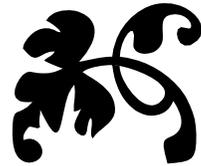


The Song Of God (Bhagavad Gita)

Introduction



Swami Venkatesananda

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INTRODUCTION

The Bhagavad Gītā (Song of God) has captured the imagination of thinking men and women all over the world. It has been translated into many languages and has among its devotees people belonging to many religions and nationalities. The uniqueness of the gospel of the Bhagavad Gītā lies in the fact that its follower need not belong to a particular formal religion or sect.

“Each man devoted to his own duty attains perfection,” declares the prophet of cosmic vision, śrī Kṛṣṇa who continues to explain succinctly how this perfection is attained.

He from whom all the beings have evolved and by whom all this is pervaded – worshipping him (God) with the due performance of his own duty, man attains perfection.

(18:46)

Here, then, is a unique gospel which does not tamper with your station in life, distract you from your duties, disturb your faith nor lure you away from the path you have chosen but illumines your path and strengthens your faith. Its proclaimed object is to free you from worry and anxiety, to protect you from yourself – your own lower self, full of unruly desires and unjustified prejudices, deluded by ageless ignorance and therefore haunted by meaningless fears of imaginary calamities.

In the Gītā Dhyānaṁ which is chanted before reading the Gītā, there is a lovely verse. In it the Gītā is considered the milk, the upaniṣad are compared to the cow and Kṛṣṇa to the cowherd. The Indian cowherd never milks the cow till the calf has had some and thus inspires the cow to release the milk. Here it is Arjuna who serves that role. They whose intelligence is filled with goodness enjoy this drink.

Please do not get the wrong impression that Kṛṣṇa himself gave the teaching chapter by chapter: “That was the second chapter, and now begins the third chapter.” It was a continuing dialogue. If you understand that, you might also appreciate why the thoughts are all jumbled. For instance, karma yoga is discussed in the second, third, fourth and last chapters.

Scriptures have all been obviously put together by human beings however much you and I may wish to believe that they are direct revelations of God. Of course, it is God speaking through them – so on the one hand you can see that all teaching comes from God; on the other hand you can see that all teaching is man-made, polluted by human speech.

The Yoga Vāsiṣṭha says: ‘Study this scripture and you will be free. If you think that because it is man-made you have no faith in it, go and seek some other scripture, but find enlightenment.’ So, study the Gītā, but stop the mind from selective understanding. If you are accepting or rejecting a scripture or a teaching because your mind likes it or dislikes it, you are in the same mill, going round and round and round, it is totally useless.

There is a great risk in trying to philosophise a teaching. A teaching is a teaching! The mind that wants to analyse that teaching runs into infinite, endless difficulty, because once you begin to analyse something there is no end to it. The teaching is totally outside.

Unity, diversity, perishable, imperishable, you, I, he, etc., are all words and ideas created by the mind, sustained by the mind and dependent on the mind. God is the dictionary in which all these words are found, and in which all these ideas can prevail. No word has a meaning built into it. The meaning of a word arises within you – often because of conventional usage, but always because of your understanding or non-understanding. Words have no meaning at all except to the extent that we intuit some meaning to them.

We are so full of definitions and our own understanding, that it is impossible to teach us. It is our own understanding that receives the new knowledge and therefore it instantly becomes old. It is far easier to teach someone who is totally raw than someone who thinks he knows or can understand. Therefore Arjuna could not be taught until he collapsed.

Swami Sivananda once said: “If you want to become a professor, please go to the library and study all the commentaries on the Bhagavad Gītā and write one of your own. On the other hand, if your main motivation in seeking to study the Bhagavad Gītā is to practise it and attain self-realisation, then take one verse and **live** it.” Knowledge and action are not two divergent paths; they can be like railroad tracks – both of them leading in the same direction. The Yoga Vāsīṣṭha says that a bird flies with two wings, not one. You must know what you are doing, and do what you know to be right.

We should take up the study of the Bhagavad Gītā with humility, with an eagerness to know what this tiny little scripture has to offer us to enrich our lives, to enable us to become useful citizens and, by God’s grace, to know for ourselves what life is about. We are asked to study the Bhagavad Gītā in order that the message may be incorporated in us so that it might become operative when the time arises – incorporated in the literal sense that it becomes part of the cells of our body.

Thousands of years ago there was a conflict between they who were called the Pāṇḍavā and they who were called the Kauravā. One person cannot quarrel with himself. A quarrel or conflict means between two forces and a union means between two forces. Without this division there is no conflict – and no union! We are told that the Pāṇḍavā had chosen lord Kṛṣṇa to be on their side, not to fight on their side – Kṛṣṇa was merely driver of an armoured car.

What has this to do with us? Is the Bhagavad Gītā relevant to us? If it is not we are wasting our time, or, what is even worse, we might misinterpret the message.

It has a relevance to us because there is ongoing conflict in us. When you are not in conflict with anybody here, you experience conflict within when you recognise that experience is division, division means conflict; there is a division between the idea you have of what you should be and the knowledge you have of what you are. Is it possible for you to observe this division either arising or existing in you all the time?

The conflict (and its resolution) implies two forces. If in reality you are split into two forces, you cannot become reconciled. You cannot find this union within yourself unless you ‘die’ – then you (‘I’) do not exist! The entire Bhagavad Gītā is an investigation into the question: ‘Is this split real?’. You experience this split, there seems to be this inner conflict. You cannot attempt a reconciliation, a union, because any attempt at bringing it about pre-supposes a division. Therefore the scripture tries to divert your attention from

either accepting or rejecting this division, and introduces a third approach – vicāra, investigation. Instead of assuming that there is a division and that division must inevitably lead to conflict, is it possible to look into it? That is what Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna. And that is what is relevant to us in the daily battle of our lives. The reason why, perhaps, Kṛṣṇa chose the battlefield to deliver this message!

There are apparently two contradictory schools of thought – one saying that you must love your neighbour, and the other saying you **are** your neighbour. If you are your neighbour, why should you love your neighbour? As long as the division lasts and until this knowledge or experience of oneness arises, it is better to love him than to fight with him. Two things are possible when there is a division – you can love or you can hate. When the division has gone you will know what love really is.

THE SECRET OF DISCIPLESHIP

The Mahābhārata story tells us that Kṛṣṇa and his beloved pupil Arjuna were great friends all their lives. They had plenty of time to talk about ātmā jñāna – self-realisation. On the other hand it seems to be very improbable that right in the middle of a battle, two people, who were the kingpins in the battle, found not only the time, but the psychological climate to discuss philosophy. I am not saying this did not happen – but there again, that may have a relevance to us.

When Kṛṣṇa placed the chariot between the two armies and pointed out to Arjuna the people with whom he had to fight, Arjuna collapsed. Having collapsed, he was not prepared to admit “I am not capable of standing. I am trembling, I am nervous.” Arjuna, the student, was a learned person – and it is highly impossible to teach a learned person. He said: “Kṛṣṇa – I should not fight these people. I am not weak, I know the truth, I know what is righteous and what is not righteous; if we kill all these men here there will be an overpopulation of women....All these moral laws on which the society is based will crumble and we who are responsible for this will all go to hell.” There is not a single flaw in that argument because it is based on cultural patterns, tradition and righteousness as it is taught in the religious schools – not on the battlefield.

Arjuna’s problem was that he knew what was right and what was wrong. Is that a problem? If you know what is right and what is wrong, why do you not do what is right and avoid what is wrong? Because the doer of the action is far removed from the knower of right and wrong. The doer of right and wrong is burdened with the memory of what is right and wrong. He is burdened with knowledge. Instead of knowledge – of truth becoming flesh – the knowledge has remained unassimilated and it prevents him from functioning in the here and now. There is a funny story: a fox and a cat met in the wilds. They were discussing methods of escaping when attacked. The cat said: “Climb the tree.” The fox said: “You are stupid. I know a hundred methods. I can chase the hunter, I can throw mud in his eyes, I can run away, I can howl.” As the fox was saying all this, a hunter came. The cat quickly went up the tree but the fox was trying to figure out what to do.

You can guess that he did not come to a conclusion; he did not have to because his conclusion came immediately! When all this knowledge is stored up as memory, it paralyses the doer of the deed.

THE INNER GURU

If you understand the spirit of the first chapter and the philosophy in the first few verses of the second chapter till the verse in which Arjuna says: “I am confused. I am your disciple. I surrender myself to you. Teach me what is good”, you have understood the entire Bhagavad Gītā. He did not say: “I have handed everything over to the guru.” The guru is not a porter who carries your luggage! You cannot hand everything over to him. You must try your best, you must use all your faculties – mental, physical, intellectual, moral and spiritual – God gave them to you in order that you may use them and then go to him only when you are in serious trouble. If they prove inadequate then return to the source, the guru, for more.

Who and what is a guru? A guru can be a person or an impersonal experience of reality. Guru is one (or that) which dispels the darkness of your ignorance. If this does not happen, there is no guru. In the Bhagavad Gītā, Arjuna did not appoint Kṛṣṇa as his guru. What is most important here is the expression ‘śiṣyas te ‘haṁ’ – I am your disciple. You have no right to appoint someone as your guru, but you can, by looking within yourself and examining, investigating yourself, find out if you are a good disciple or not.

People often use the word ‘surrender’. It is easy to surrender when you have tried your utmost to deal with a problem, and you see no way out of it. Then surrender is natural – what else are you going to do? **Then** you become a disciple, then you will joyously listen to what the other person says. Therefore real discipleship is the guru. You have found the guru if you have found what it is to be a true disciple.

If this spirit of discipleship is absent, teaching is futile. My guru, Swami Sivananda, never talked philosophy unless someone sought his counsel seriously and earnestly. Thus, in the first few verses of the second chapter, Kṛṣṇa merely laughs and keeps quiet. Only when Arjuna asked as a disciple did Kṛṣṇa say: “You are worrying yourself unnecessarily.” It is a beautiful formula upon which you can meditate.

NOT THE WHOLE, BUT TRUTH

What is of extraordinary beauty in the first few verses of the second chapter is that Kṛṣṇa seems to look at things from all angles. If you have a problem, it need not always have a single simple solution or answer. For instance if you are aggressive, the problem may be psychological, physiological, social, cultural or spiritual. How do you find the truth then? It is not possible for anyone to have a total view of life. For instance, you are taking a bath in the Gaṅgā in Rishikesh; someone is taking a bath about fifty miles upstream; another is drowning in Calcutta. Is anyone taking a bath in the Gaṅgā? Yes. The total Gaṅgā? No. Can we say that no one is taking a bath in the (total) Gaṅgā? That also is not right! Then is it not possible for us to come to grips with the totality of things which is the truth? Is that only a speculation of philosophers? Are we bound to fragmentation, is there no way out of this? Yes, there is, and it is extremely simple. It is the fact that each one can only look at the truth from his own point of view. You cannot look at any problem from anyone else’s point of view. The recognition that ‘this is only my point of view – not the whole truth – and that there are other points of view’, is the **whole** truth! There is the clear understanding that as long as the mind functions it can only comprehend a fraction of this truth.

If you do not understand that, it creates a twofold problem. One, you think you have isolated yourself from the totality, and two, you think that a fragment of the totality **is** the totality. The moment this understanding arises in your heart you become humble, simple, adaptable and universal.

All confusion arises on account of fragmented thought. Thought can only be fragmented, it is the source of fragmentation. It is not possible for the thought process to comprehend the whole truth. So, whilst you attack the problem from several angles you do not pretend that that alone is sufficient. This is precisely why Kṛṣṇa advances several arguments. No one solution is adequate to any problem. When you realise that as long as thought functions it can only function fragmentarily, then you immediately understand the whole truth. This realisation is the very basis of humility and sincerity and non-fanaticism and an exploring spirit; you are free from vehemence or fanaticism. These are the qualities I noticed in Gurudev Sivananda.

Kṛṣṇa uses several arguments to make Arjuna ‘fight’, that is – to do what had to be done. Kṛṣṇa insists that you have to do **something**. Never mind what you like to do and what you do not like to do, find out who it is that determines what has to be done. Then Kṛṣṇa suggests several ways of looking at the problem of death. Death is inevitable. Why do you worry and bring high philosophical arguments into this problem which is so simple? If you think you are the body, the body will die. If you think you are not only the body, that you dwell in this body, then you will not die.

There is another remarkable argument in the course of the first few verses of the second chapter:

The unreal has no being, there is no non-being of the real. The truth about both has been seen by knowers of the truth.

(2:16)

Fantastic! ‘You are worried that these people are going to be killed.’ What is going to be killed is the body, and the body (the form) is condemned to die. But that which **is** is not destroyed. You cannot possibly wipe out that which exists. That which does not exist does not exist; you cannot create something which does not exist! The mind indulges in a peculiar double trick. Looking for reality it somehow thinks it is different from the reality. That is precisely why you are looking! You are looking for the truth because you think that you are different from the truth. If you honestly and totally believe that, probably you will get somewhere, but having mentally dissected yourself from reality, suddenly you think that you are the body. This is what they call ‘māyā’ – illusion. Merely look at this and you will see that that which is **is**, there is no illusion. If this thing called illusion is thus disposed of, then you begin the correct investigation of the truth. You suddenly realise that illusion is not the perception of a non-existent object (like the mathematical zero) but that because you wanted to see something you assumed must exist, you failed to see what **IS!** Total emptying of assumptions is the immediate realisation of what is – the reality.

THE SELF-CONSUMING REALITY

There is infinite diversity – which is perhaps a contradiction in terms: the infinite is infinite, it cannot be diversified; and what is diversified or fragmented cannot be

infinite...yet the universe is infinite diversity. The indivisible space appears to be divided in infinite ways. (If you understand that sentence either you should be enlightened or go completely mad!)

Kṛṣṇa goes into all these discussions concerning the ultimate truth for the simple reason that action which is not backed up by true understanding is itself bondage. Any action that is backed up by right understanding is itself liberation. Mere doing is mechanical. Reflex actions and instinctive actions are mechanical actions. There is something else which rides your shoulders asking inconvenient questions. The more awake you are and the more insistent and persistent, the more inconvenient the questions become. Till the questioner himself is found, the questioning will not stop. Strangely enough, when the answer is found, there is no one to listen to it!

THE MEANING OF FREED-OM

It seems to be important not only to live, but to understand the meaning of life. Kṛṣṇa very wisely skirts around the problem of the purpose of life. He gives us an inkling into the meaning of life, but he does not really say “This is your duty”. What should be done is not so simple. It cannot be laid down by yourself or others as a sort of ‘forever’ rule, and therefore the understanding of the fundamentals of action, of the source of action – which is knowledge – becomes tremendously important.

Kṛṣṇa counters Arjuna’s argument that ‘war means killing, and therefore destruction of righteousness’, by pointing out that ‘that which you think is destruction is not destruction. But by saying: ‘I am doing this and therefore I will not do that’, you are destroying something which should not be destroyed, which is the spirit of right understanding, or Buddhi Yoga.’ The understander of the truth and the doer of the action, in our case, are complete and total strangers to each other. Your understanding of the truth concerning life and the source of action is one thing, and the understanding from which action arises is quite another. Therefore, there is this perpetual inner conflict, confusion and disharmony within oneself, and therefore disharmony with the environment.

Here it is not a question of ‘must I do this, or must I do something else?’ Explore the source of this action, which is buddhi, link that with clear understanding of what has to be done, and find out who is the doer of this action.

The unawakened intelligence has no ability to understand, but tremendous ability to **mis**understand. Our life is governed by mischief and misunderstanding, bound together. If there is no misunderstanding, or if there is correct understanding of the truth, there is absolutely no loss in your life. You are unaffected whether your life is called gainful, a success or a failure.

In this there is no loss of effort, nor is there any harm. Even a little of this knowledge protects one from great fear.

(2:40)

If you have understood this, it is gain for ever and ever. You are freed from fear for all time to come because from there on there is no loss.

What is the meaning of life? To live. Living means action, and this life of action can also be looked at from innumerable points of view by numberless people. You yourself can look at an action in a hundred thousand ways. So, doing may have a thousand meanings, but the only thing that it does not require is ambition, motivation. Doing, being in the present, that itself is the present from God. Motivation implies linking this action with the thing called future – which does not exist!

If the present can be freed from an illusory future, it becomes the greatest present that you can give to the world, and to yourself.

REAL AND IMITATION YOGI

There are many different interpretations of one of the most important questions asked by Arjuna.

Arjuna said: What, O Kṛṣṇa is the description of him who has steady wisdom, and is merged in the superconscious state? How does one of steady wisdom speak, how does he sit, how does he walk?

(2:54)

A generous interpretation is that he really and sincerely wanted to know what the characteristics of an enlightened person were. We are all seekers of truth interested in meeting the holy men, but if you are able to examine yourself and are able to see for yourself what makes you go to these holy ones, you might discover something tremendously interesting. When you look at an enlightened person you see the way he or she smiles, gesticulates, chants and so on – the external behaviour. Immediately you set about to imitate this external behaviour, hoping thereby that somehow the spirit will follow. It does not! Whereas we should study the lives of the great men and endeavour to derive some inspiration from them, we should also realise that holiness is not something which is worn around the shoulders. It is the spirit that is holy. So Arjuna's question has doubtful significance to us. When we observe a holy man, it is important to remember that whereas his actions are the outflow of the spirit, the actions in themselves are not understandable, except against the background of that spirit. It is very difficult to understand the spirit in which the holy man functions. It is easy to imitate him. In the beginning of the third chapter there is a lovely question.

Arjuna said: If it be thought by thee that knowledge is superior to action, O Kṛṣṇa, why then dost thou ask me to engage in this terrible action?

(3:1)

'If you consider that the spirit and the understanding are more important than the action, why do you want me to fight? I have understood that I am the ātmā, that all this is the spirit and there is no body at all. I have also understood that one should be totally unaffected by success and failure, pain and pleasure, honour and dishonour. My understanding is perfect.' But what is the meaning of that understanding? When you are in a happy situation, when everything is going fine, your body is healthy, your family is wonderful and you have no trouble at all, it is very easy to say you are balanced, even-minded in success and failure. But what happens when dishonour and failure hit you? By merely pretending to have understood and isolating yourself (if that is possible) from human society, how would you know that you have really understood yourself? You

cannot know that you have understood the truth that the enlightened person is even-minded in success and failure unless you plunge yourself into something which can lead to success or failure. So it is life that reveals the depth of our understanding and it is the depth of understanding that flavours life. One without the other is ridiculous and ununderstandable.

In order to answer Arjuna's question, the Lord adopted a very interesting and humorous attitude: "Yes, yes, you are right."

That was Gurudev's method. He would say: "Yes, yes, you are right", and slowly take you round and round and make you see that you were an absolute idiot!

Kṛṣṇa said: In this world there is a twofold path, as I said before, O sinless one, the path of knowledge of the sāṅkhyā and the path of action of the yogī.

(3:3)

The word 'yoga' in the Bhagavad Gītā often means 'action', what you and I call karma yoga – the yoga of living, of action – not stupid mechanical action, but action based on innate intelligence. But what is implied in the verse is a taunt! "In previous ages when I taught jñāna yoga, people understood that it implied living an enlightened life. They did not ask silly questions as you ask now. I also taught karma yoga but that did not mean it is mechanical action. It implied right understanding.

"But," continues Kṛṣṇa, "it is not possible for you not to do anything even for a single moment." So, let us do what has to be done with the right understanding. What is right understanding? There is a beautiful verse:

The world (and the individual) is bound by actions other than those performed as yajña. Do thou, therefore, perform action as sacrifice, free from attachment.

(3:9)

Do it in the spirit of yajña, meaning sacrifice.

To me the English word 'sacrifice' sounds like 'to make something sacred'. Any action that springs from correct understanding is yajña. If your actions are not directed towards better understanding of yourself, of the world, of God, then you are caught. If your actions are directed towards a better understanding, greater wisdom and insight, you realise that it will not do to dig into the past, you have to be moving, flowing. Gaṅgā is holy only because it is flowing. Life is flowing. Do not dam it anywhere. Then you are damned! Life is flowing and this flow ensures that you are not caught anywhere. If there are obstacles you either jump over them, get around them, or push them away. Life has to flow and it is in that flow that greater and greater understanding, greater and greater wisdom, self-knowledge and insight arise. In order to ensure this and in order to ensure that life is a continuous unarrested flow, as it flows you must be tremendously aware, and that awareness is free.

So for this insight to be ever aware of the flow called life, it has to be totally free, and therefore observant. That freedom is also insisted upon by Kṛṣṇa.

Therefore, without attachment do thou always perform action which should be done (your duty). For, by performing action without attachment man reaches the supreme.

(3:19)

This is the central theme of the Bhagavad Gītā. Any action that is motivated towards a goal is destructive. When you free this inner awareness or insight, of both past and future, what has to be done is done. Kṛṣṇa demands that such should be the behaviour of even enlightened people.

As the ignorant men act from attachment to action, O Arjuna, so should the wise act without attachment, wishing the welfare of the world.

(3:25)

WHO ARE YOU?

We all have had ideas concerning life; and, like the fox which has a great deal of ideas about how to escape, you will find in times of need that those ideas are utterly useless. Ideas are incapable of action.

The eyes are open, a form is seen. At one point it is called the seer, at the other point it is called the seen. Seeing is in the middle. Seeing alone is reality. When confronted by brilliant light, the eyes close. An idea arises 'Ah, that's terrible'. That **idea** is not part of the reality; it is like the image in the mirror, you can neither say it is real nor unreal. Ideas are both real and unreal; real in the sense that the stuff they are made of is real, unreal in the sense that they are non-functional.

An experiencing arises and along with the experiencing there is a polarisation – at one end is the idea-of-the-experiencer and at the other end there is the idea-of-experience. Both of them are momentary. The experiences come and go in the flow of this river called life. What is it that seeks to perpetuate itself as if it is an existential fact? The experiencer. Love and hate are born, and along with them fear is also born, of this self-perpetuating experiencer. These are born when the momentary experiencer, arising with an experience, seeks to immortalize itself. That is what you call the ego, the jivā, and so on.

They say that the senses are superior. Superior to the senses is the mind. Superior to the mind is the intellect. One who is superior even to the intellect is that.

(3:42)

There is a sort of hierarchy within you: the senses function at the behest of the mind, the mind functions at the behest of an intelligence that determines this is right, this is wrong; this is good, this is bad, etc., on the basis of past experience. The experiencer, instead of dying with the death of each experience, somehow perpetuates itself. Who is it? Find out. Beyond all this is that. Beyond the buddhi is that.

When 'that' is realised, life goes on because it is not yours. The senses will continue to function in this world – hunger will arise, thirst will arise, food will be eaten, water

drunk – but an unnatural attraction called ‘love’ or an unnatural repulsion called ‘hate’ will become extinct.

Kṛṣṇa said: I taught this yoga to the sun. If you want an illustration of what I have been talking about, look at the sun.

(4:1)

Can you live like the sun, shine without intending to do so, scorch without intending to do so? Instead of following the trend of this beautiful discourse, in response, Arjuna asks a totally irrelevant question:

You were born only recently. The sun must have been there for millions of years. How can you say that you taught this yoga to the sun?

(4:4)

Kṛṣṇa utilises that opportunity to declare another truth:

You and I were born many times. You do not know it, I know it.

(4:5)

(You are trapped in action, in thought, in idea – and I am not.)

That is the only difference between man and God. Man does not know, not because he is condemned to unknowing, but he **loves** this unknowing. He does not bother to know what is unknowingness.

He who thus knows in true light, my divine birth and action – having abandoned the body, is not born again. He comes to me, O Arjuna.

(4:9)

Freed from attachment, fear and anger, absorbed in me, taking refuge in me, purified by the fire of knowledge – many have attained to my being.

(4:10)

If you also awaken yourself and gain this knowledge, you will be like God. It is only in the Bhagavad Gītā that this expression occurs quite a few times. The devotee, the jñāni, the yogi ‘who does this, enters into my nature’. Fantastic statement! You can enter into the very nature of God. It is perhaps not even difficult to gain this knowledge. And when that knowledge arises the ignorant idea that you entertain of yourself disappears.

DOUBTLESS LIVING

The fourth chapter closes with a most inspiring verse which could liberate you once for all:

Therefore with the sword of the knowledge (of the self) cut asunder the doubt of the self born of ignorance, residing in thy heart, and take refuge in yoga. Arise, O Arjuna.

(4:42)

This is the supreme perfection of life. You have to act. Life means action, activity, but that action must be flavoured with insight, with an enlightened vision which does not

create a division (or, which does not have a division), in which insight is action, life. Activity is life; and jñāna – insight – reveals this truth and therefore instantly frees action from desire and aversion: ‘I do not like to do this’; ‘I love to do this’. In both cases your jñāna is veiled; there is no insight.

If the awareness or understanding is constantly looking for the source of action without pretending to know what it is, it is possible to discover that action does not depend upon ambition. Ambition is totally unnecessary for action. Action happens, without ambition and without inhibition.

In the light of this understanding there is no doubt, no hesitation. This is perhaps one of the main characteristics of enlightenment, which is confirmed by what Arjuna says at the end of the Bhagavad Gītā:

All my doubts have vanished, my delusion is gone. I can see clearly that ‘I’ is not necessary for living.

(18:73)

There is a very clear understanding or knowledge, ‘I am not doing any of this’. ‘I’ is not necessary for this action, and therefore all these factors which are based on the ‘I’, on the ego – ‘I like this, I do not like this’, etc. – are totally unnecessary for life and action. The very awareness of the source of action frees you instantly from likes and dislikes, because right there you see, without any doubt whatsoever, that your own private attractions and aversions have nothing to do with action. In **this** insight (jñāna), there is a clear unmistakable awareness which precludes all doubt and hesitation. Everyone has an insight, but in some cases it is dirty. It is not that the fool is devoid of insight, intelligence, but the medium is dirty so the light that shines through seems to be dirty, too.

The yogi also performs the same actions as you do, but only his body, mind, buddhi and senses are functioning. What is not functioning is the perpetuating ‘I’. The experiencer, or the performer of actions, arises and dies instantly. The repetitive function is so fast that you think there is a continuity and install a thing called ‘ego’ as if it is a continuing factor. It is an experiencer that arises with each experience and collapses instantly. The illustration of the spark at the end of a rope is usually given. When it is twirled it creates the idea of a continuing circle, whereas what exists is nothing but one little spark. So what is absent here is continuing self-existent reality called the ego, which is very much alive in the stupid man and totally absent in the enlightened yogi.

Why is there this action at all? Kṛṣṇa says in the sixth chapter:

Practise yoga for the purification of the self.

(6:12)

There is energy in the body, there is restlessness in the mind – the mind is restlessness. In order to work out that restlessness, we are to be active. In order to purify the senses, the body, the mind, there is some sort of action, some sort of activity. Action is nature’s way of purifying itself. That means that no action has any futuristic intention. An action is there because... there is neither appointment nor consequent disappointment. Life flows without any difficulty whatsoever.

God's own nature keeps the entire universe vibrating, scintillating, but in that there is neither an action nor an actor. The ego is seen to be non-existent and therefore there is great peace within. There is non-movement of consciousness which co-exists with infinite movement, where the infinite diversity is realised at the same time, without the infinite militating against the diversity. There is *samaṁ*, the sort of sameness which is not the antithesis of dividedness.

Here and now you are free – not tomorrow, or after you die, but here and now.

GET RID OF THE PHANTOM

At one point Arjuna actually said that it was better to run away and live by begging than to kill his people. There has been an idea in the minds of very well-meaning, good people that the only way to avoid doing something wrong is to avoid the situation in which you might **do** something wrong. This was considered *saṁnyāsa* renunciation. This is not wrong in itself. But 'you cannot avoid doing wrong by running away from a wrong situation', does not mean 'and therefore you must put yourself in an ugly situation and struggle'. Totally independent of these two there is a third attitude or approach, which leads directly to the truth. That is *saṁnyāsa*. This is beautifully described in the words of Jesus Christ: "Give your heart to God."

What is unwise or *unsaṁnyāsic* (if you permit that expression) is to put something where it does not belong. That is also the definition of the word 'dirt'. Dirt is matter out of its place. The word '*saṁnyāsa*' is not only 'placing', but 'placing it very well' so that it does not become a problem to you.

Do thou, O Arjuna, know yoga to be that which they call renunciation. No one verily becomes a yogi who has not renounced thoughts, scheming or planning.

(6:2)

The yogi (or the *saṁnyāsī*) who has trained himself in this fashion to understand *saṁkalpa* (thought, idea and so on) and to understand where what belongs and is able to put it where it belongs, behaves in a certain way.

He who is of the same mind to the good-hearted, friends, enemies, the indifferent, the neutral, the hateful, the relatives, the righteous and the unrighteous, excels.

(6:9)

He recognises a friend as a friend, an enemy as an enemy, a *sādhu* as a holy person. His heart is always at peace.

The word 'buddhi' does not mean some kind of a rationalising faculty. (Rationalisation is a perversion. When you are tempted to rationalise something or justify something, please look within. There is an objection – call it your conscience or the voice of God. Something says "No, I should not do this", but you do it all the same. **Then** you are tempted to rationalise.) Buddhi is an intelligence that is awake, an inner awareness, or insight which does not get agitated.

Why do we react the way we react? We have all used the expression: ‘I should not have done that. Normally I do not do that. I was taken unawares’, without really understanding what it means. Is it possible to remain aware of what is going on in your own heart while being actively and busily engaged in life? The only problem is that you do not know how. That is the business of the sixth chapter, the chapter on meditation.

Meditation is not something that is meant to shut out the world, the world is not your enemy. ‘You are your own friend, you are your own enemy’. You do not have to shut the world out of yourself, you **are** the world! But, it may be necessary at first when you are learning to look within. Kṛṣṇa gives an elaborate description of how to sit and how to keep the back straight. After giving all these practical instructions in great detail, Kṛṣṇa says: “Do not think of anything.” How do you do that? If you think ‘I should not think’, you are **thinking** you should not think! Meditation is not merely thinking that you are not thinking, nor suppressing all thoughts by sheer use of will force. In order not to think, there is only one way, and that is to find out what thought is and what saṁkalpa is. It is in that context Kṛṣṇa gives us a beautiful picture.

As a lamp placed in a windless spot does not flicker – to such is compared
the yogi of controlled mind, practising yoga in the self.

(6:19)

When you are trying to find the root of thought or saṁkalpa, it is then that the mind is absolutely still – like a lamp in a windless room. You can use a mantra and an image of God, provided you can come to this point. A mantra is a thought, a mental activity. The mind, the consciousness, is moving within you. That is what is called a mantra. If you trace the sound of the mantra to its own source, you know where thought arises. So, when you are sitting for your initial practice of meditation the mind is made still – not by suppressing anything, but by trying to find the root of the mantra. When you have found that, you have found the key to life, the key to saṁkalpa. Then you are never taken unawares.

That is the most important feature of meditation. It is then that you are a yogi, a saṁnyāsī. You can get angry in an appropriate situation; you can be very loving in an appropriate situation. The Bhagavad Gītā is the gospel of appropriate behaviour or appropriate action. That is the greatest achievement – if you want to call it an achievement – or greatest gain if you want to call it a gain.

...having obtained which, he thinks there is no other gain superior to it;
wherein established, he is not moved even by heavy sorrow. Let that be
known by the name of yoga, the severance from union with pain.

(6:22, 23)

You find the root of saṁkalpa. Instantly you know ‘This is the movement of mind.’ This movement is stopped by understanding it, not by suppressing it. If you are hungry, you know you are hungry. Go to the kitchen and eat. If you are not hungry and the cake is on the table, it can stay there. When you are hungry you put it in the mouth, when you are not hungry you leave it on the table. You have placed it in the right place. It is quite

simple. Nothing more is expected of us. The rest is God's grace. Find this yoga and you will not be affected by the worst calamity, the worst misfortune.

Pain and pleasure will be there in your life; you cannot avoid them. As long as the body is there, it will experience some pleasure and it will experience some pain. No problem. But there is something else which says "I am hurt." When the body is hurt it might pull away, it knows how to behave, but that which says "I am hurt" does not exist except as *samkalpa*, as an imaginary entity. This imaginary entity cannot be got rid of except through enlightenment. Yoga is merely disconnecting something which did not exist from contact with what exists. Then, in whatever condition you are in, you live in God.

I AM THINE, ALL IS THINE, MY LORD

The seventh chapter opens with a tremendously important declaration.

O Arjuna, hear how you shall without doubt know me fully, with the mind intent on me, practising yoga and taking refuge in me.

(7:1)

The essential teaching of Kṛṣṇa is anāsakti yoga, total non-attachment, total non-contact. When you come into contact with something, you are asking for trouble because that contact will come to an end and you will be miserable. Yet, here, we are asked to remain in intimate and constant contact with God! There is good reason for this.

How to restrain the mind and rob it of its restlessness, thereby making it no-mind? By *abhyāsa* and *vairāgya*. This is usually translated imperfectly, into ‘practice’ and ‘dispassion’. A very holy man who lived in Uttarkashi thirty years ago explained it to me in just two sentences (but please remember that it is what he said, not what I said or what we can understand from it). “*Abhyāsa* means: to know that everything is God. *Vairāgya* means: that there is no world.” Another great holy man, Swami Nisreyasananda, who belongs to the Ramakrishna Order, said more or less the same thing in a different context: “Close your eyes when you meditate – then you realise the infinite or God within. Open your eyes and you see God in all.”

God, perceived through the senses and conceived by the mind, is called the world, the body, personality, individuality and all that. The world, the personality, the individuality seen through the eyes of wisdom, is God. When your vision becomes wisdom, division is gone. There should not only be no doubt or hesitation, but the knowledge of the totality – that nothing remains outside it. Is there a knowledge like that? If there is, can **we know** that? If you know that, you are standing outside – so it’s not a totality! Any knowledge that you want to know is already divided knowledge and therefore no knowledge. If the individuality is still there and this individuality aspires to a knowledge, it is only fragmented knowledge and therefore no knowledge.

I shall declare to thee in full this knowledge, combined with direct realisation, after knowing which nothing more here remains to be known.

(7:2)

Such a knowledge implies the coming to an end of what has been assumed to exist – ego – ego in a very special sense. Until then all the seeking that you are indulging in is part of the seeker, all that you are observing is part of the observer. The ego itself, the mind itself, is indulging in some sort of acrobatics. As long as the observer is there the observation is part of the observer. It is his own projection, it is the same mind. As long as the ego is there saying: “I am seeking God, I want this liberation” you are slightly more social than the other fellow who says: “I want your property”. You are more acceptable to others because you are not a threat!

Where there is an observer, a seeker, whether he seeks a thing called ‘world’ or a thing called ‘God’, he is still seeking, and that seeking seeks something that the seeker has invented and projected out of himself. Who is the seeker? There is a problem! If there is a seeker, an observer, who is to observe this observer? Or, who is to seek the seeker and

find him? How does the knower become known? That is, my objective knowledge, ‘me’, also becomes ‘my object of knowledge. How can ‘I’ become the object of my own knowledge? How can ‘I’ know my self? Which one is the ‘me’? It is at that point that what is popularly known as self-surrender happens.

The direct realisation arises which is thus stated by Kṛṣṇa:

Earth, water, fire, air, ether, mind, intellect and egoism – thus is my nature divided eightfold. This is the inferior prakṛti, O mighty-armed Arjuna; know thou as different from it, my higher prakṛti (nature) the very life-element, by which this world is upheld.

(7:4, 5)

There is one factor which is especially thrilling: “ ‘I’ exist”. This thing called ‘I’ is everywhere. This principle called ‘I am’ is very different from what you and I assume it to be. ‘I do not belong to myself, but to God to whom everything belongs!’ That is self-surrender.

Whatever beings are pure, active and inert, know that they proceed from me. They are in me, yet I am not in them.

(7:12)

All these moods are also **of** the divine, but the divine is not confined to them. We constantly make a mistake in trying to think that we can somehow find God within **‘myself’**. When this God enters ‘myself’, then it becomes a little cap for my self!

There is nothing other than the divine. Please do not think that God especially manifests in your heart only when you are in an exalted mood. When you are in a sleepy mood also, God is manifest in you. God is always there – but not **in** those moods; God is not confined to anything.

It is possible that one day you begin to wonder and realise: “I am, but I am not mine; the body exists, it is not mine; the world exists, it is not mine. And when there is confusion, even that confusion, Lord, is not mine.” There is surrender. Every moment you are surrendering, whatever happens you are surrendering – surrendering in the sense that there is no sense of ‘mine’.

In order that we might not pat ourselves on the back Kṛṣṇa cautions us:

I am not manifest to all (as I am) veiled by the yoga māyā. This deluded world does not know me, the unborn and the imperishable.

(7:25)

This truth is not easily perceived, because everything is mixed up, everywhere. It is not easy for a person to become aware of this.

But those men of virtuous deeds whose sins have come to an end, and who are freed from the delusion of the pairs of opposites, worship me, steadfast in their vow.

(7:28)

Who will understand and appreciate this? Only they whose sins have come to an end can enter into the spirit of this teaching. Otherwise you hear the words and you try to translate them in your own way and get caught – sometimes in an iron cage, sometimes in a brass cage and sometimes in a golden cage. The golden cage is nice, but it takes a little more to realise that even **that** is a cage, a prison.

If you practise what you are taught it is only to come to that point where it is possible for this teaching to be received, not by the mind, not by the intellect, but by the heart, directly.

INDIVI(SIBLE) DUALITY

Knowledge, to be complete, perfect and free from the possibility of doubt arising, should be total knowledge – or knowledge of the totality. Knowledge of the totality implies the synthesis, the unification (yoga) of knowledge, the knower and the known. That is, there is an experienced division, which is intuitively realised to be non-existent, and which is also intuitively realised as the source of all pain and sorrow. Can this experienced division be realised to be non-existent? That is what they call an intuitive understanding, or self-realisation, enlightenment, etc. If that is also an experienced (divided) experience, if you see God as you are seeing another, you are seeing something which you have created, which comes into your life and departs from your life.

Everything that has a beginning has an end. A state in which neither a beginning nor an end was experienced, the deep sleep state, was a state of no problems, no pain, no sorrow, no division. Can **that** state ‘prevail’? (If you use the word ‘experience’ you are trapped. An experience **arises** and therefore it has to come to an end.)

This is the problem dealt with in the Bhagavad Gītā: on the one hand there is an experienced division, on the other hand there is an intuited state of non-division. That intuition at the same time reveals that the state of divisionlessness is also free from sorrow – sorrow being an experience. And, (what is important), any experience related to that which has a beginning and an end, which comes into being and goes, is sorrow.

The enjoyments that are born of contacts are only wombs of pain, for they have a beginning and an end. O Arjuna, the wise do not rejoice in them.

(5:22)

You are trapped in something which is itself passing, which had a beginning, which will have an end, but which seems to **be** in the middle. Madmen, sages, mystics and fools see the reality each in a different sense; to each one that reality exists. But the question is: is the reality real in itself – or does it come into being because you think it exists? Who is going to answer this question? ‘You’ cannot answer it, as, for instance, you cannot possibly convince a lamp that there is a thing called darkness. So, whether the problem, the world and the objects exist because you think all these things exist, you do not know; but they are.

When you think of a division between you and another, the division exists. When you think he is your friend, he becomes your friend; when you think he is your enemy, he becomes your enemy, and your existence is similarly comprehended by him. This much is certain.

Therefore what you are should be understood, not as something different and distinct from him, but in essence, without any relation to him at all, without comparison or contrast.

Is there a total knowledge which has in it the elements of the homogeneity of deep sleep and the awareness of waking? Can these two be combined in such a way that while remaining quite awake, alive, you can **live** homogeneity? In chapter eighteen there is a most beautiful expression:

That by which one sees the one indestructible reality in all beings, not separate in all the separate beings – know thou that knowledge to be **sāttvika**.

(18:20)

It is undivided and yet it **is**. It exists in diverse objects as if divided. Hence the sages have used the most beautiful and apt illustration of indivisible space which is capable of being thought of as not only divisible, but **divided**. This total knowledge appears to be divided on the surface, with the self, or me, as the perceiver, as the knower. Can this become a totality, where knowledge alone exists, but without a contradiction of the knower and the known? If you expect, for instance, that a man of enlightenment is not aware of the world, then you are trapped in the division between total knowledge and its opposite – which exists only in your mind, not in his – and you are forcing your concept of knowledge on the man of enlightenment and demanding that he, being a man of enlightenment, should behave in a certain way that **you** think he should, because you think he is different from you! But, his state cannot be described.

Awareness is not awareness unless it is at least aware of itself, and from that arises awareness of the other. A lamp is not a lamp if it does not illumine itself and at the same time illumine everything. We are seeking to combine all these. How is that done?

Kṛṣṇa emphasises that in order to have a comprehensive knowledge of the totality of existence, one should understand *adhiyajña*, *adhibhūtaṁ*, *adhidaivaṁ*. Do not make nice little images of these words and of *ātmā*, *jivā*, *ahaṁkāra*, *manas*, *citta* and so on. Is it possible to study all these factors without creating images of them? They are not things which you can think of. Between the words ‘thing’ and ‘think’ there is no difference. That which you can think of is a thing, is material. Even a thought, if you can think of **it**, is a thing, an object of your knowledge. It is a trap; it will destroy your knowledge. Kṛṣṇa said:

This knowledge should be sustained till *antakāle* (the time of death).

(8:5)

Meaning: however much you might pretend to have understood that time is a creature of the mind, you must allow for the temporal existence of time. It is beautiful! Appropriate action in this world is possible only if you do not pretend to have solved the problem. When you look directly into the eyes of the problem, then the problem itself will dissolve. So, without pretending to have solved the problem, become intensely aware of it. We are different but we are **equally** different. Become intensely aware of diversity, of your difference from him. Just as he is different to you, you are different to him. But, he can be hungry, you also can be hungry. He feels cold, you also feel cold.

Why do we consider each other different? Is it possible, therefore, without assuming that unity and diversity are conflicting factors, to discover (not think) that they are complementary factors? Is it possible to see that what is known as matter, mind, ātmā, jivā and self are inscrutable factors that have to be understood? In order to understand, one must stop assuming, one must stop building images of these.

The blessed Lord said: Brahman is the un-perishable, the supreme. His essential nature is called self-knowledge (the adhyātmān). The offering (unto the gods) which causes the creation and existence of beings is called karma.

(8:3)

The supreme (or the totality), does not undergo any change. The totality does not decay. What a magnificent truth! There is constant change – which implies constancy, plus change. These two are not contradictory, but complementary. ‘Svabhāvo ‘dhyatmam ucyate’ – the nature inherent in this totality is called adhyātmā. Or, to put it the other way around, ātmā or selfhood is inherent in this totality, even down to the point of individuality. That is, you do not belong to yourself, yourself belongs to that totality. What is called adhibhūtaṁ or elements have a beginning and an end. This is a cycle which goes on.

No one can arrest it. Even gods when they incarnated, had to die.

Adhibhūtaṁ (knowledge of the elements) pertains to my perishable nature and the puruṣa is the adhidaivaṁ. I alone am the adhiyajña here in the body, O Arjuna.

(8:4)

Puruṣa is that which is able to observe all changing phenomena. Changing phenomena here means not only the world or the universe outside, but your own body, mental states, your own states of consciousness or existence, your own states of maturity and immaturity.

Yajña is a certain type of knowledge which enables you to give and take, which enables you to engage yourself in appropriate action, and to understand that all creatures in this universe have the same needs as you have. What is your idea of self-sacrifice? For the ritualists, yajña is something where you prepare a sacred fire and pour some things into it. Yajña is self-sacrifice. But the body is not the self and the mind is not the self, and all that you are doing in the name of yajña or self-sacrifice is sacrificing that which is not your self. If you have two shirts and you give one to her and the other to him, it is not self-sacrifice, it is shirt sacrifice!

Kṛṣṇa makes a most noble, sublime, intriguing, enigmatic and inspiring statement. In effect, he says:

This spirit of self-sacrifice is not what you think it is, it is the divine presence. The recognition of the divine omnipresence is self-sacrifice.

Why so? If you still cling to the definition of the word ‘sacrifice’ as something which is killed, then it is at the moment of the realisation of the omnipresence that the idea of

self or ego is destroyed, totally and completely. If you adopt the other view of the word sacrifice (which is to ‘make sacred’) then the very moment at which you realise this divine omnipresence, the self has been made sacred. That is, it is no longer your self, it is no longer my self, it is God’s self.

NOW – AND AT THE LAST HOUR

There is a beautiful mantra in the Taittirīya upaniṣad which says that God created all this and then he ‘entered into all things, the real and the unreal, making everything real’. It is a beautiful idea. It occurs also in the Bhagavad Gītā:

I am immortality and also death, existence and non-existence, O Arjuna.

(9:19)

‘I am the reality, I am the unreality. I am that which is perishable and that which is imperishable.’ That which is perishable and that which is imperishable are two sides of the same coin. What is called perishable is also imperishable, it is another aspect of the imperishable.

You find yourself trapped in the idea ‘I am this body’ or at least ‘the body is mine’. Do not worry about who manufactured the trap, that is not your problem, but the body is still yours, so you have to feed it, clothe it, look after it. It is a sort of vehicle, an instrument, a house of God bestowed upon you by God himself. Still there is this funny feeling that the body is ‘not me, but related to me’. How all this I-ness and mine-ness arose in relation to the body we do not know.

And, whosoever, leaving the body, goes forth remembering me alone, at the time of death, he attains my being; there is no doubt about this.

(8:5)

What is it that dies? You cannot die – but there is a disconnection between what you call ‘you’, and the body (or, there is a suspension of the idea ‘I am the body’ or ‘the body is mine’).

Great haṭha yogī insisted upon a period of meditation at midnight, just before you fall asleep. Fall asleep with this consciousness: ‘That which is real and that which is unreal, that which is perishable and that which is imperishable is all that one imperishable being that can never cease to be’. That is the pivotal teaching of the Bhagavad Gītā – the reality can never cease to be, the unreality has never come into being. If it is possible to sustain this truth right up to the moment of falling asleep, you will probably wake up with the same feeling, contemplating this tremendous truth that nothing but God exists. Nothing but God has **ever** existed. Nothing but the reality could **ever** exist.

Who knows how to maintain this awareness? It is very easy to cite stories like the Ajāmila story, where a rascal suddenly remembers God at the last minute, or, Katvaṅga, who when condemned to death, suddenly said: “Oh, I still have one hour, let me meditate.” What is not so easy is to answer the serious question: when at the hour of death, your volition is suspended, and the entire brain bursts with innumerable memories, and when there is nobody to help you, are you sure you will remember God? And, **IF NOT?** (“When your throat is choked, at the time of death, who will help you for your salvation?” sang Swami Sivananda.) That is why Kṛṣṇa insisted:

Therefore at all times remember me only and fight. With mind and intellect fixed (or absorbed) in me, thou shalt doubtless come to me alone.

(8:7)

“Do it now”, as Gurudev used to say. Then it is possible that you will think of God even then, not otherwise. Then naturally you will be absorbed into him.

What really happens is, suddenly you wake up to the realisation that the body is not even yours. First the idea that ‘I am the body’ is lost, but ‘the body is mine’ is an idea that persists. As long as the *prāṇa* vibrates in that body, prompted by the mind, the idea that the body is yours will not go. When the *prāṇa* ceases to vibrate in that body then suddenly you think: “Hey, I thought it was mine, it is not mine. Because I, as such, am not.”

‘I am’, or what is known as *aham sphuraṇa*, is a part of the cosmic being. ‘I am’, but not in the sense that ‘I am Swami Venkatesananda’. That thing came into being a few years ago and it will cease to be a little later. It is an idea.

Whosoever at the end leaves the body, thinking of any (state of) being, to that being only does he go, Arjuna, because of his constant thought of that being.

(8:6)

Whatever be the state of your mind at the time that the idea ‘this body is mine’ is penultimately suspended (or, to use a simple word, when you die), that thought-form is vitally important since that is the seed for what happens afterwards. Swami Harisharananda used to give a beautiful example to illustrate what I am saying (but it can be misunderstood, also). You are sitting for a portrait which is of great importance to you. You have dressed yourself very nicely and you want to look your best. The photographer adjusts the camera and the lens and everything and says: “Smile.” You smile. He says: “Sorry, I forgot to advance the film.” Then he says: “Smile.” You smile. “Oh, sorry, I forgot to focus.” By that time you are frustrated. Now that he has focused the camera, advanced the film and is about to click, a fly sits on your nose and you wrinkle your nose. **That** is the picture you get! You cannot protest: “My God, I smiled then, I was charming then. Just at the last moment the fly came and sat on my nose and I pulled a face.” That is unfortunately the picture that the camera got! But *Kṛṣṇa* does not want us to assume that whatever might have been our mood before, we can somehow smile at the moment of the clicking of the camera (as fashion models do) and have a nice photograph. The example is not valid there. Unless you have trained your mind all the time, it is unlikely that at the last hour the state of your mind, or consciousness, will be what you hope it will be.

When you investigate the truth and realise that what is permanent and what is impermanent, what is perishable and what is imperishable, is all part of the one cosmic being, then your heart, your mind, your entire being is rooted in God. That is what is known as *brahmacharya* – to live, to move and have one’s being in Brahman. That is when even at the last moment you are rooted in that consciousness, and therefore there is no more dreaming. Just as in deep sleep there is neither a pleasant dream nor a nightmare, in deep-rootedness-in-God there is neither sorrow nor joy. That is called

brahma-nirvāṇa. There, this thing called saṁsāra ceases. You have reached supreme perfection.

What happens till then? You keep on going round and round. In your own daily life you experience different moods and the world that is experienced in one mood is perhaps very different from the same world experienced in another mood. So that you have around you an inter-penetrating world of several planes. You go on changing from one mood to the other every day. You were a loving person two or three hours ago, you are a very serious person now. An hour later you may become very angry about something, and then you might experience dullness, fatigue and sleep. Have **you** changed because of that? No, no. There is a change, and yet there is no change. In the same way it is possible that the entire universe keeps on churning from one mood to the other.

So our first endeavour should be to lead a pure and disciplined life in order that we might contact the central core of our personality, to realise that it is not **our** personality, that it is all God. Once you are there you see that all these belong to him, not to 'me'. There is no 'me' – except a sort of memory. 'I am' is him, everything is him. Then there is no more sorrow, no more coming, no more going. That 'I am' can undergo all sorts of changes, the changes brought about by sattva, rajas and tamas, but there is no problem in that. If this is understood, then the entire world-play is understood; if this is misunderstood, there is great danger.

In order that the misunderstanding may not arise, the Bhagavad Gītā cautions:

But verily there exists, higher than the unmanifested, another unmanifested eternal being who is not destroyed when all beings are destroyed (dissolved).

(8:20)

The reality is not the perishable or the imperishable, or a mere synthesis of these. Reality is not the assembly of different parts of what you call reality, but something entirely different. God is not the assembly of the different pieces of what is called the universe put together, but non-different from that and yet something that is unthinkable. So, even though the perishable and the imperishable are all parts of this one total being, this totality cannot be thought of by the mind. Therefore, go to the source of thought and let thought collapse. Truth is beyond that which is manifest, beyond that which is unmanifest, beyond that which is perishable, beyond that which is imperishable. Indescribable is this supreme truth. And that does not come to an end even when all things come to an end.

A GREAT SECRET

The ninth chapter opens with a great flourish. Kṛṣṇa declares:

I shall now declare to thee who does not cavil, the greatest secret, the knowledge combined with direct self-realisation. Having known this thou shalt be free from evil. It is the kingly science and the kingly secret.

(9:1, 2)

Just as the king is considered to be the foremost of men, this is the foremost knowledge. Not only that, it is an extremely subtle secret – secret not because it has been hidden away by some god, *māyā* or what have you, but because you have not thought about it or investigated it. You have never turned within to look.

We have never bothered to understand life; we have never bothered to understand ourselves until a tragedy or a calamity overtakes us. Even then not all the people bother to look into the facts or the truth concerning life, the self, the world. Hence it remains a secret just by default. The truth is extremely simple but because of some kind of kink in our own brain we cannot possibly believe this to be true. We think that the truth or God-realisation must be such a complicated affair, that the truth that is right in front of us seems to be too simple to be true, and therefore, ignoring it, we look for something that is imaginary – complicated.

This life, when it is lived and investigated in the proper manner, reveals the truth instantly. The nature of reality is not hidden away except to the extent that you have not bothered to investigate it. The extraordinary feature of Kṛṣṇa's teaching is that instead of looking at your body and denying its reality, he asks you to look at it and see it as God's own nature. The body is not a non-existent illusion, but it is not what you **think** it is. The totality that pervades the entire universe is not obvious to that which is unable to perceive the totality. The senses being fragmented, limited, can only perceive or respond to a certain limited field, called the sense field, so that the eyes can only see, the ears can only hear. That is not to say that what is heard is unreal and what is seen is unreal. The unreal cannot be seen or heard and so on. For instance, what the eye sees is only a certain limited spectrum of light. That is not the totality of life.

Understanding of the limitation of the senses is understanding of the existence of the totality. There is an unmanifest presence which you cannot possibly be conscious of. It is something which one cannot comprehend either with the senses or with the mind. Kṛṣṇa says:

As the mighty wind, moving everywhere, rests always in space, even so, know thou that all beings rest in me.

(9:6)

These acts do not bind me, O Arjuna, sitting like one indifferent, unattached to those acts.

(9:9)

‘All this creation takes place, diverse beings exist and dissolve and I pervade all of them, but the divine omnipresence is not polluted.’ It is not possible to conceptualise the

relationship of God, world and you; hence the apparently contradictory declarations in verses four and five of chapter nine. God pervades all things in a non-obvious (avyakta-mūrtinā) way. Thus, the enquiring mind is pushed to its own ultimate limits so that surrender may happen.

God, being the indwelling omnipresence, is in you, but not confined to you. In the very core of your being there dwells this omnipresence. It penetrates every cell of your being, because it is omnipresent. And yet it is outside the comprehension of your senses and your mind – which means neither the senses nor the mind can function independent of this omnipresence, and that omnipresence is unaffected by what is being done by the senses and the mind.

In the upaniṣad you are given an illustration which is very beautiful. The sun shines, and aided by the light of the sun, because of the light of the sun, we sit here and contemplate God. One man goes on with his building work, earning his bread; another cheats; another man picks someone else's pocket; another man kills. Though in a manner of speaking the sun is responsible for all, the sun is unaffected by the sins or the virtues of the people functioning in sunlight. In the same way, the omnipresence oversees all that goes on in this universe and yet it is not affected by it.

Just as you are endowed with a nature, this cosmic omnipresence also has got a nature of its own. What you are seeing in front of you is the manifestation of that nature. If you study yourself you will understand the cosmic being, because the omnipresent is present in you without being confined to you, so that the characteristics of the omnipresence can be intuited – not understood mentally, intellectually or psychologically – by becoming aware of what goes on in you.

The omnipresence is omniscient and omnipotent at the same time. The omnipotence manifests itself everywhere as all this and the same omnipotence stirs in you, as it were. You are not different from the universe. In you this same omnipotence stirs and the omniscience (which is in you) thinks 'I am doing it'. You are caught. The simple truth is that the omnipresence is God, God is the indwelling omnipresence, 'I am that I am'; and that indwelling omnipresence is omniscient and therefore there is awareness. It is not **'my'** awareness.

The indwelling omnipresence which is omniscient is also omnipotent and therefore is capable of diverse action. The sensory faculties experience the world as if it were outside and the faculties of action express themselves as if the action arises in the ego, but all these arise not in the 'me' but in God. All the elements that are involved in living are but the manifestations of the omnipotence of the omniscient, omnipresent being. One who realises this is instantly liberated. Why need the reality be **realised**? Because it is not obvious. Paradoxically, the truth or God is the omnipresent but unobvious reality in what is obvious. A delightful 'hide and seek'!

THE TRUTH BEYOND DEFINITION

That which exists in the three periods of time – and therefore which is beyond time – that which exists everywhere, and that which is conscious of all things at the same time, is obviously beyond guessing. In that omniscient being the universe arises as part of its own nature. The arising of the universe is potentially inherent in the cosmic being. If this is not seen, then one cannot see the omnipresence.

In that omnipresence there is no distinction between unity and diversity. In a dream there are hundreds of thousands of people, hundreds of thousands of beings, and in that dream you also exist as if independent of them – that is, independent of **you**. Crazy, but true! If that is sort of inferentially clear, then suddenly one realises that even these definitions of unity and diversity are merely words which are coined by an immature mind groping to find the truth. They are not truth.

There is nothing called unity, there is nothing called diversity. This division again is created by the mind which is stupid. In that unity this diversity exists and the two together are called omnipresent. Where the distinction between unity and diversity vanishes and one seems to merge into the other without distinction, without a contradiction, is what is called omnipresent. Omnipresent does not mean that God dwells in you; ‘God dwells in you’ means that there is something other than God also in you – which is not omnipresence. God does not dwell in you as tea in a cup – the cup being you and God dwells in it – then you are denying the word ‘omnipresent’ immediately!

It is the omnipresent that functions in a certain way, in what apparently looks like a diversity within itself, and since it is omniscient it is all the time conscious of this omnipresence, that all this is happening within the one which is also the many. And it is also omnipotent so it is able to function in infinitely diverse ways. Why does a dog bark, the swami speak, somebody sing? That is how it **is**! That is how the omnipresent, omnipotence, omniscience manifests itself. When that is understood, the *Bhagavad Gītā* is simply thrilling. If you do not understand this, you go on performing these ceremonies – doing charity and good actions in strict accordance with the injunctions and the prohibitions of the scriptures – which is very good, excellent.

If you examine your own conduct very carefully, whether you are a religious person completely and totally committed to tradition, or a philanthropic person who has been brought up on the idea that you must do good to everybody, that God has placed you on this earth in order to promote human welfare and that sort of thing, it is not difficult at all to detect the presence of fear. The best part of human goodness is unfortunately based on fear. You are good to your friend because you are afraid that otherwise your security or happiness is threatened. As long as you are doing something good, it is very good, but since this goodness is based upon fear of consequences the goodness is not free, it is constrained, conditioned.

In the same way, if you are able to look at yourself you might see that you are religious, you go to the temple, you pray and you do japa because you are afraid of some unknown unhappiness striking you. And you are afraid that for all the sins that you have committed here you might be sent to hell. These possibilities are present in our lives and we are aware of them.

As long as this fear exists, it brings in some kind of a hope that 'by doing **this** I am ensuring my happiness here and maybe a better life after I drop this body.' Fear and hope keep chasing each other without an apparent end. Can one recognise here and now, immediately, that 'I am' is true but '**I**' do not belong to 'me'? 'I am' but I am myself part of that cosmic being. This 'I am' has a dual form, one as an individual, the other as part of the cosmic totality. It is exactly like space. There is space called the room, but it is an integral, indivisible part of the total space. Even so the individual seems to be dual, but it is indivisible. Indivi(sible) duality has become individuality. It is merely a point of view.

So, if in the correct understanding or realisation of this simple truth it is possible for you and me to live in the constant realisation that all these 'I am's' are integral parts of this totality called God; and the intelligence that functions and the manifestations of that intelligence in infinite forms – whether it is called cleverness, crookedness, wickedness, saintliness, holiness, unholiness – are all part of that cosmic intelligence, then it becomes impossible for the mind **not** to be constantly conscious of God. Kṛṣṇa says:

Do this, and your security is guaranteed.

If you dwell constantly in God in this manner, if your own awareness, attention, consciousness, mind, *citta* is directed in this manner constantly, then your security is guaranteed. In other words, if you realise that God is omniscient and omnipresent and omnipotent, why will you desire anything? And will you be afraid of losing anything that you have? Knowing that he is here, he knows everything and he can do everything, is supreme security. In that state, if your limbs fall away, that is precisely what is needed. He knows best. That surrender happens when all that we have discussed so far becomes a realisation.

Occasionally we may have a glimpse of this truth, but it is not easy to sustain this awareness, because our own wrong thinking and wrong upbringing stand in the way. We have been brought up from babyhood to regard **this** as **mine** – 'I must protect it – and I must have **that** also. The more I have the better it is, the more secure I will be.' It is not easy suddenly to realise that God is omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent and that even without praying for what you need, it is provided. Occasionally one may get into this realisation, but it is soon lost because of what they call *saṃskārā* and *vāsanā*. Hence Kṛṣṇa, whose approach is always comprehensive, suggests that if you find it difficult to live in this realisation all the time:

Whatever thou doest, whatever thou eatest, whatever thou offereth in sacrifice, whatever thou givest, whatever thou practiseth as austerity, O Arjuna, do it as an offering to me.

(9:27)

Whatever you do, whether you regard that action as righteous or unrighteous, good or evil, know that this action arises in God, so it is offered unto God. Even the offerer is God, but since you have in this *bhakti yoga* a sense of duality, whatever you do, offer it to God. As you go on offering all these at the feet of this omnipresent being, gradually you will grow in this tiny little trick of pushing this ego away.

On the one hand you are trying to link yourself up with God all the time; on the other hand saṁskārā also have their own play. But gradually the good saṁskārā grow stronger and the other saṁskārās get weaker. You are moving towards the light with faltering steps.

Soon he becomes righteous and attains to eternal peace, O Arjuna, know thou for certain that my devotee is never destroyed.

(9:31)

Once you turn towards the light, darkness is dispelled.

How much more then the holy brāhmāna and devoted royal saints! Having obtained this impermanent and misery-ridden world, do thou worship me.

(9:33)

Fix thy mind on me (saturate the mind with me); be devoted to me; sacrifice unto (work for) me; bow down to me; having thus united thy whole self with me, taking me as thy supreme goal, thou shalt come unto me.

(9:34)

Therefore try with all your being to resort to or to be devoted to God.

SEE GOD IN ALL

The all is something which cannot be intellectually understood. All is the totality. The totality is not a conglomeration of the several; unity is not assembled diversity. But, but what? So, the elaboration of the teaching becomes necessary. God is all, God is everything – not every **thing**, but **everything**. As Gurudev used to say: “God is the all in all.” That is what is meant by the word ‘omnipresent’. Till one is established in perfect moral conduct, till one’s heart is pure and the mind is unagitated by love and hate, desire and aversion, it is not possible to realise the truth that ‘God is all in all’. The heart must be pure and the mind uncluttered and unagitated. The central teaching of the Bhagavad Gītā is to be able to see that the entire universe is pervaded by the omnipresent omniscience, and the universe of diversity is the manifestation of the omnipotence of the omnipresent omniscience.

God fills the entire universe inside out. One may think that it is clear in a classroom or meditation room, but in what is called ‘real life’ it is not clear at all. If you fall into the error of regarding what is socially unacceptable or considered evil as also part of the manifestation of God, then it is possible that you fall into the same trap. Once you are trapped you are out of God-consciousness.

How to realise this, not merely to speak or think of it? In order to do that one has to experience the presence of God. As a further aid to the understanding of this truth, and as a sort of restraint to us against the wrong application of these sublime truths, in the tenth chapter Kṛṣṇa gives us a list of vibhūtī or special manifestations. Vibhūtī is that which reminds you of the truth. Gurudev Sivananda was very fond of this whole chapter, for the simple reason that it enables you to ascend the ladder of God-consciousness

without missing out on anything and without merely assuming that you are God-conscious. (How he actually lived this is described in ‘Sivananda Yoga’.)

That which is called omnipresent God is also the guru and it is also the self. In the guru this omnipresence is unveiled, in the disciple it is veiled. Once the veil is removed, instantly you see that these three (God, guru, disciple) which were regarded as three are exactly the same.

Neither the hosts of the gods nor the great sages know my origin. (Even the maharṣī do not know me in essence,) because they came after me. I am their creator.

(10:2)

Your own physiological faculties are considered to be presided over by the great sages. In other words, the intellectual faculties are not ‘mine’. They are the sage’s, the maharṣī’s, but even they are incapable of directly perceiving the reality. Once you are freed from the idea ‘This is my mind, this is my intellect, this is my buddhi’, then God’s light can be reflected even in your intellectual faculties. The light of God is directly reflected in the buddhi of the guru; that is why he is able to teach. His buddhi and his intellect are not considered to be ‘mine’ (that is, his personal property), they are direct reflections of God. They can see but they **also** do not know the totality of God. They can have a vision or a glimpse of God, they cannot know the totality of God. And God is nothing but totality. Again a tremendous puzzle. You can look outside the window and see the sky but you can never see the total sky. You can go down and sip Gaṅgā water but you can never drink the whole of Gaṅgā’s water. How would you describe the phenomenon of taking a little bit of Gaṅgā water in your palm and sipping it, feeling quite satisfied that you have drunk Gaṅgā water? That is called vibhūti.

Intellect, wisdom, non-delusion, forgiveness, truth, self-restraint, calmness, happiness, pain, existence or birth, non-existence or death, fear and also fearlessness, non-injury, equanimity, contentment, austerity, beneficence, fame, ill-fame – these different kinds of natures of beings arise from me alone.

(10:4, 5)

All these opposites arise in God, in that one – not in ‘me’. Can that be understood? It is not easy to grasp – but one who lived in that understanding was Swami Sivananda. If there was great joy he welcomed it – if there was great sorrow he welcomed that also – that is also from God.

Till you realise that all experiences arise **in** God and **because** of him, you have not really and truly entered into the spirit of the teaching of the vibhūti yoga; till then look for that God-contact in the special manifestations that are mentioned in this chapter – like the Himālayā, the Gaṅgā – so that when you look at these you train your mind to think of God. By practising this vibhūti yoga, by drawing closer and closer to this omnipresence, you can be permanently ‘hooked on’ to God. This is not a mere dry, intellectual pastime, but one which you love with all your heart and soul.

Suddenly you realise that even though you are trying to see God in all, somehow the mind keeps what is called ‘yourself’ as something distinct and separate from this omnipresence. ‘I see God in all’ – even that excludes yourself. You are the seer, the observer and so on. Can **that** division disappear? By what kind of self-effort does the self get eliminated? Do you understand the beauty of the question? If you do all sorts of exercises your limbs grow stronger, so the more you exert yourself, the more adamant will the ego become. (Therefore Gurudev used to say that the saṁnyās abhimān or the egoism of a saṁnyāsi is terrible. It is accepted, adored by people, therefore there is no challenge and it is very difficult to break it.)

So, you can go up to where you learn to see God in all, where you learn to talk about God all the time with your peers, friends and comrades, but the self that experiences all this cannot annihilate itself. It can come to the end of its tether and begin to wonder “If all this is God, who am I?”

If at that point you think, “Oh I am enlightened”, you are finished. Enlightenment is not an achievement or the end result of self-effort. Self-effort is needed, self-effort is vital, and without self-effort nothing is gained, but self-effort cannot annihilate the self. Enlightenment is a gift of God, it is not the end result of any effort put forth by a sincere seeker. Knocking is important, but the key is with the other person. Gurudev said, very beautifully: “Ignorance knocked at the door, wisdom opened the door, and ignorance was no more. Darkness knocked at the door, light opened the door, and darkness was no more.” That might be what they call God-realisation.

When the buddhi becomes totally absorbed in God there is nobody to stand up and say: “I have seen God.” It is not a matter of you deserve or you demand, but it is granted by pure grace, pure divine compassion.

Out of mere compassion for them, I, dwelling within their self, destroy the darkness born of ignorance by the luminous lamp of knowledge.

(10:11)

When you think you deserve it, you least deserve it. When you deserve it, it may be granted unto you. You may not even know, because the moment that door is open **you** cease to be. The way in which vibhūti yoga is to be practised is described in great detail, but the long and the short of it is given in verse twenty.

I am the self, O Arjuna, seated in the hearts of all beings; I am the beginning, the middle and also the end of all beings.

(10:20)

What is this self? When you enquire into this do you recognise that you regard this self **itself** as some kind of an object? In order to understand what this means, one has to cultivate God-consciousness, which is to be able to see God in all.

When this feeling of the presence of God is generated again and again, your whole being becomes saturated with it and that is the beginning of vibhūti yoga.

FROM DIVISION TO DIVINE VISION

The basic problem in the practice of vibhūti yoga is: are we aware of the difference between seeing inwardly and thinking? Otherwise one can live in a fool's paradise. If you are sincere, serious and earnest, and if you are fully aware of what is happening within you, you realise a fantastic truth: that you still have a consciousness that you are different from this world; there is no realisation that "whatever I am, the whole of me is part of this universe." When you talk of the world you are always talking about something outside of you – you, meaning the skin. You realise that the world outside responds and corresponds to the state of awareness you are in. When your awareness is of yourself as the body, the world outside looks like a body, a physical, material universe. So what you see outside is directly related to the state of awareness in which you are in at the moment.

Happiness, unhappiness, fear, fearlessness, arise from God, have their origin in him, so that whenever you are afraid, you look within. The origin of this fear itself is God; when you feel fearlessness, the origin of this fearlessness is God; when you think that you or someone else is intelligent, wise – that wisdom arises in him....So all your faculties have God as the basis.

In all beings I am desire unopposed to dharma.

(7:11)

In some translations you might find 'I am lust' – so even this thing called desire, craving or lust which is considered to be unspiritual, arises in God. When the mind, the intelligence, the awareness recognise that all these have God as their source, they do not conflict with the divine will. In his last prayer, the great warrior, sage Bhīṣma, declares: "O God, in order to sustain this universe of becoming (birth and death) you yourself manifest as lust in the human heart." He who recognises this does not **entertain** lust. It is not I who generate this emotion, the emotion comes from him. That is an extremely delicate and beautiful truth which has to be handled with extreme care. First find the root of your own faculties and emotions, and the source of this universe, and only then will you learn to recognise that there is correspondence in all this. Whatever be the state of awareness you are in, that is what is reflected outside. If your state of awareness is gross, you see a gross universe; if your state of awareness is a bit more refined, you see the whole universe sustained by subtle forces; if you rise to another state of awareness you realise that there is nothing but God. When that prevails, only then will you recognise the whole universe as a manifestation of God.

I exist, supporting this whole world by one part of myself.

(10:42)

It is only when one becomes immediately conscious of this that one develops true love of God and humility at the same time.

Arjuna, who was not only a disciple but a great personal friend and relative of Kṛṣṇa, must have heard of this concept of having a vision of God. "If you are such a fantastic being and you say that the sun and moon are your manifestations and you are the cosmic being who pervades the entire universe, what a marvellous thing it would be to have a look at you like that", and half pleadingly and half seriously Arjuna prays:

If thou, O Lord, thinkest it possible for me to see it, do thou then, O Lord of the yogī, show me thy imperishable self.

(11:4)

The rest of the eleventh chapter is a description of what Arjuna saw, and the dialogue that took place between Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa.

Right in the beginning Kṛṣṇa says:

With these physical eyes you cannot see anything but physical forms.

(11:8)

There is an implied teaching here which should not go unnoticed: with these physical eyes you cannot see God. Can we translate that also to mean that what you see with your physical eyes is God seen through physical eyes, and therefore it appears as the world? Otherwise the expression: ‘God is omnipresent’ is useless. You are struggling again with something which you want to eliminate. You think that there is something other than God, something non-god which has to be eliminated in order to be able to see God. By doing that you are **creating** the non-god. You are looking at God with your physical eyes and therefore this very God appears to you as the physical universe. You are looking at the world through your mind tainted, polluted, perverted by thoughts about love and hate, and therefore you find things to love, and things to hate. Right and wrong are instantly related to love and hate. What you love is always right. What you hate is always wrong. The person you love is always right. The person you dislike is always wrong; even if that person does something good, you think it is by chance – he really did not mean to do it.

I give thee the divine eye; behold my lordly yoga.

(11:8)

“Therefore,” says Kṛṣṇa, “I will bestow upon you divine insight with which alone you can see God in all and all in God. Through this you can perceive the cosmic being.” Gurudev’s own cosmic vision is described in several places in his writings where he talks about how it grew in him right from his childhood, seeking to break down barriers built by the human mind – caste barriers, colour barriers, social barriers and so on – till he could reach a state when the one who almost murdered him could be seen as a manifestation of God. It is an extraordinarily beautiful state. When your awareness is divine, when your vision is divine, you cannot see any evil anywhere. And it is only that divine vision which sees God. Physical eyes do not have to change their composition, but when that which sees – the seer – is jñāna (wisdom), then you will see Brahman alone everywhere. There is a very inspiring poem which Kṛṣṇa dwells there, you will see everything as Kṛṣṇa only!

So it is a two-way traffic. If the awareness is heightened, then the perception is also altered. Till **this** happens, **that** will not happen. This is the catch, and also the safety catch, so we do not bluff ourselves and think that we are in a state of God-consciousness, that everything is God. Everything is God, but you are not God-conscious, therefore you are only **thinking** you are seeing God. **Seeing** God is a different story.

COSMIC VISION

We always try to put the cart before the horse. Our problem always arises from that. Therefore the teaching concerning cosmic vision and so on seems to be un-understandable and many of the problems of the world also seem to be totally incomprehensible. How can God create such a world in which there is so much of suffering and sorrow? Does he **want** this? Only if you have seen God (as the popular saying goes) can you find an answer to these questions. Only when the heart is pure can it be elevated to an awareness that can become aware of God, of the divine presence. Once that has been achieved it is possible to know what God is and why all these things take place, to know what is right and what is wrong. So, first you conform, in a manner of speaking, to the social norms to ethical and moral principles and so on. Unless you do that, your ego will be very active and very gross, unable to comprehend the subtle truth concerning the existence of the universe as a manifestation of God, as nothing but God.

Having seen the colossal cosmic form of God, Arjuna was frightened. It was Kṛṣṇa's own grace that enabled him to see (or experience) the cosmic form, and yet he was frightened. If the heart is not pure and the ego has not been thoroughly thinned out and transparent, then spiritual experiences can even be frightening. It is like death – even to discipline the ego is death. Unless you are prepared to die, it is not possible for these truths to be comprehended.

What is the cosmic vision described here in the eleventh chapter of the Bhagavad Gītā? Let us take just this one verse:

Arjuna said: I see all the gods, O God, in thy body, and also the hosts of various classes of beings, Brahmā, the Lord seated on the lotus, all the sages and the celestial serpents.

(11:15)

Does it mean that he is having a form of hallucination? I am not entirely dismissing that possibility. Books on astronomy often refer to a cluster of what you call stars which, when connected together, give the appearance of the constellation, a lion's head, ram's head and so on. Is it possible that that cluster of stars is imagined by the astronomer to resemble a lion's head, or is it really a lion's head, which you and I see as a mere cluster of stars? Who is to tell? So, it is quite possible that we are part of this cosmic body of God. It is quite possible that you and I are part of just one small cell in the body of the one huge deva called Viṣṇu. Your own body consists of three thousand billion cells. What sort of idea does one cell have of your whole body? Unimaginable!

Who is it that is seeing this cosmic form? The description goes on that Arjuna himself is seen in this cosmic form, just as you in your dream create all sorts of people and you yourself seem to be present in the dream, experiencing various relationships with the dream creations. How can you be your own object of perception? What is that cosmic vision? And yet there is a sense of I-ness. 'I' am. 'I' am experiencing all this. It is nearly impossible to answer this question.

In this context it is quite possible that a fragment of the totality is aware of an enormously huge fragment of the totality (or the totality is aware of an enormous fragment of the totality). Some awareness of God arises in your heart and it is aware of a

fragment of the totality – in other words, God is aware of his own total manifestation. It cannot be an experience ‘of the totality’ since you, the experiencer, still seem to be standing outside of it. Therefore it is called a *vṛtti*. Though it is of cosmic proportion, it is still a *vṛtti* that arises in that pure awareness within you. It is still a state, a fragment. For just one brief moment there is the experience of a fragment of the totality, and the experience is experienced by what is nearly the totality itself – God himself! Only God can realise himself, not you and I.

What is described here is the ego in its penultimate state. It is not completely dead, but gasping for the last time. Once this breathing ends, it concludes. But in the case of Arjuna it does not end, he comes back, saying: “Oh, I am afraid. I am frightened even to look at this.”

All the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, with the hosts of kings of the earth, Bhīṣma, Droṇa and Karna, with the chief among our warriors, they hurriedly enter into thy mouths with terrible teeth and fearful to behold. Some are found sticking in the gaps between the teeth with their heads crushed to powder. Verily, just as many torrents of rivers flow towards the ocean, even so these heroes in the world of men enter thy flaming mouths. As moths hurriedly rush into a blazing fire for their own destruction, so also these creatures hurriedly rush into thy mouths for their own destruction.

(11:26-29)

Arjuna, as Arjuna, has not been completely effaced or merged in the cosmic being. He still seems to stand aside.

The war has not yet started and yet Arjuna sees future events as if they are present. This is another very great puzzle. How is it possible for someone to see into the future and foretell precisely what is going to happen? And, if the future is so definitely fixed and what is to happen must inevitably happen, then what on earth are we doing here? Are we then totally mechanical beings whose behaviour is absolutely predetermined? That does not seem to make any sense at all. In which case, why do these prophets go and warn someone not to do something, as if destiny could be altered? It is a very serious problem which cannot be conclusively resolved unless we discover the source of the problem within ourselves – the ego interference in life.

You do not know what your destiny is. Certain things are predetermined and certain things are left to you. Which is which – it is not possible for the human mind to determine. Therefore Kṛṣṇa says: “Do what is appropriate at the moment and leave the rest in the hands of God.”

I am the mighty world-destroying time, now engaged in destroying the worlds. Even without thee, none of the warriors arrayed in the hostile armies shall live.

(11:32)

Beautiful. Kṛṣṇa says: “The thing that you are afraid of is God. How can you be afraid of God when you love God?” The Lord himself is time. In time things are born, in time things exist, in time they dissolve. Time is also incomprehensible because it is divine.

Your mind divides it into the past, present and future but it is indivisible into past, present and future. You cannot divide time; you cannot divide space. Here one is reminded of the central teaching of Buddha, that everything that has a beginning must have an end – that is the divine law.

Only when a disciplined and pure heart understands this can the problems concerning our lives – what to do, what not to do, what is my duty here, what is appropriate that I should do now – also be clearly seen. After resuming his usual form as Arjuna's friend, Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna:

This is an extraordinary experience that was granted to you by me out of pure love and affection just because you are my friend. (*Means, you do not deserve it!*) I see that even though you are my friend, you are still frightened.

(11:47)

I think there is a great message in that which should not be lost sight of: that the person who desires God probably does not deserve God – desire for God is desire! So when you hear the expression 'one should desire God' it merely means one should desire nothing else. It does not mean that you should go on craving for God and bashing your head against a stone wall. It is the ego that does that, and God, being beyond ego, is aware of what the ego is doing. Just as the ego clamours for worldly attainments, achievements and possessions, it also clamours for a thing called God-vision.

But, by single-minded devotion can I, of this form, be known and seen in reality and also entered into, O Arjuna.

(11:54)

You cannot attain this vision by whatever you do or however much you may aspire. When you grow in love of God, in total devotion – when the heart loves nothing else, sees nothing else, is aware of nothing else – it is only then that the heart can recognise the divine presence in all. It is then that you enter into that divine presence and feel the divine presence everywhere.

He who does all actions for me, who looks upon me as the supreme, who is devoted to me, who is free from attachment, who bears enmity towards no creature, comes to me, O Arjuna.

(11:55)

When you have not entered into this intimate love relationship with God, regard yourself as an instrument in his hands. Whatever you do, do it for his sake. Let God be your only motivation in life. You are living only for God, for God-realisation. God, as time, will take everything away. Everything that has a beginning must have an end, so do not get attached to any of these. But remain devoted forever to that which is permanent, eternal – God. Ensure that in your heart there is no hate for any being whatsoever.

One who lives in that fashion, totally devoted to God, dwells in God and suddenly realises that it has always been so, he has never been away.

GLIMPSE OF GOD-LOVE

The only person who is aware constantly that 'I exist' is yourself. You do not know what that 'yourself' is, but you think it is the body or the personality. So, even when you are not aware of your existence, 'I' exists, 'I' is the sole reality (more or less).

What is known as this 'I am' is not what you regard as 'me'. 'I am' is a fact of existence but 'me' is nothing but a conglomeration of memory. Where there is no memory the 'me' does not exist, as in the case of the enlightened man. Though his senses are very keen he lives in this world as if he is blind, deaf and dumb. His actions do not spring from memory. Only when all memory has been suspended does one have the sort of cosmic vision that is described in the eleventh chapter.

I know not the four quarters, nor do I find peace. Have mercy, O Lord of the gods, O abode of the universe.

(11:25)

'I do not know which is east, which is west.' Only the sense of 'I am' is there. What is of consequence to the wise person is: how does this 'me' arise? The beginning of conflict is the arising of the idea, 'I am different from you'. If you investigate this problem thoroughly you realise that once this dualistic idea has arisen it seems to spread and envelop nearly everything, so that eventually you feel 'I am different, distinct and separate from the totality, from God, and God seems to exist only outside us. Therefore we fear God, feeling: 'God will punish me, God will reward me, God will deal with me.' What arrogance! If you have a cosmic vision, in that cosmic vision you find you are almost nothing. You and I are totally non-existent as independent personalities.

How to reach this cosmic vision? By not considering ourselves as something independent. This must happen simultaneously at least at three levels. (That is what is called yoga, integration.) One: the I-me level. Within each one of us there seems to be some kind of an inner conflict between thinking, feeling and living. When this inner conflict is there, your emotions lead you in one way, your mind leads you in another direction, and life is full of fear. So yoga is, at first, integration of these three: thought, emotion and life. So first there is the integration of 'I' and 'me'. Secondly: there is the next integration: 'I' and 'you' – you meaning neighbour or anybody. The third integration is of 'I' and 'he' – he meaning God or **that**.

Unless this integration is actually achieved one does not have the cosmic vision, and unless one has the cosmic vision one cannot have this total integration either. So the cosmic vision or integration arises simultaneously with the disintegration of the 'me'. So the penultimate step is not for 'me' to take. Only he who practises total bhakti obtains this cosmic vision.

But, by single-minded devotion can I, of this form, be known and seen in reality and also entered into, O Arjuna.

(11:54)

In the beginning bhakti involves a sense of duality. You are aware right now that you are independent of the totality, that when you are hungry, **you** are hungry, not another person. This is where we start. From there you look out and gradually begin to

wonder...‘The Himālayā, the Gaṅgā, the Aśvattha tree, the images of God, a strong man, a beautiful face, a wealthy man, prosperous person, a famous person – I did not create these – all that is somehow a manifestation of God.’ Then slowly the faultfinding nature drops away, and when that goes you begin to realise that there is something happening within you which is not the ego. Then there is a recognition of the presence of God in and through your own faculties. As this goes on, gradually you have a wonderful feeling, which is described in the twelfth chapter:

Those who, fixing their mind on me, worship me, ever steadfast and endowed with supreme faith, these are the best in yoga in my opinion.

(12:2)

Realise that it is impossible to isolate yourself from the omnipresence. So what do you do now? “Push yourself into me”, he says. Gradually your awareness expands and then you have a feeling that God is everywhere. It is not ‘he is in me’, but ‘I am in him’. Then whatever you see, whoever you see is all God and God only. To understand that, one has to live with a great master like Gurudev and see how he handled this problem. Gurudev could become angry – supreme love could also manifest annoyance. Sage Vasiṣṭha calls such a person a mahātyāgi, whose nature cannot be understood by the little human intelligence or intellect.

Having restrained all the senses, even-minded, everywhere intent on the welfare of all beings – verily they also come unto me only.

(12:4)

What is the nature of that person who, as it were, has entered his consciousness in this cosmic being? His senses are under control. The ‘me’ has already been entered into God, so that he is virtuous without the need for a carrot and a stick, without threat or temptation, without fear. He is unafraid and yet he is pure. Therefore this purity is natural.

This supreme devotee, or the bhakta, is totally involved in the welfare of all beings. Can you be really and sincerely devoted to the welfare of all beings? Is it possible for you even to conceive of a type of behaviour which is conducive to the welfare of all beings? Go on doing whatever good you want to do, and as you keep on contemplating this you realise that you cannot do this, only God can. Suddenly one day, like a bolt from the blue, you realise that one thing can be done and that is that any action that arises in the ‘me’ can be put away. Any action that ‘I’ do **must** be partial. The only time that you do not offend anybody at all, and perhaps you promote the welfare of all beings, is when you are fast asleep. Why is it so? Because you are totally unconscious of self or ego. Is it possible to live such a life?

You can do all this, but as long as the body functions there is a mind that is related to the body. Awareness or consciousness, though cosmic, is somehow related to the body as long as it lasts, and that relation of the consciousness or awareness with the body is called mind. So as long as the body lasts, whatever be the state of the inner awakening (the awakening of the intelligence) it is still not out of the woods. The ‘me’ is still there. You are still not out of this saṁsāra.

When you are completely and totally dedicated to God, till the end of this physical existence or till the end of the personality, then it is up to God to grant you total freedom. Till the end be careful – any time it is possible to slip. Mokṣa is not your right, it is not the ego's prerogative, but is a blessing, a gift, a boon from God.

To knock is your job, to open is His.

One who is devoted to me throughout his life in this manner, him I liberate from saṁsāra.

(12:7)

Only that intelligence that understands this is integrated and totally in love with God.

THE LADDER OF DIVINE LOVE

There is a lovely saying in Tamil that three things help others but do not help themselves: a ladder, a boat and lemon pickles. A fourth can be added – a teacher! One should understand the catalytic purpose of a ladder, neither ignore it nor hang on to it.

Āsana, prāṇāyama, meditation, concentration, pūjā, japa, kīrtan, svādhyāya and satsaṅg are spiritual practices (sādhana), a ladder – very useful, tremendously important, unwise to ignore. They become abhyāsa yoga as long as God is your only goal. They are of great value if they are spiritually orientated. If remembrance of God is not there, the whole thing is a wash-out. If your intentions and your goal are not spiritual, however much your practices may appear to be spiritual on the surface, they are only pretension.

If the sādhana is directed towards enlightenment you should at least be able to recognise that though you want God-realisation and have been doing all this to attain it, God-realisation is still not there – your sādhana is nothing to boast about. (That is where your ego is cut to size.) So, as a sincere spiritual seeker you must at least recognise that though you have been practising this sādhana regularly, sincerely and seriously, you are still full of doubts, problems and difficulties which you create for yourself (and you experience) – and probably create for others also. There is disharmony between others and you, produced by you – not by the others. So instead of worrying about why God created the world, the more sensible question could be 'Why did I come into being at all?'

Spiritual practice must have as its goal that which is beautifully stated in the Bhagavad Gītā:

Fix thy mind on me only, thy intellect in me, thou shalt no doubt live in me alone hereafter.

(12:8)

Place your mind in God. Then you will dwell in him, because you have been swallowed by him.

If thou art unable to fix thy mind steadily on me, then by the yoga of constant practice do thou seek to reach me, O Arjuna.

(12:9)

It is a very moving verse. It is as if Kṛṣṇa comes down a little bit on this ladder that we are visualising and pleads: “If you are unable to do this (if there is still a sense of duality that you are different from God, and therefore the rest of creation), then by abhyāsa yoga strive again and again to reach me.”

More often than not we forget the last part of this verse. Why am I doing all this? Not in order to cultivate and strengthen the ego, but in order to attain God. If this is not forgotten even for a single split second, then all your abhyāsa becomes meaningful. There is no condemnation of routine religious practices. If some sort of spiritual routine (sādhana) helps you, please go on – but not mechanically, without understanding why you are doing it.

In the eighth chapter there is an expression which suggests: ‘If at the time you leave this body your consciousness is of God, you become God; of a human being, you become a human being; of an animal, you become an animal.’ That is because you have been thinking about **that** constantly. Supposing you have been behaving mechanically all your life – you will be born as a machine next birth! Your bhava, your inner being, is saturated with this machine mentality. (Maybe you will come back as a tape-recorder in an ashram. You will be filled with interesting discourses – which, like this ladder, raft and schoolmaster – will be of great inspiration to everybody except you!) Whatever you do that is good and humanitarian is greatly appreciated by others. But some time or the other you should also remember **why** you are doing all that.

Abhyāsa yoga here covers everything – bhakti yoga, karmā yoga and haṭha yoga practices, meditation, prāṇāyama, āsana. In and through all that, you are trying to **remember** God. Do you know what ‘remember’ is? These limbs are the members of ‘my body’. Re-member means that somehow the wrist was cut off and some nice surgeon put it back again. A member was cut off and it was re-membered! So what is it to remember God? It is not possible to explain. There was a certain unity which was somehow dismembered by the mind. Once the problem of the mind is overcome, then the dismemberment is abolished and you remember God.

When you take diagonal corners of a handkerchief you see that ‘this is one end of a handkerchief and that is the other end’. There are two ends. If you fold it the usual way, you see the handkerchief alone. It does not have any ends, it is just one handkerchief. It is your mind that created a division in which there is no division. Look again and you see two ends. Even if you are enlightened you will still see that, but you are not bluffed or deceived or deluded by it. Enlightenment merely means that. Nothing need be altered in the world.

It is the mind that creates a division. When you see this, when this becomes a living truth to you, it seems as if suddenly you wake up and your mind enters into God – only to realise that it has always been there! Nothing that does not exist can ever come into being. Kṛṣṇa reminded us of this in the second chapter. This is the central message which should not be lost sight of.

Does enlightenment mean that you will be free from all this confusion, sorrow, sin and so on? Perhaps all this may be free from you (the ego)! Is that not a better idea? When the me has gone, the oneness that already exists is remembered. That is called bhakti, that is called love. But unfortunately you blink again and see that the handkerchief has

two ends. One is definitely the left and the other is the right end. Then you practise your sādhana again, to remind yourself – or to **re**-member the truth.

What is known as the mind is itself the omnipresent omniscience. Somehow or other we assume that it is ‘my’ mind. It is not ‘**my**’ mind. ‘Me’ is itself the creation of this mind. God is not in need of ‘**my**’ love – and as long as there is a sense of separation, there **is** no love! Love is the direct experience of the unity that already exists. If that is not there, there is no love. Is it possible to constantly remember that whatever action flows in this universe from what is called ‘me’, arises not in ‘me’ but in God, in this omnipresent omnipotence. You cannot create a blade of grass, you can cut it; you cannot create a flower, you can cut it and offer it to God, you cannot create a fruit, you can eat it. You cannot create yourself. You cannot produce a thought. You cannot even (what is ‘called’) control the mind and ensure that only good thoughts arise, and no bad thoughts. Suddenly you realise that the ‘me’ is itself a creature of the mind, that ‘I am not capable of anything’ and that all actions performed by whomever, arise in God, in this omnipresent omnipotence. Here the abhyāsa as sādhana is abandoned.

‘I’, being a psychological factor, is an imaginary nothing – it is like a shadow which has absolutely no power whatsoever to do anything.

If thou art unable to practise even this abhyāsa yoga, be thou intent on doing actions for my sake; even by doing actions for my sake, thou shalt attain perfection.

(12:10)

Though psychologically you think you are doing or not doing, it is the work of the omnipresent omnipotence. All the śakti belongs to the śākta. You live your life without any problem and without the necessity to drastically change it, and yet lead an enlightened life.

Even this requires some sort of an understanding. Some of us have experienced at some time or the other that with the best of intentions you do what you consider absolutely right and it leads to precisely the opposite results. Therefore Kṛṣṇa says:

If thou art unable to do even this, then, taking refuge in union with me, renounce the fruits of all actions with the self controlled.

(12:11)

‘First do what you have to do, but forget about the results.’ This you can do. So Kṛṣṇa has come down three or four steps to your level. You are not going to practise any sort of spiritual discipline, you cannot realise that it is God who is doing all this, but you can realise that whatever you are doing, your actions may lead to contrary results. So seeing this merely as a fact, stop anticipating anything, expecting any rewards or results. By this abandonment also you will instantly attain peace of mind.

Better indeed is knowledge than practice; than knowledge meditation is better; than meditation the renunciation of fruits of actions. Peace immediately follows renunciation.

(12:12)

If you abandon the fruits of actions you will instantly become peaceful. And when the mind is at peace it will somehow realise that God is the source of all these actions, and therefore you could not determine what action should lead to what result. Then you have ascended one step in the ladder. Then constantly seek to find where all this happened. Who determines it? Who is the controller of life here? Constantly seeking, *abhyāsa*. Then one day by God's grace suddenly the truth is realised.

In the last eight verses of this chapter certain characteristics of the devotee are given in order that we might grow into them, that they might become natural. (Only that which is natural is God's creation. An artificial creation has entertainment value, but no real value.) One should study these eight verses and remember them constantly, and see that as long as all these are not naturally and effortlessly present in you, you are not a devotee of God. That realisation is enough to shatter the ego and to keep the *sādhana* flowing.

He who is free from wants, pure, expert, unconcerned and untroubled, renouncing all undertakings or commencements – he who is thus devoted to me, is dear to me.

(12:16)

Does this mean that the devotee of God does not initiate any action? Ramana Maharshi once commented on this saying that a *jñānī* (who is the same as a *bhakta*) does not egoistically embark upon a project, but responds to the needs of the people around. This is one way of putting it. The other way is to realise that everything happens because of God, because of the divine omnipotence. One who lives in this consciousness, lives in God all the time. That is *bhakti yoga*.

Bhakti yoga is not merely indulging in some sort of *sādhana* **called** *bhakti*, but where a consciousness of duality suddenly merges in a consciousness of non-duality. That is, as the handkerchief is held, you keep seeing the two ends. Suddenly you see the one handkerchief. That alone exists. That is *bhakti*.

THE SUBJECT-OBJECT TANGLE

Bhakti is not a mere pretension or emotionalism. In the thirteenth chapter you have an extremely interesting statement:

My devotee, knowing this, enters into my being.

(13:18)

He who claims to be the devotee of God becomes one with him. There is a deluded feeling of independence from God, (the totality), and that disappears. (All descriptions are infantile, ineffectual attempts at describing what is impossible to describe.) You do not 'become' God, but you will share his nature – your actions will not be **your** actions but **his** actions. Your existence will not be something that is independent of the totality. There will not even be an experience of being independent of the totality. That which never existed ceases to be. A bunch of words which have absolutely no meaning, yet that is the truth.

Thus the field, as well as knowledge and the knowable have been briefly stated.

(13:18)

In this chapter is revealed a tremendously important truth and that falls into what, to our present state of misunderstanding, appears to be three different categories: *kṣetra*, *jñāna*, *jñeyam*. *Kṣetra* means ‘the field’, *jñāna* is highest knowledge, *jñeyam* means the knowable and that which is to be known. What is knowledge is described, what is to be known is described, but who is this knower who knows all this?

The *Bhagavad Gītā* is full of unanswered questions.

When a question is answered in a clear-cut fashion you have destroyed the spirit of enquiry, the only instrument that you have of reaching enlightenment. That insight with which it may be possible to reach this point of enlightenment is snuffed out immediately an answer is given.

There is a very interesting incident in the *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha*. After *Vasiṣṭha* had explained in so many different ways with stories and illustrations, that the world as you experience it is not the truth, he said: “This is all accidental and even that famous law of cause and effect operates because...(b-cause) you think there is a cause, and then you see (c-cause)!” That is the a.b.c. of cause and effect! There may be none. *Rāma* said: “If you and I are both non-existent, then who are you and who are you teaching?” *Vasiṣṭha* remained absolutely silent. *Rāma* taunted: “Why are you silent?” Then *Vasiṣṭha* made a most beautiful statement: “*Rāma*, I did not keep quiet because I could not answer your question, but silence was the only answer.”

Kṛṣṇa says a lot but everything that he says raises a question and does not always provide an answer.

This body, O Arjuna, is called the field; he who knows it is called the knower of the field by those who know of them, i.e., by the sages.

(13:1)

What is ‘this body’? The body of Arjuna, of *Kṛṣṇa* or the (cosmic) body described in the eleventh chapter? Do not ask. You will find out. The word ‘body’ does not merely mean an assembly of physical parts or physiological mechanisms, but the body of anything. Within this thing called physical body there are a million bodies and yet this whole thing is one body – an extension of that is that the society is a body of people, a nation is a body of people, the earth is a body of living beings. What applies to one applies to all.

Do you feel puzzled and mystified? If you are afraid of confusion, you can never discover the truth. A complacent existence – ‘God is there somewhere above the roof and I am alright’, is a living death, That which is alive and vigorous is worried, ‘What on earth is this body which is talked about here?’ He who knows this, is the knower, the *kṣetrajña* – knower in the sense that he knows the *kṣetra*, the field.

In the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka upaniṣad*, *Yājñavalkya* is asked: “When the sun is set and the stars are not seen and there is no light and nobody makes any noise, what is the light in which you function?” That is the light of the *ātmā*! It is so simple, so clear and yet so

impossible! That, in this body, which knows from moment to moment that ‘this is my right hand, this is my left hand, I am sitting on my bottom, I am hungry, I am thirsty, I am drowsy’ is kṣetrajñā.

What the field is and of what nature, what are its modifications, and whence it is and also who he is and what his powers are – hear all that from me in brief.

(13:3)

Instead of using the words ‘field’ and ‘the knower of the field’ one can use the words ‘object’ and ‘subject’. The body is an object in relation to the subject that is aware of the body. If you contemplate upon this, with one stroke you have worked out a remarkable miracle – something has been disconnected from the body. When you directly realise that ‘I am aware of the body’ as ‘I am aware of this shirt’, you realise that the body is an object.

The great elements, egoism, intellect and also the unmanifested nature, the ten senses and one (mind) and the five objects of the sense,

(13:5)

Desire, hatred, pleasure, pain, the power that holds the elements together, intelligence, fortitude – the field has thus been briefly described with its modifications.

(13:6)

Hope, desire, love, hate, happiness and unhappiness are all the objects. Something else is aware of all these. All this is the field or object, and there is a subject. Who is the subject? The same subject/object are referred to differently in verse twenty.

Here the object is called prakṛti.

In the production of the effect and the cause, the nature is said to be the cause; in the experience of pleasure and pain, the soul is said to be the cause.

(13:20)

Things happen in this universe and those happenings are brought about by different agencies. This is a most difficult point to understand because of our habit of using the mind and the intellect to understand this. You are writing with that pen. Writing is the action, pen (or your hand) is the instrument. There is certainly an awareness of writing. Here, even that is brought into the field of object. The paper is an object, pen is an object, the arm is an object, but even that which thinks ‘I am writing’ (ahaṁkāra) is an object. If you understand that you are enlightened!

Can you get rid of that ahaṁkāra? If you do, who is going to write? It is part of nature (prakṛti). Can you get rid of your nature? What does it mean? Does the tree suddenly become something else? A tree is a tree – that is its nature. It stands there gloriously without any bother, worry, anxiety or fear. The eyes see, the ears hear, that is natural – but whose nature? Does my nature belong to memory or the ‘me’? Kṛṣṇa says: “No”; it looks like that, but it is not so.

The soul seated in nature experiences the qualities born of nature; attachment to the qualities is the cause of his birth in good and evil wombs.

(13:21)

There is consciousness within you. If that consciousness was not there, then the nature would not operate. In a manner of speaking, it is the consciousness that becomes aware of the diverse experiences and expressions, and that consciousness is uninvolved in those expressions and experiences – but you think you are involved.

Attachment to the qualities is the cause of his birth in good and evil wombs.

(13:21)

Though it is the power in the eye, the faculty of seeing, that sees, you cannot avoid entertaining the idea that ‘I see’ however much you struggle. Why is it so? Because of habit. Birth after birth you have done this. It is merely a habit.

If somehow you realise this truth directly (not as a teaching or a concept), you realise that the eyes see because of their faculty and the thought ‘I see’ arises because of a bad habit. Suddenly the whole thing ceases. You are no longer caught.

WHAT AN EXPERIENCE!

The universe is not our problem. Our problem is more immediate – the birth of an experience, and the birth of an experience is attended by the same circumstances that attend the birth of the universe.

Wherever a being is born, whether unmoving or moving, know thou, O best of the Bharatā, that it is from the union between the field and its knower.

(13:26)

When the subject becomes aware and experiences the object, (or apparently, not really, comes into contact with the object) it is then that the experience is born. It is a birth of a phenomenon that is going to rule you – your mind, your heart, your whole life. Whether an experience is one of pleasure or pain, it is an experience, and the birth of an experience being repeated, forms a habit which you are trapped in for the rest of your life.

The moment there is a subject there is an object, because the subject is subject only in relation to the object and the object is object only in relation to the subject. Neither of them is independently true. Truth is between the two. When you say: “I am aware of your presence”, the subject and the object arise at the same time. (So, in the handkerchief analogy, you cannot have a handkerchief with only one end. It must have two ends. If you are talking of ends it has two ends, if you are talking of the handkerchief, it is one.)

If I ask you: “Do you think ‘I am’?” your answer is “Yes, **you are**.” So ‘I am’ is equal to ‘you are’, because we are still referring to the same thing. This itself is called ‘I am’ and also ‘you are’. The two are exactly the same. It is awareness which makes this possible,

and that awareness is like the whole handkerchief in which there is neither 'east' nor 'west'. To the awareness we are merely two poles, two ends, indivisibly one forever. It is not possible to understand it because the understander creates a thing called an 'object of understanding'. Thus, being always a totality, experience cannot be divided.

There is something very interesting here. Suppose you shake someone's hand in great friendship. In you there arises an experience of joy, but at the very same time there is an experience in the other person. The object of your experience has its **own** experience, it is the subject of that experience. To that you are an object. Suddenly you realise: 'There is an experience. One side of it is me and one side of it is you'. That is called 'witness-consciousness'. Witness-consciousness is not merely repeating "I am not the body. I am the witness of this body" – you say that because you are so inextricably tied to 'I am the body' idea, that it is not possible to get rid of it so easily.

When does 'a' desk become 'my' desk? When does 'a' cap become 'my' cap? If this understanding can really arise in you then the problem of 'mineness' has been solved. Then it is possible to cultivate the habit of seeing the world as it **is** without relating it to oneself. This is part of the witness-consciousness process.

There is still this fundamental problem of 'I am the body'. It is difficult because the intelligence with which you enquire into the nature of this relationship called 'I and mine' itself arose out of this habit pattern, it is a product of the illusion that 'I am this body'. If you can get rid of the idea 'This is mine – this shawl is mine, this seat is mine', you are a *jīvanmukta*. (If you can get rid of the idea 'I am this body' you are a *videhamukta*. That is a situation that the human mind cannot understand at present because the mind began to function only after the habit pattern was formed.)

What is called witness-consciousness can be developed only to the extent of dealing with 'mineness' – not with the 'I am the body' idea. ('I am not the body' is merely a sentence with no meaning whatsoever. It is the suspicion that you are the body that makes you say that you are not the body!) A first step to witness-consciousness is to become immediately, intensely aware that you are you, I am I, and that 'you are **my** friend' is nonsense. Once you are able to get to that point suddenly you realise that the knower (subject) becomes aware of the field (object), which includes pleasure, pain and so on. All these are the object of the subject.

You are the experiencer, the *puruṣa*, and you are looking at something else which is an experience, an object. Self is the subject and you are constantly seeking for the non-self. Self is *ānanda*, happiness, and you are seeking... what? – must be unhappiness! If the subject is happiness, why is it looking for something else? And, if the subject is unhappiness, whatever it does it will **still** be unhappy. This is another puzzle. I am not giving an answer, merely posing a question. Whatever you are, you are the subject. Whatever you are, the object must have a different characteristic in relation to you. For instance, if you are hungry you need food, because there is an empty space in your stomach which needs to be filled. A full stomach does not need more food. So, when there is a state of fullness, there is no movement at all. Then you become *yogārūḍha*. Once you have reached the fullness you are quiet, silent, maybe inactive also. It is only by understanding this process of apparent contact between subject and object, and therefore the dynamics of experience, that one can free oneself from contact with objects, from the conception of objects, and thereby eventually arrive at the non-

conception of an object – which instantly dissolves the subject as subject! In that awareness there is no subject-object relationship. The subject and object both cease to be, together – but it is not a state of unawareness because awareness being awareness cannot be unaware.

Do thou also know me as the knower of the field in all fields, O Arjuna; knowledge of both the field and the knower of the field is considered by me to be the knowledge.

(13:2)

Intellectually understanding this truth is fragmentary understanding which is not understanding. What is understanding? Kṛṣṇa gives a long list of characteristics of a jñānī (one who knows). Gurudev Swami Sivananda was very fond of these few verses.

Humility, unpretentiousness, non-injury, forgiveness, uprightness, service of the teacher, purity, steadfastness, self-control,

Indifference to the objects of the senses and also absence of egoism, perception of (or reflection on) the evil in birth, death, old age, sickness and pain,

Non-attachment, non-identification of the self with son, wife, home and the rest, and constant even-mindedness on the attainment of the desirable and the undesirable.

Unswerving devotion unto me by the yoga of non-separation, resort to solitary places, distaste for the society of people,

Constancy in knowledge of the self, perception of the end of true knowledge – this is declared to be knowledge, and what is opposed to it is ignorance.

(13:7-11)

When all these qualities are present in you, then it is possible to say that you have jñāna (knowledge). These qualities cannot be cultivated. When you study this list you will realise that cultivating one quality has to be at the expense of another quality. If you are dispassionate and you do not want to get involved with anybody, how are you going to practise this thing called cosmic love? And if you are practising cosmic love and serving everybody, someone says: “You have lost your vairāgya (dispassion).” All these problems arise because we are still intellectualising, conceptualising these qualities which are the characteristics of the enlightened person. To the enlightened person himself, these problems do not arise.

I will declare that which has to be known, knowing which one attains to immortality, the beginningless supreme Brahman, called neither being nor non-being.

With hands and feet everywhere, with eyes, heads and mouths everywhere, with ears everywhere, he exists in the worlds enveloping all.

Shining by the functions of all the senses, yet without the senses; unattached, yet supporting all; devoid of qualities, yet their experiencer,

Without and within all beings, the unmoving and also the moving; because of its subtlety, unknowable; and near and far away is that.

And, undivided, yet he exists as if divided in beings: he is to be known as the supporter of beings: he dissolves and generates all these.

That, the light of all lights, is said to be beyond darkness; knowledge, the knowable and the goal of knowledge, seated in the hearts of all.

(13:12-17)

The supreme beauty of this is that nothing is denied. You realise that the entire universe is the object of this cosmic knower, which is called God. He alone exists and this alone is his prakṛti – an object in your own consciousness. You touch the core of that consciousness and suddenly you realise ‘Even **that** is not mine.’

INSIGHT! NOT OUTSIDE

The Bhagavad Gītā does not demand that the seeker after truth should run away from ‘life’. If that was the intention, this beautiful expression: ‘non-attachment to, or non-psychological dependence upon son, wife, wealth and so on’, found in the thirteenth chapter, would be meaningless. Without having to change your external appearance or your social, political, domestic or civil status, to find this insight is what is referred to as jñāna. So that it applies immediately to your life and mind without waiting for an external change.

Jñāna is best defined as insight – not intellectual or emotional assent or understanding. It is not something that **appeals to you**, because then the ‘me’ (the ego) is still there. Gurudev often pointed out that jñāna is not against reason, but it is not the end product of logic. It is independent of reason, of emotion, of life-style, of social status. It has to be discovered in your very life, because it is the very basis of all experience. That is what gives value to life, that is the very meaning of life, that is the source of life. Without that there is no experience. Insight is not thought-power or intelligence that you can cultivate, nor is it the result of some sort of discipline that you can practise. It is not something which needs to be or **can** be developed, because it is independent of the ‘me’, the ego. It has nothing whatsoever to do with anything that you do.

It demands a certain inner alertness and a certain inner freedom to remain aware in and through all experiences, whether the mind, on re-awakening after the experience, retrospectively calls it pain or pleasure, happiness or unhappiness. At the time of the experience there is no happiness or unhappiness. It is after the experience that the mind wakes up and says: “It is good: let me have it again.” The bliss is gone and memory, the ‘me’, takes over. But whether the ‘me’ arose or did not arise, in and through all these, the content (which is pure awareness) never undergoes any change.

One needs intense awareness to discover this. That awareness is lost sight of the moment a feeling or a misunderstanding arises that **this** comes from **that**. Somebody slaps you on your cheek. It hurts. You call him a rascal. At that moment, if you are alert, you will notice that your pain has gone. Your attention is on that man. So alertness is lost the moment that awareness is directed towards something else. There is a stage in which you can remain aware of what goes on within you, while being aware at the same time of what goes on around you. But in your present state, either you are able to remain

aware of your own experiences or allow the awareness to flow towards the presumed object of the experience.

We are almost all the time caught up in the awareness of the object, so that the experience which arises in consciousness is completely lost sight of. That is why the teachers give you a sort of neutral stimulation, and call it concentration or meditation.

It is possible for one who has learnt the art of meditation to understand it in an extremely simple way. You may concentrate your attention upon the breath or upon a thought. With the help of both of these it is possible to find what the state of your mind or your inner being is when inhalation has stopped and exhalation has not yet begun. Thought comes to an end at this juncture. You can pursue a thought to its own source. It comes to a stop. Before the next thought arises, what is the state of your being? That is consciousness, awareness. It is not an object of awareness, it is awareness. Awareness cannot cease to exist or to remain aware. 'I am' itself is an experience of that pure awareness, which is the content of all our experiences, thoughts and expressions.

Insight is freedom. The moment it leans on something **outside**, it ceases to be **insight**. That insight is, at the same time, virtue of the highest order. In this insight you see that you are not really attached to each other, that there is no attachment. This non-attachment is not one which involves effort or isolation. The enlightened person who is always alone, is never lonely – he is all-one. You had to see Swami Sivananda to understand this. Wherever he was, whatever situation he was in, surrounded by whomever, he was one with the Lord, and therefore he was alone – one with all, al(l)one.

Others also, not knowing thus, worship, having heard of it from others; they too, cross beyond death, regarding what they have heard as the supreme refuge.

(13:25)

Upāsate means to sit near to, draw closer. So hearing this truth again and again, repeatedly, you draw closer and closer to this truth. Your mind and your heart, bit by bit, enter into this truth. Truth enters into your mind and your heart slowly.

Know thou that nature and the spirit are both without beginnings; and modifications and qualities are born of nature.

(13:19)

What is puruṣa, what is prakṛti and what are the guṇā? Puruṣa is like fire. The flame of a candle is fire, but what is fire? It is something which is intangible, it is what is responsible for the flame burning there. Whatever fire is, it fills this flame. If you have a painting of this flame, it will not burn – there is no fire. On account of the presence of that, flame becomes a flame. The same thing when it can be seen and experienced, becomes prakṛti. The puruṣa and the prakṛti are eternally present, eternally together. Though they seem to be two, they are inseparably one. That is, what you see is prakṛti. Unseen and filling the entire thing is the puruṣa.

This flame has three qualities. One, that it is luminous; two, that it is hot; three, that there is some smoke. The smoke is produced by the flame and yet is capable of putting it

out. If you contemplate this, it is shattering! In the light generated by this fire you are able to see – that is *sattva*, luminosity.

The luminosity of a flame is non-different from the flame, it is part of the nature of this flame, it cannot be separated from this flame. Even so, *sattva* cannot be isolated. When your mind is clear and calm, then *sattva* prevails. *Rajas*, which is compared to the heat of the flame, is characterised by restlessness. *Rajas* means restless activity, restlessness, dynamism, dirt, unclarity. In winter a little bit of heat is good; in summer you do not like it; and you have to use heat fairly carefully – otherwise you burn your fingers. *Rajas* is good, without it you cannot function, but that function has to be carefully done in light. *Tamas* is blinding darkness, doubt, dullness, sleep, stupidity, but it is not independent of *prakṛti* and *puruṣa*. This is one of the most beautiful teachings in the *Bhagavad Gītā*.

There is a suggestion that *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* are inevitably inherent in the whole universe. These are the integral parts of objectivity. As long as there are objects and awareness of those objects, these three will last. They belong to the nature of God, not to ‘me’. When in the light of insight this truth is seen, **you** are free. But, the light of insight cannot function if *tamas* is allowed to preponderate. If you accept *tamas* as God’s will, then the insight is gone, and you do not see anything. So in order to kindle this flame of insight within you, you blow away all the smoke, but not because you think smoke is terrible. What you think is terrible is also a part of the divine plan – but if you use that argument to rationalise your own stupidity, you remain stupid. So first blow away that cloud of stupidity from your consciousness. When you become aware you suddenly realise: ‘O God, what I thought was evil is also a part of your nature or *prakṛti*.’

AT THE THRESHOLD

In that insight you realise the interaction between *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*, which gives rise to the so-called creation which is nothing more than the realisation of this consciousness of its own inherent nature.

When the infinite is activated and becomes aware of its own nature, all this infinite variety is formed – including what is called ‘you’, ‘me’, ‘I’. All these millions of ‘I’s are the sprouts in this infinite garden. You arrive at this insight not **through** a technique or a process, but not **without** a technique. Self-realisation is not something which you can pick up from a guru or scripture, but it is not had if you do not have any of these.

It is not very easy to understand this insight because the observer is part of the observation itself! The observer is not independent of the observed until the observation itself becomes the observer, or the fact is realised that observation is the observer, like sleep is the sleeper. There is no being, independent of sleep, who is asleep, who thinks ‘I am asleep’. There is sleep and nothing else. Similarly, can there be an observation without an observer? That is insight, that is *jñāna*. In that *jñāna* there may arise a polarity, but that polarity does not divide this *jñāna*. It is like the two ends of the handkerchief. You cannot cut a handkerchief into two, hoping to get only one end. Merely see it is one handkerchief and there are no two ends. (Still there are two ends if you want to see them as two ends!)

It is important to remain aware of the arising of the idea ‘This is mine’, whether it is related to an external object called the body or to another external object called a good thought, a bad thought, a feeling of happiness or unhappiness, of brilliance or dullness and stupidity, of excitement. Where do they arise? When the attention is focused in this manner, then one is in a state of *pratyāhāra*.

Some, by meditation, behold the self in the self by the self, others by the yoga of action.

(13:24)

It is a very enigmatic statement. How can one see one’s self? You cannot see the self. But when the attention has thus returned to its own source, there is no external flow of attention. There is insight. It is not my insight, it is not your insight. It is insight. Is that the ultimate truth? No. Kṛṣṇa calls it *sattva*.

When through every gate (sense) in this body, the wisdom-light shines, then it may be known that *sattva* is predominant.

(14:11)

What does it mean? There is an insight into all psychological functions. There is nothing concerning the body or the mind that is unclear to you. *Sattva* is fairly close to self-realisation. You are still aware that your mind is calm. If the mind is calm, the ‘me’ looking at the mind and at the calmness is still there. There is still a foolish idea that this is ‘**my**’ calmness, this is ‘**my**’ mind. When you are in some such state of mind, considering yourself a great saint, immediately stand near one of these boisterous children and ask yourself: “Where does my mind end and his mind start? The child is excited and I am peaceful.” Look carefully to see if you can find from where your mind starts. When there is no such division in space, ‘my’ calmness is not ‘my’ calmness. It so happens that in this particular area of this room there is a little bit of calmness for the time being. It may be disturbed in fifteen minutes time. Spiritual glory is useless deception.

Greed, activity, the undertaking of actions, restlessness, longing – these arise when *rajas* is predominant, O Arjuna.

(14:12)

Wait a little bit more, then lust, anger and greed start. That is *rajas*. When there is *tamas* you feel fatigued and sleepy. Kṛṣṇa warns us that all three of these can be fetters. *Sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* are part of this universal nature. What was described as *prakṛti* or *kṣetra* are subject to these three states of being. There is nothing in the entire universe which is totally free from one or the other of the three *guṇā*. If *tamas* was not there at all, a person would not be stupid or foolish – but perhaps he would not be thinking. If *rajas* was totally absent, then there would be no motion, no activity. *Sattva* cannot be completely absent. These three constitute the very substance of creation of every living organism.

Sattva, rajas and tamas – these qualities, O Arjuna, born of the divine nature, bind fast in the body, the embodied, the indestructible.

(14:12)

These three qualities bind the embodied being in the body. And therefore as long as you and I consider that ‘this body is mine’ (or not mine) it is not possible to get out of this clutch, except through grace. As falling asleep is an experience which arises when the ‘me’ comes to an end, possibly this experience of that which is beyond these three guṇā will arrive when the ‘me’ comes to an end. That is purely a matter of grace. So it is possible for you to become completely and totally free of the sense of possession and end all psychological relationship, but it is not so easy to end the relationship to this body and come to the clear understanding that this ‘body is not I’.

Of these, sattva which from its stainlessness, is luminous and healthy, binds by attachment to happiness and by attachment to knowledge, O sinless one.

(14:6)

Even sattva will bind you by an experience of happiness independent of the objects. Still it is an experience and therefore it is fragmented, divided. Any experience that is experienced as if it were separate from the experiencer is fragmented experience and therefore likely to come to an end.

To be devoted to what you regard as jñāna as wisdom, is another contact, another attachment, another bondage. There is one way out of this.

When the seer beholds no agent other than the guṇā and knows that which is higher than them, he attains to my being.

(14:19)

If there is intelligence, what is its source? If there is restlessness, dullness, stupidity, activity, what is the source? Why is it that you can only sleep when sleep comes to you; you can only be active when there is energy in you; you are intelligent, clear and wise only on certain occasions and not on certain other occasions? Obviously because these are beyond ‘me’, the ego. When those states prevail, they manifest their own characteristics which you assume to be ‘mine’.

All these activities, whether they are called sāttvikā, rājasā or tāmasā, belong to this cosmic nature. When you come face to face with this, you are at the threshold, knocking. What is beyond that? Is there something beyond that? And the beyond reveals itself to itself!

KNOCK, KNOCK!

The body is able to function only because it has a cohesiveness which makes it one unit, it is not an assemblage of spare parts. In that vision there is no bondage. But if you look at the whole body through a microscope you see different parts put together. When you view prakṛti as composed of sattva, rajas, tamas, you suddenly see that each one is a rope that binds the dehī (embodied). Whoever regards the body as ‘this I am’, or ‘this is mine’ is bound to that by one or the other of these three, or all the three together.

How do we get out of this? First of all by realising,

When the seer beholds no agent other than the guṇā and knows that which is higher than them, he attains to my being.

(14:19)

There is no word here to suggest that it is the ego or the jivā that does it. Translated in as simple a way as possible, draṣṭā is ‘attention’ which becomes aware. This awareness suddenly wakes to the understanding that there is a sense of lightness, of enlightenment, of understanding, of knowledge; that is sattva – not ‘me’, not ‘mine’. There is dynamism; that is rajas – not ‘me’, not ‘mine’. There is dullness; that is tamas – not ‘me’, not ‘mine’. When this understanding arises, the draṣṭā is aware that it is not involved in any of these. In the words of śrī Gurudev: “The wise man knows which guṇa is operating when.” If you know which guṇa is operating now, you are out of it, you are not caught in it.

You are never satisfied with the prevailing guṇā. This is something very peculiar. Though you enjoy sleep, when it comes to an end it is painful even to lie in bed. You may be doing the most splendid job on earth but it is not satisfying. Something in you says: “I want to have more knowledge, because only knowledge is accompanied by the sense of satisfaction.” Soon you are aspiring to sattva. What do you do when you have this tremendous enlightenment and understanding of the fundamentals of life? When you are very happy, bubbling with joy, you want to share it with someone else, so you start establishing a relationship, forming a society of happy people. Even that is bondage. How does one transcend this?

The blessed Lord said: Light, activity and delusion – when they are present, O Arjuna, he hates not, nor does he long for them when they are absent.

(14:22)

In one phraseology or another, this teaching is repeated nearly in every chapter. ‘Whatever be the guṇa that prevails....’ How do you complete that sentence – ‘The wise man accepts it’? Kṛṣṇa does not say so.

Only if you understand this very carefully, might you also understand what appears to be strange behaviour on the part of these great ones. You and I are subject to changing moods, but they are not, they **reflect** changing moods. There is a beautiful sutrā in the Yoga Sūtrā of Patañjali: ‘Like crystal the yogi merely reflects what is happening around him’. Therefore the yogi sleeps when tamas prevails, is active when rajas prevails; and is intelligent and happy when sattva prevails, without being bound by any of these.

What you regard as jñāna or understanding or knowledge (sattva) is not freedom. Even that is a bondage. You come into contact with jñāna – which means you are still a seeker, looking at jñāna as if it were a cloak. How to be totally free of this is the theme of the fifteenth chapter, which is the most inspiring chapter. It contains the very essence of the Bhagavad Gītā message. Do not let craving arise, because it is this craving that gives rise to all the rest of it. When there is a craving, there is attachment, hate, fear. All these

are related to a future. It is this craving that creates a thing called tomorrow. Therefore that thing called tomorrow is bondage.

In the fourteenth chapter we were cautioned that *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* can bind because you create the division between the experiencer and the experience of *sattva*, of *rajas*, of *tamas*. Having created that division, you bring them into conflict.

Even on the human plane, we love one another because we regard one another as different. Yet at all levels we are indivisibly one – the *prāṇa* is one; the mind is one; the consciousness is one.

A thing called contact arises only between two separate, independent objects. When there is only one there is no contact. It is the rejection of what is and the longing for what is not that is the problem. That is what causes this becoming – movement from one mood of being to another mood of being. All these are the products of apparent division in consciousness. But, as space is indivisible, consciousness is indivisible.

An eternal portion of myself, having become a living soul in the world of life, draws to itself the five senses with the mind for the sixth, abiding in nature.

(15:7)

This is inexpressibly beautiful. Its meaning can only be realised within oneself. It is something which cannot be translated or transmitted. What you call ‘*jīva*’ (living soul) is a cell of my (God’s) own being. This universe is filled with *jīvā* – embodied or disembodied. Consciousness or awareness is also everywhere. The *guṇā* are operating everywhere, and this *jīva* – which is everywhere) is taken for a ride by these *guṇā*.

When the Lord (the individual soul) obtains a body and when he leaves it, he takes these and goes with them as the wind takes the scents from their seats (flowers, etc.).

(15:8)

And, I am seated in the hearts of all; from me are memory, knowledge, as well as their absence. I am verily that which has to be known by all the *vedā*; I am indeed the author of the *vedānta* and the knower of the *vedā* am I.

(15:15)

Fantastic statement! I do not think you will find this in any other scriptural text in the world. Even forgetfulness of self is part of this game, so do not get upset about your own stupidity. Sit down and realise: ‘Lord, I have forgotten you, thanks to your own power. Aha! But, I remember God.’ By giving thanks to his own *māyā*, you have abolished it! It is fantastic!

Permeating the earth I support all beings by (my) energy; and having become the watery moon I nourish all herbs.

(15:13)

The essence of food is also a divine manifestation. That is why in the ashram we are asked to repeat this chapter before eating.

Having become the fire Vaiśvānara, I abide in the body of living beings and, associated with the prāṇa and the apāna, digest the fourfold food.

(15:14)

‘I am this thing called the gastric fire that is able to digest your food’. (Nobody, except God, can really deal with all the stuff that we put into this fire!) This digestive system is not under your control. It is totally independent. You are the slave. It has its own law, its own way of functioning. The master of that is that divine spark that exists in all beings, that sustains life. ‘Life is not mine – I am not this life.’ This is also part of this puruṣa looking at prakṛti, and prakṛti looking at puruṣa. One who realises this goes beyond the guṇā.

IS IT CLEAR?

In the fifteenth chapter of the Bhagavad Gītā the entire universe is visualised as a tree with roots above and branches below. This is the universal process, which metaphorically has its roots in God, grows downward and then strikes roots down, so that in a manner of speaking you emerge from God, you come down into this universe and you become trapped in this universe by the three qualities – sattva, rajas and tamas, each one of them tying you here by its own characteristics.

Its form is not perceived here as such, neither its end nor its origin, nor its foundation nor resting place; having cut asunder this firmly rooted peepul tree with the strong axe of non-attachment.

(15:3)

Kṛṣṇa suggests that you cut this down by the weapon of non-contact. How is this possible? By the realisation that the jivā, the mind, the senses and the universe are ‘not me’ and are ‘not mine’.

An eternal portion of myself, having become a living soul in the world of life, draws to itself the five senses with the mind for the sixth, abiding in nature.

(15:7)

When the Lord (the individual soul) obtains a body and when he leaves it, he takes these and goes with them as the wind takes the scents from their seats (flowers, etc.).

(15:8)

Presiding over the ear, the eye, touch, taste and smell, as well as the mind, he enjoys the objects of the senses.

(15:9)

The deluded do not see Him who departs, stays and enjoys; but they who possess the eye of knowledge behold him.

(15:10)

That which is considered *jivā* is God himself, it is part of that flame from which it has never and can never be isolated. A flame is composed of billions of sparks, but they cannot be isolated. That spark is the *jivā*. Then the analogy is changed to a particle of fragrance that is emitted by an incense stick. It seems to pervade a certain space. Does the space cease to be what it was because this aroma fills that space? Does the air which comes into contact with this aroma undergo a change? No, very soon the aroma is dispersed and the air becomes air again, the space remains space. Why was this space unaffected and why did the air appear to be affected to begin with but somehow freed itself from it? If you understand this you have got *mokṣa* in the palm of your hand.

The ultimate reality, the absolute or the infinite is like space – omnipresent, eternal, totally unaffected by what goes on within. You and I are not like that. We seem to be trapped in a certain type of conditioning or ignorance, *māyā* or *avidyā*, even as air that comes into contact with this perfume seems to have undergone a change. Suppose there are a couple of dead rats here and all the windows are closed; there is a terrible foul smell. If you open all the windows and doors, suddenly this room is not polluted any more. The moment the air in the room was brought into contact with the infinite air, the unpollutability of the air asserted itself. What you regarded as pollution has been absorbed by the same air, neither by rejecting nor accepting it, but by asserting the omnipresence of this air itself. So that nothing – not even what you regarded as foul, or filthy – is rejected, but has been absorbed by the cosmic whole. To that cosmic whole this is not pollution at all.

If that is clear you have understood what *asaṅga* means. *Asaṅga* does not mean non-attachment, detachment or thinking that you are holy, so that you say: “All these things are filthy. I am going to get rid of them or keep myself away from them.” That will lead to a dreadful form of violence from which there is no escape. On the other hand, to say that this is also God is a pitfall, and there is no getting out of that. Neither accepting evil as inevitable nor as something other than self and kicking it, is going to redeem us. When the seeker enquires into the nature of what-is, that ‘what-is’ absorbs all that is good and all that was considered evil, and therefore transcends it. That is what is described in the sixteenth chapter.

There are two types of beings in this world, the divine and the demoniacal.

(16:6)

Kṛṣṇa says here that the universe itself, as it flows, has these two elements, *daiva* and *āsura*, built into it. As soon as you are born in this world, you find that you are subjected to things called front and back, top and bottom, day and night, good and evil. Such is the flow of life. Where you are muddled, indecisive, confused, where there is delusion, there is *āsura* nature. That state of awareness or mind where things are clear, is *daiva*, divine. If there is an evil quality or habit in you, the moment you become aware of it as undesirable it will drop away. So, to remain in constant awareness is *daiva*, to remain in

constant unawareness is āsura. (If you understand this one half a verse, you have understood what life is about and what the Bhagavad Gītā teaching is all about!)

The āsura quality can function only as long as you are unaware. In the **light** of this awareness, darkness **must** disappear. Though there is this dualism called light and darkness built into this universe, light does not **know** darkness. Light does not dispel darkness as you might chase a thief from your room, though you and I use the expression. If there is an evil thought or feeling, the moment you become aware of it, it is gone. If it does not go, you have not learned to look!

You cannot cultivate a virtuous quality, however much you try. (If you have tried, you will understand what I am talking about.) When you understand this, it is then that true humility enters your heart and you say: “God, I have tried my best. I cannot do it – you had better take charge.” Then the moment that you face this light, or this truth or reality, you become an abode of all virtues. When you face the light, you are enlightened, illumined, there is clarity, you are a god, you are divine.

If you deliberately try to cultivate these virtues, it will compel you to face the light all the time – and it is also possible that you will acquire the first of the noble virtues described in the thirteenth chapter – humility. All your arrogance ‘I am a virtuous man, a holy man’, will drop away because you know what a struggle it is, how frustrating it is. Then you realise if the whole universe has come out of him, these divine and demoniacal qualities are also his. This cosmic being absorbs everything into it.

Darkness exists as long as we are in darkness. The only way to remain out of this darkness is paradoxically to remain **aware** of that darkness. But when you begin to **see** that darkness, the darkness is gone. It does not leave you only when you do not see it as evil, but also when you do not see it as something nice.

Bewildered by many a fancy, entangled in the snare of delusion, addicted
to the gratification of lust, they fall into a foul hell.

(16:16)

So Kṛṣṇa cautions, “Avoid lust, anger and greed.”

In the fifteenth chapter there is a description of the aśvattha. Aśvattha means the peepul tree; aśva means ‘no tomorrow’, that which is ‘established in no tomorrow’. If that makes sense to you, you have understood the entire Bhagavad Gītā and you have the key to enlightenment in your hands. This universe that you see seems to be solid, permanent, but Kṛṣṇa tells us that it is not. It is something that will not be there tomorrow. But, when you entertain a craving or a desire, that desire makes you think that this world is going to be like this tomorrow also, that you will come back and enjoy it. We should not forget that all our cravings, desires, fears and hopes are futuristic, related to something **called** the future which does not exist now. And we are trapped in a web of ideas only because we think that that future is a real substance, whereas it is merely conjured up by hopes and aspirations and the fear, and so on. Once this craving has collapsed, tomorrow vanishes. Do today what in the light of your awareness today, has to be done. If you can live this moment as if there is no other moment, no tomorrow, you are the conqueror of the whole world, even of heaven. One has to witness this, as in the case of Swami Sivananda. He never believed in tomorrow. D.I.N. Do It Now.

Everything he did he did as if there were no tomorrow. It had to be done now, today. Tomorrow is created by your desire, and the desire is sustained by your foolish idea of tomorrow. This is the central theme of the Bhagavad Gītā.

The sixteenth chapter is extremely interesting, in that it reveals to us that what is known as 'āśura' or diabolical is as much part of this creation as 'daiva' or divine. Hence, it is not for the puny human mind and intellect to accept or reject these. It is good to understand the constituent factors in both these trends in creation; it is also good to understand that whereas the daiva leads to liberation, the āśura tends towards bondage. This understanding itself is sufficient incentive to promote the daiva in oneself and to move away from the āśura – and this is of vital importance – without judging and condemning the āśura nature in 'others'.

It is extremely interesting in this context to see that Kṛṣṇa uses some of the expressions that the self-righteous often use in their descriptions of 'others who are of a sinful nature'. They (the self-righteous) often consider themselves 'perfected ones', 'blissful ones', 'divine beings' and so on. This is the direct result of perceiving the āśura factors in others; and it cannot but lead to the āśura nature taking root in oneself and growing there into what the self-righteous consider to be undesirable (āśura) nature.

When all this becomes clear, it is clear that clarity itself is what is important; and that clarity is daiva or divine. When that clarity is present, it makes it clear that all that is good in oneself is 'the nature of the Lord and part of his creation (not **mine**)' and that all that is good **or sinful** in others is also part of the same creation and hence beyond one's jurisdiction. When this clarity of perception is absent, then one falls into the āśura stream of creation; the virulent, violent and self-assertive rājasa ego (in the words of Gurudev Sivananda) arises and leads one to hell or the three constituents of diabolic nature (lust, anger and greed).

Uncertainty is very different from doubt. Doubt itself may be characterised either by clarity or uncertainty. When doubt is accompanied by uncertainty, it becomes destructive; and it compels one to abandon the very search for truth or God, by making you doubt the very existence of God and the validity of the teaching. However, when doubt is accompanied by clarity, it enables you to see that the teaching is not clear to you and induces you to seek – and to seek greater clarity. This is healthy doubt, constructive doubt, where there is 'clarity of one's own uncertainty', whereas in the destructive form of doubt there is deceptive 'clarity' which arrogantly and blindly rejects the truth that what it suffers from is uncertainty. It therefore shuts the door to freedom in its own face.

When there is clarity and even healthy doubt, then it is important for the seeker immediately to seek the help and assistance of a guru who is well versed in the scriptures and who has had direct experience of the reality. The guru will surely transmit his knowledge of the scripture, reinforced by his own direct experience, to the seeker thus dispelling the uncertainty and leading him to the daiva or perfect clarity.

THE SECRET OF OBEDIENCE

Towards the end of the sixteenth chapter, great emphasis is laid on śāstrā – tasmāc chāstraṁ pramāṇaṁ te – 'Therefore let scripture be your guide'.

Therefore, let the scriptures be the authority in determining what ought to be done and what ought not to be done. Having known what is said in the ordinance of the scriptures, thou shouldst act here in this world.

(16:24)

What are śāstrā? It is a very serious question if you are seriously interested in sādhana. If you are not serious in sādhana, then of course you accept something on the basis of whatever you like. If any scripture is your authority (it does not matter what it is), then you are safe. The scripture contains something which suits you and something which does not suit you. Any scripture can be your guide. A person, however righteous his actions may be, does not attain perfection if he is a slave to his own thoughts, concepts, ideas and cravings. If you follow a scripture or the guru only to the extent you wish to follow, then you are lost, because you are following yourself, nobody else – neither guru nor scripture. Obedience seems to be the key factor in all these religious traditions. No religious tradition asks you to disobey a teacher or a scripture. If you develop the faculty of total obedience, then doing what you wish to do – obviously in accordance with the dictates of your own mind and cravings – is suspended, and you are free, liberated. You have found the key to unlock the door of the hideout of your ego. It is an extremely difficult discipline to be totally obedient. If you are **totally** (not selectively, conveniently) obedient, whatever be the guru or scripture, you are free.

Is it possible to have complete śraddhā? Śraddhā is not mere faith or belief, but something totally different. Śraddhā is not faith in the sense that ‘I have faith in you and therefore I will do what you ask me to do’. In six months you might have dropped that and picked up something else. That ‘śraddhā’ was an ego trip. When śraddhā is there, there is total obedience, which is very different from what you and I **call** obedience. (In that there is an inner conflict.) This is what we found in our lives with the Master. We never **obeyed** him. If he said something, there was no question; which means that to us that was the right thing. This is not intellectual understanding or emotional response. These are fragmented and they are bound to cause problems. It is not easy to bring about an integrated total obedience. But, is it possible for you to implicitly obey a teacher or a scripture, without question and totally, without any part of your inner organism – neither the mind nor the emotion nor the physical being – rebelling against it? We think ‘I will obey selectively when it suits me.’

I am sure you have heard this even if you have not observed it within yourself. You go to a guru, and you find him wonderfully inspiring. You do all that he tells you to do. Then suddenly you discover (I am quoting) “He is not the same man that I met some years ago. He is alright, but I am not going to obey him **now**.” So obedience is not possible for the human being ruled by the ego. What is craving is ego, what is ego is craving; what is mind is ego, what is ego is mind, one is indistinguishable from the other. If you detect a desire or a craving within yourself and observe it, you find that that is the ego.

If you can obey without reserve, you are liberated then and there. You look within and there is no discordant note, no rebellion. The master says: “Do this.” The mind says: “Ah, that’s it,” the heart says: “I love to do it,” and the whole body responds to it. If that is possible, then you are free. If you follow your own cravings (which arise in their

millions every minute), you do not get anywhere. If one is a slave to the restless mind, one is bound to be constantly restless. There is no peace, no happiness.

He who, having cast aside the ordinances of the scriptures, acts under the impulse of desire, attains not perfection, nor happiness, nor the supreme goal.

(16:23)

Śraddhā could also be called witness-consciousness, or what some great masters have called ‘choiceless awareness’ – an awareness in which there is no choice, awareness without judgement.

So, while living our daily life in accordance with the scripture, it is vitally important at the same time to look within and see that this is not done because I like it, but because that is the command of the teacher, of the scripture. It is so easy and yet so impossibly difficult. Nobody is going to tell you to do something which you **cannot** do. Your guru will obviously know what you are capable of doing and will not ask you to do something more. But there is this inner resistance and disobedience: “Why should I do this? I want to do something else.” While doing what the teacher says, at the same time you **must** observe yourself and see what goes on within. If you are a yogi, body, mind and soul will be in total harmony; thinking, feeling and living will be in total harmony. So merely obeying the letter of the scripture will not do.

Then there is an integrated and total obedience which is not selective. In such obedience itself is liberation, and therefore it is not ‘obedience’. The ego has been so completely and so thoroughly set aside that in you there is no other thought, no other feeling. That is called ‘śraddhā’. Śraddhā is not faith based on the ego but it is already self-transcendence. It is the stuff of which your total being is made. Śraddhā is not faith in the sense that I have faith in you and therefore I will do what you ask me to do. In six months you might have dropped that and picked up something else. That śraddhā was an ego trip.

Śraddhā means the total response of the whole being. Sattva, rajas or tamas could be predominating. We shall not forget that no one, from the most supremely enlightened man or woman to the silliest donkey, is totally sāttvika, totally rājasa or totally tāmasa. If you understand this, only then can Gurudev’s teachings and how he was able to live with people of such completely different temperaments, be understood. If a change has to happen, that has to happen naturally within you. It should not be brought about by some external agency, because these three qualities, being constantly in a ferment, will keep changing.

Kṛṣṇa does not condemn anybody. He cautions that the mind functions on the basis of likes and dislikes and as long as the embodied being is driven by these likes and dislikes, there is no salvation, there is no freedom. Once you free yourself from them, you become the image of God and you perform the role allotted to you by God.

LIFE WITHOUT EXTERNAL GUIDE

How does one determine whether an action is right or not right? That was Arjuna's question, and the entire Bhagavad Gītā is the answer. What is the action that will instantly, here and now, free us from the experienced bondage, limitation? How does one determine right action? Right action must be absolutely free, without giving rise to a problem **now** or sowing the seed now for a problem to arise later. Can such action happen in our lives?

The Gītā is the gospel of appropriate action. The expressions used repeatedly are: *niyataṁ karmā, kāryaṁ karmā, sva karmā*. Unfortunately, we translate these words into 'duty'. But 'appropriate action' is better. Is it possible for a human being, so heavily loaded with memories and cravings related to a future hope or fear, to rise above the ego and to find this appropriate action? Can you use a scripture as a measure of your action from moment to moment? If an action does not measure up to the scripture, reject the action. As long as you have integrated and total obedience to that scripture, you will find the truth – not because the scripture gives you the truth, but because you come face to face with the source of your own cravings – the ego. There are people who may not adopt a scripture and they have no faith in a teacher. If your heart says that this teacher is a hypocrite, you cannot follow him; and if your heart starts off with a rejection of the scripture, you cannot have any faith in it.

Verse twenty three of chapter sixteen says:

He who, having cast aside the ordinances of the scriptures, acts under the impulse of desire, attains not perfection, nor happiness, nor the supreme goal.

It implies that the man who rejects the scripture but follows the dictates of his own cravings goes to hell. But there are people who may discard all scriptures and teachers and yet find the truth, if they have śraddhā.

Arjuna said: Those who, setting aside the ordinances of the scriptures perform sacrifice with faith, what is their condition, O Kṛṣṇa? Is it *sattva*, *rajas* or *tamas*?

(17:1)

If you have this śraddhā, your body and mind are functioning very efficiently while living a full life – eating, drinking, thinking, talking, doing charity, engaging yourself in austerities – with or without reference to any scripture whatsoever and without the guidance of a teacher. You are living endowed with something by which you are able to observe what is happening – in the body, the mind and life. When this observation takes place there is clarity, and associated with that clarity is a great joy. You realise that this is *sattva*. When you are able to observe that the body, the nerves, the mind and intelligence within are agitated, you realise that there is *rajas*. When it is dull, stupid, fatigued, sleepy, drowsy, lazy, you realise that there is *tamas*. The words do not matter at all. Gurudev Swami Sivananda used to ask: "Do you know what *guṇa* is operating at a given moment?" If you know, that knowledge must lead to one or the other of the two alternatives. One: You suit your action to the *guṇa* that prevails – if the mind is dull, go

to sleep; if you are in an enlightened state of mind, sit and meditate; if the body is full of energy, restless, get up and do some work. Appropriate behaviour happens. Two: You detect within yourself a sort of laziness and stupidity which seems to be unending. If it is possible for this observation to observe the prevalence of *tamas* without condemning and judging, you realise that the observation itself is free. That which is aware of this *tamas* is not *tamas* – and the moment it opens its eyes wide and looks, the *tamas* is gone. It is so simple – provided you do not indulge in hypocritical self-condemnation.

If there is this *śraddhā*, the observation observes the state of mind without condemning it, but not necessarily without distinguishing one from the other. It is one thing to distinguish and another to discriminate, to judge. The human being constantly discriminates, and hopes that somehow this discrimination will lead him to the realisation of the absolute – in which there is no discrimination and no duality! Is it possible for such a stupid creature to rise above the ego? If it is possible for the inner observation to distinguish *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* without judging one or the other as superior or inferior, then *śraddhā* is born.

This whole process by which there is immediate (meaning without mediation) and intense (meaning neither past, future nor even present tense) observation is *śraddhā*. You see yellow, you see blue. In that sight, there is no judgement. Observation does not judge, but something else arises which says: “Oh, this is beautiful, that is ugly.” It is the observer – which is memory, ‘me’, ego – that indulges in this. The observation itself is completely pure. Observation alone is the truth.

Those men who practise terrific austerities not enjoined by the scriptures, given to hypocrisy and egoism, impelled by the force of lust and attachment, are determined to be diabolical.

(17:5, 6)

There is not a single word of condemnation here. *Āsuraniścaya* – beautiful! I wish I could convey this joy to you. *Āsuraniścayan* means that they are ‘determined to be diabolical’ – it only means they do not have insight. It is not a crime not to have insight. You enjoy life in your own way and life will teach you. If it does not, there is something else which is pure grace – death – which will create another chance. You cannot be a fool for all time to come.

Later on in the same chapter you have the three-fold *tapas*:

Worship of the gods, the twice-born, the teachers and the wise, purity, straightforwardness, celibacy and non-injury are called the austerities of the body.

Speech which causes no excitement, truthful, pleasant and beneficial, to practice of the study of the *vedā*, are called the austerity of speech.

Serenity of mind, good-heartedness, silence, self-control, purity of nature – this is called mental austerity.

(17:14-16)

None of these things can be laid down as a rule. All involve constant self-awareness – śraddhā. Honesty cannot be defined; what is defined is not honesty. Brahmacharyaṁ is not only celibacy but total one-pointedness to live, to move and to have one's being in God. Ahimsā is to be totally non-violent in thought, word and deed – what you say should not upset anybody, excite anybody, disturb anybody's peace of mind. You cannot do that mechanically on the basis of the teaching that somebody gives you. Mouna is not merely not talking, but silencing the mind.

This is tapas. When you engage yourself in tapas you find your śraddhā blazing forth, and tapas is natural to you. No tapas performed without śraddhā can have these characteristics. If you perform any austerity which does not have these characteristics, there is no śraddhā: you are doing it without thought.

If you do not have this, then blindly obey a scripture or a teacher and you will be alright. Either way you are alright, because either way you will detect the ego and its play and transcend it.

WHAT IS RENUNCIATION?

The question “What must I do?” can only be determined by the answer to the question “Who does it?” One can read in the teachings of śrī Kṛṣṇa several distinctly clear messages: you are not the doer. There is nothing called an independent, individual doer. You are part of the totality. As such you are not even a part (only that can be considered a part which can part from the rest), but you are the universe. You are not an independent self-existence which could assert its freedom from something else. When that integral unity with the totality is understood or realised, then action is seen to spring from that. That is what you call God's will.

In the Bhagavad Gītā there is not a single teaching ‘either/or’. Kṛṣṇa says: “If you cannot do this you can do that, if you cannot do that you can do this.” You may not be able instantly to realise that all action is nothing but a scintillation of the totality called God, and therefore everything in the universe called good, all bad, evil or indifferent, is nothing but his job. There is a very specific verse:

The blessed Lord said: The sages understand saṁnyāsa to be the renunciation of desire-motivated action; the wise declare the abandonment of the fruits of all action as tyāga.

(18:2)

Desirable, undesirable and indifferent fortunes are known to exist in the world. They who have not abandoned desires and cravings are subject to these three. One who has abandoned the idea that he is the doer is not subjected to any of these.

Arjuna said: I desire to know, O mighty-armed, the essence or truth of renunciation, O Hṛṣīkeśa, as also of abandonment, O slayer of Keśi.

(18:1)

In view of the teaching so far, what on earth are you going to renounce? What must be abandoned? And what is saṁnyāsa? We are told that self-realisation is not had without becoming a saṁnyāsaī. The great sage Yajñavalkya told his wife Maitreyī: “I can give you

all my wealth, but if you will live as a wealthy woman lives, you will not have self-knowledge. A wealthy woman can lead a comfortable life but not attain immortality or self-realisation.”

Remain choicelessly aware, cultivate or awaken this inner intelligence. Abandon all action that is prompted by desire, craving. There is a mantra in the upaniṣad which Gurudev was fond of: ‘Even although this ātmān is everywhere, it is not seen. But this ātmān can be seen, can be realised, can be experienced by one who has an extremely subtle, sharp intelligence.’ In this subtle, sharp intelligence one has to see the distinction between desire or craving, and a natural urge.

So once again we are in trouble. We who are constantly looking for ‘dos and do nots’, clear cut rules and regulations, are once again thrown back on to our own resource or inner intelligence. Is this a craving – or a nameless, formless urge? The nameless, formless urge arises in God. Craving is something that interferes in that. Action is life, life is action, but something says: “I am doing this.” ‘I am doing this’ is never complete. It is always ‘I am doing this – in order to get that.’ Is such ambition inevitably part of life? Is it even needed for a job to be done? If you can do it (or let this happen) without any ambition or craving, you have found samnyāsa.

Do what has to be done and keep quiet. What comes out of it is not your problem at all. That is a lesson that nature teaches us. A million seeds are produced by every tree, of which only two or three perhaps grow into further trees. Out of the million actions that are generated by you, maybe one or two may bear fruit. The others maybe not. Who are you to decide? This is a fantastic lesson.

Some philosophers declare that action should be abandoned as an evil; while others (declare) that acts of sacrifice, gift and austerity should not be relinquished.

(18:3)

There is a traditional teaching that all actions should be abandoned. An egoistic action leads to a reaction that knocks the ego. As you sow, so shall you reap. But every seed that falls on the ground need not necessarily germinate. You sow, nothing grows up there. What shall you reap? Only disappointment! It applies only to egoistic action, where the reaction is not so much the result of what you do, but your own fear and disappointment.

The traditionalists assumed that every seed planted must somehow grow and that you also are bound to reap. You may not! I do not mean to suggest that the law of action and reaction is therefore totally false; but please examine it anew. It may be truth; it may not be. They who accepted this doctrine said you should not do anything. What does that mean? Another problem. Can you ‘not do’ anything at all? How do you **do** nothing? They took this doctrine to the extent that you do not even function in this world, just live like a log of wood. “This is one point of view” Kṛṣṇa says. If you want to be like that, please try.

Acts of sacrifice, gift and austerity should not be abandoned, but should be performed; sacrifice, gift and also austerity are the purifiers of the wise.

(18:5)

This is also a tradition. One tradition is that no action should be performed, the other is that you must engage yourself in rituals – *yajña*, *dāna*, *tapas* – from morning to night. Tradition gets watered down. Tradition leads to the destruction of the spirit and the careful preservation of the letter. Tradition is so strong because everyone who feels insecure takes shelter in that tradition and wants the security of the tradition. These traditions (which are not wrong in themselves) unfortunately become deadly carcasses. The meaning is lost but we go on with the tradition. As the Bible says: ‘The letter killeth the spirit’.

Yajña, *dāna* and *tapas*, which constitute humanness in a human being, are said to be non-negotiable, non-renounceable. *Yajña* is adoration of God; *dāna* is charity, giving; *tapas* is something that burns up the veil. *Tapas* could be verbal, physical, mental or psychological, but the essential quality of *tapas* – a factor that burns up the veil of ignorance – should not be lost sight of. If you observe very carefully without prejudice, you will see that these three are natural to non-human creatures.

Yajña has completely lost its meaning. It becomes just pouring something into the fire. There is nothing good or bad there, but there is a total misunderstanding. You must understand the doctrine of non-action from an entirely different approach. You do not have to abandon action in order to find this non-action, but by merely reflecting on the source of action you realise “it is not ‘I’ who is doing it.” There, your actions happen without an actor coming up, observation takes place without an observer coming up. You can even say: “I am sitting here,” but the inner feeling is quite different. It is not an egoistic feeling. In the same way, *yajñā*, *dāna* and *tapas* can be performed without diluting them, without destroying the spirit. So Kṛṣṇa goes on to say:

But even these actions should be performed leaving aside attachment and the desire for rewards, O Arjuna; this is my certain and best conviction.

(18:6)

Yajña, *dāna* and *tapas* must be practised. Abandoning them is the function of the terrible pleasure-loving ego, which revels in stupidity, in ignorance. These three are meant to thin out egoism. Egoism is the universal religion of all humanity. It is a religion that exalts the ego and makes it God. The abandonment of *yajña*, *dāna* and *tapas* is egoism; the adoption of *yajña*, *dāna* and *tapas* without understanding the spirit, is foolishness!

Sacrifice, gift and also austerity are the purifiers of the wise.

(18:5)

A beautiful expression. In the sixth chapter Kṛṣṇa said: “You must practise yoga. You must meditate in order to purify yourself.” Here again he says: “*Yajña*, *dāna* and *tapas* must be practised because they are purifiers.”

PERFECTION IS

Verily, the renunciation of obligatory action is not proper; the abandonment of the same from delusion is declared to be *tamas*.

(18:7)

Here Kṛṣṇa uses the very beautiful expression ‘niyataṁ’. Niyataṁ is what is ordained. It also means something which is extraordinarily beautiful, and something that makes things move – hence very often it is translated into ‘world order’. It is the impulse that keeps things as they are and makes them do what they do, i.e., water flow, ice freeze, fire glow, wind blow.

You are the fruit of that impulse. That you cannot abandon. Even yajña, dāna and tapas, which are essentially human characteristics, do not belong to you because you have cultivated them, but they are determined by niyati. These qualities are there, not because you want them to be in you in order that you might reach a certain goal, but because that is the only way in which a human being is made.

To lead a natural life means you become completely and totally one with this niyati. You do not want to defy niyati and you have no consciousness of obeying destiny; you just live in total harmony. A tree full of luscious fruits is completely different from us – when you have something precious, beautiful or glorious in you, you lock it up, whereas when the fruit becomes really ripe the trees drop it. That is ‘niyati’. That is as it should be.

He who is free from the egoistic notion, whose intelligence is not tainted (by good or evil), though he slays these people, he slayeth not nor is he bound (by any action).

(18:17)

Non-attachment is possible only when the sense of doership is not there. It is easy to understand, but if you do not want to understand, it is impossible to understand! Nobody in the whole universe is going to say: “I am not”. ‘I am’, ‘ahaṁ bhāvanā’, is correct, but ‘ahaṁkāra’ is very doubtful. One who is certain that ‘I’ is not the doer of this action, that this action is part of niyati, does not cling to the action or to the result – like the blessed tree, when the fruit is ripe, it drops. It is then that you are totally in niyati, inseparable from niyati and therefore unattached to it.

Non-attachment, or non-contact, is not an arrogant and isolationist separation from all but a total integration with everything; and therefore the expression ‘to be detached’ is very defective – though one understands what it means. To be non-attached is not to be detached, but to realise oneness. When I am one with you I am not attached to you but I am not detached **from** you. Therefore the ‘buddhi’ does not come into contact with anything – not because it stands aloof as a sort of super divinity, but it is one and therefore there is no contact. It is not an aloofness but an all-oneness. If that is sort of clear, then the second half of that verse becomes meaningful – otherwise it is dreadful.

... though he slays these people, he slayeth not nor is he bound (by any action).

(18:17)

Even if that person destroys the entire universe, he does nothing and he is not bound. Therefore if the tree drops one of its big branches when you are sitting underneath, for meditation, and you are instantly crushed, it does not sin. Can you also pretend to be like that? If you cut a branch, the tree stands there absolutely non-resistant. Can you similarly be totally unaffected by the consequences? So, hypocrisy will not do here, it is a

waste of time. (Only if that is more or less clear can we read epics like the Mahābhārata and understand what they mean.)

The most crucial message of the Bhagavad Gītā is contained in verses forty-five and forty-six of the eighteenth chapter.

Each man devoted to his own duty attains perfection. How he attains perfection while being engaged in his own duty – hear now.

(18:45)

He from whom all the beings have evolved and by whom all this is pervaded – worshipping him with his own action, man attains perfection.

(18:46)

If you can be totally devoted to whatever you are doing, you will immediately come face to face with your likes and dislikes, and realise that you are not devoted to the action but to what comes out of it. If you are totally devoted to the action that happens right now, then you will have freed yourself and also have understood what Kṛṣṇa said earlier: “Yoga is skill in action.” You will become a great expert in whatever you are doing because your whole being is there in that action. If there is no ‘doership’ in this action, if you are observing without creating an observer so that the action alone is, then it becomes total, tremendously efficient, and yoga. That action itself is perfection because you have no sense of doership, and it is from God that the action arises.

How does one who is trapped in these two errors of perception – ‘I am talking’, ‘I am talking to **you**’ – get out of them? Kṛṣṇa suggests a method. “Use every one of these actions as a flower and adore the Lord through these actions.” Realise that all these beings towards whom you direct your actions are the offspring of this cosmic being, or God. The offspring is identical with the parent, so all these beings who are the offspring of God, **are** God. Therefore all these beings that have emanated from God are pervaded by God. Therefore I am talking – but I am offering this as a flower at the feet of God who dwells in all.

This in itself is not perfection, but it will remove all the stupid ideas, such as ‘You are so and so and I am talking to you in order that...’, that have crept into your consciousness and veiled the truth. As this dirt is wiped away, knowledge of the truth arises. That is, there is the faculty of speech which speaks, there is the faculty of hearing that hears and there is a faculty of understanding that understands. ‘I am’ – there are so many ‘I am’s’ sitting here. The faculty of speech expresses through one ‘I am’, the faculty of understanding expresses through a second ‘I am’, the faculty of non-understanding expresses through a third ‘I am’ and the faculty of misunderstanding expresses through a fourth ‘I am’. No problem, everything is correct.

When that understanding arises:

He whose intellect is unattached everywhere, who has subdued his self, from whom desire has fled – he, by renunciation, attains the supreme state of freedom from action.

(18:49)

– then there is non-attachment, self-control and self-transcendence. Suddenly something (desire, ambition) that seemed to propel you in various directions is gone, and ‘niyati’ has taken its place. What happens, happens. Then and only then does one become a non-doer of any action whatsoever. It is then that you can justifiably say that God does everything.

The Lord dwells (abides) in the hearts of all beings, O Arjuna, causing all beings, by his illusive power, to revolve as if mounted on a machine.

(18:61)

This is a great verse. I think it contains in it the acme of Kṛṣṇa’s humour. He says: “What do you think you are doing? Do you think you are fighting? Do you think you do not want to fight? There is a God sitting in your heart and in the hearts of all beings, and you are being made to dance like a puppet.” This is a verse of extraordinary beauty, humour, truth and mystery. It is quite simple – and yet not so simple. ‘God is in the very heart of your whole being, and not only yours, but the entire universe.’ What does it mean? You cannot understand because you are caught in this *māyā* and you are being whirled around as on a merry-go-round – where you are being whirled around so fast that nothing seems to be clear. That is our fate.

Finally Kṛṣṇa says:

Abandoning all dharma, take refuge in me alone: I will liberate thee from all sins; grieve not.

(18:66)

Where are all the dharma mentioned here? Dharma is something that upholds, that brings us together. Dharma is also something that is worn, a dress that is put on. But, deeper than external coverings and dresses are the false notions and ideas ‘I am this, I am that; I am doing this, I will not do that’. Somehow we become confirmed in those notions even to the extent of regarding them as duty or non-duty.

Where do all these things arise? In ‘me’, in memory, in something that aspires for liberation. There is nothing wrong with aspiring for liberation provided you know where you are bound. And it is possible that the very effort of understanding this bondage **is** liberation.

When this bondage is sought to be understood, there is inner awakening. Then the guru is seen – whether it is the indwelling presence (or God), or an external personality who is also God in another form. Then, one by one, all your cravings drop away. Your eyes are open, they see; your ears are open, they hear; when breath flows through the throat and the vocal cords, they speak; when energy moves in your brain, that is thought. None of these things belongs to you. But, it is possible for us to deceive ourselves. Therefore constantly seek to find God within, and as you seek, ‘niyati’ will take over.

God cannot be found as long as the ‘I am’ functions. As long as you are clinging to the religion called **egoism**, you cannot find your foothold in Godism. As you seek to find this God, you have to go beyond this egoism. There ‘niyati’ takes over –perfection **IS**.

GĪTĀ DHYĀNAM

MEDITATION ON THE GĪTĀ

(To be recited at the commencement of the Gītā study)

Om pārthāya pratibodhitām bhagavatā nārāyaṇena svayaṁ
vyāsenā grathitām purāṇa muninā madhye mahābhārataṁ
advaitā 'mṛta varṣiṇīm bhagavatīm aṣṭādaśā 'dhyāyinīm
āmba tvām anusaṁdadhāmi bhagavad gīte bhava dveṣiṇīm

1. Om. O Bhagavad Gītā, with which Pārtha (Arjuna) was illumined by lord Nārāyaṇa himself and which was composed within the Mahābhārata by the ancient sage Vyāsa, O divine mother, the destroyer of rebirth, the showerer of the nectar of advaita (oneness), and consisting of eighteen chapters – upon Thee, O Bhagavad Gītā, O affectionate mother, I meditate!

namo 'stu te vyāsa viśhāla buddhe
phullā 'ravindā 'yata patra netra
yena tvayā bhārata taila pūrṇaḥ
prajvālito jñānamayaḥ pradīpaḥ

2. Salutations unto Thee, O Vyāsa, of broad intellect, and with eyes like the petals of full-blown lotuses, by whom the lamp of knowledge, filled with the oil of the Mahābhārata, has been lighted!

prapanna pārijātāya totravetrai 'ka pāṇaye
jñāna mudrāya kṛṣṇāya gītā 'mṛta duhe namaḥ

3. Salutations to Kṛṣṇa, the pārijātā or the bestower of all desires for those who take refuge in him, the holder of the whip in one hand, the holder of the symbol of knowledge and the milker of the divine nectar of the Bhagavad Gītā.

sarvo 'paniṣado gāvo dogdhā gopāla nandanaḥ
pārtho vatsaḥ sudhīr bhoktā dugdhaṁ gītā'mṛtaṁ mahat

4. All the upaniṣad are the cows, the milker is Kṛṣṇa the cowherd boy, Arjuna is the calf, men of purified intellect are the drinkers, the milk is the great nectar of the Gītā.

vasudeva sutaṁ devaṁ kaṁsa cāṇūra mardanaṁ
devakī paramā 'nandaṁ kṛṣṇaṁ vande jagad gurum

5. I salute lord Kṛṣṇa, the world teacher, the son of Vasudeva, the destroyer of Kaṁsa and Cāṇūra, the supreme bliss of Devakī.

bhīṣma droṇa taṭā jayadratha jalā gāndhāra nilotpālā
śalya grāhavatī krpeṇa vahanī karṇena velākulā
aśvatthāma vikarṇa ghora makarā duryodhanā 'vartinī
so 'tīrṇā khalu pāṇḍavai raṇa nadī kaivartakaḥ keśavaḥ

6. With Kṛṣṇa as the helmsman, verily, was crossed by the Pāṇḍavā the battle-river whose banks were Bhīṣma and Droṇa, whose water was Jayadratha, whose blue lotus was the king of Gāndhāra, whose crocodile was Śalya, whose current was Kṛpa, whose billow was Karṇa, whose terrible alligators were Aśvatthāma and Vikarṇa, whose whirlpool was Duryodhana.

pārāśarya vacaḥ sarojam amalaṁ gītārtha gandhotkaṭaṁ
nānākhyā 'nakakesaraṁ hari kathā sambodhanā 'bodhitaṁ
loke sajjana ṣaṭpadair ahar ahaḥ pepīyamānaṁ mudā
bhūyād bhārata paṅkajaṁ kali mala pradhvaṁsi naḥ śreyase

7. May this lotus of the Mahābhārata, born in the lake of the words of Vyāsa, sweet with the fragrance of the meaning of the Gītā, with many stories as its stamens, fully opened by the discourses on Hari, the destroyer of the sins of Kali, and drunk joyously by the bees of good men in the world, day by day, become the bestower of good on us.

mūkaṁ karoti vācāraṁ paṅguṁ laṅghayate girim
yat kṛpā tam ahaṁ vande paramā 'nanda mādharmaṁ

8. I salute that Kṛṣṇa, the source of supreme bliss, whose grace makes the dumb eloquent and the cripple cross mountains!

yaṁ brahmā varuṇe 'ndra rudra marutaḥ
stunvanti divyaiḥ stavair
vedaiḥ sāṅga pada kramo 'paniṣadair
gāyanti yaṁ sāmagāḥ
dhyānā 'vasthita tad gatena manasā
paśyanti yaṁ yogino
yasyā 'ntaṁ na viduḥ surā 'sura gaṇā
devāya tasmai namaḥ

9. Salutations to that God whom Brahmā, Varuṇa, Indra, Rudra and the Marut praise with divine hymns, of whom the Sāma-chanters sing by the vedā and their aṅgā, (in the pada and krama methods), and by the upaniṣad, whom the yogī see with their minds absorbed in him through meditation, and whose ends the hosts of the devā and asurā know not.

OM

OM NAMO BHAGAVATE VĀSUDEVĀYA

OM NAMAḤ ŚIVĀNANDĀYA

OM NAMO VEṅKATEŚĀYA

OM TAT SAT



GĪTĀ MĀHĀTMYA

THE GLORY OF THE GĪTĀ

(To be read at the end of the day's Gītā study)

śrī ganeśāya namaḥ! śrī gopāla kṛṣṇāya namaḥ!

dharo 'vāca:

bhagavan paramesāna bhaktir avyabhicāriṇī
prārabdham bhujyamānasya katham bhavati he prabho

1. The Earth said: O Lord! The Supreme One! How can unflinching devotion arise in him who is immersed in his worldly life, O Lord?

śrī viṣṇur uvāca:

prārabdham bhujyamāno hi gītā 'bhyāsa rataḥ sadā
sa muktaḥ sa sukhī loke karmaṇā no 'palipyate.

2. Lord Viṣṇu said: Though engaged in the performance of worldly duties, one who is regular in the study of the Gītā, becomes free. He is the happy man in this world. He is not bound by karma.

mahā pāpādi pāpāni gītā dhyānam karoti cet
kvacit sparśam na kurvanti nalinī dalam ambuvat

3. Just as the water stains not the lotus leaf, even so, sins do not taint him who is regular in the recitation of the Gītā.

gītāyāḥ pustakam yatra yatra pāṭhaḥ pravartate
tatra sarvāṇi tīrthāni prayāgā 'dīni tatra vai

4. All the sacred centres of pilgrimage like Prayāga, etc., dwell in that place where the book, the Gītā, is kept and where the Gītā is read.

sarve devās ca ṛṣayo yogīnaḥ pannagās ca ye
gopālā gopikā vā 'pi nārado 'ddhava pārṣadaiḥ

5. All the gods, sages, yogī, divine serpents, gopālā, gopikā (friends and devotees of lord Kṛṣṇa), Nārada, Uddhava and others (dwell there).

sahāyo jāyate śighram yatra gītā pravartate
yatra gītā vicāraś ca paṭhanam pāṭhanam śrutam
tatrā 'ham niścitam pṛthvi nivasāmi sadai 'va hi

6. Help comes quickly where the Gītā is recited and, O Earth, I dwell at all times where the Gītā is read, heard, taught and contemplated upon.

gītā 'śraye 'ham tiṣṭhāmi gītā me co 'ttamam grham
gītā jñānam upāśritya trīmllokān pālayāmy aham

7. I take refuge in the Gītā and the Gītā is my best abode. I protect the three worlds with the knowledge of the Gītā.

gītā me paramā vidyā brahma rūpā na saṁśayaḥ
ardha mātrā 'kṣarā nityā svā 'nirvācyā padātmikā

8. The Gītā is my highest science, which is doubtless of the form of Brahman, the eternal, the ardhamātrā (of the sacred monosyllable Om), the ineffable splendour of the self.

cidānandena kṛṣṇena proktā sva mukhato 'rjunam
veda trayī parānandā tatvā 'rtha jñāna saṁyutā

9. It was spoken by the blessed Kṛṣṇa, the all-knowing, through his own mouth to Arjuna. It contains the essence of the three vedā, the knowledge of the reality. It is full of supreme bliss.

yo 'ṣṭādaśa japen nityam naro niścala mānasaḥ
jñāna siddhim sa labhate tato yāti param padam

10. He who recites the eighteen chapters of the Gītā daily, with a pure, unshaken mind, attains perfection in knowledge, and reaches the highest state or supreme goal.

pāthe 'samarthaḥ sampūrṇe tato 'rdham paṭham ācaret
tadā go dānam puṇyam labhate nā 'tra saṁśayaḥ

11. If a complete reading is not possible, even if only half is read, he attains the benefit of giving a cow as a gift. There is no doubt about this.

tribhāgam paṭhamānas tu gaṅgā snāna phalam labhet
ṣaḍamśam japamānas tu soma yāga phalam labhet

12. He who recites one-third part of it achieves the merit of a bath in the sacred river Gaṅgā, and he who recites one-sixth of it attains the merit of performing a soma-ritual.

ekā 'dhyāyam tu yo nityam paṭhate bhakti saṁyutaḥ
rudra lokam avāpnoti gaṇo bhūtvā vases ciram

13. That person who reads one chapter with great devotion attains to the world of Rudra and, having become an attendant of lord Śiva, lives there for many years.

adhyāyam śloka pādām vā nityam yaḥ paṭhate naraḥ
sa yāti naratām yāvan manvantaram vasundhare

14. If one reads a quarter of a chapter or even part of a verse daily, he, O Earth, retains a human body till the end of a world-cycle.

gītāyāḥ śloka daśakam sapta pañca catuṣṭayam
dvau trīn ekam tad ardham vā ślokānām yaḥ paṭhen naraḥ
candra lokam avāpnoti varṣāṇām ayutam dhruvam
gītā pāṭha samāyukto mṛto mānuṣatām vrajet

15, 16. He who repeats ten, seven, five, four, three, two verses or even one or half a verse, attains the region of the moon and lives there for 10,000 years. Accustomed to the daily study of the Gītā, the dying man comes back to life again as a human being.

gītā 'bhyāsaṁ punaḥ kṛtvā labhate muktim uttamām
gīte 'ty uccāra saṁyukto mṛiyamāṇo gatim labhet.

17. By repeated study of the Gītā he attains liberation. Uttering 'Gītā' at the time of death, one attains liberation.

gītā 'rtha śravaṇā 'sakto mahā pāpa yuto 'pi vā
vaikuṅṭhaṁ samavāpnoti viṣṇunā saha modate

18. Though full of sins, one who is ever intent on hearing the meaning of the Gītā, goes to the kingdom of God and rejoices with lord Viṣṇu.

gītā 'rthaṁ dhyāyate nityaṁ kṛtvā karmāṇi bhūriśaḥ
jīvanmuktaḥ sa vijñeyo dehā 'nte paramaṁ padaṁ

19. He who meditates on the meaning of the Gītā, having performed a lot of good actions, attains the supreme goal after death. Such a man should be known as a jivānmukta (sage liberated while living).

gītām āsṛitya bahavo bhūbhujō janakā dayaḥ
nirdhūta kalmaṣā loke gītā yātāḥ paraṁ padaṁ

20. In this world, taking refuge in the Gītā, many kings like Janaka and others reached the highest state or goal, purified of all sins.

gītāyāḥ paṭhanaṁ kṛtvā mähātr̥myaṁ naiva yaḥ paṭhet
vṛthā pāṭho bhavet tasya śrama eva hy udāhṛtaḥ

21. He who fails to read this Glory of the Gītā after having read the Gītā, loses the benefit thereby, and the effort alone remains.

(This is to test and confirm the faith of the reader in the Gītā. It is not a mere book but the **Song of God** and should therefore be studied with great faith and devotion which this **Glory of the Gītā** generates in one's heart.)

etan mähātr̥mya saṁyuktaṁ gītā 'bhyāsaṁ karoti yaḥ
sa tat phalam avāpnoti durlabhāṁ gatim āpnuyāt

22. One who studies the Gītā, together with this **Glory of the Gītā**, attains the fruits mentioned above and reaches the state which is otherwise very difficult to attain.

sūta uvāca:
mähātr̥myaṁ etad gītāyā māyā proktaṁ sanātanaṁ
gītānte ca paṭhed yas tu yad uktaṁ tat phalaṁ labhet.

23. Sūta said: This greatness or **Glory of the Gītā**, which is eternal, as narrated by me, should be read at the end of the study of the Gītā, and the fruits mentioned therein will be obtained.

iti śrī varāha purāṇe śrī gītā mähātr̥myaṁ etad saṁpūrṇaṁ.

Thus ends the **Glory of the Gītā** contained in the Varāha purāṇa.

