

THE SPIRIT OF
THE BHAGAVAD GITA

A SUMMARY OF
THE LECTURES ON THE BHAGAVAD GITA

Delivered by
SWAMI VENKATESANANDA
At the Triveni Cultural Circle,
MAURITIUS.



The Spirit of the Bhagavad Gita

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Dedicated to Gurudev Swami Sivananda

Gurudev Sivananda is "gita in real life".

The great scripture would remain a closed book to one who has not had His Darshan and satsanga - holy company - at least for a few minutes. Those who were privileged to live at His Lotus-Feet could never fail to recognise that, every moment of His life, every thought, word, and deed, that issued from Him, was a commentary on one verse or the other of the Bhagavad Gita.

Dynamic, yet detached, affectionate, yet unattached, vigorous, yet relaxed, grave, yet good-humoured, melting the extremes into the golden middle path, the meeting place of all that is noble and divine, in the East and in the West, in Heaven and on Earth - Gurudev was a reincarnation of Sri Krishna Himself, and His life, an exemplification of the Buddhi Yoga, taught by the Lord in the Bhagavad Gita.

To Him, His own and others' bodies were the Shrine of God; the value belonged to Him, not to the combination of the elements that the physical being is. To the sick man belonged His life itself, to the relief of the suffering Gurudev dedicated every activity; but He would never shed a tear over a mere carcass. He lived in the Eternal Present, and built a glorious future; but I have never heard Him mention the past with grief or remorse.

Whether He swam in a sea of humanity, as during the All-India Tour, or lived in the seclusion of His own kutir, He was ever the same. When He was conducting the jnana yajna or a quiet satsanga in the ashram, the same spiritual radiance shone from His countenance - a radiance that today shines in the sun, the moon, and the stars.

The thoughts contained in this booklet sprang from His Lotus-Feet, at which this booklet is humbly-offered.

2. Integral Perfection in the Bhagavad Gita

Epitomised in the Eternal Scripture that was revealed by the Lord Himself, the fullest manifestation of the unmanifest, are truths that would transform Man into Divinity. Strung together in a luminous garland, are gems of wisdom, that at once throw light, peace, joy, and strength, into our hearts. Deep and unfathomable to an adept diver, the ocean of the Bhagavad Gita is yet refreshing to a lay novice, who bathes in the crystal clear waters of divine wisdom nearer the shore! Who would not like to be drowned in this ocean of Truth?

The prospects of such an adventure are glorious and irresistibly charming. For, what the Gita promises us is not an abstract Self-realisation of the transcendental philosopher, or complete annihilation of the nihilist, but a concretised presentation of the goal to mankind, and the brighter side of its utility.

What every man desires and seeks in the illusory phantom of phenomena, what he strives to achieve, by letting loose his base instincts of possession, self-preservation, procreation, etc., - the peace, the joy, the security - are absent in the objects of the senses, where he seeks to find them. In them, he can derive as much joy and peace as a thirsty man can obtain from a mirage.

That which is eternal and infinite alone can offer us this perfect peace, this real joy, and this unassailable security - and the Upanishads had emphatically declared so. That which neither existed in the past, nor will exist in the future, is a sensory illusion, a strange vision of a delirious mind - even in the present. It cannot satisfy the aspirations of the Inner Self; and the deluded soul that seeks to satisfy its longings in it, perishes like the moth in a flame. Yet, such is the force of the mind-current, which ever flows down the incline on the side of the objects that, in spite of repeated reminders to the contrary, man delights in the poisonous draughts of objective pleasure, in preference to Eternal Bliss.

To wean man away from the pursuit of the shadow is the purpose of the Gita. And, he is promised thereby the suzerainty of the Supreme Abode, where ever reigns Eternal Peace and Bliss. To reach God, to become God, or to realise that Man in essence is God Himself, is the grand goal that the Bhagavad Gita places before us.

The multi-coloured beacon-light of the Lord's Song - Bhagavad Gita - illumines the various paths that present themselves in its dazzling brilliance, and warns the intending pilgrim to avoid the pitfalls on the roadside. The colour-blind wayfarer imagines plurality of paths where but one alone exists.

In the wordy wrangle that has gone on with an endless stream of debaters, each trying to read his philosophy into the Bhagavad Gita, the different paths, viz., karma yoga - selfless action, bhakti yoga - devotion, jnana yoga - the path of wisdom, and raja yoga - the path of contemplation, have had their independent days of glory and decline. It was left to modern seers like Sri Ramakrishna and

Sri Swami Sivananda to call a truce, and to flourish before all the trumpet of Truth - that the Gita, far from being doctrinaire or dogmatic, is the point of synthesis where all the roads converge.

The Lord Himself declares that He propounded two paths to Godhead - though, later on, He affirms that the two are fundamentally one, and quickly adds that of the two He Himself holds one as preferable to the other. This is karma yoga. Karma yoga is not different from the yoga of wisdom, for wisdom is inherent in the former. The choice is then between abandonment of action and its due performance, in accordance with the principles enunciated by the Lord Himself - without egoism, attachment, or profit-motive.

Activity is the very soul of creation. Manifestation of phenomena is the result of the primordial activity in the unmanifest. The inverse process of evolution into the unmanifest has also to be through activity; for, activity can drop off of its own accord only when creation is transcended. Forced restraint of the external organs of perception or of action, will only result in a hypocritical suppression of the natural tendencies in Man, but not in their sublimation into Divine. It is this wisdom that prompted Janaka and others to follow the path of action to reach the goal.

Yet, the same activity, when it is prompted by desire and ego and profit-motive, limits the self, and causes bondage to life-death cycle. The pre-requisite of Self-realisation being the infinite expansion of individual consciousness, the separatist ego which limits the soul to the five sheaths, has to be annihilated. Whichever be the missile chosen, the target is the ego. The utter destruction of the self-limiting ego is brought about only by the exercise of discrimination. This is therefore taken as the basis for yoga.

When this fast-binding shackle of ego is broken, the yogi perceives the Atman - the Self, the image of God, which is the innermost Man, ever remaining unmoved and unaffected by the eternal activities - the Eternal Witness who either acts nor enjoys. Actions belong to the realm of nature or the ever-changing principle in nature, not to the Self. The six states - separate existence, birth, growth, change, decay and death - pertain to the qualities of nature and their combinations - not to the transcendental Self which remains tranquil and equanimous, because it is infinite and omnipresent.

Dynamic actions proceed from the yogi who has awakened himself from the slumber of ignorance - but inwardly he remains quiescent. Herculean tasks that he might undertake for the commonweal move him not a hair's breadth from his Abode of Peace. Gigantic endeavours gather not their offsprings to cling to the desire-lapel of his soul; for, he has burnt the illusion-cloak itself. The ego-causeway having been destroyed, the fruits of actions that hide the noose of transmigration dare not approach him.

Thus the yogi ever rests in his own Self, peaceful, blissful, and wise, though

dynamic and ever-acting.

Into this karma jnana - action-wisdom - synthesis is thrown devotion, too. Emotion plays a prominent part in the make-up of Man, and it claims a place at least equal to that of his head and hand. Emotion, with its seat in the heart of man, encloses within it the seed for rapid expansion of consciousness. Para - superior and apara - inferior bhakti - devotion, both have their place in the unique process of evolution, according to the Bhagavad Gita. The inferior form leads to the superior devotion, which is identical with jnana or the highest wisdom. A true devotee of the Lord sees Him seated in his own heart, and in every particle of creation. When the heart expands to limitless consciousness, the ego-covering slowly and gradually thins out, and ultimately vanishes. The goal is reached.

Man - his entire being - is thus homogeneously developed into God. There is no stunted growth of any part to mar the beauty or the grandeur of his godly stature. He is no more in danger of being preyed upon by the deadly lioness - the ego; for, no part of his being is vulnerable. He has guarded himself against the danger of exposing an unregenerated corner of himself to the hungry gaze of worldliness - as does often happen in the case of those who indulge in the alluring amusement of one-sided development - alluring because it affords shelter to the ego in convenient corners.

Nor is the practice of the yoga of meditation ignored. It is a fortress built, morning and evening, by the yogi around himself, to protect him from the external forces and the internal enemies. It is the main switch which, when put on, sets the dynamo in motion, to enable the latter to generate a high voltage current of wisdom throughout the day, and electrocute the ego if it chances to come into contact with it.

This, in essence, is the yoga of the Bhagavad Gita.

Krishna repeatedly stresses the idea that one who has reached the goal does not seclude himself in a mountain-cave, but lives an active life, in the very thick of the battle, inspiring and guiding the less-evolved souls. He is characterised by undisturbable balance of mind, unperturbable peace, ineffable joy, and indubitable wisdom. He has great power of endurance. He is perfectly free from lust, anger, greed, fear, attachment, and selfishness. In short, he is egoless.

The 'sage liberated while living', standing on the pinnacle of glory, finds joy in serving mankind, in pointing out the path leading to the great destination, and in providing in himself the ideal example for all to emulate.

Here, then, is the message of the Gita that can save mankind. The destination, as well as the path, are made of the same substance. The end and the means have a common composition. Untruth cannot lead to Truth; hatred cannot lead to love; the path to God is godliness.

Therefore, if humanity is to progress towards divinity, it should listen to this saving message. Naught else will help. That message is egoless service to the entire mankind - nay, to the whole creation - with a progressive realisation of the Truth that the One Self alone pervades every speck of space. With the gradual expansion of consciousness, selfishness will be squeezed out of existence. Ah, if only man sheds his selfishness and transcends his little ego, humanity will find itself in Paradise.

When Man realises that it is his own Self that has put on the million garbs of numberless men and women, how will he bring himself to hate any one? If man reflects for a moment that everybody is his own Self, why need he fear any one? Jealousy will flee before him if he asserts in wisdom that the most glorious deeds, performed by the mightiest potentate, have proceeded from his own Self. Humility will abide ever in him if he feels that in the vilest sinners his very Self dwells.

It is the perception of duality - the original sin - that gives rise to the multitude of errors and sins. If this original sin - ignorance - is annihilated by the dawn of wisdom, Man will perceive One alone in all. Fear will vanish; for, fear is rooted in the thought of another. Delusion will vanish; it has no place in the light of wisdom. Misery will disappear; for, the sun of happiness, joy, and bliss, has arisen.

The acquisition by every Man of this supreme wisdom, through the diligent practice of the yoga of synthesis, in accordance with the Lord's teachings in the Bhagavad Gita, can bestow on mankind the triple blessings of peace, joy, and security, that will bring the ages of wars, hatred, and ignorance to an end once and all.

Om Tat Sat.

Premaiva Satyam - Love is God.

3. The Bhagavad Gita - a Divine Light

We are about to commence a jnana yajna. This expression is obtained from the Bhagavad Gita itself. You all know what yajna means in the ordinary sense. It is a form of worship in which someone pours ghee or some such article into the sacred fire! In the jnana yajna we are about to commence, you are the sacred fire into which I pour the oblations of spiritual knowledge.

When thus this fire augmented, it will burn all inner impurities, leaving only the pure ash of wisdom, at the same time illumining our path to God-realisation. In this light, we shall be able to live our life in such a way that will ensure our peace, happiness, and prosperity, here, and ultimately our salvation too.

Here there is no teacher-student relationship, no lecturer-audience relationship; if there is any distinction between you and me, it is this - you are the manifestation of God and I am His devotee, Pujari.

In order that this worship may be fruitful, it is essential that the doubting intellect should be silent, and the receptacle of the heart should be open. The first condition is achieved by eagerly receiving all the knowledge made available to us by the Lord, here. If the intellect engages itself in concurrent argumentation, the burden on the brain might become too heavy, with the result that the eyelids drop and you go to sleep! After receiving this knowledge, it is wise to sit quietly somewhere, and then reflect over it - accepting what appeals to us, and rejecting what does not, in our present state of evolution.

The second condition is obtained by the universal method of regarding the holy book we are studying, not as a volume of printed pages, but as the manifestation of Divine Light, of God Himself. This attitude bypasses the intellect, and implants the message of the scripture effectively in the heart.

Hence, the people of all religions regard a Holy Book itself as manifest God. Though in reality it is the Message that is Divine, the value transferred to the Book itself - the result is salutary.

In the 9 verses which we recite before we commence the study of the Bhagavad Gita, we pay our homage to the scripture, the chronicler, and the author of the Gita. The very first verse personifies the scripture, and addresses it as "Mother". It is to our spiritual being what the mother is to our physical being. She feeds us - here, with the milk of wisdom - when we are hungry. She awakens us - from our spiritual slumber - when we sleep too long. She gently and lovingly corrects us when we err. All three functions are fulfilled by the Bhagavad Gita.

When the school-teacher spans him, the little boy goes only to his mother - not to the father, who may spank him again! The mother however offers him shelter and security, love, and solace. Even so, when we are harassed by our great teacher - the world, we run to Gita, the Mother, Who gives us shelter and security, love

and solace.

The Bhagavad Gita has 18 chapters - 18 adds up to 9, which is a number of finality. The scripture contains the last word, not in its literary form, but in its spiritual content. Historically, the Gita was born 5.000 years ago; but its message is eternal. We do not consider it as the Final Book. The same message can be reinterpreted and redelivered again! The number 9 is also unchanging in that, when divided or multiplied, it will have the same quotient. Hence, it implies "unchanging Truth."

Another of these verses extols the Lord - the author - as the wish-fulfiller, but quickly warns that this privilege is available only to one who surrender themselves to him. Hypocrisy will not pay here! For, says the verse, He has a whip in one hand. If we sleep or cheat after having surrendered, the whip will land on our back, to awaken us. If we surrender ourselves and keep awake, then the Lord will impart the highest wisdom to us.

Yet another verse compares the Lord to a milk-man - which Krishna was, the Upanishads to a cow - which can be milked only by the expert, and Arjuna to a calf - without whose provocation, the cow will not release its milk. Everywhere, these three are necessary for successful jnana yajna: the scripture, the audience and the lecturer or interpreter. When these three come together, there is the Holy Trevini, and the holy waters of wisdom will flow through the interpreter to the eager audience.

There is another startling verse which extols the Lord as one whose Grace enables the dumb to become eloquent and the lame to walk. On the face of it, it sounds like magic and miracle, in direct contrast with the essential message of the Bhagavad Gita, which is life, ordinary day-to-day life, full of common-sense. If we meditate upon this verse, however, we realise that it is literally true in our case, even without a spectacular miracle taking place. Is it not by His Grace that we are alive and that we are able to talk, to walk, and to live? That is what the verse means, and that is the message of the Bhagavad Gita, too. We should experience His Presence and His Grace in every phenomenon in our day-to-day experiences, and walk in the Light of God, which surrounds us literally all the time.

4. The Birth of the Bhagavad Gita

We need not indulge in vain argumentation concerning the historicity or otherwise of Krishna, nor the authenticity of the Bhagavad Gita. No one can prove or disprove anything that is said to have taken place five thousand years ago. Law court records are full of disputes regarding contemporary events! What is important, however, is the value - not merely the utility - of the scripture. The Bhagavad Gita can certainly ennoble our personality and enrich our life, free us from the host of negative and destructive thoughts, feelings, and their complexes, with which modern psychology is battling.

The Bhagavad Gita 'creates' an interesting psychological situation, and deals with it. It is part of a much larger epic - the Mahabharata - which is the story of the primordial conflict between good and evil, here personified in the five sons of Pandu and the hundred sons of Dhritarashtra respectively. Pandu and Dhritarashtra were brothers - good and evil are first cousins, too. They exist side by side in all creating problems, conflicts, anxieties, and complexes.

The wicked Kauravas endeavour by every means to destroy the 'good' Pandavas, but without success. Eventually, they resort to foul strategem - to deceive the Pandavas in a game of dice, and banish them to the forest, usurping their throne. When the Pandavas return to the city after fulfilling their part of the contract, however, the Kauravas refuse to part with power to which they have become accustomed and attached by now! Persuasion and conciliation having failed, war is recognised to be inevitable. Even Krishna, whose mission was to 'destroy the wicked', pleads with the Kauravas on behalf of the Pandavas, thus illustrating a great truth that violence should be avoided at all costs, and that armed conflict should be regarded as the last resort. Of course, this inevitability applies to those days when only combatants fought according to a high code of honour - these no longer prevail, and therefore, now, all warfare is unrighteous.

Vigorous canvassing is carried on by both the parties for the support of neighbouring kings. Duryodhana and Arjuna, both approach Krishna for his support. Duryodhana chooses Krishna's army, and Arjuna is glad to have Krishna Himself on his side, though Krishna had resolved not to take up arms and fight. This is a lesson for us, in the words of Jesus: "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and all these things shall be added unto you". If man resorted to the Divine with all his being, then the divine forces within him, the good, will be strengthened - they will triumph, subduing evil, and prevent the natural conflict between the two, resulting in a psychological warfare - the neuroses. Though Krishna does not openly fight and kill, it was His presence on the Pandava-side that made their victory possible.

On the eve of the battle, sage Vyasa offers to bestow temporary eye-sight on the born-blind Dhritarashtra, to witness the historic event. Dhritarashtra is not interested. Vyasa then empowers his minister Sanjaya with supernatural sight, with which he could see what took place on the battle-field. Yet, Dhritarashtra is

not even interested in hearing Sanjaya's running commentary of the war. He complacently rests in the belief that, so long as mighty warriors were on his side, his sons would win, however wicked they might have been. This is 'blind faith'. On the 10th day of the battle, Bhishma the invincible is defeated. This rudely shakes the blind faith of Dhritarashtra, and he asks Sanjaya to relate to him the events of the battle from the beginning.

Faced with the life-and-death struggle, Duryodhana, standing on the field of battle, thinks of his Guru: a valuable pointer to the fact that in those days even the most wicked were thoroughly imbued with the spirit of guru-bhakti - devotion to one's spiritual preceptor. But the wicked Duryodhana does not seek the Guru's blessings; he commands him. Duryodhana is afraid; his own conscience worries him - anxiety is the lot of the wicked, and no amount of psychotherapy can cure this malady; only turning away from evil can.

On the other side, Arjuna, who but a moment ago was enthusiastic about fighting the evil ones, collapses at the thought that 'they are all my own kith and kin.' This single word of two letters - my - causes all our worries, fears, anxieties, and sorrows. Even as Mr. is an abbreviation of the word Mister - the first and last letters - 'my' is an abbreviation of the word 'misery'. Otherwise, why should the possessive case of 'I' be 'my', without structural similarity, whereas the possessive case of 'he' is 'his'? Misery and 'miser' have the same root and form, if you know what I mean. The Bhagavad Gita creates the problem in order to reveal the truth that this 'my' alone is the cause of our woes, and it gives us the solution to this problem.

This volte-face produces in Arjuna all the symptoms of a nervous breakdown. But, the inferior man assumes a superiority complex, the weakling makes a show of strength. The nervous lecturer walks the platform to camouflage his shaky knees. Arjuna prattles words of wisdom. Krishna is silent - it is useless teaching such a 'wise' man.

Krishna's coolness disarms Arjuna, who eventually admits that he is confused as to his duty and, falling at the feet of Krishna - "I am your disciple", he prays to Krishna to advise him - "What is the course of conduct which will lead me to my own ultimate good - salvation?"

This question releases a flood of wisdom, which is the Bhagavad Gita, meant by Lord Krishna not only to solve the immediate problem of Arjuna, but to serve as a guiding light for humanity in the conflict between good and evil, for all time to come.

5. The Gospel of Wisdom

Under the weight of misplaced sympathy, Arjuna had collapsed on the battle-field. We should not get the impression from the Bhagavad Gita that sympathy is undesirable, nor that war and killing are in any way desirable. What Krishna insists upon is (a) that virtue should spring from wisdom, and not from fear of prison, here or hell elsewhere, and (b) that our actions should not be governed by selfish and egotistic motivation, but that we should realise that we do His Will.

Feigned virtue is worse than evil. Whereas personal hatred may lead us to criminal conduct; when it is unmasked, it will hatch a plot which will disrupt the social structure if it is masked by a cloak of virtue. The latter will often instigate one to social and political agitation, in whose guise one can 'legally' indulge in the crime one is averse to commit openly. Virtue should be second-nature; only then is it real. Krishna merely unmask Arjuna's personality, and points out to him that his 'virtue' was but a cloak to his fear and vanity.

In one verse, and one of the greatest of verses, Krishna lifts Arjuna, and with him, us, out of the morass of misery. "Asochyananvasocha stvam" - "You are worrying unnecessarily." This, when it is used as a Mantra, can save from endless worries and anxieties. "Don't worry" should not be construed to mean encouragement of callousness. On the contrary, it is a commandment not to waste precious physical, mental, and psychic forces in worry, but to use them in working and in thinking well. The distinction between these two should be clearly borne in mind. When a task is ahead of us, it is work to be done. By concentrating all our attention on it, and using all our faculties, we can tackle it well. The indolent man lets the task remain undone, and when the opportunity has passed behind him, begins to worry. In front it was work, behind it is worry. This worry again cannot recall lost time, nor recapture lost opportunity. It can only make us ignore the present opportunity, too! Though the good God has put our two eyes in front - so that we may always look forward, eagerly to achieve success in life, the unwise man insists on looking constantly behind him. That driver is a menace to himself and to society; he drives looking at the backseat passenger. We are allowed only to turn our head side-ways, and to look in front. We need only scan the entire horizon in front of us, perceive every task in its correct context, and then keeping our gaze right in front go ahead. We shall never worry ourselves.

"You are worried; and you speak as though you are a man of wisdom!", says Krishna, addressing Arjuna - and us, too. Worry and wisdom do not go together. If your wisdom cannot guide you in your life, what is its worth? If you are wise and let that wisdom guide you, you will have no time to worry. "Wise men do not worry about the living - present - or the dead - past". Look at the graveyard where lie in peace they who worried themselves with the thought that but for them the world would be ruined! That worry perhaps took them sooner to the grave, but did not alter the course of the world.

We bury the dead. So should we bury the dead past, our memories of past

experiences, in order that we may have enough room in our mind for the present thoughts and experiences. Just as a wise heir buries one of his father's properties - viz., the body, but keeps the other - viz., his wealth, the wise man will forget the past experience, but cherish the wealth of wisdom he gained therefrom. If the latter were also thrown away, he will remain poor. If the past unpleasant experience is not forgotten, the heart will be ruled by baser passions of animosity, hatred, malice, and vengeance.

If we are not worried about the past, we are worried about our future! There is a lady in South Africa who went off her mind when she was told that the world will perish two million or so years hence! There are those who are always worried about the distant future. In their endeavour to ensure a happy life then, they make themselves miserable now. Worrying over that future, they miss present opportunities which could have ensured just what they want - a happy future. Wisdom consists in calmly analysing the present situation, and living up to the very best standards in the light of one's own knowledge and understanding; and this itself will ensure that the future, when it becomes the 'present', will find us ready to handle it similarly. We should work for it, plan for it, and strive towards that ideal - but not to worry.

In all such cases, it is wonderful to visualise Sri Krishna standing in front of us and, with a smile on his lips, saying to us, "You are worrying unnecessarily". The worry will instantly leave us.

Krishna does not stop there, but goes on, to impart to Arjuna the highest spiritual knowledge. Scholars have pounced upon this circumstance to declare that (a) on the battle-field, neither Krishna nor Arjuna would have been in a mood to discuss metaphysics, and (b) there was no need for metaphysics to solve the issue at hand. On the basis of this theory, they have ventured the theory that the whole of the Gita is an interpolation by a clever poet who wanted to immortalise his composition even at the risk forfeiting his glory.

Krishna's actions were never without significance. This is the lesson I draw from the fact that the Gita was revealed by him on the battle-field. "Look", the Lord seems to say, "I declared it on the battle-field, and you should apply it in the daily battle of your life, not discuss it to pass your lazy moments. Not when your life is sweet, but when you are called upon to swallow the bitter pill of suffering, defeat, and dishonour, should you apply the Gita to your life."

In regard to the second objection, too, I think Krishna was right. Often in our life we do not look at the problems of our life squarely in their face, and solve them - at the very root. We take the easy way out, content with a makeshift attempt to tide over the immediate crisis. The evil root is still there, and throws up an even greater crisis soon after. Since we took the easy way out, out of cowardice and weakness, we do not possess the inner strength to face the greater crisis, and we collapse. If we wish to enjoy peace of mind and happiness, we should, at the first sign of a problem or conflict in our life, seek its root and

eliminate it there. This will also give us sufficient inner spiritual strength to face others when and if they arise later on.

Hence, taking advantage of the situation, Lord Krishna gets to the root of the problem facing Arjuna - viz., ignorance of the nature of the soul, the world, and God - and removes it once and for all.

6. Fear of the Self-created Ghost

We saw that, in quarter of a verse, Krishna had opened the prison-door of sorrow, in which we have shut ourselves, by continuous and unnecessary worry. When we walk out of that door, the outside events need not change, but our interpretation of them undergoes a drastic change. If we carefully analyse the roots of all our worries, we shall discover that they can be classified in two categories - worries concerning - fear of - death and worries concerning - fear of - life. In this world, there are some who are afraid of life, and so commit suicide. There are others who are afraid of death, and so live a life worse than death. That man in whose heart these two fears have no place, will be happy to live, and live happily, and will be glad to die - when the time comes, and die peacefully.

Incidentally, that is 'the devotee's prayer' offered in an interesting Sanskrit couplet: "O Lord, give me the boon that I may live without poverty and penury, and die without suffering". Again, that is the main reason - though legend might weave a number of stories to explain it - why, of the Indian Trinity, Brahma the creator is not popularly worshipped. So far as we are concerned, his work has already been accomplished! We are here. All that we are at present interested in is a happy life - the function of the protector Vishnu - and a peaceful end - the province of the redeemer Siva.

Krishna is not interested in piecemeal solutions, as we saw last time. Cut the gordian knot. What is death? It is a misnomer. It is a misunderstanding. Birth and death are events connected with the body - but, on account of ignorance, we superimpose them on the Self. "I was born" and "I die". The statement 'I was born' is as wrong as the one 'I woke up at 5 this morning'. 'I' did not sleep before that; if you pinched my foot at 5 a.m., you would have noticed that I quickly withdrew my foot. I was awake enough to do that. Part of my mind was resting at night; and at 5 a.m., it also woke up. But, for the sake of convenience, we say, "I woke up". In the same way, the statement 'I was born' is defective and false.

The soul assumes a relationship - called identification in Indian philosophy - with the body. It is this identification that is responsible for our experience of pain; otherwise, neither the inert body nor the everblissful soul is subject to pain. The body undergoes continuous change, even while the soul indwells it. Childhood, youth, manhood, old age - and then, transfer to another body - these are stages through which the false identification leads the soul. The body itself undergoes continual cell-renewal; there is not one cell in my body now, which was there, say, 10 years ago. Yet, I feel it has ever been with me, it is 'I'. I may replace all the parts of a watch to which I may be sentimentally attached because it was given to me by my Guru; there may not now be a single part in it which was there when my Guru gave it to me - but, the 'idea' still persists. The 'I' is but an idea. It is not affected by the integration or the disintegration of the elements which we refer to as birth and death. It is easy enough to prove that 'I' is distinct from the physical body. The man who says 'I am Venkatesananda' points to his 5' 7" body as that. From head to foot, it is 'Venkatesananda'. Supposing, by an

accident, this man lost both his legs, would he then be only 'Venkate', 'sananda', having been amputated? No. Even this 4' 10" body is referred to as 'Venkatesananda'.

Reflection over this thought will reveal a great truth to us. The body is but an outer cloak which the soul periodically discards in favour of a new one. There is no such thing called 'death'; it is in truth 'getting into a new body', a very welcome and happy event. In the darkness of our ignorance, we assume that the shadows cast by trees as ghosts; and we then fear these self-created ghosts! This fear can be removed by knowledge alone - knowledge that 'I am the Immortal Self'.

Once this fear of death is dispelled, we are filled with courage, optimism, and joy. We are ready to face life. Here, as we have seen, there is the other kind of fear! Fear of life and its ever-changing pattern. And, again, Krishna comes to our rescue with an astounding but obvious truth. "These things - heat and cold, pain and pleasure, honour and dishonour - constantly change. Endure them." Do not invest the moment with the mantle of eternity. Even this will pass away. So, why worry? Where is the need to worry about the darkness of midnight? And, where is the sense in it? Wait. It will pass away, and the sun will rise once again.

Recognition of this nature of the world lifts a big load from our head. We do not dread pain, nor do we cling to pleasure - and these two characteristics are mentioned as those of a sage. When we dread pain and try to push it away, we are oppressed by the pain all the more, even as the passenger who pushes the car which has run out of petrol is oppressed by the weight of the car. If we sit within the car and hold the steering, we do not suffer so much. Let us go on with living, knowing well that the pain will pass. Clinging to a little pleasure, with a heart filled with the fear that we might lose it, is itself pain! The miser, wishing to prevent suffering in old age, hoards his money foregoing nourishment and medical attention, and invites suffering in old age. The wise man who knows that these are passing phenomena, stands by as a silent witness, neither clinging to pleasure nor kicking pain, but calmly enduring them. In that unruffled state, he is ever happy. That is the secret.

From endurance comes 'samam' - sameness. The difference is this: in endurance, the pain is felt, but accepted lightly, whereas in 'sameness', the pain is not felt at all - and what does one mean by that? If pain is not felt, it is not pain! Hence, it is said that the sage is ever blissful.

The only obstacle, the only enemy that prevents this, is the inner one with his two 'faces' or phases - love and hatred. It is the demon called desire - insatiable and sinful. His other phase is hatred, anger. Both are insatiable. No one can satisfy - even one man's - desire in this world. No one can appease - even one man's - hatred either. What will man not do in order to ensure that his 'enemy' whom he hates is not happy even in the other world!

Desire and anger, love and hatred, attachment and aversion - these impel us to

'like' certain experiences and 'dislike' certain others. The mental equilibrium is disturbed. 'Sameness' is gone. Likes and dislikes make it impossible for us to endure the slightest pain - which is unbearable, and also the least separation from what we like, which again is unbearable. This the root-cause of all our fears, worries, and anxieties. It is removed by the correct understanding of the nature of the world, i.e. everything is passing phenomenon in this world. Fear of death is removed by realising that the Self is immortal. We shall ever be happy.

7. Integral Vision

Granted that the soul is immortal, and that the world is an ever-changing panorama of night and day, heat and cold, pleasure and pain, honour and dishonour, to be endured at first, and to be dissociated from later, how are all these related? For, if my soul is immortal, and similarly your soul also is immortal, and if I do not like you, this dislike also will become immortal! Our legends are full of stories of the quarrels among the dwellers of heaven, who had earned what is euphemistically called 'temporary immortality'. Incidentally, that is one of the reasons why the Bhagavad Gita discounts all attempts at winning a holiday in heaven; after that period of enjoyment, one has to return to this world of pain and death! While one may be dissatisfied with loneliness, the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad declares that, from the awareness of another, there is fear!

The Bhagavad Gita guarantees fearlessness, grieflessness, freedom from sin, and suffering. The Upanishads remind us that such a state can be had only in the Infinite, where one does not see another, think or know of another. In other words, where Oneness prevails. That is the natural inference from the deep sleep state, too - where there is experience of homogeneity, there is happiness. So, then, even if the soul is immortal, if there are many, there still persists the possibility of fear, grief, and sin.

The Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita contain inspiring declarations to the effect that God is Omnipresent, Infinite. There cannot be two infinities! This one word deals a fatal blow to all sense of duality-between even 'I' and 'God'. Krishna reminds us that the whole universe, including all beings in it, is His Nature, Prakriti. Unfortunately, philosophers, both in the East and in the West, have been using this word 'nature' independently. Nature refers to attribute; and an attribute does not stand alone, but is always referred to a substance. Whose attribute is this Nature? God's!

Sri Krishna explains this further in great detail. Earth, water, fire, air, and space, mind, intelligence, and also the ego-principle - all these eight constitute God's inferior Nature. Hence, the five senses which partake of the five elements, the mind, and the intellect, as also the 'I', none of these can ever hope to grasp the Infinite, because they themselves are finite and imperfect. Hence, therefore, our attempt to scientifically understand the truth about the objects of the universe as they are, is also foiled. We are caught in the snare of illusion, Maya.

This theory of Maya is important and difficult to grasp. The Indian philosopher does not say that the world is false, that it does not exist at all. He only says that the appearance is false, that the world is not what it looks to us to be. What it appears to be is always determined by what inwardly we want it to look like! This is the bold philosophy of the Yoga Vasishtha - that the world is a projection of one's own mind, that our perception of what is is always coloured by our inner likes and dislikes. A book is not the same to everybody - the printer appreciates

the printing and set-up, the author is proud of it, the pious reader venerates it as a scripture, the bookseller treats it as an article of trade, and a donkey may make a meal of it. When this self-created illusion is dispelled by the Light of Guru's instruction, what one sees is the Cosmic Vision, or the Integral Vision, in which the whole universe appears as the Body of God.

All-animate and inanimate objects are the Body of God. The five elements, their permutations and combinations, are all parts of the Body of God. Even thought is a factor that belongs to this inferior portion of His Nature - for thought is of an object, limited, finite, and imperfect. Discrimination, too, is inferior Nature - the very notion of discrimination is between two, whereas, in reality, one alone exists. Similarly, even the ego-sense is a finite factor.

A crude analogy will enable us to appreciate that even what we call mineral can be part of this Body of God. In our own body, we do have parts of different sensitivities, and even the practically insensitive hair and nail are also parts of our body. Even so are the minerals in God's Body. In them, the Consciousness is 'asleep', as it were.

Indwelling all these is the Life-Principle, the Jiva, the Atma, the Self. That Self is the superior Nature of God - but still His Nature. He Himself is indescribable. This Self is in fact one with God, God Himself. But, on account of its reflection in each one of the cells of His Body, we deludedly imagine that each Self is different from the other. The Upanishads remind us that this self is Brahman or the Infinite Itself - Tat Twam Asi. On account of its extreme subtlety, and on account of the fact that the mind and intellect belong to the inferior category, it is impossible for the latter to grasp the Self.

Now, therefore, Matter is His Body and Spirit is His Intelligence - on the analogy of the human body. He Himself is Transcendental. Each cell in our own body, by virtue of its being part and parcel of our physical being, is one with it, without any distinction. Each cell is filled with my power and pervaded by my intelligence. As long as each little cell works in harmony with the entire body, the part enjoys the dignity of the whole. When, as in cancer, it tries to defy the Whole, it is excised and discarded; and in the Cosmic Body, the cell cannot be thrown 'outside', but is subjected to the process of purificatory transmigration. The pure cell realises its oneness with His Body, and realises that all its own former imperfections, and the consequent sin and suffering, were imaginary, and that God and He alone exists.

The realisation of the Absolute, God's Omnipresence, the Infinite, frees us from the fear of life and the fear of death, from grief and delusion, of sin and suffering.

8. From Falsehood to Truth

When the problem is clear, the solution is simple. The manifold is an appearance of the One; the diversity is in truth One experienced as many. Oneness frees us from fear, grief, sin, and suffering. Diversification generates fear of another, love of one and hatred of the other, sin that is the fruit of ignorance, and suffering which is the fruit of sin.

The word 'sugar' does not sweeten our mouth; nor can the word or even the idea of 'oneness' tantamount to a realisation of the Truth which alone can liberate us. Hence, the Bhagavad Gita gives us detailed and clear instructions on the method to be adopted to intensify knowledge into realisation. Here, again, one cannot fail to notice Lord Krishna's love of synthesis in the Gita. Not only does He correct the false notion that one method is superior to another, but He points out unmistakably how one method is another! Diversity is the creation of the mind in its attempt to grasp the Infinite with its finite hands. Diversity, even in the concept of God, and in the method of reaching Him - though inevitable to begin with - ought to be overcome.

As you approach a big railroad junction, you find the single railway track branching off into a yardful of criss-cross of railway lines. As you leave the station, you see this process is reversed; all these lines merge into one another, and once again you have one. It is an arduous, long, and exciting journey back to the source. It involves many integrations, to be delicately worked out. Hence, the Lord gives us many opportunities to effect this perfection, and many instruments and vehicles with which to pursue our path.

The path is called yoga. Krishna gives it a distinctive name Buddhi Yoga - not to distinguish it from others, and hence quarrel even in His Name, but to reveal its chief characteristic, viz., it is not a blind system of physical practice, nor of rituals and ceremonies, but it is full wisdom, and it is a rational approach to the Reality.

Yoga is integration. It does not attempt to do anything new. It does not bring together incompatibles. It reintegrates (i) the threefold nature of the Inner Man, viz., head, heart, and hand, and his three-fold self-expression, viz., thought, word, and deed; (ii) man and society; (iii) man and God; which three imply (iv) matter and spirit; and (v) service and salvation. My Master summed up yoga in four simple words - be good, do good - (i) achieves subjective goodness - be good, (ii) ensures good actions - do good. They, together, lead to God.

The various aspects of yoga, the different phases of the one process, the facets of the single gem, have been given different names. Krishna deals with them separately, and then points out that one includes the others.

By an initial determined turning - not running - away from 'the world' as an alluring anti-God influence, the spiritual aspirant paves the way to a reintegration of his own personality. The desireless heart allows the wisdom of the 'head' to express without distortion through the 'hand'. When life's goal becomes One - the

seeking of the One - the conflict between thought, word, and deed, is reconciled. To ensure that there is no self-deception in regard to this all-important preliminary, Krishna gives us again and again long lists of noble qualities which we should possess and develop.

When selfish desires are curbed, His own Will manifests in us as the desire to do good. Goodwill is truly God's Will. The man of goodwill serves society, without attachment and personal desire. That is possible only if he is able to see that behind the society, and within his own personality, there is a reality which is responsible for all this apparent ceaseless activity. It is God. Karma Yoga is based on, and is one with bhakti or devotion.

This bhakti again is not showmanship nor emotionalism. It is enlightened with Self-knowledge, and expressed as the adoration of God Omnipresent. Yet, one who has not experienced the love of one, cannot love all! In the secret cave of his own heart, therefore, the aspirant is asked to commune with God in his own way. A direct experience of His presence will provide him with the touchstone to evaluate the validity of his experience of God-in-all. Meditation is part of Raja Yoga. Bhakti and Raja Yoga are integral parts of this inner adventure.

When, through Karma Yoga, and the deliberate turning away from worldly pleasures, the heart has been purified, and when the mind has been steadied by the love of God, in which all other worldly loves find their fulfilment and culmination, the Self and the world merge into the Cosmic Being, that they always were. Ignorance is removed as smoothly and quickly as darkness is removed when light is brought in. Man becomes sage.

The sage does not withdraw himself from the world. He lives, knowing that His Will lives in him. He works, knowing that God works through him. No self, no world, no dualities, no distinctions, no barriers of caste, creed, religion, race, or nationality, can hold him now. He is one with all. He realises that the Self is the All. When he sheds the body, he actually becomes the All-in-All. Thus the goal has been reached.

The question does not arise in him - what is the world, who created this, and why, what is sin, and what is suffering, and why do they exist. He has not found answers to these questions. The questions themselves vanish. He has not solved any problems. All problems are dissolved in Self-realisation.

May you all reach that Goal in this very life.

9. Jnana Yajna, Dissemination of Spiritual Knowledge

Jnana Yajna is everyone's duty. God's Grace - or the Wisdom Light - is like the rain. The works of saints and sages, like our Gurudev Sri Swami Sivananda, are like the perennial rivers which 'capture' the rain, and flow down the plains of the world. But the rain, and even these rivers, do not suffice to quench the thirst of humanity, nor can rivers flow into houses.

For this purpose, there ought to be canals branching off the main rivers. Finally, there should be the domestic pipe-line and taps in every house. The water, which fell as rain, and which was brought down to the plains by the great rivers, will thus quench your thirst and mine. Even so, there should be study groups in all the towns and villages of the world. Every member of such a group should take the spiritual knowledge to every house in his locality, so that the thirst of every individual for spiritual knowledge, for peace, bliss, and immortality, may be quenched.

In every house in the world, there should be one person in the first instance, who is thoroughly conversant with the teachings of our Divine Master and the Bhagavad Gita. To bring this about is our duty.