower *prakṛti*. Therefore, *Śaṅkara* says, it is indeed *anarthaka*, something that brings about the undesirable. This is the *prakṛti* that creates all the problems. It is the one that causes you *duḥkha* by giving you a *jīva-śarīra*, etc. Out of this *prakṛti*, your body, mind, and senses are produced. And because of this alone, you have all the *duḥkha* associated with them in the form of all their limitations. All these are caused by this *aparā prakṛti*. Its very form is the bondage of *saṁsāra*. For this reason it is the lower *prakṛti*.



## MY REAL NATURE — PARĀ PRAKṚTI

Then what is the higher *prakṛti*? *Tu*, whereas, *itaḥ anyām* – other than this, *me parām prakṛtiṃ viddhi* – please understand my higher *prakṛti*. Other than this, please understand the *svarūpa* of myself, my very nature as the *parā prakṛti*. This *parā prakṛti*, Śaṅkara says, is *visuddha*, pure, not touched by anything. *Parā* means *utkṛṣṭā*, the most exalted *prakṛti*. With reference to the other one, it is *utkṛṣṭā*, because if you know this *prakṛti*, you are liberated. The other *prakṛti* will bind you.

## MY REAL NATURE IS YOU

Here, *Kṛṣṇa*, speaking as *Īśvara* says please understand my real nature and that is *jīvabhūta* – in the form of the *jīva*. And that is you. In this *prakṛti*, *ātmā* always remains the same. That *ātmā*, *sat-cit-ātmā* is the *kṣetrajñā*, the one who knows the entire *kṣetra*. The *kṣetra* is the mind, intellect, doership, memory, body, senses, sensory world, etc. The *ātmā* that illumines all of them is called *kṣetrajñā*. That is the real meaning of the word *jīva*, the one who is in every *kṣetra*. Later *Kṛṣṇa* is going to say that in every body-mind-sense-complex, *sarva-kṣetreṣu*, the one who remains there is *ātmā*, *kṣetrajñā*.<sup>1</sup> This is not included in the *aparā prakṛti*.

## MY REAL NATURE, PARĀ PRAKṚTI, SUSTAINS EVERYTHING

In *aparā prakṛti* only the elements, the *ahaṅkāra*, *buddhi*, and *manas* are included. *Ātmā* is omitted. That is *parā prakṛti* which is the one by which this entire world is sustained. *Yayā* – by this *parā prakṛti* alone, *idaṃ jagat* – this entire world, *dhāryate* – is sustained.

Therefore, please understand that *parā prakṛti*, which is other than this — *itaḥ anyām parām prakṛtiṃ viddhi*. Although both must be understood, *Kṛṣṇa* is going to say, this is the real *prakṛti*. This is my real nature, the cause for everything, and therefore, it is called *prakṛti*. It is this *prakṛti* from which everything has come, which remains always the same, which is indeed the *jīva*, the *ātmā*. Therefore, understand that *prakṛti* to be *parā*, *utkṛṣṭā*. The other one is *aparā prakṛti*, the five elements, etc. Having set this up, he's now going to reveal that there is nothing other than this *parā prakṛti*.

एतद्योनीनि भूतानि सर्वाणीत्युपधारय ।

अहं कृत्स्नस्य जगतः प्रभवः प्रलयस्तथा ॥ ६ ॥

*etadyonīni bhūtāni sarvāṇītyupadhāraya*

*ahaṃ kṛtsnasya jagataḥ prabhavaḥ pralayastathā*

Verse 6

<sup>1</sup> *Gītā* – 13-2

सर्वाणि भूतानि *sarvāṇi bhūtāni* — all beings and elements; एतद्-योनीनि *etat-yonīni* — are those that have these (the two *prakṛtis*) as their causes; इति उपधारय *iti upadhāraya* — thus please understand; अहम् *aham* — I; कृत्स्नस्य जगतः *kṛtsnasya jagataḥ* — of this entire world; प्रभवः *prabhavaḥ* — am the cause; तथा *tathā* — so too; प्रलयः *pralayaḥ* — (I am) the source into which everything resolves

Please understand that all beings and elements have their cause in this two-fold *prakṛti*. (Therefore,) I am the one from whom this entire world comes; so too, I am the one into whom everything resolves.

### EVERYTHING HAS ITS BEING IN THIS TWO-FOLD PRAKṚTI

*Etad* means this two-fold *prakṛti*. It includes all beings beginning from *Brahmāji* right down to a worm. In other words, all living beings, from A to Z, and all non-living things also, from the space to the earth. All of them are included. Nothing is left out. Everything known and unknown, everything that may be there in the cosmos, and whatever is there sustaining it, all the forces, all the laws, all the phenomena, then varieties of lower *lokas* like *atala*, etc., and all the beings therein, and all the higher *lokas* with their celestials — *yakṣas*, *gandharvas*, etc., *devas* — *Indra*, right up to *Brahmāji*. With that everything is covered — all fourteen *lokas*, seven up and seven below. All this together is called one *brahmāṇḍa*. That *brahmāṇḍa* and everything that is there in it is *sarvāṇi bhūtāni*. *Etad*, this is the two-fold *prakṛti*. One is *ātmā*, *sat-cit-ānanda-ātmā*, *kṣetrajñā-svarūpa-ātmā*, the *parā prakṛti* of *Īśvara*. The other is the *māyā-upādhi* and because of that all the elements, etc., is the *aparā prakṛti*. *Kṛṣṇa* says, please understand this — *upadhāraya*.

So, *etat-yonīni* means those that have these (the two *prakṛtis*) as their causes. *Yoni* means cause. These two *prakṛtis* are the cause for everything in this *jagat*. Therefore, all the things in this *jagat* are called *etat-yonīni*.<sup>1</sup> The *aparā prakṛti* is everything that is there and *parā prakṛti* is the real cause, *satyaṃ jñānam anantaṃ brahma*. That alone is the cause for everything. Please understand that *prakṛti*. It is *jīva*, in the form of *jīva*, *ātmā*, *pratyagātmā*. That is the real *svarūpa*, the real cause for everything. All the *bhūtāni*, space, air, mind and so on, have their being only in this, in *paramātmā*. All beings have their basis only in the *sat-cit-ātmā*. Therefore, *etat-yonīni sarvāṇi bhūtāni iti upadhāraya* — please ascertain, come to understand that all the things in this *jagat* have these two *prakṛtis* as their cause.

<sup>1</sup> *ete yonī yeṣāṃ te – etadyonīni.*

## I AM THE CAUSE FOR THE PROJECTION AND RESOLUTION OF CREATION

The Lord says, ‘*ahaṃ kṛtsnasya jagataḥ prabhavaḥ* — I am the cause for the projection of this entire world.’ Which ‘I’? This ‘I’ — the one who has the two-fold *prakṛti*. The one that is in the form of this entire *jagat – aparā prakṛti* and the other one which is the real ‘I’ – *satyaṃ jñānam anantaṃ brahma*, the *parā prakṛti*. And therefore, I am indeed the cause for the entire creation. Not only that. I am also the one into which this entire creation resolves — *pralayaḥ tathā . Tathā – so too, kṛtsnasya jagataḥ pralayaḥ* – I am the source into which everything resolves. I am the one from whom everything comes. I am the one into whom everything goes back. Therefore, there is nothing other than myself. When the creation is there, it is me because from me it has come. As I told you, this *aparā prakṛti* which is the *pariṇāmi-upādāna-kāraṇa* is also nothing but me alone.

*Bhagavān* has already said that all the five elements, etc., are not other than Myself; but as *sat-cit-ātmā*, as the *kṣetrajñā*, I have undergone no change whatsoever to become all this. So, now, when he says here, ‘I am the one who is the *jīva, kṣetrajñā*, and I am the one from whom the entire world has come, and unto whom it returns,’ in effect he is saying, ‘like me, you are also the cause of this entire world.’ From the standpoint of *paramātmā*, you are the one who is *parā prakṛti*, the cause for everything.

Then what is *Īśvara*? If you look at the *jagat* as an individual, then naturally you have a physical body, mind, and senses. The world is there. For all this you require a cause which is what we call *māyā-upādhi*. *Satyaṃ jñānam anantaṃ brahma* with *māyā* in the form of this entire world is *Parameśvara*.

From the standpoint of *parā prakṛti*, all that is there is one, without which there is no *jagat* at all. It alone gives *sattā*, existence, to every aspect of the creation and it also gives *sphūrṭi*, that by which you come to know each and every thing. *Sattā – sat* and *sphūrṭi – cit*, by which this entire *jagat* is sustained, is *ātmā*. That is *parā prakṛti*.

## DEFINITION OF THE CAUSE - THE MAKER AND THE MATERIAL

In the previous verse, *Kṛṣṇa* said, ‘I am the cause of the entire creation and also its point of dissolution.’ When the Lord says he is the cause, how does he mean this? As a conscious being, the *nimitta-kāraṇa*, he is the cause in a three-fold way — as the creator, as the one into whom everything dissolves, and as the one who sustains everything.

*Taittirīyopaniṣad* also says the cause is the one from whom, *yataḥ*, all these beings come, by whom, *yena*, they are sustained and into whom, *yat*, (here it means

*yasmin*) they resolve.<sup>1</sup> This is the definition of the cause. The word *yataḥ* represents the fifth case used in the sense of that from which something is born. This indicates the *upādāna-kāraṇa*, the material cause. Then he says *yena*, by whom they are sustained, then *yasmin*, unto whom they go back — *yatprayantyaḥhisamviśanti*. Apart from this pronoun, *yat*, there is no mention of any other cause. From this we understand that this *kāraṇa*, the cause is both *nimitta-kāraṇa* and *upādāna-kāraṇa*.

Earlier in the *Taittirīyopaniṣad*, it is said, *śo'kāmayata* — He desired.' This clearly indicates the *nimitta-kāraṇa*. The one referred to later by the pronoun, *yat*, from which everything has come, *upādāna-kāraṇa*, is the same one who desired to become many and then created everything, *nimitta-kāraṇa*. From this it is clear that according to the *śruti*, the cause for this world is *Parameśvara* — both in the sense of the maker and the material.

### NATURE OF THE CAUSE DEFINED

When the *śāstra* analyses the cause, it unfolds what we call the *svarūpa*, the nature of that very cause. For that it has a different definition altogether — *satyaṃ jñānam anantaṃ brahma*. You'll find that none of these words, even though they are defining words, has a particular quality. In fact, these words negate all qualities. Therefore, *Brahman*, the cause, is revealed as *nirviśeṣa* – free from attributes, by words which negate all the attributes we know. Thus, the cause is presented as *nirvikalpa* – free from any form of duality.

The definition is that it is *satya*. And it is *anantaṃ satyam*. Therefore, it is not existent, as we usually understand — that is its existence is not in terms of time. Similarly *jñāna* is not the knowledge of any given thing. It is *anantaṃ jñānam*, unlimited *jñāna*, that is limitless consciousness. This definition, *satyaṃ jñānam anantaṃ brahma*, is *svarūpa-lakṣaṇa*.

### THE TWO TYPES OF LAKṢAṆAS

#### SVARŪPA-LAKṢAṆA

There are two types of *lakṣaṇas*, *svarūpa-lakṣaṇa* and *taṣastha-lakṣaṇa*. *Svarūpa-lakṣaṇa* reveals the essential nature of something. For example, if you describe water as  $H_2O$ , this is *svarūpa-lakṣaṇa*. Water is nothing but these atoms so if you describe water as  $H_2O$ , you are explaining the *svarūpa* of water. Here, the definition of *Brahman* as *satyaṃ jñānam anantaṃ brahma*, reveals the nature of *Brahman*, the

<sup>1</sup> ?? ?????????????? ????? ???? ?????? ?????? ??? ?? ?????

*yato vā imāni bhūtāni jāyante, yena jātāni jīvanti, yatprayantyaḥhisamviśanti.*

(*Taittirīyopaniṣad* – 3-1)

*vastu*. It negates all attributes and then points out by implication that the *vastu* is the existence of anything that is existent and is the content of any form of knowledge.

#### TAṬASTHA-LAKṢAṆA

Then, if, for example, you want to indicate a certain house and do so by saying it is the house on which the crow is sitting, that is *taṭastha-lakṣaṇa*. The crow is not a part of the house even though it helps you recognise the house. The next time you have to identify that house you need not wait for the crow to come and sit on it. Once you recognise the house, the crow is not a part of the understanding of the house. That is called *taṭastha-lakṣaṇa*.

Whenever creation is discussed in the *śāstra*, *Brahman* is presented as the cause from which everything has come, by which everything is sustained and into which everything resolves. Therefore, everything is *Brahman*. This is *taṭastha-lakṣaṇa*.

It is important to understand that *Brahman* itself has not undergone any change whatsoever to be this world. Because the world is *mithyā*. Anything you analyse reveals itself to be only a name and form which is reducible to another name and form which again has its being in something else.

#### SATYA MUST BE UNDERSTOOD TO UNDERSTAND MITHYĀ

A Buddhist will claim that, if you continue analysing like this, you will end up in non-existence. The conclusion will be that the world has its cause in the non-existent and the discovery that I am that non-existent is *nirvāṇa*. *Nirvāṇa* means extinguishing everything. This is the Buddhistic approach

But we do not mean that. The discovery here is that, I am the only *satya*, the only reality. Even though the Buddhistic analysis of *mithyā* looks the same, it is not; because *mithyā* is truly *mithyā* only when *satya* is appreciated. Otherwise *mithyā* becomes *satya*, a reality. *Mithyā* is defined as anything that has no independent existence, no basis of its own. So, by the very definition there is no such thing as *mithyā* without *satya*. Even though one may say the world is *mithyā*, he cannot appreciate it as such unless he appreciates *satya*. When the clay is appreciated as the truth of the pot, the pot is appreciated as *mithyā*. So, only in the wake of the appreciation of *satya* does *mithyā* become clear.

#### TWO TYPES OF MATERIAL CAUSE — VIVARTA-UPĀDĀNA-KĀRAṆA AND PARIṆĀMI-UPĀDĀNA-KĀRAṆA

*Satyam jñānam anantaṃ brahma* is the *svarūpa* of *ātmā* and at the same time is the cause of everything. A question now arises whether as the cause of everything it undergoes any type of change in becoming the world? Further, does it have any other

material apart from itself with which it creates the world? The *śāstra* makes it very clear that *Brahman* is *satya* and the *jagat*, the world is *mithyā*. This being so, the world is non-separate from *Brahman* and so *Brahman* is the material cause. Here a problem arises. *Īśvara*, *Brahman* with reference to the creation, is both *nimitta-kāraṇa*, the efficient cause and *upādāna-kāraṇa*, the material cause. We can understand, that there is an *Īśvara* who is all-knowing and so on, who is the efficient cause. But how can he be the material cause? Any material cause undergoes a change to become the effect. If the Lord himself is the material cause then he too must undergo a total change to become space, air and so on.

#### VIVARTA-UPĀDĀNA-KĀRAṆA

Here we have to make a very careful note. When we say *Brahman* is the *upādāna-kāraṇa* of this *jagat*, we mean it as *vivarta-upādāna-kāraṇa*. This is one particular word I have not unfolded so far. *Vivarta-upādāna-kāraṇa* is different from simple *upādāna-kāraṇa*. *Upādāna* is the material and as a material, generally we would expect that it undergoes a change to become the effect. This is what we commonly understand as *upādāna-kāraṇa*. This is called *pariṇāmi-upādāna-kāraṇa*. It undergoes a change. The example generally given to illustrate this is of the milk turning into yoghurt. Milk was sweet and liquid; now it is sour and semisolid. It has undergone some change. No doubt milk is the *upādāna-kāraṇa* for the yoghurt, but the yoghurt is definitely not in the form of milk. The milk, which is the *upādāna-kāraṇa* has undergone a change to become yoghurt.

Similarly if the Lord, is understood to be the *upādāna-kāraṇa*, one may think that perhaps he also undergoes some change to become this *jagat*! — that is perhaps as *pariṇāmi-upādāna-kāraṇa*, he has indeed become the world, and as the material cause, must have undergone a change. If he has undergone a change, he is no longer in his original form. Therefore, all that is here now is the world. Where is the Lord? There is no Lord at all! This is an argument raised by some people to negate the Lord being the *upādāna-kāraṇa*.

This is too simplistic! The Lord, no doubt, is the material cause, *upādāna-kāraṇa*. But he is not the *pariṇāmi-upādāna-kāraṇa*. He is the *vivarta-upādāna-kāraṇa*. That is, without undergoing any change he is the *upādāna-kāraṇa*. This kind of *upādāna-kāraṇa* is called *vivarta-upādāna-kāraṇa*.

The definition of *vivarta* is, *sva-svarūpa-aparityāgena-rūpa-antara-āpattiḥ* — assuming another form without giving up one's own nature. An example is your own dream world. There you are the *nimitta-kāraṇa*; and you are the *upādāna-kāraṇa*. Without undergoing any intrinsic change, without giving up its *svarūpa*, *ātmā* has become the world in the dream. There is the subject; there is an object; there is an action. All the *kāraṇas* are involved. A *kāraṇa* is anything connected to an action.

Relationships are also included like, this is my house, this is my son etc. All these take place there without bringing about any intrinsic change in the *ātmā*. *Ātmā*, pure consciousness, alone is in the form of this dream. As in the dream, so it is in this waking state.

When we say the Lord is the *upādāna-kāraṇa* for the creation, we mean it as *vivarta-upādāna-kāraṇa*. It is like the rope which, without undergoing any change, becomes the basis for the snake that is seen. Rope is *vivarta-upādāna-kāraṇa* for the snake.

### PARIṆĀMI-UPĀDĀNA-KĀRAṆA — MĀYĀ

Since *Brahman* itself cannot undergo any change in order to be the cause of this creation it must have some *upādhi* which is as good as the creation. If the creation is *mithyā*, there must be an *upādhi* which is equally *mithyā*. That *upādhi*, we call *māyā*, the *upādhi* for *Brahman* to be *Īśvara*, the creator. We can now say, from this standpoint, that *Īśvara* has undergone a change to become this *jagat*. From the standpoint of *māyā-upādhi* we call *Īśvara* the *pariṇāmi-upādāna-kāraṇa*.

When we look at *Īśvara, Brahman*, as the cause of everything, we look at it as the *vivarta-upādāna-kāraṇa*. That *Īśvara* you are. When I say that you are that *Īśvara*, I mean *Īśvara* as *vivarta-upādāna-kāraṇa*. When we talk about the world as non-separate from *Īśvara* it is *Īśvara* that has become space, air and so on. Here we look at *Īśvara* from the standpoint of the *māyā-upādhi* which has undergone all the changes. When we say *Brahman*, besides being the *nimitta-kāraṇa*, the efficient cause, he is *upādāna-kāraṇa*, the material cause, what we mean is that, *Brahman* is the *vivarta-upādāna-kāraṇa*. And because of this *vivarta-upādāna-kāraṇatva* alone, it is possible to appreciate *ātmā* as *sat-cit-ānandaṃ brahma*.

One high school teacher once told me that *Śaṅkara* has said that God became the world. In the beginning there was God and then he created the world out of himself. So, God became the world. And now there is no God. It is exactly like making *idli* out of rice. The rice is gone; only *idli* is there. Later, I repeated this as *Śaṅkara's* philosophy to someone and he laughed so hard that I knew that there was some mistake in what I had said. But I didn't know what the mistake was and he didn't correct me either.

It is obvious. The mistake is that God is taken as *pariṇāmi-upādāna-kāraṇa*, a material cause that undergoes a change. We require the technical term, *vivarta*, to understand this. Once we say *Brahman* is *vivarta-upādāna-kāraṇa*, *Brahman* remains as *Brahman*. That alone will work. *Satyam jñānam anantaṃ brahma* always remains the same. Its *svarūpa* being what it is, it cannot undergo any change.

To understand the non-dual nature of *Brahman*, that there is nothing beyond *Brahman* and that the creation is not different from *Brahman*, this

*kāraṇa-kārya-vāda*, discussion of cause-effect is the set-up. Through this, one understands that all that is here is *Brahman* and I am none other than that *Brahman*.

मत्तः परतरं नान्यत् किञ्चिदस्ति धनञ्जय ।

मयि सर्वमिदं प्रोतं सूत्रे मणिगणा इव ॥ ७ ॥

*mattaḥ parataraṃ nānyat kiñcidasti dhanañjaya*  
*mayi sarvamidaṃ protaṃ sūtre maṇigaṇā iva*

Verse 7

धनञ्जय *dhanañjaya* — O *Arjuna!*; मत्तः परतरम् *mattaḥ parataram* — superior to me; अन्यत् किञ्चित् *anyat kiñcit* — any other thing; न अस्ति *na asti* — there is not; सूत्रे *sūtre* — in a string; मणिगणाः इव *maṇigaṇāḥ iva* — like the group of beads; मयि *mayi* — in me; इदम् सर्वम् *idam sarvam* — all this; प्रोतम् *protam* — is woven

O *Dhanañjaya*, there is no other cause superior to Me. All this is woven (has its being) in Me, like the beads in a string.

In this verse, *Kṛṣṇa* says, ‘O *Dhanañjaya*, (*Arjuna*), there is no other (cause) which, is superior to Me.’ Previously he had said, ‘I am the creator of this entire world and I am the place to which it returns.’ There, he definitely talks about himself as *vivarta-upādāna-kāraṇa*. He says, ‘Out of Me everything has come; unto me everything returns.’

A pot maker can not say, ‘From out of me came this pot,’ because it does come out of his efforts. But when the pot is destroyed, it does not go back to the pot maker. If something goes back to its cause, we understand that cause to be the *upādāna-kāraṇa*. The pot came out of clay, unto clay it will return. Therefore, when we say the effect goes unto the cause, it is always the *upādāna-kāraṇa*, the material cause.

In saying that the Lord is the one from whom the creation has come and to whom it goes back, we accept that the Lord is the *nimitta-kāraṇa*, the maker, as well as the *upādāna-kāraṇa*, the material. We have to understand this material cause to be the *vivarta-upādāna-kāraṇa*.

So, in this verse the Lord says, ‘In this world, there is no cause other than Me.’ Here, *na kiñcit āsti* can be either *kiñcit anyat nāsti* — there is no cause other than Me, or *kiñcit parataraṃ nāsti* — there is no other cause superior to Me.

This indicates that the Lord is the uncaused cause of everything. If there were to be a cause for this cause, it in turn would require another cause and we would get into an infinite regression. Here we are talking of the cause which is *satyaṃ jñānam anantaṃ brahma*. That is the point in which the whole world resolves. It is the point in which both the seer and the seen resolve and that is presented here as the cause of everything.



Then *Kṛṣṇa* says, ‘*mayi sarvamideṣu protaṁ sutre maṇigaṇā iva*’ — into me alone all this is woven like a group of beads on a string.’ *Śaṅkara* says that, this entire world is pervaded by *Parameśvara* like how a cloth is pervaded by its threads. As a tapestry is not separate from its threads, the world is not separate from *Parameśvara*. *Kṛṣṇa* says it is, *sutre maṇigaṇā iva* — as in one string a group of beads is strung together. By saying a group of beads he takes into account the variegated nature of the world. As beads of various shapes, sizes, colours and values are all strung together on a single string, similarly, ‘in Me,’ *paramātmā* alone, this world in all its variety is strung. As *pratyagātmā*, I am the truth of everything that is here.

The limitation of this example is that the beads are different from the string. This is duality. The thread runs through the beads but is distinct from it. *Parameśvara* can also say, ‘I am the thread of all the beings but I am distinct from all of them — being the basis of all of them and being *asaṅga* at the same time.’ But here, there is no duality. Anything one experiences is non-separate from *ātmā*, the sustaining factor. Therefore, I am the *ātmā*, the *pratyagātmā* of all beings experiencing different worlds. This is another meaning.

The word *protā* also suggests the expression ‘*otaḥ protaḥ* — the warp and the woof.’ As in weaving, I am the warp and I am the woof. This variegated tapestry of the world is woven in *sat-cit-ātmā* alone. Existence, which is in the form of consciousness is *sat-cit-ātmā*, *Brahman*, and in this *Brahman* alone are all the modifications of *māyā*. Wherever there is *māyā*, I am there because *māyā* has no existence apart from Me, *Brahman*. This entire *jagat*, which is *mithyā* is non-separate from Me.

Now we can understand how this *jagat* is *īśvara-sṛṣṭi* — from *Īśvara* alone the *jagat* has come, *mattaḥ parataraṁ na anyat kiñcit asti*. In the previous verse the Lord says, ‘I am the cause of the birth of this creation; I am the place where it resolves.’ In this verse he adds, ‘I am the sustaining factor. Not only does the creation come from Me and go back to me, it is sustained by Me. The essence of each and every thing everywhere is Me alone at all the different levels. I am the one who is in the form of the subtle elements; I am the sustaining factor of the gross elements. All the gross elements can be reduced to the subtle, like matter can be reduced to energy. Similarly one can say matter is sustained by energy. If the *Gītā* were to be written today, *Bhagavān* could say, I am energy in the form of matter and therefore, all forms of matter are sustained by Me, the energy. Then what is energy? That also can be reduced to *māyā* which has no independent existence apart from *Brahman*. And that *Brahman*, *satyaṁ jñānam anantaṁ brahma*, is *ātmā*.

Now he shows how each and every thing is non-separate from him because he is the essence of everything. That particular essence he points out here in order to reveal that the world is sustained by him. One can ask *Bhagavān*, ‘What is the essence of each

thing by which you sustain it? What are the characteristics you have with which you sustain everything?' A few more verses elaborate this.

रसोऽहमप्सु कौन्तेय प्रभास्मि शशिसूर्ययोः ।

प्रणवः सर्ववेदेषु शब्दः खे पौरुषं नृषु ॥ ८ ॥

*raso'hamapsu kaunteya prabhāsmi śaśisūryayoḥ  
praṇavaḥ sarvavedeṣu śabdaḥ khe pauruṣaṃ nṛṣu*

Verse 8

कौन्तेय *kaunteya* — O Son of *Kuntī!*, (*Arjuna*); अहम् अस्मि *aham asmi* — I am; अप्सु *apsu* — in the water; रसः *rasaḥ* — taste; शशि-सूर्ययोः *śaśi-sūryayoḥ* — in the moon and sun; प्रभा *prabhā* — light; सर्ववेदेषु *sarvavedeṣu* — in all the Vedas; प्रणवः *praṇavaḥ* — *Om*; खे *khe* — in space; शब्दः *śabdaḥ* — sound; नृषु *nṛṣu* — in human beings; पौरुषम् *pauruṣam* — strength

O *Kaunteya*, I am the taste in the water; I am the light in the moon and the sun; I am *Om* in all the Vedas; I am sound in the space; and I am the strength in human beings.

O *Kaunteya* (*Arjuna*), *raso'ham apsu* — I am the taste in the water. I am the essential characteristic of water which you experience in the form of taste. I am the subtle element of this gross element which you experience, the cause for water to be water. In other words, I am the essence of water. Essence here means taste because the taste of water is its unique property. If water has a quality of its own it is *rasa*, taste. Because of which water is water, that indeed I am. I am the truth of water. What makes the water distinguishable as an element from everything else? That is Me, the taste in water.

*Prabhā asmi śaśi-sūryayoḥ* — I am the light in these famous luminaries, *śaśi*, the moon and *sūrya*, the sun,' says the Lord. There is no sun without light and without the sun's light the moon also would not be visible. I am the light in the sun; I am the light in the moon. Once you are the light in the sun then naturally you are the light in the moon because moonlight is nothing but the reflection of sunlight. That sunlight itself is Me. I am the essence of the sun, the light because of which the sun is sun. And the reflected light because of which the moon is moon, that is also Me, *prabhā*, the light that shines, *aham asmi*, I am.

*Praṇavaḥ sarva-vedeṣu* — in all the Vedas I am *praṇava*. The Vedas discuss varieties of things. And all those things can be reduced to one thing — *Om*. In *Kāthopaniṣad* it is said, 'I will tell you briefly that one thing that is talked about by all the Vedas desiring which people take to a life of *brahmacarya*, study, etc. — *Om*

*ityetat* – it is this *Om*.<sup>1</sup> *Praṇava*, *Om* is a well known symbol for *Brahman* and also the whole *Veda* can be reduced to *Om*. I am that *Om*.

‘*Śabdaḥ khe*’ means, I am the *śabda*, the sound, in space. Sound is not experienced by any other sense organ except the ears. To reach the ears sound has to travel in space, so, the sound is manifest in space. Also, ‘sound’ stands for the subtle element of space which sustains the gross element space as its cause.

Then again I am *pauruṣaṃ nṛṣu* — in human beings I am *pauruṣa*, the strength. In the human physical body, whether it is a male or a female body, there is a certain strength. That strength I am. The body has got the capacity to do, to walk, even the capacity to procreate; that is all *pauruṣa*. Whatever strength or capacity the body has, that *pauruṣaṃ aham asmi*.

Two elements, water and space, are covered. Now the earth and the fire that lends its heat are dealt with in the next verse. All the elements are not named here. Four are mentioned and the fifth, *vāyu*, we have to add. The idea here is not to enumerate everything but to mention a few things to prove that anything that is here is Me. Anything that has a form, a particular quality is Me. It doesn't gain its uniqueness by anything else. It is my creation, non-separate from Me. In each and every thing, that which makes it so distinct, so different from everything else is all Me. And therefore, everything is Me.

पुण्यो गन्धः पृथिव्यां च तेजश्चास्मि विभावसौ ।

जीवनं सर्वभूतेषु तपश्चास्मि तपस्विषु ॥ ९ ॥

*puṇyo gandhaḥ pṛthivyāṃ ca tejaścāsmi vibhāvasau*  
*jīvanam sarvabhūteṣu tapaścāsmi tapasviṣu*

Verse 9

पृथिव्याम् च *pṛthivyāṃ ca* — and in the earth; पुण्यः गन्धः *puṇyaḥ gandhaḥ* — the sweet fragrance; विभावसौ च *vibhāvasau ca* — and in the fire; तेजस् *tejas* — the brilliance and the heat; अस्मि *asmi* — I am; सर्वभूतेषु *sarvabhūteṣu* — in all the beings; जीवनम् *jīvanam* — the life itself; च *ca* — and; तपस्विषु *tapasviṣu* — in the ascetics; तपस् *tapas* — the ascetic disciplines and their results; अस्मि *asmi* — I am

And I am the sweet fragrance in the earth and the brilliance and heat in the fire. I am the very life in all beings and the ascetic disciplines and their results in the ascetics.

*Kṛṣṇa* continues to say that the essence of each object is himself. All have come from Me; they are non-separate from Me. I am, *puṇyaḥ gandhaḥ pṛthivyāṃ*, the sweet fragrance in the earth. Because earth has the special quality of smell, all fragrance is

<sup>1</sup> *Kāthopaniṣad* — 1.2.15

from *prthivī*. *Kṛṣṇa* mentions the sweet fragrance because that is the special fragrance which attracts people, like the sweet fragrance in a flower. That sweet fragrance, even though it is manifest in various things, has its source only in *prthivī*. And therefore, in the *prthivī* I am in the form of sweet fragrance. That is the *sūkṣma* aspect of *prthivī*.

*Tejas ca asmi vibhāvasau — vibhāvasau* – in the fire, *tejaḥ asmi* – I am the brilliance. *Tejas* can also mean heat. The heat as well as the brilliance in the fire are Myself.

*Jīvanaṃ sarva-bhūteṣu — sarva -bhūteṣu* – in all the beings, I am *jīvana* – the life that is there. *Jīvana* if taken as that which makes life possible will mean *anna*, the food because of which the growth and sustenance of the physical body is possible. That *anna*, *jīvana*, is Myself. Or we can take *jīvana* as the life that is present in all living beings; that life, that very *prāṇa* is Myself. Both *prāṇa* and *anna* are *jīvana* — they make life possible.

So far *Bhagavān* has been speaking of the essence of things. Now he cites certain qualities. He says, '*tapas ca asmi tapasviṣu* — I am the austerity in the ascetics.' *Tapasvins* are the ascetics, those who follow a life of prayerful disciplines. *Tapasviṣu*, in these *tapasvins*, in these ascetics who live a life of discipline, prayer, and meditation, I am the very *tapas*. I am that quality that makes them ascetics, *tapasvins*. That means any accomplishment, even in terms of *tapas*, is non-separate from *Īśvara*. All the powers that one can accomplish — the power of concentration, power of absorption, power of a purified heart — are called *tapas*. A *tapasvin's* power is nothing but the manifestation of what is already possible in an unmanifest form because we can only tap what is available as a potential; we cannot create anything that is not there. These *tapasvins* only tap the potential which is *Īśvara*. Once a potential is tapped, it manifests. The discipline is born of the free will of the *jīva*, but when it manifests, the power enjoyed by the *tapasvin* is *Īśvara*. If that result were not there, nobody would do *tapas*. Like anything else, one does it for the *karma-phala*, the result. The *tapas* is the means for the result, which is already locked up as a potential in the *jīva*. That is what comes to manifestation. That is Myself.

The power because of which a person becomes a *tapasvin* is also Myself. Unless the means is there, no end can be accomplished. And the means to become a *tapasvin*, like all means and ends are according to the laws. Those laws are Myself. Therefore, the *tapas* in every *tapasvin*, because of which he is a *tapasvin* is also Myself. So, I can't say I am the *tapasvin*, unless the I is *Parameśvara*. And when I am borrowing the *tapas* from *Īśvara*, I cannot say I am the *tapasvin*.

*Śaṅkara* says here, 'In the *tapas* that is Me all the *tapasvins* are woven.' We can keep on extending this. I am the voice in the musician. I am the sound in all the musical instruments. I am the very quality in the creation because of which a thing is a thing, a

violin is a violin, a guitar is a guitar, a *viṇā* is a *viṇā*. That because of which all these are what they are is myself.

बीजं मां सर्वभूतानां विद्धि पार्थ सनातनम् ।

बुद्धिर्बुद्धिमतामस्मि तेजस्तेजस्विनामहम् ॥ १० ॥

*bījaṃ māṃ sarvabhūtānāṃ viddhi pārtha sanātanam*  
*buddhirbuddhimatāmasmi tejasvijāsvināmaham*

Verse 10

पार्थ *pārtha* — O Son of *Prthā!*, (*Arjuna*); माम् *mām* — Me, the *Paramēśvara*; सर्वभूतानाम् *sarvabhūtānām* — in all beings; सनातनम् बीजम् *sanātanam bījam* — as the eternal seed; विद्धि *viddhi* — understand; बुद्धिमताम् *buddhimatām* — of those that have the capacity to discriminate, i.e. human beings; बुद्धिः *buddhiḥ* — the intellect; तेजस्विनाम् *tejasvinām* — in the brilliant; तेजस् *tejas* — the brilliance; अहम् अस्मि *aham asmi* — I am

O *Pārtha*, (*Arjuna*), understand Me as the one who is the eternal seed in all beings. I am the intellect of those that have the capacity to discriminate; I am the brilliance in the brilliant.

*Viddhi* – understand, *mām* – Me, *Paramēśvara*, as the *bīja* – seed *sarva-bhūtānām* – in all living beings. The sense in which *bīja* is used here is different from the sense in which *yonī* was used previously when *Bhagavān* said, *etad-yonīni bhūtāni sarvāṇi*, this *prakṛti* of Mine is the cause of everything. Here *bīja* is the seed form of any living being. Each tree has its own seed which is the essence that makes it a given tree and not any other. Similarly, each animal, each human being is what he is because of a particular seed. That biological source is myself. Again it is the laws that make all this possible and those laws are *Īśvara*. When a seed is planted, it sprouts within a given time. The biological law that causes the sprouting of the seed is Myself. As it was pointed out earlier, here *Kṛṣṇa* is not talking about the general cause for the creation. Within the creation there is a further cause for creation. That final cause is also Me.

Then he says *sanātana*, eternal. *Sanātana* can go with *mām*, Me, the one who is eternal, the seed of all the beings. It can also be an adjective to *bīja* but that would make it the general cause which cannot be the meaning here. Even though that meaning is possible, it is not appropriate in the context. Therefore, the meaning is ‘please understand that the eternal Me, *Paramēśvara*, is indeed the *bīja*, the seed, of every living being.’ This is in keeping with the flow of the unfoldment.

Similarly the statement, ‘*buddhiḥ buddhimatām asmi.*’ This removes all *ahaṅkāra*. *Buddhimats* are those who have the capacity to discriminate. Not all living beings have an intellect; so, the word *buddhimatām* means, ‘among the human beings.’

Each one has an intellect, a *buddhi* because of which he is called *buddhimat*. That *buddhi*, the rational capacity or the free will is the Lord. Therefore, if there is a person who can think properly, that accomplishment in terms of intellectual discipline, is Me. That *buddhi*, that capacity itself is Me. Therefore, nobody can say that I am *buddhimat*. That *aham* can only be *Paramēśvara*.

*Tejas tejasvinām aham* — *Tejas* means the shine of health or brilliance. ‘Among the brilliant people, I am the brilliance.’ He has already said ‘I am the *buddhi*, intellectual capacity, in the human beings who are capable of thinking.’ If so, why do only some become brilliant? It is true that everybody is *buddhimat* but the person who makes an effort is the one who becomes brilliant, who becomes educated. The brilliance that he is able to tap within himself is also Myself.

बलं बलवतां चाहं कामरागविवर्जितम् ।

धर्माविरुद्धो भूतेषु कामोऽस्मि भरतर्षभ ॥ ११ ॥

*balaṃ balavatāṃ cāhaṃ kāmarāgavivarjitam*

*dharmāviruddho bhūteṣu kāmo'smi bharatarṣabha*

Verse 11

च *ca* — and; भरतर्षभ *bharatarṣabha* — O foremost in the clan of *Bharata* ! (*Arjuna*); बलवताम् *balavatām* — of the strong people; काम-राग-विवर्जितम् *kāma-rāga-vivarjitam* — that which is free from *kāma*, desire, and *rāga*, attachment; बलम् *balam* — the strength; भूतेषु *bhūteṣu* — in the beings; धर्म-अविरुद्धः *dharma-aviruddhaḥ* — that which is not opposed to *dharma*; कामः *kāmaḥ* — desire; अहम् अस्मि *aham asmi* — I am

And in the strong, I am the strength that is free from desire and attachment. In all beings, I am the desire that is not opposed to *dharma*,  
O the foremost in the clan of *Bharata* !

‘*Balaṃ balavatām asmi*’ — I am the strength of all people who are strong. Developing physical strength requires dedication because strength is a potential which can be brought to manifestation. And what is potential is *Īśvara*. So, the strength that is developed is *Bhagavān*. People are not born with large biceps; they work for them. Even the free will required to accomplish this is *Bhagavān*. Therefore, that strength which is latent in all people and is manifest in the *balavat*, the strong person, the strength because of which he is called *balavat*, that strength I am. So, the person who is strong cannot say, I am strong, unless that ‘I am’ is *Īśvara*.

*Īśvara* is not simply any *bala* but a *bala* that is devoid of *kāma* and *rāga* — *kāma-rāga-vivarjitam balam aham asmi*. Generally, *kāma* is a word that covers *rāga* and *dveṣa*. But here *kāma* and *rāga* are mentioned separately; so, we have to look at the meaning a little differently. Here, *kāma* is a desire to accomplish what you don't have

and *rāga* is an attachment to what you have. In his commentary on this verse, *Śaṅkara* says that, *kāma* is a longing for objects which are not with you, which are away from you and therefore, to be accomplished by you. *Rāga* is attachment to objects which are already gained by you.

Here *Bhagavān* is saying, ‘The strength in the strong that is without *kāma* and *rāga* is Me.’ This has to be mentioned with reference to strength. Earlier he has said, I am the *buddhi* of the *buddhimat*, the *tejas* of the *tejasvin*, the *tapas* of the *tapasvin*.’ But unlike here, there he did not qualify those with any adjective. But when it comes to strength, a condition is mentioned because where there is strength, there can always be abuse. *Kāma* and *rāga* signify *ahaṅkāra*. Therefore, it is a strength which is free from *ahaṅkāra*.

Even though it is not specifically mentioned, this can apply everywhere. If somebody has brilliance, it should also be *kāma-rāga-vivarjitam*. *Kāma* and *rāga* are centred on ego, *ahaṅkāra*, so, what is there without the misappropriation of the *ahaṅkāra*, is naturally *Bhagavān*. When ego is present, it sullies the whole thing. If *Bhagavān* is not appreciated, the person with strength becomes a source of fear. If he has strength and also *kāma* and *rāga*, he is no longer *Īśvara*; he becomes a ruffian. If there is really a strong man who doesn't have *kāma* and *rāga*, you will see only *Īśvara*.

It is true even in music. If someone has a gift for music but has the sense that ‘I am a musician,’ then you can't enjoy his music. The *ahaṅkāra* vitiates the beauty. And to the extent that he doesn't have *ahaṅkāra*, you can enjoy his music.

Here *Bhagavān* says, understand Me to be the very strength in the people who are strong and free from *ahaṅkāra*. Even in the people who have *ahaṅkāra* the strength is Myself, but it is not visible. A strong person can be a great support because if you have the protection of a strong man, you are fearless. But if he has *kāma* and *rāga*, he becomes a source of fear. Therefore, strength with *ahaṅkāra* is dangerous. That is why he tells all this here. In fact the whole thing is to remove the *ahaṅkāra*.

‘*Dharma-aviruddhaḥ bhūteṣu kāmo'smi bharatarṣabha*’ — In the living beings I am the desire that is not against *dharma*,’ said *Kṛṣṇa*. This is another beautiful thing. We always hear it said that desires should be removed. That is nonsense. ‘Oh *Bharatarṣabha*, the foremost in the clan of *Bharata*, listen, *ahaṅ kāmaḥ asmi* — I am desire.’ I am the very desire because *kāma* is a *śakti*, a power. Without that desire, there would be no creation. Therefore, I am that very form of desire, *kāmo'smi bharatarṣabha*. And what should this desire be like? It should be *dharma-aviruddha*, unopposed to *dharma*. There you can see *Īśvara*. Suppose a person is free from *ahaṅkāra*. He has a lot of talents, skills, wisdom and so on, but no desire to do anything. Then it all just remains inside. He doesn't have a desire to talk; he doesn't have a desire to write; he doesn't have a desire to share. Suppose he doesn't have those desires —

because he need not have desires — then *Bhagavān* has to say, I am the silence in the silent people.

But he can also have desires because desire itself does not bind. Therefore, he says that he is *dharma-aviruddha kāma*. *Dharma* is in keeping with the *śāstra* and in keeping with the universal order of ethics. And the desire that is in keeping with *dharma* is the beauty of *Bhagavān*. It is the expression of *Bhagavān*. Anything beautiful has come out of such a desire. This is what we call *icchā-śakti*, the power of desiring which is a part of *māyā-śakti*. So, in all beings, any desire that is unopposed to *dharma* is Myself.

Previously he indicated the *jñāna-śakti* when he said, I am the *buddhi* in the *buddhimat* and the *tejas* in the *tejasvī*. That *jñāna-śakti* is *Bhagavān*. He also said that I am the *bala* in the *balavat*. This *bala* indicates the *kriyā-śakti* which is also *Bhagavān*. Here, *icchā-śakti* is referred to and that is also *Bhagavān*.

Since *Kṛṣṇa* has said that I am the desire which is not against *dharma*, if a desire is against *dharma*, it belongs to the *jīva*. Even though the *jīva* is non-separate from *Īśvara*, since for the time being we are giving the *jīva* a free will, those desires and desire prompted activities which are against *dharma* definitely belong to the *jīva*. They are not *Īśvara*.

Concluding this particular section using *ca* to connect, *Kṛṣṇa* says:

ये चैव सात्त्विका भावा राजसास्तामसाश्च ये ।

मत् एवेति तान्विद्धि न त्वहं तेषु ते मयि ॥ १२ ॥

*ye caiva sātṭvikā bhāvā rājasāstāmasāśca ye  
matta eveti tānviddhi na tvahaṃ teṣu te mayi*

Verse 12

ये च *ye ca* — and those; एव *eva* — indeed; सात्त्विकाः *sātṭvikāḥ* — born of *sattva*; भावाः *bhāvāḥ* — beings and things; ये च *ye ca* — and those; राजसाः *rājasāḥ* — born of *rajas*; (च *ca* — and;) तामसाः *tāmasāḥ* — born of *tamas*; तान् *tān* — them; मत्तः एव *mattaḥ eva* — from Me alone; इति *iti* — thus; विद्धि *viddhi* — may you know; ते मयि *te mayi* — they are in Me; तु *tu* — but; न अहम् *na aham* — I am not; तेषु *teṣu* — in them

And those beings and things which are indeed born of *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*, may you know them to be born from Me alone. They are in Me but I am not in them.

*Ye ca eva sātṭvikāḥ bhāvāḥ* — those things which are born purely of *sattva*. Desires which are *sātṭvika* in nature, like a desire to know, are born of *sattva*. If the *antaḥ-karaṇa* consists of three qualities, *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*, *sattva* accounts for anything noble, anything in keeping with *dharma*. Even experiences like happiness,



*sukha*, and tranquillity, *śānti*, are born of *sattva*. Right attitudes, devotion, prayer, are all *sāttvikāḥ bhāvāḥ*.

Then those things which are born of *rajas* like ambition, dislike, anger and so on, are all *rājasa*. And those things, which are *tāmasa* in nature are born of *tamas*.

Or we can take it this way. *Ye bhāvāḥ* can mean those living beings, and *sāttvikas*, can mean those who are born of *sattva*, like the *devatās*. In this case it would mean predominantly *sattva*. And all the *rākṣasas* and so on are born of predominantly *rajas*. Similarly, *tāmasas* can mean those who are born of predominantly *tamas*, such as the animals. Then we have the human beings who are *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas* put together. This accounts for all types of beings.

Or we can take ‘*ye bhāvāḥ*’ as those people who are predominantly *sāttvika*, or *rājasa* or *tāmasa*. Such people, all these various beings are all born out of their own *karma*. That being so, they are all born of Me because the very *karma* is Me, the law of *karma* itself is Me. And further, the cause for everything is Me; so, nothing is separate from Me. To be born you require a physical body and for that you require all five gross elements. These are all Me. And you require subtle elements because without the subtle elements there would be no subtle body nor would there be any gross elements. And the subtle elements are also born of *Īśvara*. Therefore, there is nothing that is away from Me. To be born with a given body, all these ingredients are required. All of them are Me. I provide the *upādāna*, I am the material for all of them. So, according to one’s own *karma*, whatever form one takes, whether it is a *tāmasa* or a *sāttvika* form, that form is non-separate from Me.

Even though they are born of Me, *na tu ahaṃ teṣu* — I, however, am not in them. This means I am not under their control, I don’t depend upon them. Since they are born of Me, I do not depend upon their existence. This is similar to how the existence of the clay does not depend on the existence of pot. But they are in Me — all of them, *sāttvika*, *rājasa*, *tāmasa*, all depend entirely upon Me, upon My laws. According to My laws they are born and the laws are Me. And everything is Me, so, to exist they entirely depend upon Me. To breathe they require air which is Me; they require water which is Me; they require fire which is Me; they require earth, food that is Me. They all depend entirely upon Me. But I am not in their hands.

Here *Śaṅkara* gives an introduction to the next verse. Even though this is how it is, even though I am the taste in water, I am the strength in the strong, I am the desire itself, I am the one from whom all of the *sāttvika*, *rājasa* and *tāmasa* are born and even though nothing is separate from Me; even then, the world of people does not recognise Me, *Parameśvara*. Who is that *Parameśvara*? *Śaṅkara* tells here that he is *parama* as well as *Īśvara*. *Parama* indicates the *svarūpa* of *Īśvara*. Whenever we use the word *Parameśvara*, it covers both the *svarūpa* of the Lord as well as his status of being *sarva-kāraṇa*, the cause of everything.

Why do we say *sarva-kāraṇa*? In the world we draw a line and delineate different causes. Physical bodies are born of the physical elements. Therefore, the physical elements are the cause for the physical bodies. Then, the physical elements themselves are products of the subtle elements and so, the subtle elements become the causes. In this way, we can keep on tracing the cause. From the standpoint of a product we can trace the cause elsewhere, and that cause again is a product for which the *kāraṇa*, cause is elsewhere. Since there are many *kāraṇas* in this world we have to use the word *sarva-kāraṇa* for the cause of all. *Sarva-kāraṇa* is called *Īśvara*.

### ĪŚVARA'S SVARŪPA

ETERNAL, ALWAYS PURE, ALWAYS ENLIGHTENED, ALWAYS FREE

Then what is *parama*, *Īśvara's svarūpa*? That alone is the thing that is to be understood here. Therefore, *Śaṅkara* says that *Īśvara's svarūpa* is *nitya-śuddha-buddha-mukta-svabhāva*. This is an expression often used by *Śaṅkara* when he wants to reveal the *svarūpa* of *ātmā* which is *para*. The word *para* always qualifies either *ātmā* or *Brahman*.

The word *nitya* is an important word and it has to be understood properly. That which always is, is called *nitya*. If it always is, it is outside the scope of time. This is what we mean by eternal. *Ātmā* is *nitya*, *eternal*. The word *nitya* alone points out the nature of *ātmā* and also accompanies all the other words here. *Nitya* also serves as an adjective to *śuddha*, pure. And *śuddha* is the *svarūpa* of the *ātmā*, which is *nitya*. Because it is *nitya*, it doesn't become pure nor is it subject to becoming impure. Therefore, he says *nitya-śuddha*. *Śuddha* here means that which is free from bondage, free from *saṃsāra*, free from all *puṇya-pāpa-karma*.

Then he says *nitya-buddha*, always enlightened. In fact, *nitya-buddha* means never bound at all. *Buddha* means the one who is enlightened. If we say he is enlightened, it implies that there was a time when he was not enlightened. If he got enlightened, it was an event that took place at a given time. But here, *ātmā* is *nitya-buddha*. When a person says he is enlightened he only recognises the fact that he is always enlightened. Therefore, the word *nitya-buddha* expresses the fact that *ātmā* is always enlightened. Since the source of bondage is ignorance one who is *nitya-buddha* is naturally *nitya-mukta*, always free.

### ARE THESE QUALITIES?

If we look upon *nityatva*, *śuddhatva*, *mukhatva* as qualities, then the enlightened person may be considered to have these qualities. Any object has its own qualities because of which we call it an apple or by some other name. Unlike *ātmā*, an object does not have *nityatva*, *śuddhatva* and *mukhatva*. If these were qualities, then *ātmā* would be another object which has the attributes of *nityatva*, *śuddhatva* and *mukhatva*.

It would become another substantive enjoying its own qualities. This is not the case. *Ātmā* is not a locus in which qualities reside. When you identify an apple as sweet or red, you recognise those qualities in the particular object which you call apple. If you identify a green leaf, then the leaf is seen and its colour green is seen abiding in or qualifying that leaf. Similarly, when you realise the *ātmā*, will you see in the *ātmā* *nityatva* and so on, like you see the green in the leaf? No, you will not see all these qualities. A word like *nitya* is not a quality; it is a *lakṣaṇa*.

### LAKṢAṆA — A WORD THAT NEGATES AND RETAINS PART OF ITS OWN MEANING

*Nitya* is used to reveal that the nature of *ātmā* is not time-bound, *anitya*. Everything that we know is *anitya*; therefore, the word *nitya* becomes a *lakṣaṇa* to reveal the *svarūpa* of *ātmā*. *Ātmā* being a self-evident, self-effulgent being we only have to negate all the erroneously superimposed attributes like *anityatva*, etc. And this is done by a word like *nitya* which becomes a *lakṣaṇa*. The meaning of the word is retained. But any attribute which is time-bound is negated by the word *nitya*.

Similarly, the word *śuddha* negates all impurities like *rāga-dveṣas* and *punya-pāpa-karmas*. The word *buddha* negates ignorance as well as inertness. *Ātmā* is not inert; it is consciousness. And bondage is negated by saying *ātmā* is *mukta*.

Each word negates and also retains a part of its own meaning. It negates the status of being a quality but retains the root meaning. This is what we call *lakṣaṇa*, and the words are given a context to reveal the nature of *ātmā* which is free from attributes. It is our own *svarūpa* and it is the *svarūpa*, the *ātmā* of all beings, *sarvabhūta-ātmā*.

*Śaṅkara* says that the seed of *saṃsāra* is nothing but *ajñāna*, ignorance. Therefore, knowledge of this *nitya-śuddha-buddha-mukta-svabhāva-ātmā*, is the cause for the burning of all *saṃsāra*. Any knowledge is not going to be different from the very *svarūpa* of the object. And so, here knowledge of *ātmā* is not separate from the very *svarūpa* of *ātmā*. Naturally then, the very knowledge of *ātmā* becomes the cause for burning *saṃsāra*.

*Śaṅkara* continues to say that people do not know this 'I,' *Parameśvara*, who is the cause for burning the seed of the defect of the entire *saṃsāra*. They know Me in some form; but they do not know Me properly. They have some kind of appreciation that there is a cause but even though I am themselves, they don't know Me. In the following verse *Bhagavān* shows the cause of the ignorance of the world.

त्रिभिर्गुणमयैर्भावैरेभिः सर्वमिदं जगत् ।

मोहितं नाभिजानाति मामेभ्यः परमव्ययम् ॥ १३ ॥

*tribhīrguṇamayairbhāvairbhīḥ sarvamidam jagat  
mohitam nābhijānāti māmebhyaḥ paramavyayam*

Verse 13

एभिः *ebhiḥ* — by these; भावैः *bhāvaiḥ* — things; त्रिभिः गुणमयैः *tribhiḥ guṇa-mayaiḥ* — that are the modifications of the three *guṇas*; सर्वम् *sarvam* — all, entire; इदम् *idam* — this; जगत् *jagat* — world; मोहितम् *mohitam* — being deluded; माम् *mām* — Me; एभ्यः परम् *ebhyaḥ param* — who is beyond, distinct from these (*guṇas*); अव्ययम् *avyayam* — who is changeless; न अभिजानाति *na abhijānāti* — does not know

This entire world (of human beings), deluded by these things, which are the modifications of the three qualities, does not know Me who is changeless, distinct from, and beyond these (modifications of the *guṇas*).

*Mayaḥ* is a suffix which has two meanings — *vikāra*, modification and *prācurya*, predominance or saturation. Here it is used in the sense of modification. What is modified is *guṇa*. *Ebhiḥ tribhiḥ guṇamayaiḥ* means by the modifications of these three qualities — *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*. The modifications of these *guṇas*, Śaṅkara says, produce varieties of likes, dislikes, delusions and so on.

## MODIFICATIONS OF THE THREE GUṆAS

*Rāga*, is born of both *rajas* and *sattva*. There is a *sāttvika-rāga*, a desire born of *sattva* and a *rājasika-rāga*, a desire born of *rajas*. Suppose you want to study *Gītā*. It is a *sāttvika* desire. Any desire for knowledge is *sāttvika*. A desire born of *rajas*, like ambition, is a *rājasika-rāga*. Desire for name, fame, power and so on are all *rājasika-rāgas*.

Dislike, *dveṣa*, is always born of *rajas*. Delusion, *moha*, is born of *tamas*. *Tamas* is ignorance and *moha* is its product. It is responsible for all false values. False values are born of delusion which in turn is born of *tamas*, ignorance. So, the root of all non-thinking and false values is ignorance. Later, in Chapter 14, we will discuss the three *guṇas*, *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*, in detail.

## PEOPLE ARE DELUDED BY MODIFICATIONS OF THESE THREE GUṆAS

*Sarvam idam jagat*, this entire world, is *mohita*, deluded, by the modifications of these three *guṇas*. When Śaṅkara talks of the whole world here, he does not mean the various objects. They don't have these problems. Even though *jagat* means the world, it has a restricted meaning here. Therefore, Śaṅkara immediately brings in the word *prāṇi-jāta*, the living beings, the human beings.

*Mohita* means deluded, which here means lacking in discrimination. There is a lack of discrimination between what is eternal and what is non-eternal which is the basis of a lack of understanding about what I am seeking, *puruṣārtha*. There is also a lack of

discrimination with reference to *ātmā* and *anātmā*. So, at every stage it is a problem of discrimination.

### DELUDED, THEY DO NOT RECONGISE ĪŚVARA AS THEMSELVES

*Kṛṣṇa* says here, ‘Nobody understands Me — *māṃ na abhijānāti.*’ Being carried away by all this, they don’t recognise Me, even though I am not different from them. Then what is the nature of that ‘I’? *Kṛṣṇa* says further, I am *param avyayam.* *Para* means the one who is distinct from all the *guṇas* and in whom all the *guṇas* exist. He is the one because of whom the *guṇas* have their status of being *guṇas*. People do not recognise Me, the one who is free from the three *guṇas*.

*Avyaya* means that which does not die. Here it also includes what is not born. Therefore, *Śaṅkara* says it is free from the six-fold modifications beginning with birth and ending with death.<sup>1</sup> If it does not die, it means that it is not born. It means further that it is not a particular object existing now. And it does not undergo growth, then metamorphosis and death. *Vyaya*, therefore, includes death and all those things that take place between birth and death, greying, ageing, wrinkling, and so on. And *avyaya* means the absence of all these six-fold modifications.

Deluded by these three modifications of the *guṇas*, people don’t recognise *Īśvara* as the one who does not undergo any of these changes. In their delusion they are busy trying to fulfil their desires all the while complaining about their inadequacy. In fact, they recognise *Īśvara* only as a cause of complaint. They keep complaining, ‘You did not give me this or that. Why did you do this? Why didn’t you do this?’ and so on. So, the Lord becomes an altar of complaint. He is like the supreme court, the last place of appeal. But he is not recognised as he is. He has pointed out the reason for this. And in the next verse he will tell who is going to cross this *māyā* made up of these three *guṇas*.

In the previous verse *Kṛṣṇa* said, ‘This entire world, deluded by the modifications of the three *guṇas* does not know Me. Overcome by whatever happens in the mind, one identifies totally with it and therefore, does not recognise Me — even though I am there as the very *ātmā* of all beings, independent of all the *guṇas* and their modifications.’

Then how is one to be released from this delusion and recognise the Lord? How do people cross this *māyā* which belongs to *Viṣṇu*, the Lord, if at all they can cross it? This is answered here.

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<sup>1</sup> *The ṣaḍ-bhāva-vikāras, the six-fold modifications, are jāyate, asti, vardhate, vipariṇamate, apakṣīyate, vinaśyati — birth, existence, growth, modification, decline, and death.*

दैवी ह्येषा गुणमयी मम माया दुरत्यया ।

मामेव ये प्रपद्यन्ते मायामेतां तरन्ति ते ॥ १४ ॥

*daivī hyeṣā guṇamayī mama māyā duratyayā  
māmeva ye prapadyante māyāmetāṅ taranti te*

Verse 14

हि *hi* — indeed; एषा *eṣā* — this; मम माया *mama māyā* — My *māyā*; गुणमयी *guṇamayī* — which is in the form of the modification of the *guṇas*; दैवी *daivī* — that which belongs to the Lord; दुरत्यया *duratyayā* — is difficult to cross; ये *ye* — those; माम् एव *mām eva* — Me alone; प्रपद्यन्ते *prapadyante* — who seek; ते *te* — they; मायाम् एताम् *māyām etām* — this *māyā*; तरन्ति *taranti* — cross

Indeed this My *māyā*, which is in the form of the modification of the three *guṇas*, which belongs to Me, (the Lord), is difficult to cross. Those who seek only Me, they cross this *māyā*.

### MĀYĀ IS DIFFICULT TO OVERCOME

Right in the beginning Lord *Kṛṣṇa* says, ‘*Eṣā mama māyā duratyayā hi* — Indeed this *māyā* of mine is difficult to cross.’ Deluded by the modifications of the mind we are not able to recognise our identity with *Īśvara*.

Further, he says that this *māyā* is *daivī* – belongs to the Lord and is *guṇamayī* – endowed with the three *guṇas*. As we have seen, the conditions of the mind are all products of the qualities of *māyā*, that is, products of *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*. Thus *māyā* is *guṇamayī*, endowed with the three *guṇas*. It is this *māyā* manifesting as the mental modifications that seemingly obstructs the recognition of *Īśvara*. That has to be overcome; the reality has to be seen as it is.

And it is *daivī*, it belongs to *Īśvara*. The very basis of *māyā* is *Parameśvara*. So, it does not affect him; it becomes a power for him. Pervading everything *Parameśvara* is called *Viṣṇu* and this *māyā* is his *svabhāva*, his nature. His *svarūpa* is different as we have seen, but his *svabhāva* is omniscient, almighty and so on. All these qualities are due to *māyā*. And it is the product of this *māyā* that we are not able to easily overcome.

Even though it is not impossible to cross this *māyā*, Lord *Kṛṣṇa* acknowledges here that it is difficult. The difficulty is that when you are overwhelmed by or under the spell of the *guṇas*, there is no possibility of overcoming them. Unless you are able to see yourself as distinct from them, you cannot recognise them as the causes for all the activities of the mind. The difficulty is that one sees this only when one is not under the spell of the *guṇas*, in other words, to get out of the spell, you have to be out of the spell. This is a problem. You cannot get out of the spell unless you are out of the spell and as

long as you are under the spell, you cannot get out of the spell. And you want to get out of the spell. This is a very difficult situation.

### EVEN THOUGH DIFFICULT, IT IS POSSIBLE TO CROSS MĀYĀ

Having said how difficult it is, *Kṛṣṇa* does not leave it there. He says here that there is one way out — *ye mām eva prapadyante etāṃ māyāṃ taranti te* — those who seek only Me, they cross this *māyā*. Those who pursue only Me — *mām eva prapadyante*, they cross over — *te taranti*, this *māyā* — *etāṃ māyāṃ*. If they are under the spell of *māyā*, searching for a way to overcome it within the very *māyā*, they cannot cross it. In the name of searching for a solution, they will remain under the spell of *māyā*. They have to seek Me alone. Only then can they get out of the spell of *māyā*.

Later *Kṛṣṇa* is going to say, having totally surrendered all *dharmas* (and *adharmas*) unto Me, may you approach Me as the only refuge — *sarva-dharmān parityajya mām ekaṃ śaraṇaṃ vraja*.<sup>1</sup> Keeping that fact in view, he says here, '*mām eva ye prapadyante*, those who seek me alone.' *Śaṅkara* immediately follows this *mām* with the adjective, *svātma-bhūtam*, the one who is of the nature of oneself, the one who is *sarva-ātmā*, the self of everything. Me, who is of the nature of oneself, they seek as the self of everything, the basis of this *māyā* which is non-separate from oneself, the seeker's *ātmā*. At the same time it is totally free from *māyā* and its products, the *guṇa* modifications. Those who seek refuge only in this *ātmā* will cross *māyā*.

*Śaṅkara's* expression, *sarva-ātmā*, can also mean those who seek *paramātmā* with all their being, with their whole hearts and souls. For the inquiry and the *vastu* itself, there is love, and the commitment is total. So, *sarva-ātmā* can mean a person who is emotionally committed to this pursuit. Such a person alone, such people alone, cross this *māyā* which, *Śaṅkara* says, is *mohinī*.

### MĀYĀ IS MOHINĪ — THE ONE WHO DELUDES

*Mohinī* means the one who deludes by fascinating you and luring you away from your purpose. Lord *Viṣṇu* sometimes came as a *mohinī* assuming the form of an enchanting girl. In one instance, he appeared in this form to an *asura* who had invoked Lord *Śiva*, who is a reckless giver. He is easily satisfied, therefore, he is called *āśutoṣa* (*āśu* — quickly, *toṣa* — one who is satisfied), and he does not think of the consequences of his giving. So, when the *asura* performed austerities, *tapas*, and prayed, Lord *Śiva* appeared and asked him what he wanted. Being an *asura*, he did not ask for anything we would consider very desirable. He asked that anyone whom he happened to touch should be reduced to ashes.

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<sup>1</sup> *Gītā* — 18-66

Because of that, he is called *Bhasmāsura*. *Bhasma* means ashes. And Lord *Śiva* said, ‘*tathāstu*,’ so be it. Once Lord *Śiva* says *tathāstu* he does not think about it. He is so satisfied with the devotee and his devotion that he grants whatever he wants. Thus when Lord *Śiva* said *Tathāstu* – let it be so. As you have asked, you will have. Whomsoever you touch, you will find to be a heap of ashes.’ When this was granted to *Bhasmāsura*, he wanted to know if it worked. He said to Lord *Śiva*, ‘You may be deceiving me, so, please give me your head. Let me try it on you first.’ Lord *Śiva* ran for his life. He ran from one place to another and finally went to Lord *Viṣṇu* who is generally the rescuer. Lord *Viṣṇu* then appeared to the *asura* in the form of a *mohinī*, a highly fascinating girl. Now when Lord *Viṣṇu* assumes this form, he manifests all charms wrapped up in one physical frame. With all his wiles and charms, Lord *Viṣṇu* came in the form of this *mohinī* whom he created out of his *māyā*. And when the *asura* saw her, he forgot what he was searching for. He had been running after Lord *Śiva*. But Lord *Śiva* disappeared and the *mohinī* entered his head. And wherever the *mohinī* went, he went after her.

Then the *mohinī* said, ‘You are an *asura* and without chanting the *gāyatrī-mantra*, you cannot touch me because I am a celestial damsel.’ He said he would touch her after chanting the *gāyatrī*. Now, before one chants the *gāyatrī-mantra*, one has to touch one’s head and say, ‘*Praṇavasya*.’ When he put his hand on his head, he became a heap of ashes. Because of this, he was known as *Bhasmāsura*.

Lord *Viṣṇu* appeared as a *mohinī* in many such instances. *Māyā*, therefore, is *sarva-bhūta-mohinī*, the deluder of all creatures. No one is an exception to this. *Māyā* lures a person and keeps him fascinated; therefore, he forgets everything. This is *mohinī* and it comes in a variety of forms — power, money, and so on. This *māyā*, the one who enchants everyone, keeps all people under its spell until they cross over.

How do they overcome *māyā*? *Kṛṣṇa* says, ‘Because I am the one who has crossed over, by seeking Me alone they overcome the *māyā*. In fact I am the one who has always been free. And I remain as the *ātmā* of everyone. Therefore, there is no real difficulty if they seek Me. Therefore, those who seek Me alone cross over this *māyā* — *mām eva ye prapadyante māyām atitaranti te*.’

### SOME ERRONEOUS INTERPRETATIONS OF VERSES LIKE THIS

These verses are all celebrated by devotees. Devotion itself is not a problem. The problem arises when, out of that devotion, a philosophy is created. In commenting on a verse like this some devotees will say, that this statement, means that by worshipping *Kṛṣṇa* alone, one can cross this *māyā*. If anyone worships any other god, that person cannot cross this *māyā*. There is a small *Upaniṣad*, called *Kalīsantaraṇopaniṣad*, which presents the *mantra* — *hare rāma, hare kṛṣṇa*. And based on this there is a



popular verse<sup>1</sup> which says that to overcome impurities in this *kalīyuga* chanting the name of *Hari* alone is enough. Whether this *Upaniṣad* was added later or not, we do not know. But it is counted as one of the *Upaniṣads* in the ‘Hundred and eight *Upaniṣads*.’

In it, there is the *mantra* — *hare rāma, hare rāma, rāma rāma hare hare; hare kṛṣṇa, hare kṛṣṇa, kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare*.

In this *mantra*, *Rāma* is called first, *Kṛṣṇa* second. Now a devotee in the *Hare Kṛṣṇa* sect will not say *Rāma* first. He will start with *hare kṛṣṇa* and then say *hare rāma* because he considers *Kṛṣṇa* superior. The belief is that you must worship only *Kṛṣṇa* because Lord *Kṛṣṇa* said here — *mām eva, kṛṣṇam eva*. Therefore, he alone should be worshipped. Then he will take you away from *māyā* — to his abode in *Vaikuṅṭha*. The problem is, *Vaikuṅṭha* is also within *māyā*.

#### PRAPATTI

Another religious sect claims that in this verse *Bhagavān* is saying that the only way to cross *māyā* is to totally surrender to *Viṣṇu*. They ritualise it and call it *prapatti*. As a part of the ritual they tattoo a conch, *śaṅkha*, on one hand and a disc, *cakra*, on the other symbolising a total surrender to Lord *Viṣṇu* who carries a *śaṅkha* in one hand and a *cakra* in the other. It is symbolic and there is no problem with this. The *śaṅkha* symbolises a call, a message, and *cakra* stands for the destruction of ignorance. Perhaps the idea is that apparently *Kṛṣṇa* is saying, ‘If you respond to My call of the Veda, then My disc will take care of your *saṃsāra*. It will destroy your ignorance, your sorrow.’

But in the Vedic tradition, you are not supposed to injure your body or anyone else's. It is *hiṃsā*, injury. Burning, especially, is considered to be a very sinful action. In any case, some devotees do this with the thought, ‘You are the only refuge for Me. With my body, my mind, senses, etc., I surrender to you.’ This surrender is very beautiful. But the difficulty is, how do you surrender? How are you going to surrender the body, mind, and senses to the Lord when they are the Lord? Further, you yourself — your physical body, your mind — and all the created products are born of *māyā*. If your *ātmā*, the one that is surrendering, is also a product, how are you going to cross *māyā* by surrendering in this way? You can only remain within it.

The religion of *prapatti* advocates surrender alone and claims that *Bhagavān* teaches this here when he says, *ye mām eva prapadyante*. It says that the word *mām* in this statement indicates *Viṣṇu* because *Kṛṣṇa* is *Viṣṇu*. The word *eva* indicates that *Viṣṇu* alone is to be worshipped, not any other *devatā* — not *Śiva*, Allah, or the Father

<sup>1</sup> ?????????????????? ?? ??????

????? ?????????? ??????????

*kalau kalmaṣa-cittānāṃ pāpadravayopajīvinām  
vidhikriyāvihīnānāṃ harernāmaiva kevalam*

in heaven. And a simple act of devotion, he says, is not enough. *Prapatti*, total surrender, is required. ‘*Ye prapadyante*’ means those people, who are doing this *prapatti*, surrender.

A further difficulty is that since *Kṛṣṇa* says ‘*ye mām prapadyante*’ we now have *mām*, indicating *Īśvara* and *ye*, indicating the *jīvas*, individuals. The devotees are doing the act of *prapatti* and the object of their surrender is Lord *Viṣṇu*. Therefore, there is duality — *kartr-karma-bheda* and *jīva-īśvara-bheda*. To consider that *Īśvara* and *jīva* are different is to dismiss *mokṣa* because there is no possibility of *mokṣa* when there is duality.

My intention here is not to discredit *prapatti* or any other form of worship. I just wanted to show you some of the endless distortions that are possible and how necessary proper understanding is for *mokṣa*.

### RESOLUTION OF THE SEEMING DUALITY

When Lord *Kṛṣṇa* says, *ye mām prapadyante*, there is a seeming duality. So, we have to understand what he means by looking into the context. In the beginning of this chapter he said, ‘I am going to teach you exactly what is knowledge along with immediate understanding without anything being left out — *jñānam te ahaṃ savijñānam idaṃ vakṣyāmi aśeṣataḥ*. I will give you, not merely knowledge, but immediate knowledge.’

Later he is going to say, ‘There are many people who are devoted to Me. The distressed raise their prayers to Me as do those who want to accomplish things. And the people who want to know about Me, of course are devoted to Me as are the ones who do know Me, the *jñānīs*. All of them are devotees. But understand that the *jñānī* is no longer separate from Me. He is Myself, *jñānī tu ātmaiva me matam*.<sup>1</sup> So, the knowledge, that *Bhagavān* has promised to teach, resolves the duality between *jīva* and *Īśvara*.

He will also say very clearly that, he is the one who has entered into all beings as ‘I.’ And that he is the *ātmā* of all beings — *sarvasya cāhaṃ hṛdi sanniviṣṭaḥ*.<sup>2</sup> As the space seemingly enters the pot as it is created, *ātmā* having created everything, seemingly enters everything, remaining the same, as the uncreated basis of everything. Throughout the *śāstra*, the *jīva* is never said to have been created — a very important thing to understand. The physical body, the mind, the senses are all created because they are assembled. But the *jīva* is never created. It is the changeless *ātmā*, the very *ātmā* of every being. After the entire process of creation, *ātmā* remains the same as the ‘I’ of everything. And that ‘I’ is independent of all the three *guṇas*.

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<sup>1</sup> *Gītā* – 18-7

<sup>2</sup> *Gītā* – 15-15

These three *guṇas* are to be overcome. How? Since Lord *Viṣṇu* has already overcome them, has them all under his control, *Kṛṣṇa* says here, '*mām eva prapadyante* — they seek only Me, the one who is everything. Then they are released.

Introducing the next verse *Śaṅkara* says, if this is so, why doesn't everyone seek you? *Kṛṣṇa* answers this here.

न मां दुष्कृतिनो मूढाः प्रपद्यन्ते नराधमाः ।

माययापहतज्ञाना आसुरं भावमाश्रिताः ॥ १५ ॥

*na mām duṣkṛtino mūdhāḥ prapadyante narādhamāḥ  
māyayāpahṛtajñānā āsuram bhāvamāśritāḥ*

Verse 15

दुष्कृतिनः *duṣkṛtinaḥ* — those who do wrong actions; मूढाः *mūdhāḥ* — those who are deluded; नराधमाः *narādhamāḥ* — the lowest among men; न माम् प्रपद्यन्ते *na mām prapadyante* — do not seek Me; मायया *māyayā* — due to *māyā*; अपहतज्ञानाः *apahṛtajñānāḥ* — robbed of their discrimination; आसुरम् भावम् *āsuram bhāvam* — state of revelling in sense pursuits (or doing things that are not good for them); आश्रिताः *āśritāḥ* — they are the ones who have resorted to

Those who do wrong actions, who are deluded and the lowest among men do not seek Me. Robbed of their discrimination by *māyā*, they have resorted to the condition of those who revel in sense pursuits.

### WHO ARE THE PEOPLE WHO DO NOT SEEK ĪŚVARA AT ALL?

These are those who, even though they can cross over this *māyā* by seeking Me do not seek Me, *mām na prapadyante*. Why? Because they are *mūdhās*, *duṣkṛtins*, *narādhamas* and *māyayā apahṛta-jñānāḥ*. You cannot say more. *Kṛṣṇa* simply piled up all these characteristics which, in short, make them *āsuram bhāvam āśritāḥ* — people who have resorted to the condition of indulging in what is not good for them. Let us see the meaning of the individual words.

*Duṣkṛtinaḥ* means those who, either in this life or in the previous ones have done wrong actions, *pāpa-karmas*. And *duṣkṛtins* can also be taken as those who continue to do so.

*Mūdhāḥ* means those who are deluded. Why do they do these wrong actions? Because they are *mūdhāḥ*, deluded. To put it in a simple form they have a confusion of priorities. What exactly is important and what is not is not very clear. As a result, sometimes the end becomes so important, the propriety of the means is not considered. Even for religious fanatics the end becomes so important that they compromise with reference to the means. This is an unfortunate thing. These people are called *mūdhās*,

deluded as they are about what is to be done and what is not to be done, *kārya* and *akārya*. As a result, they become *duṣkṛtins*, people who did wrong actions previously and continue to do so under the spell of *māyā*.

*Nara-adhamāḥ* — Śaṅkara says among the human beings, there are people who are exalted – *utkr̥ṣṭa*, lowly – *adhama* and in between, average – *madhyama*. Being lowly in terms of behaviour is entirely due to thinking. Essentially there is no sinner. But due to ignorance and a lack of discrimination, people do behave improperly. They can gain a good discriminative faculty through doing good *karma* at least in this life. But even for this, a change in thinking has to occur. That is why grace is required and therefore, prayer.

### WHY ARE THEY LIKE THIS?

*Māyayā apahr̥ta-jñānāḥ* — These are people whose discrimination is robbed away by *māyā*. *Apahr̥ta-jñānas* means those who have lost their *viveka* because of the very *māyā* that they have to cross. *Māyā*, we have seen, means ignorance and its products, likes and dislikes and so on. It becomes a decoy. Robbed by this *māyā* one is bereft of his treasure, *jñāna*, which here means *viveka*. That rational discriminative faculty is our treasure. And if the treasure which is given only to a human being is taken away by *māyā*, these people becomes totally given to the condition of an *asura*, *āsuraṃ bhāvam aśritāḥ*.

### WHO IS AN ASURA?

‘*Āsuraṃ bhāvam aśritāḥ*’ refers to people who have resorted to the qualities of an *asura*. *Sura* means the one who revels in himself or in things that are good. *Asura* means the opposite, i.e., the one who revels in all the things that are not good. It can also mean *asuṣu ramate*, the one who revels only in the sense organs meaning the sense enjoyments — wine, woman, horse races, discos and so on. Or, as Śaṅkara takes it, *hiṃsā-anṛtādi-lakṣaṇam āsuraṃ bhāvam* — *āsura-bhāva* is nothing but a tendency to hurt others, to tell lies, etc. *Hiṃsā* means hurting another for the sake of personal gain like money or pleasure. *Anṛta* is falsehood and *ādi* can be taken to mean all other false values like stealing. *Lakṣaṇa* means characteristic. So, these are the characteristics of the state of mind and lifestyle of an *asura*. Given to this, naturally they do not seek *Īśvara*. Carried away by fancies and wrong values, they will be totally given to the life of an *asura*, and they do not come to *Īśvara* at all. They do not even think of *Īśvara*. The Lord just does not come into their lives.

*Kṛṣṇa* himself tells us in the next verse that to overcome this seemingly hopeless situation one need not even know *Īśvara* as oneself. Just the understanding that there is *Īśvara* is good enough. Then a certain attitude and prayer will develop and one will find that changes begin to take place. These changes occur only with a prayerful attitude and

recognition of *Īśvara* in one form or another. That is what really paves the way for an inner conversion to take place.

Therefore, it is not totally hopeless; there is a chance. *Kṛṣṇa* is going to explain that in the next verse. From here till the end of the chapter he will be talking about people given to good works and attitudes, *sukṛtins*. Even for those who are prayerful only in distress, there is hope. They may not think of *Īśvara* at all until they get into trouble; but at least they think of *Īśvara* at that time. There are some who, even in trouble will not think of him. But even if they think of him only in distress, there is a change. That is what we call conversion. Once *Īśvara* is accommodated in one's life, the change takes place thereafter.

चतुर्विधा भजन्ते मां जनाः सुकृतिनोऽर्जुन ।

आर्तो जिज्ञासुरर्थार्थी ज्ञानी च भरतर्षभ ॥ १६ ॥

*caturvidhā bhajante mām janāḥ sukṛtino'ṛjuna*  
*ārto jijñāsuararthārthī jñānī ca bharatarṣabha*

Verse 16

चतुर्विधाः *caturvidhāḥ* — four-fold; जनाः *janāḥ* — people; सुकृतिनः *sukṛtinaḥ* — who do good actions; माम् *mām* — me; भजन्ते *bhajante* — worship; अर्जुन *arjuna* — O *Arjuna*!; आर्तः *ārtaḥ* — the one in distress; अर्थार्थी *arthārthī* — the one who wants security and pleasure; जिज्ञासुः *jijñāsuḥ* — the one who desires to know; च *ca* — and; ज्ञानी *jñānī* — the one who knows; भरतर्षभ *bharatarṣabha* — O foremost in the family of *Bharata*!

O *Arjuna*, the people, given to good actions who worship me are four-fold. They are, the one in distress, the one who wants security and pleasure, the one who wishes to know (Me), and the one who knows (Me), O foremost in the family of *Bharata*!

*Sukṛtinaḥ janāḥ* — the people who do good deeds. As a contrast to the *duṣkṛtins* who do not seek the Lord, in this verse *Kṛṣṇa* tells us of the *sukṛtinaḥ janāḥ*, those people who do good actions now, or did them in previous lives. He says, 'They seek Me — *bhajante mām*. And it is because of the *puṇya* earned through their good actions that they seek Me.'

## TWO TYPES OF PUṆYA

There are two types of *puṇya*. One gives wealth, pleasures, comfort, parentage etc. For this you do not require any culture or inner growth. There is another type of *puṇya* which is purely spiritual. And that *puṇya-karma* expresses itself no matter where one is born. Even if a person has a difficult beginning, it does not deter him at all in his

seeking. Those who have this type of *puṇya-karma*, those *sukṛtins*, worship *Īśvara*, *māṃ bhajante*. They recognise *Īśvara*.

#### FOUR TYPES OF DEVOTEES

Among those *sukṛtins* who recognise and worship *Īśvara*, there are four types, *catur-vidhāḥ* — *caturvidhāḥ bhajante mām*. *Vidhā* means variety. Therefore, there are four varieties of devotees. All of them have sufficient recognition of *Īśvara* to be devotees but among them there is a gradation. The degree of recognition, their attitude, approach, prayers, etc., all determine the four types. And they are, he says, *‘ārtaḥ jījñāsuḥ arthārthī jñānī ca bharatarṣabha’*.

#### ĀRTAḤ

*Ārti* means any sorrow or grief. Sadness, distress, discomfort, trouble are all called *ārta*. *Śaṅkara* defines *ārta* as one who is seized by a distress, caused by a thief, tiger, or disease. Tigers were common in those days when India was full of forests; so, *Śaṅkara* commonly uses the tiger as an example. When a person is seized by some distress, whom he will call as a last resort? If he has some *puṇya-karma*, there is *Īśvara* in his life and he will call upon him. But only when he is in distress. Till then he does not think of him. But at least during that spell of distress he does think of him because he does not see anyone else who can help him. This kind of devotee is called *ārta*, a devotee in distress.

#### ARTHĀRTHĪ

*Artha* means that which is desired. In this context it means wealth and things similar to it — power, progeny and so on. One wants all these and to get them, the *arthārthī* invokes the grace of *Bhagavān*. He thinks that he cannot live happily without these things and so, he makes use of various means to get them. He uses local influence, money, etc., along with *Bhagavān*, because he recognises that there is always a factor over which he has no control. As a devotee, he is mature enough to recognise the chance element. That he recognises as *daiva*. And there is no way of having any control over it without some grace. So, whenever he wants to accomplish something, he invokes the grace of *Īśvara* to control certain factors that he cannot control or even know. He will perform rituals in order to invoke *Īśvara's* grace to help him gain whatever he wants. This is *kāmya-karma*, a *karma* done with a desire to accomplish a given end within *saṃsāra*. The one who does *kāmya-karma* is an *arthārthī*. But he is also an *ārta*, a devotee in trouble. When he is in trouble, he will of course, invoke the Lord. An *ārta*, however, is not an *arthārthī*. Because only in distress can he think of God.

### JIJÑĀSUḤ

The third one is *jijñāsu*. The order in the verse, *ārta*, *jijñāsu*, *arthārthī* is for the sake of metre. But in order of their understanding the *ārta* and the *arthārthī* belong to one group, the *jijñāsu* and the *jñānī* to another. *Jijñāsu* is the one who desires to know. What does he want to know? That is also important because even the one who does wrong actions, the *duṣkṛtin*, wants to know a lot of things — like how to open locks, etc. But here, the subject matter is *Īśvara*, the truth of *Īśvara*, *bhagavat-tattva*. He is not invoking *Īśvara*'s grace for simple accomplishments. He wants to know the truth of *Īśvara*, the ultimate cause of everything. And this *jijñāsu* is a great devotee. He does not use *Bhagavān* as an accomplice for his small little pursuits; he wants to know who is *Īśvara*. As a *bhakta* he invokes *Īśvara*'s grace for this. He also offers his prayers; he also performs his daily and occasional duties, *nitya-naimittika-karma*. But he does all this to gain a clear mind, *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*, and the knowledge of *Īśvara*.

Knowledge of *Īśvara* is nothing but knowledge of *ātmā*. *Īśvara*, the cause of everything happens to be in essence, oneself. If *Īśvara* were other than *ātmā*, he would be *anātmā*, and therefore, inert. The only conscious being is *ātmā*, and *Īśvara* is not separate from it.

This seeming difference between *Īśvara* and the individual is due to *upādhi*, as we have seen. There is only one reality and that the *jijñāsu* wants to know. He is a devotee because he seeks the help of *Īśvara* and performs prayerful actions to earn this help. But his actions are not for limited ends within *saṃsāra*, *kāmya-karmas*. The *ārta* and *arthārthī* are *kāmīs* because their *karmas* are *kāmya-karmas*. The *jijñāsu*, however, is a *karma-yogī*; so, his is a different type of devotion. Because of his extra *puṇya*, he has discrimination, *viveka*, and because of that he is a *jijñāsu*.

### JÑĀNĪ

And then there is a fourth *bhakta*. All four recognise me and to the degree they recognise me they are in union with me. The fourth one's recognition is complete; so, his identification is total. When you are a *jijñāsu* you necessarily become a *jñānī*, the one who knows the truth of Lord *Viṣṇu*, *Parameśvara*, as himself. He is a real *bhakta*.

### HOW THE JÑĀNĪ'S DEVOTION DIFFERS FROM THAT OF ALL OTHERS

The *jñānī*'s devotion is what we call *sādhya-bhakti*. There are two types of *bhakti*. One is *sādhana-bhakti*, a devotion to *Īśvara* as a means. This is the devotion of a *jijñāsu*. But the *bhakti* of one who understands *Īśvara*, who recognises the truth of *Īśvara* as *ātmā*, is *sādhya-bhakti*. It is a *bhakti* that has fulfilled itself, a devotion in the form of absolute love — *parama-prema-svarūpa-bhakti*.

What is this absolute love? Between the object of love and the person who loves, there is no difference at all. Love consumes all the differences. That is what we call absolute love and it is only in the form of knowledge. The non-difference is already accomplished because *Īśvara* is *ātmā*. This is a fact which has only to be recognised.

When there is already non-difference, its recognition is called *ananya -bhakti*. *Ananya* means there is no other. The altar of *bhakti* and the seeker, the devotee, are one and the same self. That *bhakti* is not time-bound or comparable because it is a fact. This is the devotion of a *jñānī*. For him, all the *bhakti* has fulfilled itself. So, how can we call him a *bhakta*? He is still a *bhakta* if we consider a *bhakta* as someone who is in union with *Īśvara*. The other three are also in union with *Īśvara*, but, for them, *Īśvara* is other than themselves and therefore, remote, *parokṣa*. For a *jñānī*, *Īśvara* is immediate, *aparokṣa*. That is the only difference, and it is a great difference. Again among the three, *Īśvara* is always *parokṣa* for the *ārta* and the *arthārthī* but for a *jijñāsu* he is *parokṣa* only for the time being.

*Parokṣa* means indirectly known — as omniscient, almighty and so on. The difficulty is with the little knowledge I have, how can I appreciate omniscience? And with my limited power, how can I appreciate what is all powerful? By no stretch of the imagination is that possible. For an *ārta* and an *arthārthī* then, *Īśvara* is always indirectly known, *nitya -parokṣa*.

For the *jijñāsu*, however, there is a possibility of *Īśvara* becoming *aparokṣa* and for the *jñānī*, he is *aparokṣa* because *Īśvara*, the cause of everything, is non-separate from *ātmā*. Even though he is the *ātmā*, of everyone, only the *jñānī* appreciates it. Only he has an intellect subtle enough to recognise what is true for everyone. And the *jñānī* is distinguished here among the *bhaktas* as a fulfilled *bhakta*. The *jijñāsu* is going to be fulfilled and even the others will be fulfilled in time. Eventually they will come to *Īśvara*. The *ārta*, the devotee in distress, will become an *arthārthī* and then a *jijñāsu* because he has devotion. His recognition of *Īśvara* paves the way for his progress.

*Bhakti*, devotion, is any type of union between *jīva* and *Īśvara*. By a proper action or even a thought you are uniting yourself to *Īśvara*. But *jñānī* doesn't try to make a bridge between *jīva* and *Īśvara*. Gaining the knowledge, he finds that he is always united. There's only one thing there. That is *Īśvara*; that is *ātmā*. There's no second thing at all to unite with. So, he is always united, *nitya -yukta*. That is told in this next verse.

तेषां ज्ञानी नित्ययुक्त एकभक्तिर्विशिष्यते ।

प्रियो हि ज्ञानिनोऽत्यर्थमहं स च मम प्रियः ॥ १७ ॥

teṣāṃ jñānī nityayukta ekabhaktirviśiṣyate

priyo hi jñānino'tyarthamaḥ sa ca mama priyaḥ

Verse 17



तेषाम् *teṣām* — among these; ज्ञानी *jñānī* — the one who knows (Me); एक-भक्तिः *eka-bhaktiḥ* — whose devotion is resolved in oneness; नित्य-युक्तः *nitya-yuktaḥ* — always united (with Me); विशिष्यते *viśiṣyate* — is distinguished; हि *hi* — because; अहम् *aham* — I am; ज्ञानिनः *jñāninaḥ* — to the *jñānī*; अत्यर्थम् *atyartham* — totally; प्रियः *priyaḥ* — beloved; स च *sa ca* — and he; मम प्रियः *mama priyaḥ* — is My beloved

Among these, the *jñānī*, always united (to me), his devotion resolved in oneness, is distinguished because I am totally beloved to him and he is absolutely My beloved.

### THE JÑĀNĪ IS ALWAYS UNITED TO ĪŚVARA

*Teṣāṃ jñānī nitya-yuktaḥ* — among these four devotees, the *jñānī* is always united to *Īśvara*. *Jñānī* means the one who has immediate knowledge of the truth of *Īśvara*. He is a knower of the truth, *tattvavit*. Because of this knowledge, he is always united to *Īśvara*, *nitya-yukta*. This is a very important word here.

As long as *Īśvara* is remote, *parokṣa*, one has to make a connection with him. If one has a certain recognition of *Īśvara*, one connects oneself by some prayer, a thought, a *mantra*, some meditation, or some act like a ritual. If the connection is for redemption from some distress, it is the connection of an *ārta-bhakta*, but it is not permanent, *nitya*. He is united for now; later he will not be. It is the same for the *arthārthī*. When he undertakes something important, he thinks about *Īśvara* and then begins that action. At this time he is united to *Īśvara*. The *jijñāsu* is more or less always united because his whole mind is consumed by the desire to know the truth. And the truth is *Īśvara*. Therefore, his mind is more often than not connected. As a *mumukṣu*, he is a *karma-yogī* and therefore, has *prasāda-buddhi*. His attitude is, ‘Whatever action I do, it is all offered to you — *yat yat karma karomi tat tat tava arādhnam*. He conforms to *dharma* because that is *Īśvara* for him. Therefore, he is more or less *nitya-yukta*. More or less because he does not yet know *Īśvara*’s truth, *tattva*. So too, a renunciate, *sannyāsī*, seeking *mokṣa* is more or less a *nitya-yukta*.

The *jñānī*, however is *nitya-yukta*. There is identity between *Īśvara* and *jīva* and he recognises that. This fact is revealed by the *śāstra* which he exposed himself to as a *jijñāsu*. Because of his desire to know, he inquired into the meaning of the *mahāvākyas* like *tat tvam asi*. And in these, the identity is revealed. The one who understands that revelation is called the *tattvavit*, the knower of the truth. And he is always united to *Īśvara*, *nitya-yukta*.

Further, he is *eka-bhakti*. For him there is only *ātmā*. Previously he was also a devotee, but now his very devotion resolves into one *ātmā*. The difference between *jīva* and *Īśvara* is resolved and in his understanding of the identity between *jīva* and *Īśvara*, there is resolution of his devotion. His devotion to inquiry, etc., all resolves into that.

Therefore, he's called *eka -bhakti*. And he is *viśiṣyate*, distinguished as the most exalted among the four.

### THE JÑĀNĪ IS DISTINGUISHED

All of them are devotees but the *jñānī* has a special feature that makes him stand out. This is told here not to set the *jñānī* apart as someone extraordinary. What is pointed out is the extent to which our devotion has to mature. It has to mature in a knowledge by which one becomes always united to *Īśvara*, *nitya-yukta*. All the devotion should resolve in that knowledge. Therefore, the one who knows is distinguished, *jñānī viśiṣyate*.

*Bhagavān* started off this chapter saying *jñānaṃ savijñānaṃ vakṣyāmi*, I will tell you about knowledge along with *vijñāna*. Here he says that the one who has that knowledge is a *jñānī*, the most exalted among the four types of devotees. Why is he so exalted?

### WHY IS THE JÑĀNĪ DISTINGUISHED?

When someone is in distress, he calls upon Me and for the time being he is one with Me. At that time he considers Me to be his only refuge. But it is only when he is in distress. So, what is he really interested in? Is he interested in Me or is he interested in getting relief from his distress?

He is not interested in Me, really. He wants to make use of Me like any other commodity. Because there is no other commodity that will release him, he resorts to Me. For him I am another source of help that he makes use of, all for release from his plight. Being a *saṃsārī* he is subject to getting into one difficulty after another, and then he has to make use of all the help available, local as well as non-local. The non-local help is Myself, *Īśvara*.

Therefore, *Bhagavān* continues and says, it is not exactly that I am a value for him. The value is to get out of trouble. My value is that I am useful for that. I am a common tender, like money. For all the devotees for whom I am *parokṣa*, I am not truly beloved, *priya*. Even a *jijñāsu* has not understood Me; so, I am not totally *priya* for him either. For him what is *priya* is *mokṣa*. He wants release from bondage and therefore, he invokes Me.

Only for the *jñānī*, am I the most beloved — *priyaḥ hi jñāninaḥ atyartham aham* — because only he knows Me as *ātmā*, the object of all love. *Ātmā* is *ānanda*, the only value in the whole creation. It therefore, becomes the object of all love. Here *Kṛṣṇa* uses the word *atyartha* – absolutely. So, for the *jñānī*, I am totally beloved. *Ātmā* is known to him as *sat-cit-ānanda-ātmā* and all love resolves into that *ātmā*. *Ānanda*, the fullness which is the nature of *ātmā*, becomes love whenever there is a

relationship. If the object to which he is related happens to seek a certain redress, then the love becomes service or compassion. The same love keeps on changing into various forms. Emotionally, *ātmā*, being *ānanda* and I being known to him as *ātmā*, I am the most beloved for the *jñānī*.

And that *jñānī* is also the most beloved to Me — *atyarthaṃ sa ca mama priyaḥ*. *Atyartha* is used for both *Īśvara* and the *jñānī*. Therefore, the Lord says that he, the *jñānī*, is the most beloved for Me because he is Me. In the next verse he says this — *jñānī tu atmaiva me matam*. He is My most beloved because he is Myself, *sat-cit-ānanda-ātmā*. *Priya* is *ātmā*. Why? Because *ātmā* is the most beloved. So, *saḥ* — he, is *mama* — My (the Lord's) *priyaḥ* i.e., *ātmā*.

In these two verses, *Kṛṣṇa* has shown that four types of people worship him. They are, *ārta*, a devotee in distress, the *arthārthī*, the one who invokes him not only in distress but also when he wants to accomplish something, the *jijñāsu* who wants to know the *svarūpa* of *Bhagavān*, and the *jñānī* who knows the *svarūpa* of *Bhagavān* and knows that essentially he is not different from *Bhagavān*. Among these four, the *jñānī* is the most exalted. Even though they are all devotees, the Lord singles out the *jñānī* as the one who has accomplished what devotion can accomplish. All the others are united to him whenever they pray, but the *jñānī* is always united to him because he is a *tattvavit*; he knows the truth of *Īśvara* as not separate from himself. Naturally he is always united. Because of this knowledge — that I am the *ātmā*, and *ātmā*, being *ānanda-svarūpa*, the object of absolute love — the Lord says, 'I am the most beloved to him and he the most beloved to Me.'

Now if this is so, what about the other three devotees? Are they not beloved to *Bhagavān*?

उदाराः सर्व एवैते ज्ञानी त्वात्मैव मे मतम् ।

आस्थितः स हि युक्तात्मा मामेवानुत्तमां गतिम् ॥ १८ ॥

*udārāḥ sarva evaite jñānī tvātmaiva me matam*

*āsthitaḥ sa hi yuktātmā māmevānuttamāṃ gatim*

Verse 18

सर्वे एव एते *sarve eva ete* — all these indeed; उदाराः *udārāḥ* — are exalted; ज्ञानी तु *jñānī tu* — but the one who knows (Me); आत्मा एव *ātmā eva* — is Myself alone; ( इति) मे मतम् (*iti*) *me matam* — this is My vision; हि *hi* — because; सः *saḥ* — he; युक्त-आत्मा *yukta-ātmā* — the one whose mind is absorbed in Me; माम् एव *mām eva* — Me alone; अनुत्तमाम् गतिम् *anuttamām gatim* — the end beyond which there is no end; आस्थितः *āsthitaḥ* — abides in (has reached)

All these indeed are exalted, but the one who knows (Me) is myself alone. This is My vision. Because he, the one whose mind is absorbed in Me, has reached Me alone, the end beyond which there is no end.

### ALL DEVOTEES ARE EXALTED

*Sarve ete udārāḥ* — all of these devotees are exalted. All of them recognise Me; so, from the standpoint of those who do not recognise me at all, they are exalted. They are all mature people because they recognise Me. This is what *Kṛṣṇa* says. But *Śaṅkara* takes it slightly differently. He takes the word *ete*, these, to mean the other three devotees because *Bhagavān* has already singled out the *jñānī* as the most beloved.

### BUT THE JÑĀNĪ IS MYSELF

The Lord said, ‘I consider the *jñānī* as Myself — *jñānī tu ātmaiva (iti) me matam.*’ If they are all exalted, why is the *jñānī* distinguished as the most beloved? *Śaṅkara* says that there is no devotee of *Īśvara*, who is not beloved to him. Each one becomes the recipient of his grace. But the *jñānī* is the most beloved, because, the Lord says, ‘He is Myself alone. He is not separate from Me. Therefore, he is definitely different. The others are also not different from Me. But they have not recognised the fact. I have no partiality because I am already everyone. It is not that only the *jñānī’s* *ātmā* is My *ātmā*. The fact remains for all. But because of the *jñānī’s* recognition that *ātmā*, is *Parameśvara*, he becomes Me and I become him. ‘*Me matam*’ means ‘that is My vision.’ The word *mata* used in the sense of ‘an opinion.’ It is a very clear vision for *Kṛṣṇa*. What he means by this is that the *jñānī’s* *ātmā*, is not different from *Kṛṣṇa*, the Lord. Therefore, the *jñānī* is the most beloved for the Lord.

### WHY IS THE JÑĀNĪ NOT DIFFERENT FROM BHAGAVĀN?

Why is this so? In answering this he defines the *jñānī* — *sa hi yuktātmā mām eva anuttamāṅ gatim āsthitaḥ*. He is the one whose mind is absorbed in Me — *sa hi yukta-ātmā*. For that *jñānī*, the most exalted end is Me. *Anuttamā gati* means an end beyond which there is nothing greater. In other words, there is no other end. And the *jñānī*, the one who accomplishes that end, who reaches Me, is indeed the most exalted because he is Myself. We can also take *anuttamāṅ gatim āsthitaḥ* as the one who remains in this end of all ends, the one who is established in this knowledge, who has *jñāna-niṣṭhā*. That *jñānī*, is indeed the most exalted because he is not other than *Īśvara*.

The praise of the *jñānī* here is to point out that devotion is meant only for this knowledge. There is a claim that *jñāna* is for devotion. The thinking is that you must know *Īśvara*, so that you can have devotion for him. But if I know *ātmā*, as *Īśvara*, the devotion resolves. Till then it is devotion; its culmination is knowledge. So, it is clear

that devotion is not after knowledge; it is before. Devotion is for the sake of knowledge and knowledge itself is devotion.

The definition of *bhakti* is — *parama-prema-svarūpa*. *Prema* means love; so, *parama-prema-svarūpa* is absolute love. Between the object of love and the one who loves there is no difference whatsoever. When there is a love which there is no other, *ananya*, the devotee and the altar of devotion are one and the same. That devotion is nothing but knowledge, *jñāna*. Expressing the same thing another way, this is *sādhya-bhakti*, an end in itself, the fulfilled devotion of the *jñānī*.

In the next verse, the *jñānī* is again praised.

बहूनां जन्मनामन्ते ज्ञानवान्मां प्रपद्यते ।

वासुदेवः सर्वमिति स महात्मा सुदुर्लभः ॥ १९ ॥

*bahūnāṃ janmanāmante jñānavān māṃ prapadyate*  
*vāsudevaḥ sarvam iti sa mahātmā sudurlabhaḥ*

Verse 19

बहूनाम् जन्मनाम् *bahūnām janmanām* — of many births; अन्ते *ante* — at the end; ज्ञानवान् *jñānavān* — the one who has knowledge; वासुदेवः सर्वम् इति *vāsudevaḥ sarvam iti* — ‘*Vāsudeva* is everything’ thus; माम् प्रपद्यते *mām prapadyate* — reaches Me; सः महात्मा *saḥ mahātmā* — that wise man; सुदुर्लभः *sudurlabhaḥ* — is very rare

At the end of many births, the one who has knowledge reaches Me by knowing, ‘*Vāsudeva* is everything.’ That wise man is very rare.

At the end of many births – *bahūnāṃ janmanām ante*, the wise man – *jñānavān* seeks Me, *mām prapadyate*. Does this mean that if you begin in this life, you will become a *jñānī* only after a number of births? No. *Śaṅkara* says here that, the word *bahūnām* indicates a number of births wherein one had gathered enough *puṇya* conducive to knowledge. One has any number of births before one begins to recognise the fundamental problem and seek a solution.

The word *jñānavān* can be taken in two ways. He can be the one whose mind, at the end of many births, is mature enough to gain this knowledge. Because of his maturity, he seeks Me, *mām prapadyate*. Such a person alone becomes a *jñānī*. Or *jñānavān* is the one who has the knowledge. He reaches Me.

## EVERYTHING IS VĀSUDEVA

How does he reach *Bhagavān*? Because of his knowledge, he understands *Vāsudeva* alone is everything, as himself — *vāsudevaḥ sarvam*. *Vāsudeva* is non-separate from *ātmā*. So the gain is a recognition of the identity between the ‘I’ of the *jīva* and the ‘I’ of *Īśvara* and sees that all that is here is *Vāsudeva*. Everything is

non-separate from that cause. And the product, the creation is *mithyā*. It has no existence apart from its cause which he recognises as *satya*. And he sees very clearly that the only *satya* is *ātmā*, which is *Brahman* and recognises therefore, that everything is *Vāsudeva*. In this knowledge he reaches Me.

This makes it very clear that devotion after knowledge is not what is meant here. If *Vāsudeva* is everything, he cannot be separate from Me. If he is minus Me, he is not everything. And he would also be *anātmā*, which, as we have seen, would mean he is inert, *jaḍa*. If *Īśvara* is inert, he depends entirely upon Me to be known, like any other inert object. But it is not so. Everything depends on *ātmā*, the only thing that is real, the *satya-vastu*. And *ātmā*, happens to be *Īśvara*. Therefore, you can say ‘I am all this — *aham idaṃ sarvaṃ*.’

This is what the *śāstra* says throughout in various ways. All this is *Brahman* alone; there is no multiplicity here at all — *sarvaṃ khalu idaṃ brahma neha nānā asti kiñcana*. And further, without the world, *ātmā* is whole, *pūrṇa*, and with the world, it is whole — *pūrṇamadaḥ pūrṇamidam*. Wholeness is not going to be improved upon. Therefore, the world, being *mithyā* is not an addition to *Brahman*; it is dependent on and non-separate from *Brahman*. And *Brahman* itself has not undergone any change whatsoever to become the world. Without *Brahman* there is no world either. Without a reality, there is no *mithyā*.

## HOW THE ŚĀSTRA REVEALS IDENTITY

### BĀDHĀYĀṂ SĀMĀNĀDHIKARANYAM

To reveal this, *śāstra* uses a linguistic method called *bādhāyāṃ sāmānādhikaranyam*. The word *samāna* means ‘the same.’ The word *adhikaraṇa* means ‘locus.’ When two things have the same locus, then one is said to be a *samāna-adhikaraṇa* with reference to the other. The condition in which two objects enjoy the same locus is called *sāmānādhikaranyā*.<sup>1</sup> There are two types of *sāmānādhikaranyā*. In a blue pot, both the blue colour and the pot are in the same locus; they have the same *adhikaraṇa*. Similarly, when you say, ‘*Rāma* is a musician,’ both *Rāma* and the property of being a musician reside in the same locus. *Rāma* is the musician and the musician is *Rāma*. A is B and B is A. Therefore, there is *sāmānādhikaranyā* between A and B.

But when we say the world is *Brahman*, the situation is different. The world is *Brahman* alright but *Brahman* is not the world. A is B but B is not A. This kind of *sāmānādhikaranyā* is called *bādhāyāṃ sāmānādhikaranyam*. To illustrate, let us consider the following situation. Suppose a stump of a tree is mistaken for a person.

<sup>1</sup> ?? ???? ???? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ?

Then someone who knows that it is not a person, points out that it is not a person but a stump of a tree. He says, ‘*sthāṇuḥ ayaṃ puruṣaḥ* — this person is a stump of a tree.’ It means — what you see as the person is a stump of a tree. In Sanskrit, both the word ‘person,’ *puruṣa*, and the word ‘stump,’ *sthāṇu*, have the same case ending. This indicates that they have the same locus. But are there two things here? No. What is referred to as a person, *puruṣa*, is the stump of a tree, *sthāṇu*. First you see it as the person and then the person resolves into the stump. The person does not qualify the stump, like blue qualifies the pot; the person resolves into the stump. This kind of *sāmānādhikaraṇya* in which one is negated, that is, one resolves in to the other is called *bādhāyāṃ sāmānādhikaraṇyam*. And the *śāstra* uses this technique of *bādhāyāṃ sāmānādhikaraṇyam* to explain the fact that what we perceive as the pluralistic world is in fact one non-dual *Brahman*.

This is what is said here by the statement, *vāsudevaḥ sarvam*. The word *Vāsudeva* we have seen is the one in whom everything has its being and who is in the form of consciousness, *caitanya*. *Vasu* is the one in whom everything exists, by whom everything is sustained. It causes every thing to exist in itself and is the basis of every existence. And *vasu* is *deva*. Its own nature is pure consciousness, *deva*. From the standpoint of the world, it is *vasu*, the cause of everything and from its own standpoint it is in the form of consciousness, *deva*. This *vasudeva* itself is *Vāsudeva*.

That is why it is only oneself, the conscious being, *pratyagātmā*. Therefore, his knowledge is, ‘I am everything — *aham idaṃ sarvam* or *Vāsudeva* is everything — *vāsudevaḥ sarvam*. In this way he reaches Me.

### THE ONE WHO HAS THIS KNOWLEDGE IS VERY DIFFICULT TO FIND

*Sa mahātmā sudurlabhaḥ*. Such a *jñānī* is *sudurlabha*, very hard to come by. He recognises Me as the *ātmā*, of all beings; so, his *ātmā*, is *mahān*, great, limitless. One who has that knowledge is called *mahātmā*. Generally the word *mahātmā*, is used for any *sādhu*, any saint. In that case, the word *ātmā* refers to the *antaḥ-karaṇa* and the word *mahātmā* indicates a person whose mind or heart is very big. But here, because of the context, *mahātmā* is the one whose *ātmā* is *Brahman*. There is no one equal to that *mahātmā* because you cannot improve upon limitlessness. He is a *mahātmā*. And he is very difficult to find. This is why, even though all are beloved, the *jñānī* is distinguished.

In this verse *Kṛṣṇa* has said that it is very difficult to find a *mahātmā*, who knows everything is *Vāsudeva*. Even though only devotees are being discussed here, all of them are not able to recognise *Vāsudeva* as *ātmā*. Why is it so difficult to recognise that the Lord is everything? This is the reason.

कामैस्तैस्तैर्हृतज्ञानाः प्रपद्यन्तेऽन्यदेवताः ।

तं तं नियममास्थाय प्रकृत्या नियताः स्वया ॥ २० ॥

*kāmaistaistairhṛtajñānāḥ prapadyante'nyadevatāḥ*  
*taṁ taṁ niyamamāsthāya prakṛtyā niyatāḥ svayā*

Verse 20

तैः तैः कामैः *taiḥ taiḥ kāmaiḥ* — by those particular desires; हृतज्ञानाः *hṛta-jñānāḥ* — whose discrimination is robbed away; तम् तम् नियमम् *taṁ taṁ niyamam* — whatever are the stipulations for that; आस्थाय *āsthāya* — following; प्रकृत्या स्वया *prakṛtyā svayā* — by their own dispositions; नियताः *niyatāḥ* — driven; अन्यदेवताः *anya-devatāḥ* — other (lesser) gods; प्रपद्यन्ते *prapadyante* — they worship

Those whose discrimination is robbed away by their own particular desires, driven by their own dispositions, worship other gods following what is stipulated.

#### DESIRES ROB ONE OF DISCRIMINATION

*Hṛta-jñānāḥ* — are those whose discrimination is robbed away. *Hṛta* means robbed, taken away, and what is robbed is *jñāna*, discrimination. If they do not have discrimination between *ātmā*, and *anātmā*, what they want will not be very clear to them.

How have they been robbed of their discrimination? *Kāmāiḥ taiḥ taiḥ* — by those desires. Because desires differ from person to person, the plural is used here. Each person has his own unique desires and by those he is robbed of his discrimination. Without an object you cannot have a desire. So, *Śaṅkara* says here that their discrimination is robbed away by objects like son, wealth, heaven and so on — *putra paśu-svargādi viṣayaiḥ*. *Putra* is son. If one has money, one wants a heir. If he has no money, even though he has nothing to give, he still wants a son. Perhaps the hope is that the son will improve his lot. Each one wants to continue to live in the form of his son. A man also wants a son to continue the family name. And every woman has an inbuilt desire to have a child because there is a natural fulfilment there. If she chooses not to, it is because of other problems. In Indian society there is also a religious reason to have a son. Only a son can perform the funerary rites of a parent. *Putra* also stands for *kāma*, all forms of pleasure. This desire for progeny is one of the most powerful desires and is therefore, mentioned separately. *Paśu*, cattle, is the symbol for all forms of wealth. In an agricultural society, the number of cattle a person had indicated the amount of land he owned. *Svarga* is heaven. The word *ādi* meaning etc., indicates power, fame, and so on.

By these various objects of desire, people are *hṛta-jñānas*, those who are robbed of their discrimination. Because of the predominance of the desires for various things,



discrimination between *ātmā*, and *anātmā*, or between *nitya* and *anitya* does not arise in such people. They are too busy fulfilling their desires.

### THEY IMPLORE OTHER GODS

*Anya-devatāḥ prapadyante* — they propitiate other *devatās*. In doing so, they meet with a number of obstructions. To ward these off and enhance the results of their efforts, they invoke *Īśvara* in the form of different *devatās*. They implore – *prapadyante*, other gods – *anya-devatās*. There are prayers to invoke a specific *devatā* for a specific result and for certain results there are certain specified rituals. So, to fulfil their desires they invoke various other *devatās*.

All the *devatās* they worship are looked upon as other than *ātmā*, which is *Vāsudeva*. They do not think about *ātmā*, being *Vāsudeva* and that they have to gain this knowledge. The desire for knowledge, *jijñāsā*, does not arise in them.

### EACH IS IMPELLED BY HIS OWN DISPOSITION

Driven by their own dispositions — *svayā prakṛtyā niyatāḥ*— they approach other *devatās* for what they want or they go to *deva-loka* and become *devatās* themselves as a result of their worship. When the same result can be achieved by worshipping any deity why should one choose a given deity? It all depends upon his own *saṃskāra*, tendency. Perhaps he had worshipped that deity in his previous life, or in this life. Because of what was done before, certain things attract, certain things do not. Even though they may not have prejudices against other deities, still, one attracts. So, they follow that particular form of worship — all for the fulfilment of their own unique set of desires.

### WORSHIP IS ACCORDING TO STIPULATIONS

How do they worship? Following a particular stipulation — *taṃ taṃ niyamam āsthāya* — they invoke a given *devatā*. The repetition, *taṃ taṃ*, indicates that according to each desire, there is a particular type of worship available. If one wants a son, he cannot perform a ritual which is meant to bring rain. He will perform *putra-kāmeṣṭi*, a particular ritual meant for the birth of a son. There are rules about, how to perform this ritual, who are the *devatās* involved, what are the oblations, what are the *mantras*, and what are the gifts to be given. All these are called *niyamas*, rules. *Āsthaya* means ‘following these rules or stipulations.’

Driven by their own disposition, following a particular set of rules, they worship *devatās* other than *ātmā*, *Vāsudeva*. There is nothing wrong in this. The only problem is that they are only interested in *dharma* or *artha* or *kāma*. So, it becomes very difficult to see that *Vāsudeva* is all this. To gain that vision they have to see the limitations of

these desires and pursue the understanding of *ātmā*. And for that they must have *nitya-anitya-viveka*. The desire for *mokṣa* must be there. If it is not, the desire for *dharma*, *artha* and *kāma* loom large in their minds.

Even *Arjuna*, up to now, was only interested in *dharma-artha-kāma*. He became interested in *mokṣa* only a few chapters ago, a few hours ago, perhaps. Since *Kṛṣṇa* started talking to him, only an hour or two would have passed. Before that *Arjuna* was interested in fighting and in establishing *dharma*.

Therefore, robbed of their discrimination by various desires, driven by their particular disposition, they propitiate different *devatās* according to the stipulations. As a result, they don't come to Me. This applies to all forms of religion where *Īśvara* is other than you. In the next verse, Lord *Kṛṣṇa* says that in whichever form they worship, in that form I bless them.

यो यो यां यां तनुं भक्तः श्रद्धयार्चितुमिच्छति ।

तस्य तस्याचलां श्रद्धां तामेव विदधाम्यहम् ॥ २१ ॥

*yo yo yāṃ yāṃ tanuṃ bhaktaḥ śraddhayārcitumicchati*  
*tasya tasyācalāṃ śraddhāṃ tāmeva vidadhāmyaham*

Verse 21

यः यः *yah yah* — whoever; भक्तः *bhaktaḥ* — the devotee; याम् याम् *yām yām* — whichever; तनुम् *tanum* — particular form; श्रद्धया *śraddhayā* — with faith; अर्चितुम् *arcitum* — to worship; इच्छति *icchati* — he desires; तस्य तस्य *tasya tasya* — for each one of them; ताम् एव श्रद्धाम् *tām eva śraddhām* — indeed that same *śraddhā*; अचलाम् *acalām* — unshakeable; विदधामि अहम् *vidadhāmi aham* — I make

Whoever be the devotee and in whichever form (of a *devatā*) he wishes to worship with faith, indeed that same faith, I make firm for him.

*Yah yah bhaktaḥ* – whoever be the devotee, whether he be an *ārta*, a devotee in distress, or an *arthārthī*, someone who wants help for his accomplishments, *yāṃ yāṃ tanum* – whichever particular form, *śraddhayā arcitum icchati* – he desires to worship with faith, I make that faith unshakeable — so says *Bhagavān*. *Bhakta* here is a person whose primary concern is fulfilling his desires; but because he has *śraddhā*, he is a devotee rather than a simple *kāmī*. This restricts the meaning of *bhakta* to an *ārta* and an *arthārthī*. He will invoke the Lord in a particular form, *tanu*, according to his *śraddhā*; but because he does not see that *Vāsudeva* is everything, he propitiates a particular aspect of the Lord and performs a specific ritual invoking that form of *devatā*.

With *śraddhā* he desires to worship, or to praise a particular form of *devatā*. According to his understanding he may insist that this is the only form of the Lord or he may accommodate other forms of worship.

## THE LORD HIMSELF ESTABLISHES A DEVOTEE'S ŚRADDHĀ

The Lord says *'tasya acalām śraddhām vidadhāmi aham*. The important thing here is *śraddhā*. Earlier *Kṛṣṇa* had said that, the one who has *śraddhā* gains knowledge of the identity of the individual and *Īśvara* — *śraddhāvān labhate jñānam*.<sup>1</sup> In this verse he says whatever *śraddhā* he now has, that, I make it firm, unshakeable, for him — *tasya acalām śraddhām vidadhāmi aham*. For the one whose *śraddhā* manifests as a worship of a particular *devatā* for a particular result, I make his *śraddhā* firm. How? By giving the results. Suppose someone performs a particular ritual and he does not get the promised result, then his *śraddhā* will quickly disappear. I make sure that it does not by giving the results. They are doing *karmas* for which results are to be given. That result I give. Even though they are worshipping only a fraction of me, even though they don't worship me totally, still I make firm whatever *śraddhā* they have. I am available in the particular form of *devatā* that they invoke. No *devatā* is separate from Me but I am more than these *devatās*. The difficulty is that these devotees think that this particular *devatā* is *Īśvara*. But I do not disturb that at all. I give them results only according to their *śraddhā*. If I were to interfere and tell them, 'I am you,' it would not help because they are not ready for it. Even if the Lord appears before such people, they will ask for a promotion. They already have a certain firmness in their *śraddhā*. I make it more firm by giving the result. This he tells in the next verse.

स तया श्रद्धया युक्तस्तस्याराधनमीहते ।

लभते च ततः कामान् मयैव विहितान् हि तान् ॥ २२ ॥

*sa tayā śraddhayā yuktastasyārāadhanamīhate*  
*labhate ca tataḥ kāmān mayaiḥ vihitān hi tān*

Verse 22

There are two different ways of reading the second line of this verse as given below.

१. मया एव विहितान् हि तान् कामान् लभते ।

*mayā eva vihitān hi tān kāmān labhate*

२. मया एव विहितान् हितान् कामान् लभते ।

*mayā eva vihitān hitān kāmān labhate*

सः *saḥ* — he; तया श्रद्धया *tayā śraddhayā* — with that faith; युक्तः *yuktaḥ* — being endowed; तस्य *tasya* — of that (form of *devatā*); आराधनम् *ārāadhanam* — worship; ईहते *īhate* — he engages in; च *ca* — and; ततः *tataḥ* — from that (worshipped *devatā*); (1) मया एव *mayā eva* — by Me alone; विहितान् *vihitān* — ordained; हि *hi* —

<sup>1</sup> *Gītā* – 4-39

because/definitely; तान् कामान् *tān kāmān* — those objects; लभते *labhate* — he gains; (2) मया एव *mayā eva* — by Me alone; विहितान् *vihitān* — ordained; हितान् कामान् *hitān kāmān* — those desired objects; लभते *labhate* — he gains

Here in the second reading, *hitān kāmān* will mean very desirable objects.

1. He who, endowed with that faith, engages in worship of that (*devatā*), gains from that (*devatā* he has worshipped) those objects of desire that are definitely ordained by me alone.
2. He who, endowed with that faith, engages in worship of that (*devatā*), gains from that (*devatā* he has worshipped) the very desirable objects of desire that are ordained by Me.

### A DEVOTEE WORSHIPS WITH ŚRADDHĀ

*Saḥ yuktaḥ tayā śraddhayā* — this is a person endowed with *śraddhā* in the Veda which promises a particular result for a given ritual. A given means is capable of producing a given result and the connection between them is permanent. This is the order, the law of *karma* which is *Īśvara*. How do we know these various means and ends are connected? When you perform a ritual, what is its connection to a son, or the rains, etc.? This connection is revealed in the *śāstra* which is given by *Īśvara*. *Śraddhā* means the acceptance of that connection. ‘If I do this, this will happen. Therefore, I do this.’ This is the *śraddhā* of the person spoken of here. Then he engages in worship of that form of *devatā* with this *śraddhā* — *tasya ārādhnam ihate*.

### HE GETS THE RESULTS FROM ĪŚVARA

*Labhate ca tataḥ kāmān* — from that *devatā* he gains those objects of his desire. *Kāma* can mean both the desire and the object of desire. Here it means the desired objects. *Tataḥ*, from that, means from the *devatā* whom he has worshipped. And *Kṛṣṇa* says here that the *devatā* this person has worshipped is nothing but himself.

The Lord says ‘*mayā eva vihitān hi tān* — by Me alone the results of their worship are ordained.’ People perform rituals or offer prayers with *śraddhā* and obtain the results. These results are determined by Me, the Lord, but they think they come from the *devatā* that they worshipped. They don't recognise *Īśvara*, but it doesn't matter. The prayer has given the result, and therefore, the *śraddhā* becomes more firm. Next time the prayer will be better in order to get a better result until there is a maturity in the understanding.

The first reading is: *tān vihitān kāmān labhate hi* — they gain those ends because they are ordained by Me. Here *hi* means ‘because.’ It is all arranged by

*Parameśvara*, who is omniscient and therefore, knows that this *karma* has precisely this result. Everything that is done is taken into account; so, we sometimes see different results for the apparently same action. Two people may perform a ritual, *putra-kāmeṣṭi*, for the gain of a son. One has a beautiful son who is very bright and healthy. The other has a son born with poor eyesight. This means that in the performance of the ritual by the second person, there was some problem. He did get a son, but there was some omission or commission in the ritual and the results have to be given only according to the *karma* performed. Both of them did the same ritual but one did it better than the other; so, he gets a better result. Who is to decide all this? *Śaṅkara* says here that the one who is omniscient, the Lord, gives the result.

*Hi* can also mean definitely. A given means produces a given result and there are degrees of results because there are variations both in how the ritual is performed and the person's knowledge of what he is doing. How much one understands when performing a ritual also determines the nature of the result. All these conditions, including his attitude when giving the gifts affect the result. If he had a sense of loss, that affects the result because one is supposed to give with a full heart, with the feeling that he could not have given more. A person's *śraddhā*, his knowledge, and the mode of performance are all in different degrees, and these determine the result. So, each one gets exactly what he must. Here *hi* has the meaning of definitely, necessarily. These are the meanings if we read the words as follows — *vihitān hi tān*. Here the words *hi* and *tān* have been read separately as two words instead of *hitān* as one word.

In the second reading it is read together as one word — *hitān*. In that case the statement would be *mayā eva vihitān hitān kāmān labhate*. Here these results are desirable ends, ends, *kāmas*, that are *hita*, good for you — *hitān kāmān*. *Śaṅkara* cautions here that they are not totally desirable because *kāma* is never really desirable, *hita*. Desires and desired objects which are other than ourselves, are not what is good for us. They cause pain when they are unfulfilled and even when they are fulfilled, they ultimately come to an end and cause grief. They have limitations; so, they are not *hita*, the most desirable. *Kṛṣṇa* elaborates this in the next verse.

अन्तवत्तु फलं तेषां तद्भवत्यल्पमेधसाम् ।

देवान् देवयजो यान्ति मद्भक्ता यान्ति मामपि ॥ २३ ॥

*antavattu phalaṃ teṣāṃ tadbhavatyalpamedhasām*

*devān devayajo yānti madbhaktā yānti māmapi*

Verse 23

तु *tu* — but; अल्पमेधसाम् तेषाम् *alpamedhasām teṣām* — of those who have limited discrimination; तत् फलम् *tat phalam* — that result; अन्तवत् *antavat* — finite (having an end); भवति *bhavati* — is; देव-यजः *deva-yajaḥ* — those who worship the gods; देवान्

*devān* — the gods; यान्ति *yānti* — go to; मद्भक्ताः *mad-bhaktāḥ* — those who worship Me; अपि *api* — indeed; माम् यान्ति *mām yānti* — reach Me

But for those who have limited discrimination, that result is finite. Those who worship the gods go to the gods; those who worship Me go to Me indeed.

#### FOR THOSE OF LIMITED DISCRIMINATION, THE RESULT IS LIMITED

*Teṣām alpa-medhasām* — *alpa* means a little, *medhas* means capacity to think; so, *alpa-medhas* is one who has a limited capacity to think, to inquire. Because they engage in such limited pursuits they are *alpa-medhasaḥ*. Here it specifically means the one who has limited *viveka*. They do have some *viveka* because they are devotees. They have *dharma-adharma-viveka* and they recognise *Īśvara* in some form. But this is a limited *viveka*. For those of *alpa-medhas*...

*Tad phalam antavad bhavati* — the result (of all the *karmas* they do) is *antavat*. *Antavat* means that which has an end. In terms of time there is an end. Being a result it will definitely perish. In terms of place, it is finite. Any result that takes you to another place is limited because in going to one place another is missed. If a person goes to heaven, he doesn't go to other *lokas* such as *brahma-loka*. Even in heaven, he will occupy a given position and enjoy only the benefits of that position; so, there is a limitation in terms of what is enjoyed. Some things are available for enjoyment, some are not. The degree of pleasure he will experience is again limited because of the limitation of the body he gets. And whatever be his enjoyment, it is only for a finite length of time. So, in every respect the result is *antavat*, limited. For these people of limited discrimination, the result of worship is only finite; it has an end.

*Devān deva-yajāḥ yānti*. Because they worship various *devatās* or perform rituals invoking various deities, they are called *deva-yajāḥ*. As a result of such worship they go only to those *devas*, *devān yānti*. They go to the world where the particular deity resides and become *devatās*, denizens of the heavens etc. If one worships *Indra* he goes to *indra-loka* and becomes another *deva* in that world. But that *deva* is still a *jīva*.

Heaven is definitely a limited end. And this is the maximum one can get from *karma*. There they may find themselves employees in the palaces of the *devas*. But the *devas* themselves look up to *Indra* who looks up to *Brhaspati* who is his *guru*. These are all places, positions, and are therefore, *upādhis*. Therefore, those who experience them are mere *jīvas*. They have better powers, better sense perception, and a better capacity to enjoy; but it is all only for a given length of time. Later *Kṛṣṇa* is going to say that when the *punya* that got them there is exhausted, they will leave that particular *loka* and enter another — *kṣīṇe punye martya-lokaṃ viśanti*.

## THOSE WHO SEEK ĪŚVARA DIRECTLY GAIN HIM

*Mad-bhaktāḥ mām apiyanti* — whereas those who seek Me directly come to Me; they become Me. If they want to know what is *Parameśvara*, what is this *ātmā*, they become Me because *Parameśvara* is *ātmā*. What was said before is confirmed here. They become *mahātmās*, who know that all this is *Vāsudeva*, *vāsudevaḥ sarvam*. There is only one *ātmā*, which is Me and that they come to recognise as themselves. Thus they come to Me alone.

## BOTH MAKE EFFORT; THE RESULT IS VASTLY DIFFERENT

*Śaṅkara* points out here that even though the effort is the same, there is a great disparity in the result. Those who pursue the *devatās* make effort but they do not seek Me for a result that has no end. Rituals are fraught with effort, physical, *kāya-karma*; oral, *vācika-karma*; and mental, *mānasa-karma*. One has to gather the materials and then take great care to perform the ritual properly. Then he has to distribute wealth. Appropriate *mantras* are to be chanted and they must also be done properly. Meditation upon the deity is prescribed and this also is not easy.

In the seeking of *Parameśvara* also there is effort. You have to dedicate yourself to the pursuit of this knowledge and deny yourself certain pleasures that you might have otherwise enjoyed. Then there is the study of language, and in earlier times, the study of logic. Today we assume that you all have some logic from your general education because for *Vedānta*, you require a certain intellectual discipline. Previously it was acquired by the study of logic and grammar. In fact just the study of Sanskrit grammar develops the capacity to think properly. All this requires effort. The study of logic, especially, is most tortuous. It requires a lot of effort. You have to keep track of everything that was said and learn its jargon. The whole language changes. To say a pot is filled with water they will say the object that is conditioned by the word called pot is filled with the thing which is conditioned by the word water. And filled is neither less nor more. By the time he completes the statement, it will be in the form of two paragraphs. This is Indian logic. It is very thorough.

For a ritual you make a lot of effort and to conduct this inquiry you make a lot of effort. But for the first, you get a limited result and for the other, the result is limitless; the very seeker is resolved. What kind of a bargain is this? There is no bargain at all. And for the *vivekī*, there is no choice either. Only for the *avivekī* does there seem to be some choice.

## EVEN THE EFFORT IS DISPARATE

The effort, however, is not really equal. *Paramatmā* is not separate from *ātmā*, the seeker; it is already accomplished. It is oneself alone. And yet, without *viveka*, a

person abandons it and pursues something else. He has nectar in his hand and he gives it up and extends his hand for some gruel. *Ātmā* is already available without any effort. He has only to claim it, nothing else. Only one effort is involved here, knowledge. But if he does not discern this, he has a lot of things to do.

If he has *vairāgya*, a clarity about what produces what, and if he loves knowledge, all he has to do is only to inquire. What effort is there in that? And yet when he undertakes this pursuit, the whole society will sympathise with him, thinking that he is making a great sacrifice and wondering what is wrong with him. But he doesn't feel he has sacrificed anything. He has a commitment to the pursuit of knowledge; and so, there is no real giving up and no effort.

For a person with such a commitment this concept of giving up is all nonsense. When the fruit is ripe it detaches itself from the tree; it does not give up anything. It falls off the tree because otherwise it would hang and rot. It has to fall so that another tree will come out of it. Giving up is only from the standpoint of a person who has some difficulties, not for the person who has maturity. For him there is no giving up; there is simply growing out of.

Others consider that he has made a foolhardy step. But if he is a *vivekī*, he will understand them. They have their own value system. If they ask him what he will do for his next meal, he will say, 'When I am hungry I will think about it.' The future is not a problem for him. For such a person there is no effort at all in this pursuit.

The whole pursuit being in the form of inquiry, all he requires is his mind. For rituals, a lot of ingredients are required but for knowledge, only the mind. And there is no sense of effort in the inquiry because all along he is discovering something. And that is all he wants. All along it is beneficial, not just at the end. It is one continuous pleasant affair. From the beginning it is an end in itself and therefore, it is entirely different from any other pursuit.

So, in fact, there is no equality of effort. And in terms of the result they are definitely different. One is *saṁsāra*; the other is *mokṣa*. They are opposites. But still people do not come directly to *Bhagavān*, so, he shows him sympathy here in this verse.

Those who seek Me directly attain Me while those who look upon *artha* and *kāma* pursuits invoke various deities and gain only the limited results they seek. *Kṛṣṇa* has already explained the meaning of the word *mām*, Me, here as the one who is the self of everything, the one the *jñānī* knows as himself. He says that these people recognise his essential form and therefore, are non-separate from him, the Lord. The whole presentation here is from the standpoint of *paramātmā*. Either *Vyāsa* introduces *Kṛṣṇa* here as *Īśvara* or *Kṛṣṇa* introduces himself as *Īśvara*. Whether *Kṛṣṇa* was a historical figure or an *avatāra* or not, does not matter.



In this verse he is introduced very clearly.

अव्यक्तं व्यक्तिमापन्नं मन्यन्ते मामबुद्धयः ।

परं भावमजानन्तो ममाव्ययमनुत्तमम् ॥ २४ ॥

*avyaktaṃ vyaktimāpannaṃ manyante māmabuddhayaḥ  
paraṃ bhāvamajānanto mamāvyayamanuttamam*

Verse 24

अबुद्धयः *abuddhayaḥ* — those who lack discrimination; अव्ययम् *avyayam* — changeless; अनुत्तमम् *anuttamam* — beyond which there is nothing greater; मम परम् भावम् *mama param bhāvam* — My limitless nature (as *ātmā*); अजानन्तः *ajānantaḥ* — not knowing; माम् अव्यक्तम् *mām avyaktam* — Me who is not manifest (to any means of knowledge); व्यक्तिम् आपन्नम् *vyaktim āpannam* — endowed with a particular manifest form; मन्यन्ते *manyante* — consider

Those who lack discrimination, not knowing My limitless, changeless nature beyond which there is nothing greater, look upon Me who is formless as one endowed with a manifest form.

## LACK OF DISCRIMINATION DENIES RECOGNITION OF ĪŚVARA

*Abuddhayaḥ* means those who have insufficient *viveka*. The negative particle ‘a’ here means inadequacy as used often in an expression such as, ‘I have no money.’ Everyone has intellect, *buddhi*, but if they lack *viveka*, they are called *abuddhis*, people of limited discrimination. In the context here they are devotees but because they are *abuddhis*, lacking in discrimination, they look upon Me as *Viṣṇu* in this particular form of *Kṛṣṇa*.

*Avyaktaṃ māṃ vyaktim āpannaṃ manyante* — they look upon Me who is *avyakta* as *vyakta*. *Avyakta* has two meanings. *Śaṅkara* takes it here as *aprakāśa*, not known (as an object). It is not accessible to any means of knowledge we have and therefore, is not known directly.

The other meaning of *avyakta* is unmanifest. Because they lack discrimination they look upon Me as now endowed with a particular manifest form — *manyante vyaktim āpannam*. I am considered to be Lord *Viṣṇu* who was in heaven, *Vaikunṭha*, and has now come here as *Kṛṣṇa*.

## ĪŚVARA'S REAL NATURE IS NOT KNOWN

Why do they consider Me as *vyaktim āpannam* when I am *avyakta*? Because they do not know My limitless nature — *mama paraṃ bhāvam ajānantaḥ*. They do

not know My limitless nature, the nature of *paramātmā*. So, it looks as though what is *avyakta* has become *vyakta*.

The word *vyakta* can be looked at in another way. The nature of *paramātmā*, *Īśvara*, is always *vyakta*, always manifest. It is always available, *nitya-aparokṣa*, for the following reasons. Any experience is imbued with the very nature of *ātmā*. Whatever the experience, there is the presence of consciousness, the nature of *ātmā*. A given experience is of an object which was previously away from you and has now come into the range of your experience. Since it was not there before, it will not be there in the same form the next minute. The object can also be a thought form without a corresponding external object. Whatever be the object, in the experience of every object, one thing is invariable — experience. The object is a qualifying factor to experience. Without a particular object there is pure experience.

Just as through all the beads of a necklace runs one thread, similarly in all forms of experience, what is always present is consciousness, the *svarūpa* of *ātmā*. Is it away from you? i.e., is it *parokṣa*? Is it perceived by you as an object, *pratyakṣa*? If it is, it was not perceived previously and therefore, later it won't be perceived. This contradicts our experience of ourselves. *Ātmā*, is not an object of perception, much less an object of inference. All inference is because of the presence of *ātmā*. Therefore, *ātmā*, is neither something remote that is inferred, *parokṣa*, nor an object of perceptual experience, *pratyakṣa*. That is why it is called *aparokṣa*. It is immediately known yet not perceived or inferred.

### AN ORIENTATION CAN PERSIST AFTER KNOWLEDGE

One who knows this contemplates upon the knowledge constantly recalling Me, *Parameśvara*, to his mind. This recollection is always preceded by listening to the *śāstra* — *śravaṇa*. Unless you have already collected an experience you cannot recollect it. *Parameśvara* is understood through the *śāstra*. But even after exposure to the *śāstra* and analysis of it, one can still have the orientation that he is the body. This is called *deha-ātma-buddhi*.

There is a difference between an orientation and a confusion. A simple confusion requires clarification only once. Suppose you use the wrong key to unlock a door. You immediately understand the confusion because the door does not open. Therefore, you choose the right key and confusion is resolved. There is no further problem. But suppose a door gets sealed off and a wall is erected behind it. Even though you know there is no longer a functional door there, out of habit you will try to open it for some time. Then you remember yourself. This is an orientation.

For me this problem is very visible. When I travel by car, I always sit in the passenger seat. In India, I know the cars have right hand drive and that I am supposed to go to the left door, not to the right door. But when I go to India after being in America

for some time, I go only to the right door. Why? There is no confusion. I know what is left and right. I know in America it is left hand drive and in India right hand drive. But still I commit a mistake because there is an orientation.

When there is such an orientation you have to remember. It does not go away just because you have resolved the confusion. Nor does it go by a single recollection of what you know. The notion that *ātmā* is the body and the body is *ātmā*, is what we call *deha-ātma-buddhi*. This confusion is resolved by the *śāstra*. Once it is resolved you should not have any problem. But we see that the problem continues. Either the *śāstra* is not properly understood or the problem continues because of orientation. Even in one life so many years have been invested in this notion. How are you going to remove it just because somebody said ‘*tat tvam asi?*’ The orientation has to go.

### HOW DOES ONE CORRECT THE ORIENTATION?

To help remove this orientation we need the exposure to the teaching, direct and indirect. Then there is what we call *brahma-abhyāsa* which consists of dwelling upon that – *tat-cintanam*, talking about it – *tat-kathanam*, mutual discussion among seekers, – *anyonyaṃ tat prabodhanam*. Contemplation is also included. Living with the knowledge in this way for a length of time is remembering — *smaraṇam*. And it is absolutely necessary.

This is to be done as long as necessary. *Śaṅkara* says elsewhere, *satataṃ smarati nityaśaḥ*. *Nityaśaḥ* means always and so does *satata*. Why does he use two words with the same meaning? *Satata* has the sense of without any interval — remembering *Īśvara* constantly. Remembering here is spending one's time in contemplation, in dwelling on the truth of *Īśvara* as revealed by the words of the *śāstra*. The word *nityaśaḥ* also means ‘always,’ but it has the sense of a length of time. You can dwell constantly for one day, two days, one week or one year. So, constantly, for how long is this to be done? For this *Bhagavān* says, ‘*nityaśaḥ* — for a long time.’ The affix *śas* on *nitya* gives the meaning of abundance. *Nitya* means always and adding *śas* to it extends it. It is not a one or two days or a three year affair. It is to be done as long as one is alive.

But it is not an unpleasant task. It is a very pleasant affair. Constantly remembering the fact that *aham* is *Parameśvara* is something that one loves. It is the highest form of joy because you cannot be better than that. It is not simple self - hypnotism. It is a knowledge born of *śāstra* and again and again we dwell upon that. Somehow the mind will pose the question, ‘How can I be *Parameśvara*?’ It may argue, ‘How can you be *Parameśvara* in spite of a backache.’ You now have a contemplative theme. This is how the contemplation continues. Anything that opposes the vision has to be met with. How long should this go on? *Śaṅkara* says — as long as one is alive. In the

beginning perhaps it is something that has to be done consciously. Then later it becomes very natural. There is really nothing for you to think about.

If the fact, ‘*ahaṃ parameśvaraḥ*’ is very clear to you, then, there is no problem. Your mind does not pose any objections. Neither a mental condition nor a condition of the physical body is taken to be the nature of *ātmā*. Things are viewed as they are. In this case one does not need to do anything.

But when someone requires *smaraṇa*, for how long should it be done? As long as it has got to be done, it is done. ‘The one who constantly dwells upon Me through listening, answering objections, contemplation and even *satsaṅga*, as long as he is alive, for him I am *sulabha*, easily gained,’ says the Lord.

### THE GAIN OF PARAMEŚVARA IS EASY — SULABHA

There are a number of reasons why *Īśvara* is easily gained. Any accomplishment requires some effort, even wearing your clothes. Suppose you have a shirt that is a little tight. When you are in a great hurry, you would rather not wear it because it takes a half a minute extra to put it on. You want to avoid that extra time and effort.

Now suppose you need some money. You have to put in effort. If you want power, you have to put in effort. If you want pleasure, it takes some effort on your part. To create a pleasurable situation you have to manipulate a lot of things. Only then can you relax and enjoy. And if you want to go to heaven, a lot of effort is involved. A lot of things have to be avoided; a lot of things have to be done.

But the gain of *Brahman* is ‘*sulabha*,’ says the Lord. While going to *brahma-loka* requires the maximum amount of effort, gaining *Brahman* is no effort. If it is argued that always dwelling upon *Brahman* is an effort. It is not. Because there is no effort in dwelling upon what you love. Everybody loves to stand before the mirror. Even an old man who has cataracts in his eyes and does not see well at all, still stands before the mirror and tries to look at himself. Why? — because of love for *ātmā*. So, here, it is not an effort, because, love is not an effort. It is very natural. For a *mumukṣu*, dwelling upon *Parameśvara* is a matter of love.

And it is very natural because, *ātmā* is of the nature of absolute love. Any form of love extended towards any object is, after all, for my own sake. That object makes me pleased and therefore, becomes an object of my love. What I really love is my pleased self, *ātmā*. And since *ātmā*, is *Parameśvara*, whose nature is *ānanda*, there is nothing more to be desired. Being absolute fullness, *ātmā*, becomes the object of absolute love. So, dwelling upon it becomes a joyous thing. Because it is the most desirable, dwelling upon it is not a painful affair. It is a love affair; it is what you love the utmost.

And nothing new is produced either, because, *ātmā* is already existent as *Parameśvara*. The result is not born of effort; it is born purely of recognition. There is

no effort involved; nothing new is added; nothing old is removed. The accomplishment is of an already accomplished fact. Therefore, it is *sulabha*, easily gained.

Then you may argue that the removal of ignorance is an effort. In fact, you only recognise and in the recognition, ignorance gets removed. You do not do any action. It is purely an activity of the *pramāṇa*. Therefore, it is *sulabha*. The one who dwells upon Me is endowed with a mind, which is tranquil, contented, and under control, in the sense that it does not have any problem with reference to reflection on *Parameśvara*.

Whenever the mind is free, it goes towards *Bhagavān*, like a person in love with someone. The mind very naturally goes towards the object of love. It does not require an appointment. Similarly here, the mind of a *mumukṣu*, a *jīñāsu*, will naturally go towards *paramātmā*, the *vastu*. He has understood the nature of *paramātmā* as something that is not different than himself. So where else will the mind go?

Until that takes place, he continues to do *śravaṇa*. Will is used in the beginning and later the very subject matter takes over. Afterwards he doesn't require any will at all. It is something like going to a *kumbha-mela*. You don't require a road map. All you have to do is get into a crowd that is going. Soon the momentum of the crowd is so great that even if you want to go back, you cannot. It becomes like a moving ramp. People from behind push you and you keep moving. You are in the stream. You keep moving and you find yourself right in front of *Gaṅgā*!

This is exactly what happens here. A certain will is required until you get into this stream of thinking of understanding. Once a certain clarity is there, there is no effort at all.

In the previous verse, *Kṛṣṇa* said that these people who lack discrimination, not knowing my real nature, look upon Me as someone who has a form. They think I am someone remote from them who has assumed a body and come here from another place. In fact, I am the whole world and I am the *ātmā* of everyone. This is My real nature — changeless and beyond which there is nothing greater. Not knowing Me in this way, they regard Me as having a given form.

*Śaṅkara* asks, what is the reason for this ignorance? Why do they worship other *devatās* and pursue smaller ends? Why do people not directly seek the Lord? *Kṛṣṇa* points this out in the next verse.

नाहं प्रकाशः सर्वस्य योगमायासमावृतः ।

मूढोऽयं नाभिजानाति लोको मामजमव्ययम् ॥ २५ ॥

*nāhaṃ prakāśaḥ sarvasya yogamāyāsamāvṛtaḥ*  
*mūḍho'yaṃ nābhijānāti loko māmajamavyayam*

Verse 25

योग-माया-समावृतः *yoga-māyā-samāvṛtaḥ* — completely covered by *yogamāyā*; सर्वस्य *sarvasya* — for everyone; न अहम् प्रकाशः *na aham prakāśaḥ* — I am not recognised, known; अयम् लोकः *ayam lokaḥ* — this person/world; मूढः *mūḍhaḥ* — being deluded; अजम् *ajam* — one who is unborn; अव्ययम् *avyayam* — one who is changeless; माम् *mām* — Me; न अभिजानाति *na abhijnāti* — does not know

1. I am not recognised by everyone. A person, completely covered by *yoga-māyā* (*māyā* united with the three *guṇas*) is deluded and does not know Me properly as the one who is unborn and changeless.
2. Alternate Reading: I, completely covered by *māyā*, united with the three *guṇas*, am not recognised by everyone. A person is deluded and does not know Me properly as the one who is unborn and changeless.

### COVERED BY MĀYĀ, NOT EVERYONE RECOGNISES BHAGAVĀN

*Na aham prakāśaḥ sarvasya* — I am not known to all people. *Na aham prakāśaḥ* means I do not come to light. Even the people who see Me now, see only this boy from *Brindāvan*. They do not recognise Me, *Īśvara*, at all. The Lord says, ‘I cannot be known by all people.’ And, *Śaṅkara* adds here, that the Lord can be seen only by certain *bhaktas*, certain seekers. This means *Īśvara* comes to light only for those who seek him and are qualified to recognise him, not to everyone. Why?

People are covered by *māyā* — *lokaḥ yoga-māyā-samāvṛtaḥ*. *Yoga*, *Śaṅkara* says, means the connection or tying together of the three *guṇas*. That is *māyā*. By that *māyā*, united to the three *guṇas*, they are covered. Previously it was said that people are deluded by the three *guṇas* — *tribhiḥ guṇa-mayaiḥ bhāvaiḥ ebhiḥ sarvam idaṃ jagat mohitam*.<sup>1</sup> As we saw, it is the product of the *guṇas* that delude. *Sattva* accounts for happiness, *rajas* for sorrow, and *tamas* for dullness. By these, people are covered. *Āvrta* means ‘covered’ and *samāvṛta* means ‘totally covered.’ By this *yoga-māyā* — the three *guṇas* and their products — people are totally covered.

### WHAT IS COVERED?

The question is, what is covered? Suppose consciousness, *ātmā*, is covered, then, you would not be able to know anything; there would be no world — that is, there will be *jagadāndhya-prasaṅga*.<sup>2</sup> You must know this expression. It is one that is used often in the *śāstra*. How would there be no world? If the eyes are obstructed I cannot see; if the ears or any of the five sense organs are obstructed, they cannot perceive. Similarly,

<sup>1</sup> *Gītā* – 7-13

<sup>2</sup> *The possibility of the world being absent for a person.*

suppose consciousness is really obstructed by this *yoga-māyā*, then, you will not perceive anything. The mind will not be able to observe the world — there would be *jagadāndhya-prasaṅga*. *Jagadāndhya* means being blind to the world. This is contrary to our experience. We do experience the world. And consciousness is not covered by anything. That is why we are able to see, to hear, to think, even to say ‘I am a *saṃsārī* and therefore, a *mumukṣu*.’ All this is possible because consciousness is never covered.

Then what is covered? The verse says, ‘*lokaḥ*.’ *Loka* is defined as that by which something is known, experienced — *lokyate anena iti*. If that is so, is it the unconditioned consciousness, *ātma-caitanya*, or is it the consciousness, conditioned as a knower, *pramāṭṛ-caitanya*, that is indicated by the word *loka*? Consciousness is never covered. We have seen that. Therefore, *loka* here means the knower, *pramāṭṛ-caitanya*, the one who recognises an object. It is only from his standpoint that there is covering,

What is covered for him is the nature of *ātmā*. It is not understood. All understanding is for the knower. Therefore, it is from his standpoint that we say the nature of *ātmā* is covered by *māyā*, by ignorance.

It is mistaken for a doer, an enjoyer, and therefore, someone subject to birth and death etc. The whole thing is an error on the part of the knower who is consciousness essentially. That very consciousness obtaining as the knower is covered by ignorance.

### DELUDED, THE PERSON DOES NOT RECOGNISE ME

*Mūḍhaḥ na abhijānāti mām* — being deluded the person does not recognise Me. Naturally when the mind is totally covered by *māyā*, a person is deluded and does not recognise Me. The external world, the physical body, and so on, are not deluded, nor is consciousness, *ātmā*. There is only one thing in this world that can be deluded — the mind, *antaḥ-karaṇa*. All delusion resides there. *Loka*, the consciousness conditioned by the mind, called the knower, does not know Me. That knower alone is deluded. Nothing else. Therefore, he does not know Me, *māṇ na abhijānāti*.

*Abhijānāti* is a very good word here. *Jānāti* means ‘he knows;’ *abhijānāti* means ‘he knows properly.’ *Na abhijānāti* means ‘he does not know properly.’ All devotees know *Īśvara* in some form other than themselves; as another individual located somewhere in the world — as *parokṣa*. The Lord says, ‘The whole world is Me but a devotee looks upon it as something different from Me. Even though I am his very *ātmā*, he does not recognise that. On the contrary, all that he recognises about Me, I am not.’ Only one thing is there — *Brahman*; no history, no biography, no problems, only *satyaṃ jñānam anantaṃ brahma* — it was like that before, it is like that now and it will always be like that. But that he does not know. And not knowing Me like this, he also does not know himself. He knows only what he is not. After saying, ‘I am,’ he will relate an elaborate history and will add psychology to it by bringing in the subconscious or the unconscious. Therefore, he has a variety of histories. And they are all valid,

because he does not know Me — *māṇ na abhijānāti*. He knows Me, but only well enough to commit a mistake about Me.’

Even to mistake something you must have some knowledge of it. You must see the rope; only then can you mistake it for a snake. Similarly *ātmā* has to be known in some way before you can commit any mistake about it. And it is always available for one to commit a mistake. *Ātmā* is always self-evident, *nitya-aparokṣa*. Evident enough for the *buddhi* to commit a mistake uniformly.

Then we keep compounding it. Through experiences, the mistake gets more and more complicated. That is what we call living. There is one fundamental error followed by a variety of others. These entrench the original mistake. It is buried under all the other mistakes you are now busy correcting. But it is always there.

Therefore, no matter how much you keep correcting the secondary mistakes, you do not arrive at the right solution. It is like solving an arithmetic problem. You commit a mistake in the first step of simple addition, then you commit a mistake in multiplication, then in division. Afterwards you correct the mistakes in multiplication and division. But you do not think you can commit a mistake in addition because it is such a simple thing. Therefore, you get the wrong answer. The same is true with *saṃsāra*. The original mistake is not corrected. Before continuing the seeking, the first step is to find out, if am I a seeker. Do I have to seek? If that is not answered properly and you keep on correcting every subsequent step, it is meaningless.

### UNIQUENESS OF IGNORANCE OF ĀTMĀ

This ignorance of *ātmā* is different from ignorance of an object like a pot. There are a lot of things in this world, like a pot, which you do not know and are therefore, objects of your ignorance. *Ātmā*, however, unlike a pot, is not an object of ignorance — or knowledge. It does not have its basis in *yoga-māyā* and therefore, like a pot, it cannot be an object of *yoga-māyā*, ignorance. It is self-evident and is the basis of both ignorance and knowledge.

Being covered by *yoga-māyā* amounts to this. The knowledge, which has to take place in the *buddhi* is now covered or obstructed by the products of the three *guṇas*. The obstruction is not for *ātmā*; it is for the mind where the knowledge has to take place. Therefore, we say that there is ignorance of *ātmā* until the knowledge takes place. In other words, it is there until it goes away for good!

### UNIQUENESS OF KNOWLEDGE OF ĀTMĀ

When we say knowledge is obstructed by *yoga-māyā*, what do we mean by knowledge, *jñāna*? Two meanings are possible. One is pure consciousness — *jñapti-*



*svarūpa-jñānam*. The other is, that by which a given object is known, i.e., the instrument of knowledge — *jñāyate anena iti jñānam*. This is *vṛtti-jñāna*.

Now, consciousness is not obstructed by *yoga-māyā*. As we have seen, that would mean that there would be *jagadāndhya-prasaṅga*. That is, the world would not be recognised. Therefore, the only other thing that can be obstructed is *vṛtti-jñāna*, that by which something is known. This knowledge, which removes ignorance and error, takes place only where a *vṛtti* can take place, that is, in the *buddhi*. There is no other place where it can occur. *Ātmā* has to be understood only by the mind — *manasā eva anudraṣṭavyaḥ*.

Not understanding the *śāstra*, people interpret statements like, ‘*yato vaco nivartante aprāpya manasā saha*,’<sup>1</sup> to mean, ‘You must transcend the mind, etc.’ What is said there is that, along with the mind the words come back having not accomplished the *ātmā*, that is, having not objectified the *ātmā*. *Ātmā* is not available for objectification by a *vṛtti*. You cannot relate to it as you would to an object like a pot or a tree.

You relate to the object of a *vṛtti* as, ‘This is the object, I am the knower of this object.’ Can you relate this way to a *vṛtti* for which the ‘object’<sup>2</sup> is *ātmā*? Can you say, ‘This is *ātmā*’ like how you can say, ‘This is pot?’ If you can, then, who are you? This knower-known difference, which is always present between the object and the knower does not exist with reference to the nature of the knower. Then how do you ever recognise it?

### A SPECIAL PRAMĀṆA, A SPECIAL VṚTTI — AKHAṆḌA-ĀKĀRA-VṚTTI

Any *vṛtti* leading to knowledge can be produced by only a means of knowledge, a *pramāṇa*. To generate a *vṛtti* that will remove self-ignorance, our known means of knowledge, perception and inference, will not work because they reveal only objects. Only *śabda-pramāṇa* can create the *vṛtti* that destroys ignorance of the subject, *ātmā*. *Ātmā* is not created by the *pramāṇa*; it is because of *ātmā* that the *pramāṇa*s can even be operated. It is the *vṛtti* that is created. And the *śāstra* is the *pramāṇa* which can create this new knowledge, *vṛtti-jñāna*, by a sentence that reveals the truth of the knower. This sentence, *mahā-vākya*, creates the *vṛtti* that removes the ignorance of the nature of the knower. That *vṛtti* is the *akhaṇḍa-ākāra-vṛtti*.

*Akhaṇḍa-ākāra-vṛtti* means that between the object of knowledge and the knower there is no difference. What is common between *Īśvara* and the *jīva* is

<sup>1</sup> *Taittirīyopaniṣad* – 2.4.1

<sup>2</sup> The word *object* is put within quotes to indicate that *ātmā* can never be an object of our perception.

limitlessness, *akhaṇḍa*. After negating the differences, the *śāstra* says, ‘*tat tvam asi* — that *Īśvara* is you.’ This creates a *vṛtti* that brings about the understanding that the meaning of the word ‘you’ and the meaning of the word *Īśvara* are the same. What abides as the basis of everything, *jīva* and *Īśvara*, is one consciousness. This particular recognition, brought about by the *vṛtti*, takes place in the mind destroying ignorance of the fact that *ātmā* is *akhaṇḍa*, limitless.

Before that, the knower is covered by *yoga-māyā* and therefore, does not recognise his limitlessness. When the mind is under the spell of the *guṇas* and their products, there is no possibility of this *vṛtti-jñāna*, ‘I am *Brahman* — *ahaṃ brahma asmi*.’ Hence the Lord says, ‘Being covered by *yoga-māyā* naturally, people are deluded and do not recognise Me — *mūḍhaḥ ayaṃ māṃ na abhijānāti*.

### WHAT IS NOT KNOWN?

*Bhagavān* says, ‘One does not know Me properly...’ Who is that ‘Me’?

It is *aja*, the unborn self. Certain things are not born but they die, like ignorance. It cannot have a beginning. If it began, something must have been there before it came into existence — something that is opposed to ignorance must have been present before it. That can only be knowledge. Where there is no darkness, there is necessarily light. Similarly, where there is no ignorance there is necessarily knowledge. But if knowledge was there, how could ignorance come about? Therefore, we understand that ignorance has no beginning. Can we also say it has no end? No. Ignorance of *ātmā* or anything else has no beginning but it ends when you know what it is.

*Ātmā* also cannot have a beginning. If it came into existence at a given time, someone must have been there to note it. Otherwise how do we know that it was born? If someone was there to observe the birth of *ātmā* he had to be a conscious being. But that is *ātmā*. *Ātmā* cannot simultaneously exist and observe the termination of its own non-existence. And when *ātmā* does exist, there is no possibility of its having had a non-existence and subsequent birth. Therefore, *ātmā* has to be *aja* — unborn.

*Ātmā* is thus beginningless, but unlike ignorance, it is endless. It is *avyaya*, it does not change — *na vyeti iti avyayam*. It has no decline, no destruction. *Kṛṣṇa* says, ‘They do not know Me as the one who is not born and is never destroyed, the one who is eternal.’

### IS BHAGAVĀN ALSO COVERED BY YOGA-MĀYĀ?

*Śaṅkara* raises a question here. If *Bhagavān* cannot be known properly by all beings because he is covered by *yoga-māyā*, then, is his nature also not covered to himself by *yoga-māyā*? After all, that *yoga-māyā* is his *māyā*. Without it, he cannot function. May be he is also covered by it and he does not know himself! *Śaṅkara* refutes

this argument. He says that the difference lies in the fact that *Īśvara* is the *māyāvī*, the one who wields this *māyā*. And *yoga-māyā* is his *upādhi*. All three *guṇas* of *yoga-māyā* are glories for him; they do not bind or obstruct him in any way.

The ancient Indian *māyāvī*, as reported even in *Śaṅkara's bhāṣya*, is a type of magician who creates a spell. His magic is not simply a sleight of hand. He makes you see things that he apparently produces and then makes them disappear again. Everybody else is under the spell, but the *māyāvī* is not. If he were, there would be no magic. Similarly, *Īśvara* with his *māyā* is the greatest magician. He creates all these names and forms which, if analysed, do not exist at all. All that is there is consciousness. But still the names and forms appear. That is the magic.

Therefore, *Īśvara* is a magician alright, but he does not come under the spell of his magic. All the *jīvas*, however, are very much under the spell. To break it what should one do? Just as one goes to the local *māyāvī* and asks him what the trick is, one must seek the *māyāvī*, *Paramēśvara*, to find out, what the truth of this *māyā* is, and who this *māyāvī* is. That is what the *śāstra* does. It tells us who this *māyāvī* is and what this *māyā* is. It is like a magic book that reveals the secret of what looked like a great trick. You expected to discover something miraculous and complicated. When it is explained, it looks so simple. You feel foolish. It is the same thing here. Once you know, all your seeking seems foolish. That I was seeking is itself a foolish thing. To know this you go to the *māyāvī* and ask him to explain what it is all about. That is what the Lord explains in the *Gītā*.

*Īśvara*, the *māyāvī*, is not affected by his *māyā*. That is the difference between *jīva* and *Īśvara*, which the Lord explains in the next verse.

वेदाहं समतीतानि वर्तमानानि चार्जुन ।

भविष्याणि च भूतानि मां तु वेद न कश्चन ॥ २६ ॥

*vedāhaṃ samatītāni vartamānāni cārjuna*

*bhaviṣyāṇi ca bhūtāni māṃ tu veda na kaścana*

Verse 26

अर्जुन *arjuna* — O *Arjuna*!; समतीतानि भूतानि *samatītāni bhūtāni* — all things/beings that have gone by (those that existed before); वर्तमानानि च *vartamānāni ca* — and all things that are existent; भविष्याणि च *bhaviṣyāṇi ca* — and those that will exist (in the future); अहम् वेद *aham veda* — I know; तु *tu* — but; न कश्चन *na kaścana* — no one at all; माम् वेद *mām veda* — knows Me

I know all things that have gone before, that exist now and will exist in the future, *Arjuna*. But no one at all knows Me.

‘I, however, know not only Myself but also what had gone before, *samatītāni*.’ says the Lord. *Atītāni* is what had gone before and the prefix *sam* makes it each and

every thing that had gone before. *Bhūtāni* means all beings. And also *Arjuna*, all things that are existent now, *vartamānāni ca*, and all the beings that are going to be born in different forms, *bhaviṣyāṇi ca*, I know, *ahaṃ veda*.

‘*Māṃ tu veda na kaścana* — but there is no one at all who knows Me,’ says *Bhagavān*. And to that *Śaṅkara* adds here, ‘No one knows the Lord except that one person who has reached the Lord's refuge, who seeks the Lord as his most intimate self, *pratyagātmā*.’ There has to be at least one such person, otherwise the *śāstra* would be useless.

### WHEN ĪŚVARA IS NOT KNOWN

In any theology, *Īśvara* is accepted as the efficient cause, the author of the entire world. And the creation, in most theologies, is looked upon as real. That is the problem. Certain theologies confound this further by claiming that *Īśvara* has created this world, which is real, out of nothing. How something has come out of nothing is not intelligible. A variation on this is that *Īśvara* has created the world out of his power.

Not only has he created the world, he has created each individual — every body, every mind and every soul. Among the theologies that hold this view, some contend that only human beings have a soul. Animals and other creatures do not. That is why even a very religious person will have no qualms about killing animals and eating meat. His theology tells him that they have no souls and are meant for food.

Thus each human being has a soul and each soul has to seek God — because God loves him. First he creates me, condemns me to this body with all its problems, creates all kinds of difficulties for me, and then asks me to believe that he loves me, because he is my father. If he loves me why should he create all these irritants — some of which are not even visible? At least if I can see them I can deal with them. But no. I simply innocently breathe in, because I was made that way, and inhale all sorts of germs. Then when I breathe out, the germs remain inside and cause disease in me. And I am told he loves me! When this is so, every individual has to seek the mercy of *Īśvara* — through a mediator, of course, because he is a sinner. This is an erroneous conclusion, and as long as it is there, there is no way *Īśvara* can be known. He is, by the very definition, eternally remote, *nitya-parokṣa*.

If *Īśvara* is other than me, I have to assign a place for him somewhere in this creation. Suppose he is in heaven, and suppose I go there and get very near to him. After all he must have a body of his own, his own *ātmā*, mind and senses etc. No matter how near I am, I will only see that he has a body and he is right in front of me — still *parokṣa*. I will not know the truth of *Īśvara*. Even though, I am standing before *Īśvara* and saying that he is all-knowing etc., with my limited knowledge, how am I going to understand that? I will still know only as much as my limited understanding will allow. How am I going to understand omniscience? It can never be understood by someone

with limited knowledge, an *alpajñā* can never know what omniscience is. All-knowledge will remain only with the one who is all-knowing.

Every contention of this sort was covered by *Bhagavān* himself in the simple statement, '*avyaktaṃ māṃ vyaktim āpannaṃ manyante abuddhayaḥ* — those who lack discrimination consider Me, the one who is unmanifest as one endowed with a particular form. So, they do not know Me.'<sup>1</sup> This is what *Śaṅkara* is talking about here — the absence of knowledge of the truth of *Īśvara*. Because of that, all these beliefs arise.

### THE TRUTH OF ĪŚVARA

The truth is that *Īśvara* is consciousness, *Brahman*, conditioned by *māyā* — *māyā-avacchinna-caitanya*. *Māyā* is the *upādhi* for *Brahman*. At this point, one may ask as to what is the difference between *Īśvara*, which is *Brahman* conditioned by *māyā-upādhi*, and *Brahman*? *Māyā* does not exist apart from *Brahman*. It depends upon it entirely. Being *mithyā*, *māyā's* reality is *Brahman*, so, *māyā* is also *Īśvara*. And *Īśvara* is nothing but *Brahman*.

The *śruti* points out and my own experience confirms that when I look at this world, I find any given thing is nothing but a name and a form. No matter what I analyse, I find it reduced to something else which is in turn reduced to something else. I cannot say categorically of anything that it exists of its own accord. Everything is reduced to its constituent reality. The constituent reality of the table is nothing but its substance, wood, which itself is reduced to particles and so on. Everything is reducible; so, we have a world whose reality is *mithyā*; it exists but not independently.

To create this *mithyā* world, *Īśvara* requires some material, a *mithyā* cause. That is *māyā*, the factor responsible for making that same limitless consciousness appear as all-knowing, *sarvajñā*; all-powerful, *sarva-śaktimān*, the author of this whole world, *sarva-sṛṣṭi-kartā*, and so on. The authorship, and so on, belong only to what is conditioned by *māyā*, *Brahman*. That *Brahman*, consciousness, *ātmā*, with reference to *māyā* becomes the author of the creation. Because he is *sarvajñā*, he does not have doership. He knows himself. Omniscience, and so on, is with reference to *māyā-upādhi*. With reference to himself he is *satyaṃ jñānam anantaṃ brahma*, pure consciousness. He is not ignorant of this fact.

The material, because of which he is called *Īśvara*, his *māyā-upādhi*, becomes the material cause for the whole world. As a material cause, *māyā* must undergo changes to become this variegated world and is therefore, as we have seen, *pariṇāmi-upādāna-kāraṇa*, a material cause that undergoes modification. *Māyā* changes to become space, air, fire, water, earth, plants, food, a physical body, etc. The

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<sup>1</sup> *Gītā* – 7-24

whole world is *māyā*. And *māyā* is *Īśvara*. Therefore, the world is *Īśvara* who, in reality, is nothing but consciousness, *Brahman*. *Brahman*, however, does not undergo any change and is therefore, as we have seen, *vivarta-upādāna-kāraṇa*, something that does not undergo any change, and yet makes all changes possible. From the standpoint of consciousness, *Brahman* is *vivarta-upādāna-kāraṇa*. Whereas *māyā* is *pariṇāmi-upādāna-kāraṇa*. Thus *Brahman* is the material and also the efficient cause for this entire world because *Īśvara* is nothing but *Brahman*.

### HOW ĪŚVARA IS APAROKṢA

When one talks of the entire world, one generally excludes one's own body. That is the whole problem. Everything that is created has to be included — your physical body, *prāṇa*, senses, mind, and the entire subtle and gross world have to be included. All this you can now say, is *Īśvara*. That *Īśvara* is nothing but *Brahman*. Now between *Īśvara* and the world what is the difference? There is none at all. And between *Īśvara* and *Brahman* there is no difference. Therefore, all this is nothing but *Brahman* — *sarvaṃ khalu idaṃ brahma*, there is nothing else here — *neha nānā asti kiñcana*.

Right now, I as an individual am discussing all this about *Īśvara*. And the physical body of this individual as well as your physical body is included in the *Īśvara-upādhi*. The *prāṇa*, sense organs, mind, intellect, memories are all included. Only *ātmā*, consciousness is left out. Now it is very clear how *Īśvara* is *aparokṣa*. When you say, 'I am,' that 'I' is *Brahman*, consciousness. There is no other 'I.' Consciousness is *Brahman* and *Brahman* is *Īśvara*. This entire world, including the body, the mind, the senses etc., is *Īśvara*. And what is behind it all is consciousness, *Brahman*. Therefore, all this is you. So, where is *Īśvara*? You, consciousness, are the only *Īśvara*; there is no other. Everything is *Īśvara* and therefore, everything is you. This is what we call *jīva-Īśvara-abheda*, the non-difference between the individual and *Īśvara*. *Īśvara* is nothing but *Brahman*, consciousness, and that consciousness is yourself. This is *aparokṣa*.

### PAROKṢA - ĪŚVARA IS A CONCESSION

There is no *parokṣa-īśvara* in reality. Only the one who does not have this knowledge looks upon *Īśvara* as *parokṣa*. He is only interested in an *Īśvara* who is *parokṣa*. And this is because he has not understood that there is no such thing as *parokṣa-īśvara*.

*Bhagavān* has said however that even if they invoke Me as *parokṣa-īśvara*, still I will establish their *śraddhā* by giving appropriate results for their actions.<sup>1</sup> The hope is that one day, because of their good *karma*, they will also come to know him. A devotee

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<sup>1</sup> *Gītā* – 7-21, 22

will never go to a bad lot, whatever be his religion. And one day, he will realise the truth because good *karmas* have their results.

But why do they worship these other *devastās*? Why don't they seek you directly? It is because they do not know; they not even suspect the truth of Myself. In fact they establish a theology, which is against it. That theology may draw out of them a certain emotional commitment, which does not allow them to analyse the theology objectively. They cannot even acknowledge the possibility of knowing the Lord. If that is so, how can they recognise him as *aparokṣa* i.e., as oneself?

Obstructed by *yoga-māyā*, people do not understand the truth of the Lord and therefore, do not know him. What are these obstructions? The expression, *yoga-māyā*, indicates these very broadly but now these are given in some detail in this verse.

इच्छाद्वेषसमुत्थेन द्वन्द्वमोहेन भारत ।

सर्वभूतानि सम्मोहं सर्गे यान्ति परन्तप ॥ २७ ॥

*icchā-dveṣa-samutthena dvandvamohena bhārata  
sarvabhūtāni sammohaṃ sarge yānti parantapa*

Verse 27

भारत *bhārata* — O the one who is born in the *Bharata* race! (*Arjuna*); परन्तप *parantapa* — O Scorcher of enemies! सर्गे *sarge* — in the world; इच्छा-द्वेष-समुत्थेन *icchā-dveṣa-samutthena* — born of desire and aversion; द्वन्द्वमोहेन *dvandva-mohena* — due to the delusion of opposites; सर्वभूतानि *sarvabhūtāni* — all beings; सम्मोहम् यान्ति *sammoham yānti* — go to total delusion;

O *Bhārata*, O the Scorcher of the enemies, all beings, due to delusion of the opposites arising from desire and aversion, go into a state of total delusion in this creation.

*Sarva-bhūtāni sammohaṃ sarge yānti*. All beings in this creation, from the beginning of creation, go to a state of total delusion. *Sarge*, in creation, means they have this delusion even when they are born. What is that delusion and how is it caused? It is a delusion, which is born of *dvandva*, the opposites *dvandva-mohena*. What are those opposites and where do they come from? They arise from desire and aversion — *icchā-dveṣa-samutthena*. Likes and dislikes create opposites, committed opposites, out of which, delusion, *moha*, is born.

## THE PROBLEM WITH OPPOSITES

The opposites themselves are not a problem. Heat is not a problem nor is cold. Similarly success or failure is not a problem. In fact, even labelling something a success indicates that there is already a problem. How do you label something a success? It is purely from the standpoint of your expectation. Suppose you are a cook and tasting the

food you have prepared, you decide it is a failure. But the person you have prepared it for thinks it is wonderful. You think it is failure because it is overcooked. But that is exactly the way he likes it. So, is it a success or a failure? There is no such thing as success and failure; it is all our own creation. We set arbitrary goals for ourselves and then judge ourselves as a success or failure. The very word success has an element of subjective judgement. And so does the word failure.

These opposites are all created by our own *icchā* and *dveṣa*. *Ichchā* is *rāga* —what you want. *Dveṣa* is what you do not want. Some opposites are created by *Īśvara*; like hot and cold, night and day. What you do and do not want are created only by you. Suppose you want the day to be lengthened and the night to be shortened. This is a *dvandva* created by you. *Īśvara* only created day and night. It is your own likes and dislikes that make it a set-up for you in terms of opposites. You want one; you do not want other. This is what we call being caught between the horns of the opposites. You can only get caught if you have powerful likes and dislikes. Only then will you have a delusion about success, failure, gain-loss etc. These consume your attention, keeping you busy and worried either about the previous failure or the imminent failure.

It is because we want to control everything that we have all these problems. With two hands and legs and five senses, some of which do not function at all well, and a mind, which has very limited information, we want to control the whole world. We cannot even control the bugs. How are we going to control the entire world? In this attempt to control, we fall under a great spell of delusion.

*Śaṅkara* says that the *icchā* and *dveṣa* themselves are the opposites, opposed to each other like heat and cold. One is the cause of pleasure, the other of sorrow. An *icchā* has as its object something desirable, something capable of giving you pleasure. A *dveṣa* has something undesirable, something capable of giving you pain. In their own time, *Śaṅkara* adds, meaning now you have one set of likes and dislikes, later they may be different. They are connected to the individual. As they arise in one's mind, they create delusion, *moha*. Strong likes and dislikes control the discriminative faculty causing a multifaceted delusion. This obstructs the rise of knowledge of the reality of the *jīva* and *Īśvara*. In the *Gītā*, all of psychology is brought under *icchā* and *dveṣa*; and it is adequate to explain all the problems. If you are able to manage your likes and dislikes, you have the right mind for this knowledge. But this *moha*, born of the opposites, completely deludes people.

### WHAT IS A DELUSION?

A delusion obstructs even the desire for this knowledge, leave alone the knowledge. In a mind which is possessed by likes and dislikes, even correct knowledge of external objects is not possible. For example, I once knew a man who was possessed by greed. To save money he always purchased the cheapest items. Once he bought a bag



of coffee for only three rupees when its normal price would be ten rupees. When he got home, he discovered that only the top half-inch was coffee; the rest was sawdust. Because of *icchā*, his greed, his vision was blinded.

*Icchā-dveṣas* also include anxiety and fear. *Icchā* produces anxiety and *dveṣa*, produces fear. A person with fear will see a snake in every rope, a thief in every post. When they are powerful, likes and dislikes cause a variety of mental conditions producing an inner torpor that does not allow you to see things as they are. That is *moha*. It is like a veil that partially blinds the intellect and as a result things, are not seen properly. What has no value seems to have an overwhelming value. If even external objects are not very clear, one will not be able to discern between what is proper and improper. *Puruṣārtha* will definitely not be clear and priorities will be all confused. Where is the question of knowledge of *ātmā*?

In the verses 18 and 19, of this chapter, *Bhagavān* had talked about the *jñānī*, the one who knows him. Who are these people who come to know *Bhagavān* directly?

येषां त्वन्तगतं पापं जनानां पुण्यकर्मणाम् ।

ते द्वन्द्वमोहनिर्मुक्ता भजन्ते मां दृढव्रताः ॥ २८ ॥

*yeṣāṃ tvantagataṃ pāpaṃ janānāṃ puṇyakarmaṇām*  
*te dvandvamohanirmuktā bhajante mām dṛḍhavratāḥ*

Verse 28

तु *tu* — but; येषाम् *yeṣām*— for those; पुण्यकर्मणाम् जनानाम् *puṇya-karmaṇām janānām* — people of good actions; पापम् अन्तगतम् *pāpam antagatam* — *pāpa* has come to an end; ते *te* — they; द्वन्द्व-मोह-निर्मुक्ताः *dvandva-moha-nirmuktāḥ* — being released from the delusion of the opposites; दृढव्रताः *dṛḍha-vratāḥ* — being of firm commitment; माम् भजन्ते *mām bhajante*— seek Me

But people of good actions, for whom *pāpa* has come to an end, being released from the delusion of the opposites, being firm in their commitment, they seek Me.

The word *tu* meaning ‘however,’ is to distinguish these people from those in the previous verses. *Yeṣāṃ janānāṃ puṇyakarmaṇām* means ‘for those people who have done good *karmas*.’ They refuse to be under the spell of their likes and dislikes and instead use their free will to do good *karma* and refrain from *pāpa-karma*. In doing good *karma* they neutralise the old *pāpa* by creating *adṛṣṭa*. And they insulate themselves against doing new *pāpa-karma* by daily prayers and adherence to *dharma*. These are *puṇyakarmās*, that is, these are people whose actions are good and are done with a proper attitude. *Śaṅkara* defines *puṇya-karma* as *karma* which causes purification of the mind. And the person who has done such actions is called a *puṇyakarmā*. And also these are those for whom the *pāpa-karmas* have reached their

end — *yeṣāṃ pāpam antagatam*. This means the tendency to do wrong actions is no longer there. It is not necessary for them to use their will to avoid *pāpa-karma*. These are mature people. They are free from *pāpa-karma* because they no longer have even the tendency to do them.

## HOW TO FREE ONESELF FROM PĀPA-KARMA

In the beginning you use your will against *pāpa-karma* and later it is not necessary. For example, in every culture there are swear words. Suppose a person has been brought up in an environment where it is common to use these words. One day he decides that he is not going to use them any more. In the beginning, especially when he gets angry, they will come to the tip of his tongue. But using his will he can curb them there. Very cautiously, very wilfully he will choose words which are more objective. He will have to do this for some time. Afterwards those words do not even come to his mind; they just disappear from his language. No will is required. They are out of his system.

This is how you change. The tendencies for *pāpa-karma* cannot remain in you when you keep doing *puṇya-karma*. There is a reason for this. When you do any type of action, it produces a *saṃskāra*. The more you do it, the more you reinforce a tendency for that type of action, a *saṃskāra*. If water flowing down a mountain repeatedly follows the same track, the track becomes deeper and deeper. This is also true with reference to *saṃskāra*. *Karma* creates a *saṃskāra* and because of the *saṃskāras* we tend to repeat the *karma*. This is why criminals become habitual offenders. They are prone to a given type of offence and a certain way of doing it. Some are burglars. Then among them, one always comes through the window, another through the door. That tendency, once it is formed is like water running down a mountain creating a deeper and deeper track and making it more and more impossible for the water to go anywhere else. Similarly, *saṃskāras* create thought ravines that result in habitual actions. A tendency is formed to do the same thing and the more it is done, the stronger the tendency becomes.

To break out of it, one has to use one's will. And to do this, one must undergo a cognitive change. He has to look at his life differently and that is possible only by some grace, some help. Once he gets it, the course of his life changes and the old tendencies start to fall away.

For the *puṇya-karmās*, for those who do *puṇya-karmas*, the *pāpa-saṃskāras* themselves have been eliminated. And the *pāpas*, which were done before are neutralised to a great extent. Such people have reached the end of their *pāpa-karmas*. That is, they have almost reached the end. It is not complete because both *pāpa* and *puṇya* will go away only with knowledge. These are people whose minds are more or less unaffected by *pāpa-karmas*. The mind abides. It is a pure mind.

## FREED FROM DELUSION, ONE SEEKS ĪŚVARA

*Te dvandva-moha-nirmuktāḥ* — they become completely liberated from the delusion of the opposites, *rāga-dveṣas*. *Mukta* means ‘liberated,’ *nirmukta* means ‘totally liberated.’

Because of powerful likes and dislikes, one can only think of what one wants. Right and wrong are not considered; naturally, he will do *pāpa-karma*. But if these likes and dislikes are taken care of, the mind will present him with what is proper and what is not. Then he is freed from the inner torpor, the delusion of the *dvandvas*.

*Māṃ bhajante* — they worship me. People like this are the ones who recognise what is really to be sought in life. Then they see the meaning of all the words of the *śāstra*. Before, because of *rāga-dveṣas*, they had no time even to look at the *śāstra*. Now the words all become alive and they seek *Parameśvara*, *paramātmā*. Who are they?

## THIS SEEKING REQUIRES COMMITMENT, SANNYĀSĀ

*Dṛḍha-vratāḥ* are people with a firm commitment. *Vrata* is a vow, a commitment; *dṛḍha* means ‘firm.’ These are people of firm vows, of great commitment. *Śaṅkara* says that only in this way can you gain the truth, *paramārtha-tattva*. It requires a firm resolve. Because of that, they give up all other pursuits. They are no longer under the spell of *rāga-dveṣas* and pursue only those desires useful to their *puruṣārtha*, which is *mokṣa*. They become *sannyāsīs* either in spirit or take to the order itself.

A real *sannyāsī’s* mind is the most mature mind because it has no concern for tomorrow. Such a mind can be either careless or mature. A foolhardy, misadventurous person also does not think about tomorrow. He squanders everything today and tomorrow, he begs. Even though he has a lot of desires to fulfil, he does not plan for the future. That is foolish. Whereas a *sannyāsī* is a person who does not care about tomorrow because he knows tomorrow will take care of itself. And he is content with what he has. Such a person has the sanest mind. You think about it. There is no saner mind. It is not born of carelessness but of a certain contentment and a trust in oneself and in *Īśvara*.

He understands that a person's daily requirement is very little and he will always get it. That is *sannyāsa*. Such people of firm commitment, ‘seek Me and they gain Me,’ says the Lord. *Bhajante* can mean both the above; but ‘they seek’ is more appropriate in view of the following verse. Totally free from the delusion of the opposites they seek *Īśvara*. They give up everything else to recognise *paramātmā*.

For what purpose do they seek you? What do they gain?

जरामरणमोक्षाय मामाश्रित्य यतन्ति ये ।

ते ब्रह्म तद्विदुः कृत्स्नमध्यात्मं कर्म चाखिलम् ॥ २९ ॥

*jarāmaraṇamokṣāya māmāśritya yatanti ye*

*te brahma tadviduḥ kṛtsnamadhyātmaṃ karma cākhilam* Verse 29

जरा-मरण-मोक्षाय *jarā-maraṇa-mokṣāya* — for freedom from old age and death; माम् आश्रित्य *mām āśritya* — having taken refuge in Me; ये यतन्ति *ye yatanti* — those who make effort; ते *te*— they; तद्ब्रह्म *tad brahma* — that *Brahman* (the cause of creation); कृत्स्नम् अध्यात्मम् *kṛtsnam adhyātmaṃ* — wholly as themselves; कर्म च अखिलम् *karma ca akhilam* — and *karma* in its entirety; विदुः *viduḥ* — know

Having taken refuge in Me, those who make effort for freedom from old age and death, they know that *Brahman* wholly as themselves and they also know *karma* in its entirety.

*Bhagavān* says, ‘Those who make effort for freedom from old age and death, *jarāmaraṇamokṣāya ye yatanti*, by taking refuge in Me, *mām āśritya*, they know that *Brahman* wholly as themselves, *tad brahma adhyātmaṃ viduḥ*. One always wants freedom only from what is undesirable never from the desirable. Old age is undesirable. No one wants to age because it means death is nearing. A human being is allotted only a finite number of years. Therefore, every year that goes by is a year closer to death. That is one problem with old age. The second problem is that one by one, the bodily functions begin leaving you. The presiding deities of the sense organs, take their leave as though to say, ‘This is enough. I supported you for so many years. What did you accomplish? Good-bye.’ When the presiding deities which make the eyes see, the ears hear, etc., leave, all that remains is a cavity, a *golaka*, where once there was sight, hearing etc. As these deities depart, one by one, you find that the sense organs are no longer as efficient as they once were; everything becomes a nuisance. Nobody wants that.

The rest of the body also begins to disintegrate. The joints become stiff and it becomes difficult to take the body around. Getting up is a chore; lying down is a chore. Then getting up from lying down is a chore. Sometimes the peristaltic movement stops functioning and even eating is a chore. Remembering becomes a very big task. This is *jarā*, old age. Who wants it? Everyone wants freedom from it. And certainly nobody wants death, *maraṇa*. There is always a love to be free — free from ageing, free from death.

Ageing and death stand for all the other changes a body goes through — birth, growth, metamorphosis, decline, as well as all the mental modifications such as,

doership and enjoyership in the form of pleasure and pain. All our notions about ourselves are based on these and it is from these that we want to be free.

The intense desire for this freedom is born of the conclusion, ‘I am subject to ageing; I am mortal.’ As long as such a conclusion is there, there will be a desire for release. But it is not possible and we know that. So, there is always a desire to live a day more. And we know that is not always going to be possible. So, there is a helplessness and naturally, a fear. If you could help yourself, there would be no fear. But you cannot stop ageing, much less death.

### DISCERNING THE PROBLEM

A person who is not under the spell of *rāga-dveṣas* has a mind that can discern this and seek a real solution. He understands what has value in this life and seeks *paramātmā* — now, before old age and death come. He discerns that he wants to get out of this problem entirely not just out of the ageing body. He wants to get out of the notion, ‘I am subject to old age and death.’

The body does not say, ‘I am afraid of old age.’ It just survives the years like a stone or any other inert object. It has no notion that it is getting older. You are the one who recognises yourself as someone subject to old age and death. Therefore, *mokṣa* is not from physical old age or physical death. It is from the notion that I am subject to old age and death. From that notion alone is freedom and that is the only freedom possible.

It is also the only freedom required because ‘I,’ *aham*, alone is the problem. All the problems are centred on ‘I.’ This problem of self identity is what causes fear. Therefore, for release from it, one seeks *paramātmā*.

### HOW DOES ONE SEEK FREEDOM FROM DEATH?

Taking refuge in *Īśvara*, they make effort — *mām āśritya yatanti*. *Mām* means Me, *Īśvara*. So, pursuits based on their likes and dislikes are given up and now they are seeking *Īśvara*. After analysing their experiences, they find that fulfilment of *rāga-dveṣas* is not exactly what they are seeking. That I am subject to *rāga-dveṣas* is the problem. If that is very clear to a person, his refuge is *Īśvara* and he becomes a *jijñāsu*.

Now that he is no longer under the spell of his likes and dislikes and the tendency for improper actions is gone, discrimination has arisen. He wants only to know what *Parameśvara* is and seeks his grace for that knowledge. And to know *Parameśvara* is to know him as oneself. There is no other *Īśvara*. He is not separate from you nor is he separate from the world. If there is any sense of separation it is due to ignorance. Therefore, *Bhagavān* says, ‘Taking refuge in Me, in voking My grace, they seek to know Me.’ For this they make efforts — *yatanti*.

How? With a mind absorbed in Me through *śravaṇa*, *manana*, and *nididhyāsana*. These three things keep one absorbed. Previously the mind was dwelling upon the objects of *rāga-dveṣas* and now it is led to dwell upon *Parameśvara* through inquiry into the *śāstra*.

To see the difference between this and all other pursuits, just observe your mind when you turn the pages of an attractively printed catalogue. Potential *rāga-dveṣas*, even unheard of *rāga-dveṣas* would surface. You see something you had never even thought about and suddenly it is a want. That is one type of mind.

Then see what happens when you read the pages of the *Upaniṣads* or *Gītā*. The mind is entirely different. The words of the *śāstra* create a mind that is fulfilled, resolved, the opposite of a mind in pursuit. That is why they say that listening to the *śāstra* is to be done again and again — *paunaḥ punyena śravaṇaṃ kuryāt*. It creates an orientation. Even though there is only one thing to be understood, and that is the statement, *tat tvam asi*, the elaborate study of the *śāstra* is to keep the mind exposed for a good length of time to this thinking about realities. While doing *śravaṇa*, there is naturally *manana*. Doubts are raised and answered. Through this exposure you get a certain insight. A certain *vastu-jñāna* takes place. That you contemplate upon and gain increasing clarity. This is *nididhyāsana*.

Spending one's time in these three — *śravaṇa*, *manana*, and *nididhyāsana* — is reflecting on *Parameśvara*. This is the *brahma-abhyāsa* that we saw previously — *tat cintanaṃ tat kathanam anyonyaṃ tat prabodhanam*. Reflecting on the subject matter, talking about it to others and discussing with fellow students trying to understand and help each other is all part of *brahmābhyāsa*. This is what is meant by taking refuge in *Parameśvara*.

It is important to understand the meaning of expressions such as this. One commentary I read long ago interpreted taking refuge in *Īśvara* to mean going to him for protection as one would go to a stronger person when one is in trouble. Such appeals will definitely bless you. Any good *karma* will give its result. But to think that *Īśvara* is just another person who is protecting you is simplistic. *Parameśvara-āśraya* is something that requires understanding. It is not a simple thing. It is an absorption, a committed thinking and dwelling upon, which is accomplished by *śravaṇa*, *manana*, and *nididhyāsana*. This is *parameśvara-āśraya*.

## THE RESULT OF SEEKING ĪŚVARA DIRECTLY

*Te brahma tad viduḥ* — having resorted to *Parameśvara*, these people — *te*, come to know — *viduḥ*, that *Brahman* — *tad brahma*. It is clear from this that *āśraya* is in the form of enquiry and the result is that they come to know Me as not separate from themselves. *Tat* is *paraṃ brahma*, who is *satyaṃ jñānam anantaṃ brahma* and the

cause of the whole creation. Taking refuge in Me, the cause of everything, coming to know Me, he naturally knows everything.

Now look at this sentence. *Mām āśritya yatanti* — taking refuge in Me they make effort. And what do they get? They get to know that *Brahman*, *te viduḥ tad brahma*, because I am *paramātmā*. This makes the meaning of *yatanti* very clear; the effort is for the sake of knowledge.

That knowledge is for freedom from old age and death — *jarā-maraṇa-mokṣāya*. This means all you require for freedom is knowledge. But by knowing how can anybody escape from old age and death? All the *jñānīs* are dead and gone! That is, the bodies of the *jñānīs* are gone. A *jñānī* is never gone because he is *paraṁ brahma*; he is not separate. *Bhagavān* had said earlier '*jñānī tu ātmā eva me matam* — I consider the *jñānī* as myself.'<sup>1</sup>

### THE IMMEDIACY OF THEIR KNOWLEDGE

From this we understand that they know *Brahman* not only as the cause of creation and therefore, remote, *parokṣa*, but as not other than themselves, *aparokṣa*. It is unlike what happens to *Arjuna* in the eleventh chapter, *Kṛṣṇa* gave *Arjuna* the capacity to see him in his cosmic form. As *Arjuna* looked, he saw the whole cosmos within Lord *Kṛṣṇa*. All the stars and heavens, the earth, all the people, the *Pāṇḍavas* as well as *Duryodhana* and his group were within him. He saw everyone on the battle field writhing within the mouth of time, sticking between the teeth of Lord Death as they were being consumed by time. He saw them all, not dead, but in the process of dying. And he was frightened. He saw the whole cause of creation in a particular form. Everything was included in that form, both cause and effect, so, it was impossible to distinguish them. Seeing all this, he was frightened because he did not see himself there. That is enough for fear. Wherever one makes even a small division, there he will have fear, *udaram antaram kurute atha tasya bhayaṁ bhavati*.<sup>2</sup> So, *Arjuna* asked *Kṛṣṇa* to return to his original form and experienced a great relief. The fear and the relief were all because *Arjuna* did not include himself. So, *Brahman* has to be understood not just as the cause of creation but as oneself.

They also know that *Brahman* entirely as themselves — *kṛtsnam adhyātmanam*. *Kṛtsna* means total, entire. *Adhyātma*, means with reference to *ātmā*, with reference to yourself. You have to see that *Brahman* as totally identical with yourself, *pratyagātmā*. The truth of *ātmā* happens to be identical with *Brahman*. The one who knows this understands everything connected to *ātmā* as identical with *Brahman* — *kṛtsnam adhyātmanam tad viduḥ*.

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<sup>1</sup> *Gītā* – 7-18

<sup>2</sup> *Taittirīyopaniṣad* – 2-7

## THEY ALSO UNDERSTAND KARMA

Because of that, he now understands *karma* also very well — *karma ca akhilaṃ te viduḥ*. He understands, ‘I do not do any action nor do I cause anything to be done.’ At the same time actions are done. He understands the truth of *karma* and the word *akhila* means ‘entirely.’ Therefore, it indicates that now he understands *karma* in its entirety. The truth about *karma* is that the doer, the object of the action, the means of doing the action, the purpose of doing the action, from where the action originates, anything connected to the action, and the locus of the action are all *Brahman*. We saw this in the fourth chapter. In a ritual, the means by which an oblation is offered, the oblation itself, the fire unto which it is offered and the one who makes the offering are all *Brahman*.<sup>1</sup> This is the truth of *karma* and he knows this also. In his vision, *karma* is neither opposed to *Brahman* nor is it something that has *Brahman* as its result. The one who knows this sees *Brahman* everywhere.

What is this *Brahman* that these people come to know so totally?

साधिभूताधिदैवं मां साधियज्ञं च ये विदुः ।

प्रयाणकालेऽपि च मां ते विदुर्युक्तचेतसः ॥ ३० ॥

*sādhibhūtādhidaivam māṃ sādhiyajñam ca ye viduḥ*  
*prayāṇakāle’pi ca māṃ te viduryuktacetasaḥ*

Verse 30

ये च *ye ca* — and those; माम् *mām* — me; साधिभूत-अधिदैवम् *sādhibhūta-adhidaivam* — as centred on the physical world and as centred on the *devatā*; साधियज्ञम् च *sādhiyajñam ca* — and as centred on the rituals; विदुः *viduḥ* — know; ते *te* — they; युक्तचेतसः *yukta-cetasaḥ* — whose minds are absorbed in me: प्रयाणकाले अपि *prayāṇa-kāle api* — even at the end of their life; माम् विदुः *mām viduḥ* — they know me

Those who know Me as centred on the physical world, the *devatās* and the rituals, whose minds are absorbed in me, even at the end of their life, they know me.

‘Those who know Me in this form they alone gain Me.’ says the Lord. Here *mokṣa* is the *phala*, result i.e., the *puruṣārtha* is *mokṣa*. It was said previously in verse 28, that these people are *dr̥ḍha-vratas*. And Śaṅkara had pointed out that these people are *sunīścita-vijñānāḥ*. These are people who have ascertained the *puruṣārtha* before they commit themselves to the pursuit of the knowledge of *Paramēśvara*. So, it was said, in verse 29, that having taken refuge in Me, those who make effort for freedom from old age and death, they know that *Brahman* wholly as themselves — *jarāmarāṇamokṣāya māṃ āśritya ye yatanti, te tad brahma viduḥ*. Up to verse 28,

<sup>1</sup> *Gītā* – 4-24



*Bhagavān* was talking in the first person. Now suddenly in verse 29, he put it in the third person and said, ‘*te adhyātmaṃ brahma viduḥ* —they understand the *pratyagātmā* as *paraṃ brahma* and also understand all that is connected to *pratyagātmā*. They understand that the *kartā*, *karma*, *karma-phala*, etc., are all *mithyā*. Now in this verse he reverts back to the first person again and continues.

He says that, previously what was said as *Brahman* is Myself. He says, those who know Me, as *sādhibhūta*, *sādhidaiva* and *sādhiyajña*, they know me as themselves — *adhyātmaṃ te viduḥ*, *ātmātvena te viduḥ*. *Brahman* as *jagat-kāraṇa* is *adhibhūta*, *adhidaiva* and *adhiyajña*. This *Brahman* they know as themselves. This is a particular way of talking. This is called *rāsīkṛtya kathanam* — a collective mention, putting everything together and saying, ‘All this is Myself.’ Otherwise it will be an endless process of saying, ‘I am this, I am that, etc.’ By saying that I am the one who obtains in the form of all the *devas*, in the form of all the factors related to *yajña* or *yajña-puruṣa* and in the form of all the *bhūtas* — the five elements or the *kārya-karaṇa-saṅghāta*, the body- mind-sense-complex. That means *sarvaṃ brahma*. This is a way of saying that all this is *Brahman*. You will often find this particular expression in the *sāstra* — *adhibhūta*, *adhidaiva* and *adhiyajña*. It is very important to know what these words mean. *Bhagavān* will also talk about it in the next chapter because *Arjuna* is going to ask a question about these words.

The Lord says, ‘They know Me, *Īśvara*, who is *sādhibhūta*, *sādhidaiva* and *sādhiyajña* — *sādhibhūta-adhidaivaṃ māṃ sādhiyajñaṃ ca ye viduḥ*. The word *sa* that is compounded to the words *adhibhūta*, etc., is *saha* which means ‘along with.’ In all those expressions, what is indicated is *Īśvara*, the one who exists in the form of the Sun, Moon, stars, etc., and all the *devatās* thereof.

*Adhibhūta* is all that is centred on the *bhūtas* — *bhūtāni adhikṛtya bhavati iti adhibhūta*. The *bhūtas* can be taken as the *kārya-karaṇa-saṅghātas*. Therefore, *Bhagavān* says, ‘What obtains in all the *kārya-karaṇa-saṅghātas* is Myself alone as *pratyagātmā*. The *bhūtas* can also be taken to mean the five elements. Similarly, *adhidaiva* is what is centred on the *devatās* — *devān adhikṛtya vartate iti adhidaiva*. *adhiyajña* is what is centred on the *yajñas*, the rituals etc. This means that *Bhagavān* is the one who is the form of the very ritual — *yajño vai Viṣṇuḥ*, *yajñādhipati* because he is the real receiver of the offerings in the *yajña*. And he is the one who is in the form of *karmādhyakṣa* and the *karma-phala-dātā*.

Thus *Bhagavān* says, ‘These people recognise Me as the one who is in the form of this world, as *adhibhūta*, from whom nothing is separate and also as all the *devatās*, as *adhidaiva*, the one from whom no *devatā* is separate.’ Further he says, ‘They also recognise Me as *adhiyajña*.’ *Yajña* means a ritual. Thus he says, ‘These people see that the result of the *karma*, the *karma* and the *devatā* invoked are all Me. They recognise Me as the truth of *karma*.’

*Adhyātma* is what is centred on the individual. In the previous verse, *Bhagavān* talked only about *adhyātma*. He had said that they know *Brahman* as *adhyātma*, *pratyagātmā*. Now he converts the whole thing into *Īśvara* again. That is he says *Īśvara* is *Brahman*. This is how it is established that there is non-difference between *Īśvara* and the *jīva*.

### KNOWLEDGE OF ĪŚVARA AS BOTH EFFICIENT AND MATERIAL CAUSE

When a given phenomenon, like the sun, is looked upon as *Īśvara*, *Īśvara* is considered the material cause, *upādāna-kāraṇa*. This is the *adhibhūta* vision of *Īśvara*. When *Īśvara* is considered as the efficient cause, the *nimitta-kāraṇa* of the sun, etc., it is the *adhidaiva* vision. These are the two levels — *Īśvara* as the *nimitta-kāraṇa* is *adhidaiva*, and as the material cause is *adhibhūta*.

These people know *Īśvara* as also *adhyātma*, which was pointed out in the previous verse. *Adhyātma* is also *Brahman*. That is, they see themselves as *Brahman*. Then what is left out? Nothing! Everything is *Bhagavān*. The world is *Bhagavān*; all the *devatās* are *Bhagavān*; your physical body and mind and senses together called *adhyātma* and *pratyagātmā* are all *Bhagavān*. This is one way of saying everything is *Bhagavān*. Nothing else is there here in this universe other than *Bhagavān*.

Therefore, the Lord says, ‘Those who know Me in this form are non-separate from Myself.’ First, you recognise *Īśvara* as *parokṣa*, that is, you understand that this entire *jagat* is *Īśvara*. Then afterwards, you internalise the whole thing and understand, ‘my own body, mind, senses are all *Bhagavān*. And the consciousness, *pratyagātmā*, behind this body-mind-complex is the truth of *Bhagavān*.’

Those who are *yukta-cetasaḥ* — *yuktaṃ ceteh yeṣaṃ te*, meaning those whose minds do not have any inhibiting factors — know Me like this even at the time of travel, death. There is a belief — which can not be supported with any great logic — that what kind of course the departing soul takes depends on what the final thought of the person was when he or she was dying. That is why in India, there is a custom of naming people with the names of the Lord. A person dying is likely to call out his son by name and if that is the name of the Lord he will be reminded of *Bhagavān* and that would give him a good *gati*.

But it is not easy to remember the Lord at the time of death. Unless all one's lifetime one has lived a life keeping the Lord in mind, it is not possible. The thought of *Nārāyaṇa* will not come even if one has named his son as *Nārāyaṇa*. He will tend to use some diminutive of the name and never remember *Bhagavān*. Even a great *upāsaka* is not going to remember his *upāsya* at the time of death because his attachment to his own children etc., is so much that he will remember only those things. Or he will think of his omissions and commissions and will be riddled with guilt and hurt. Unless a person is very mature, it is not easy to have the thought of the Lord at the time of death.

While this is so, the Lord says, ‘If you know Me there is no such problem. Whether it is at the time of death or not there is no question of your losing sight of Me — *vismaraṇaṃ nāsti*. Because without knowing the Lord, it is a question of *nārāyaṇa-nāma-smaraṇa*, remembering the name of *Nārāyaṇa*; but here it is *nārāyaṇasya tattva-jñāna*, knowing the truth of *Bhagavān* as myself. Here there is no ignorance of *Bhagavān* at all. The knowledge that ‘I am *Nārāyaṇa* — *nārāyaṇaḥ aham*’ is not subject to *vismaraṇa*, forgetfulness. Ignorance can not come back. Even if a person goes into a coma, that does not really create ignorance. The mind may not function and the mind may be incapable of responding to the external world but the ignorance gone is gone. It can never come back.

Therefore, *Bhagavān* says, ‘*prayāṇakāle api māṃ viduḥ* — even at the time of death they know Me.’ This is the meaning of the word *api* in this statement. At the time of death even though there is generally *vismaraṇa* for most people including the *upāsakas*, the *jñānīs* do not have this *vismaraṇa*. When they are alive and well in the body and mind with strong commitment they put forth adequate and proper effort to know *Bhagavān* — *māṃ viduḥ*. How do they know? They know that all that is here is *Bhagavān* — *idaṃ saravaṃ aham asmi iti viduḥ*, *sādhibhūta-adhidaivaṃ sādhiyajñam māṃ viduḥ*

And also they know that *Bhagavān*, who is in the form of all this, is not separate from themselves. That is, they know the Lord who is in the form of all this as themselves — *sādhibhūta-adhidaivaṃ sādhiyajñam māṃ (Īśvaraṃ) ātmatvena viduḥ*. And they know this even at the time of death when generally there is *vismṛti*. This is because there is no *smṛti-apekṣā*, dependence on memory for this knowledge unlike the knowledge of other things in this world. Self knowledge is not to be remembered; only self ignorance has to go. This is because the self is always evident. Therefore, he says these people who are *yukta-cetasaḥ*, and do not have any inhibiting factor that prevents the knowledge, know Me even at the time of death.

## KNOWLEDGE, EVEN AT THE TIME OF DEATH, RELEASES

Finally what the Lord says with reference to the final moment also means this: ‘Even those who only know Me at the time of death, who gain this knowledge then, or those who have been living with this knowledge and are not swayed from it right up to the time of death because it is so clear, they know — *prayāṇa-kāle api maṃ te viduḥ yukta-cetasaḥ*. Those minds are united to Me, know Me, not just remember Me, even at the time of death. There is no return for them.’

They are *Brahman*. When I am everything and everywhere, who is to return, and from where? I can go to some place and return, if I am not there already. If I am only here, then I can go to heaven and come back. But heaven also is Me, the heavenly bodies are Me, all the *devatās* are Me, all the angels are Me, all the celestials are Me. The local

world is Me, the sun, the moon and stars, the physical body, mind and senses, are all Me because I am *Brahman*. Tell me now, who is to go and where?

Thus those who know these five, i.e., *adhyātma* (*pratyagātmā* their innermost self, and the body-mind-sense-complex), *karma* in its entirety, *adhibhūta*, *adhidaiva* and *adhiyajña* as *Brahman*, for them their knowledge of the identity between themselves and *Īśvara* stands firm and unaffected even at the time of death. They were free living; they are free when this body has fallen.

Thus ends chapter seven in which the *tat-pada-vācya*, the actual meaning of the word *tat* which is the *svarūpa* of *Īśvara* and the *tat-pada-lakṣya*, the implied meaning of the word *tat*, which is *Brahman*, was explained. We have already seen in the first *ṣaṭka* that the *tvam-pada-lakṣya*, the implied meaning of the word *tvam* is also *Brahman*. This is how the *vākya*, *tat tvam asi* is unfolded.

ॐ तत्सत् ॥ इति श्रीमद्भगवद्गीतासु उपनिषत्सु ब्रह्मविद्यायाम्  
योगशास्त्रे श्रीकृष्णार्जुनासम्वादे ज्ञानविज्ञानयोगो नाम  
सप्तमोऽध्यायः

*om tatsat. iti śrīmadbhagavadgītāsu upaniṣatsu brahmavidyāyām  
yogaśāstre śrīkṛṣṇārjunasaṁvāde jñānavijñānayogo nāma  
saptamo'dhyāyaḥ*

*Om tat sat.* Thus ends the seventh chapter called *jñāna-vijñāna-yoga* in the *Bhagavadgītā*, which is the dialogue between Lord *Kṛṣṇa* and *Arjuna*, which is also *brahmavidyā* and *yogaśāstra*.

We have to see what this *Om tat sat* means. Later *Bhagavān* himself is going to say '*om tat sat iti nirdeśaḥ*.'<sup>1</sup> Here in this statement all the three words are in *sāmānādhikarāṇya*, that is they are in apposition. It means this: what is *Om*, that, *tat*, is *sat*. *Om* is the name for *Parameśvara*. Therefore, it is an invocation consisting of a single syllable. Thus it is a *bījākṣara*. *Bījākṣaras* are actually words consisting of a single syllable. *Om* is considered in the *mantra* to be the *bījākṣara* of all *bījākṣaras* — *bījākṣarāṇāṃ bījākṣaram om*. That is, from it originate all the other *bījākṣaras*. This is because *Om* is used to invoke *Parameśvara* who is everything, i.e., all that was in the past, all that is in the present, all that will be in the future — *bhūtaṃ bhavat bhaviṣyat, sarvaṃ omkāra eva, yat ca kālātītaṃ tadapi omkāra eva*.

<sup>1</sup> *Gītā* – 17-23

Then there are other *bījas* that invoke various aspects of *Parameśvara*. For example, the *bījākṣara hrīm* invokes the *śakti* of *Īśvara*. Since this *śakti* has the power to create or the power to destroy either of them can be invoked by adding the appropriate *bījākṣara*. Thus if you want to invoke, *Lakṣmī*, you add a *śrīm*. Thus the *mantra* now would be *oṃ hrīm śrīm* — *Oṃ* stands for *Parameśvara*, *hrīm* stands for the *śakti* of *Parameśvara* and *śrīm* stands for *Lakṣmī*. Similarly *gam* stands for *Gaṇeśa*. Thus we have a variety of these *bījākṣaras* and through these we invoke an aspect of *Īśvara*. *Oṃ* is the source of all *bījākṣaras*. Thus it invokes *Parameśvara*. That is why it is added before every *nāma* invoking *Īśvara*.

*Oṃkāra* thus is the *abhidhāna*, the name for the *abhidheya*, the named, *Brahman*. Therefore, *oṃ tat sat*, *Brahman* alone is *sat*. That is, *Oṃ* is that *Brahman*, which is *jagat-kāraṇa*, and *tat*, that, alone is *sat*, *satya*, the truth of everything. A lot of words have been said and all said and done, that *Brahman* alone is the *satya-vastu*, the truth of everything. A lot of things have been said. They may or may not have been said properly; they may or may not be understood properly. Finally what is to be understood is *oṃ tat sat*. Thus it marks the conclusion.

This chapter is called the *jñāna-vijñāna-yoga*. This chapter has the topic of *jñāna* and *vijñāna*. The word *jñāna* indicates that this chapter has the knowledge of *Parameśvara*. The knowledge of what the *tat-pada* stands for is the predominant topic of this chapter. The word *vijñāna* indicates that the knowledge is so complete that even at the time of death there is no possibility of *vismaraṇa*. Thus ends the seventh chapter.

**ABABABABAB**



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