

20. 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.

Asana, pranayama, meditation, concentration, puja, japa, kirtan, svadhyaya and satsang, are spiritual practices - sadhana, a ladder - very useful, tremendously important, unwise to ignore. They become abhyasa 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 sadhana 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 sadhana 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 sadhana 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 Gita:

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 Krsna 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 abhyasa 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 abhyasa becomes meaningful. There is no condemnation of routine religious practices. If some sort of spiritual routine - sadhana - 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.

Abhyasa yoga here covers everything - bhakti yoga, karma yoga, and hatha yoga practices, meditation, pranayama, asana. 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 remembered! 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. Krsna 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 sadhana again, to remind yourself - or to remember 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 cut 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 abhyasa as sadhana 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 abhyasa 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 sakti belongs to the sakta. 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 Krsna 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, Krsna 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, abhyasa. 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 sadhana 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 Maharsi once commented on this saying that a jnani - 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 sadhana 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.

21. 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: ksetra, jnana, jneyam. Ksetra means 'the field', jnana is highest knowledge, jneyam 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 Gita 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 Vasistha. After Vasistha 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 you think there is a cause, and then you see a cause!' There may be none. Rama said: 'If you and I are both non-existent, then who are you and who are you teaching?' Vasistha remained absolutely silent. Rama taunted: 'Why are you silent?' Then Vasistha made a most beautiful statement: 'Rama, I did not keep quiet because I could not answer your question, but silence was the only answer.' Krsna 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 Krsna 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 ksetrajna - knower in the sense that he knows the ksetri, the field.

In the Brhadaranyaka Upanisad Yajnavalkya 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 atma! 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 ksetrajna.

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 senses. Desire, hatred, pleasure, pain, the power that holds the elements together, intelligence, fortitude - the field has thus been briefly described with its modifications. (13:5,6)

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.

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)

Here the object is called prakrti.

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' - ahamkara - is an object. If you understand that, you are enlightened! Can you get rid of that ahamkara? If you do who is going to write? It is part of nature - prakrti.

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'? Krsna 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.

22. 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 Arjuna, 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 I, you are a Jivanmukta. 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 purusa, 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 ananda, 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 yogarudha. 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? Krsna gives a long list of characteristics of a jnani - 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 nonseparation, 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 jnana - 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 vairagya (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 prakrti an object in your own consciousness. You touch the core of that consciousness, and suddenly you realise 'Even that is not mine.'

23. Insight! Not Outside

The Bhagavad Gita does not demand that the seeker after truth should run away from 'life'. If that was the intention, this beautiful expression: 'non-attachment to, non-psychological dependence upon son, wife, wealth 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 jnana. So that it applies immediately to your life and mind without waiting for an external change.

Jnana 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 jnana 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, all-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)

Upasate 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 purusa, what is prakrti, and what are the guna? Purusa 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 prakrti. The purusa and the prakrti are eternally present, eternally together. Though they seem to be two, they are inseparably one. That is, what you see is prakrti. Unseen and filling the entire thing is the purusa.

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 prakrti and purusa. This is one of the most beautiful teachings in the Bhagavad Gita.

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 prakrti.'

24. At the Treshold

In that insight you realise the interaction between purusa and prakrti, 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 jnana. In that jnana there may arise a polarity, but that polarity does not divide this jnana. 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 pratyahara.

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. Krsna 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. Krsna warns us that all three of these can be fetters. Sattva, rajas and tamas are part of this universal nature. What was described as prakrti or ksetra 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 guna. 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. (14:5)

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 guna 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 jnana, as wisdom, is another contact, another attachment, another bondage. There is one way out of this.

When the wise beholds no agent other than the guna, 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 sattvika, rajasa or tamasa, 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!

25. 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 prakrti as composed of sattva, rajas, tamas, you suddenly see that each one is a rope that binds the dehi - 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 wise beholds no agent other than the guna, 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 jiva that does it. Translated in as simple a way as possible, drasta 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 drasta is aware that it is not involved in any of these. In the words of Sri Gurudev: "The wise man knows which guna is operating when." If you know which guna is operating now, you are out of it, you are not caught in it.

You are never satisfied with the prevailing guna. 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 guna that prevails ...' How do you complete that sentence - 'The wise man accepts it'? Krsna 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 sutra in the Yoga Sutra of Patanjali: '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 jnana or understanding or knowledge - sattva - is not freedom. Even that is a bondage. You come into contact with jnana - which means you are still a seeker, looking at jnana 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 Gita 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 prana 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 'jiva' (living soul) is a cell of my - God's - own being. This universe is filled with jiva - embodied or disembodied. Consciousness or awareness is also everywhere. The guna are operating everywhere, and this jiva - which is everywhere - is taken for a ride by these guna.

When the Lord obtains a body and when he leaves it, he takes the manas and goes with them, as the wind takes the scents from their seats. (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 veda; I am indeed the author of the vedanta and the knower of the veda 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 maya, you have abolished it! It is fantastic!

Permeating the earth, I support all beings; 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, I abide in the body of living beings and, associated with the prana and the apana, 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 purusa looking at prakrti, and prakrti looking at purusa. One who realises this goes beyond the guna.

26. Is it clear?

In the fifteenth chapter of the Bhagavad Gita, 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)

Krsna suggests that you cut this down by the weapon of non-contact. How is this possible? By the realisation that the jiva, 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. When the Lord obtains a body and when he leaves it, he takes these and goes with them as the wind takes the scents from their seats. Presiding over the ear, the eye, touch, taste and smell, as well as the mind, he enjoys the objects of the senses. The deluded do not see him who departs, stays and enjoys; but they who possess the eye of knowledge behold Him. (15:7,10)

That which is considered jiva, 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 jiva. 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 moksa 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, maya, or avidya, 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 asanga means. Asanga 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)

Krsna says here that the universe itself, as it flows, has these two elements, daiva and asura, 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 asura 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 asura. If you understand this one half a verse, you have understood what life is about, and what the Bhagavad Gita teaching is all about!

The asura 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 'I am a virtuous man, a holy man' arrogance 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 Krsna cautions: "Avoid lust, anger and greed."

In the fifteenth chapter there is a description of the asvattha. Asvattha means the peepul tree; asva means 'no tomorrow', that which is 'established in no tomorrow'. If that makes sense to you, you have understood the entire Bhagavad Gita, and you have the key to enlightenment in your hands. This universe that you see seems to be solid, permanent, but Krsna 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. 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 Gita.

The sixteenth chapter is extremely interesting, in that it reveals to us that what is known as 'asura' 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 asura tends towards bondage. This understanding itself is sufficient incentive to promote the daiva in oneself, and to move away from the asura - and this is of vital importance - without judging and condemning the asura nature in 'others'.

It is extremely interesting in this context to see that Krsna 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 asura factors in others; and it cannot but lead to the asura nature taking root in oneself and growing there into what the self-righteous consider to be undesirable - asura - 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 my creation, 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 asura stream of creation; the virulent, violent and self-assertive rajasa 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.

27. The Secret of Obedience

Towards the end of the sixteenth chapter, great emphasis is laid on sastra - tasmac chastram pramanam 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 sastra? It is a very serious question, if you are seriously interested in sadhana. If you are not serious in sadhana, 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 sraddha? Sraddha is not mere faith or belief, but something totally different. Sraddha 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 'sraddha' was an ego trip. When sraddha 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)

Sraddha 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 'sraddha'. Sraddha is not faith based on the ego, but it is already self-transcendence. It is the stuff of which your total being is made. Sraddha 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 sraddha was an ego trip.

Sraddha 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 sattvika, totally rajasa, or totally tamasa. 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.

Krsna 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.

28. 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 Gita 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 Gita is the gospel of appropriate action. The expressions used repeatedly are: niyatam karma, karyam karma, sva karma. 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 23 of chapter 16 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. (16:23)

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 sraddha.

Arjuna said: Those who, setting aside the ordinances of the scriptures perform sacrifice with faith, what is their condition, O Krsna? Is it sattva, rajas or tamas? (17:1)

If you have this sraddha, 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 guna 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 guna 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 sraddha, 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 sraddha 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 sraddha. 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. Asuraniscaya - beautiful! I wish I could convey this joy to you. Asuraniscaya 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, the practice of the study of the veda, 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 - sraddha. Honesty cannot be defined; what is defined is not honesty. Brahmacharyam is not only celibacy, but total one-pointedness to live, to move and to have one's being in God. Ahimsa 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 sraddha blazing forth, and tapas is natural to you. No tapas performed without sraddha can have these characteristics. If you perform any austerity which does not have these characteristics, there is no sraddha; 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.

29. 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 Sri Krsna 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 selfexistence 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 Gita there is not a single teaching 'either or'. Krsna 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, bad, evil or indifferent, is nothing but his job. There is a very specific verse:

The blessed Lord said: The sages understand samnyasa to be the renunciation of desire motivated action; the wise declare the abandonment of the fruits of all action as tyaga. (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 samnyasa and tyaga.(18:1)

In view of the teaching so far, what on earth are you going to renounce? What must be abandoned? And what is samnyasa? We are told that self-realisation is not had without becoming a samnyasi. The great sage Yajnavalkya told his wife Maitreyi: 'I can give you all my wealth but 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 selfrealisation.'

Remain choicelessly aware, cultivate or awaken this inner intelligence. Abandon all action that is prompted by desire, craving. There is a mantra in the Upanisad which Gurudev was fond of: 'Even although this atman is everywhere, it is not seen. But this atman 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 'do's and do nots', clear cut rules and regulations, are once again thrown back on to our own resources 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 samnyasa.

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", Krsna 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 - yajna, dana, 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.'

Yajna, dana and tapas, which constitute humanness in a human being, are said to be non-negotiable, non-renounceable. Yajna is adoration of God; dana 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.

Yajna 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, yajna, dana and tapas can be performed without diluting them, without destroying the spirit. So Krsna 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)

Yajna, dana 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 yajna, dana and tapas is egoism; the adoption of yajna, dana 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 Krsna said: "You must practise yoga. You must meditate in order to purify yourself." Here again he says: "Yajna, dana and tapas must be practised because they are purifiers."

30. 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 Krsna uses the very beautiful expression 'niyatam'. Niyatam 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 yajna, dana 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', 'aham bhavana', is correct, but 'ahamkara' 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 nonresistant. 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 Mahabharata and understand what they mean.

The most crucial message of the Bhagavad Gita is contained in verses 45 and 46 of the 18th chapter.

Each man devoted to his own duty attains perfection. How he attains perfection while being engaged in his own duty - hear now. He from whom all the beings have evolved and by whom all this is pervaded - worshipping him with his own action, man attains perfection. (18:45,46)

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 Krsna 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? Krsna suggests a method. "Use every one of these actions 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 Krsna'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 maya, 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 Krsna says:

Abandoning all dharma, take refuge in me alone: I will liberate thee from all sins; grieve not. (18:66)

What 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 - 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'.