

BHAGAVAD GITA

The Global Dharma for the Third Millennium

Chapter Eleven

Translations and commentaries
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Chapter 11

Visva rupa darshana yoga

The yoga of contemplation of the universal form

After speaking about the glories of the universal form, Krishna is now going to show it directly to Arjuna, on his request. Arjuna knows that the supreme Consciousness can connect directly to his mind and give him a direct perception of its *vibhutis*, just as if he was looking at it physically. What would be the difference anyway?

What is sense perception? A micro electrical transmission in the nervous system, carried by the electro-magnetic power of consciousness, and received from other sources of transmission that use waves of various frequencies, such as light, sound, motion, heat, etc. When the consciousness leaves the body, or where the nervous system wiring is interrupted by tissue damage, there is no more sense perception.

Conversely, when the consciousness expands outside the range of the physical senses (sight, hearing, touch, smell, taste), it can perceive other things in what many call ESP (extra sensorial perception). Also, there is a "6th sense" of subtle perception of magnetic energy, that we can feel for example when we are within someone else's magnetic sphere of the body (called *aura*), and we can perceive their emotions - such as fear, lust, joy, anger, etc.

Conventional academy says it is about pheromones - a type of hormones produced by the gland system in our bodies, that give off a particular smell, but if our perception is clear enough, we can directly experience a flow of energy, like an electrical current, that has nothing to do with smell. In this regard, we may note that according to the Vedic system, the mind is called the 6th sense.

Furthermore, the mind can independently create sensory perceptions through visualization, memory, and even hallucination - that are increasingly powerful manifestations with varying degrees of deliberation, knowledge and awareness, depending on the individual experiencing them.

Popular mainstream culture has developed a sort of duality of love-hatred for these powerful functions of the mind, on one side ridiculing and condemning day-dreaming and hallucinations, and on the other side praising genius in creative imagination. The actual difference between the two sides is the strength of awareness and understanding. The lack of knowledge and clarity among the general population usually lead people to think that the problem is about conventional reality versus subjective illusion, and to rely on established official authorities to tell the difference between the two.

However, the boundary between what is acceptable and what is not acceptable can be easily misplaced by ill-motivated leaders that take the position of authorities in spite of their lack of ethical qualifications. This generates serious problems at many levels - individual and collective - and inevitably sufferings appear whenever the natural order becomes unbalanced and the purpose of life is derailed.

Vedic knowledge gives us a complete and scientific method of directly verifiable experiences, that can be repeated consistently by different individuals in exactly the same way, with the precisely

same procedures and results. This is why it is so important for any student of Vedic knowledge to follow the requirements with the greatest precision and sincerity possible, because even a small inconsistency or disruption in the programmed protocols will vitiate the process and make it unsuccessful. Thus, academic indology is intrinsically doomed to fail to understand Vedic knowledge, because it does not give any importance to the actual key that can open its doors.

Modern medical research has admitted that a large part of the human brain (between 65% and 85%) remains unused by most people in contemporary society. The ancient science of *yoga* is precisely meant to train individuals to the full utilization of the human body-mind set, consciously engaging those faculties that sometimes manifest spontaneously in phenomena that modern science cannot explain, and that have been defined as telepathy, telekinesis, clairvoyance, and so on.

VERSE 1

अर्जुन उवाच ।

arjuna uvāca ।

मदनुग्रहाय परमं गुह्यमध्यात्मसंज्ञितम् ।

madanugrahāya paramam guhyamadhyātmasañjñitam ।

यत्त्वयोक्तं वचस्तेन मोहोऽयं विगतो मम ॥ ११-१ ॥

yattvayoktam vacastena moho'yaṁ vigato mama ॥ 11-1 ॥

arjunah: Arjuna; *uvaca*: said; *mat anugrahaya*: for kindness towards me; *paramam*: supreme; *guhyam*: secret; *adhyatma*: of the original *atman*; *samjñitam*: understanding; *yat*: that; *tvaya*: by you;

uktam: said; *vacah*: words; *tena*: by that; *mohah*: confusion; *ayam*: this; *vigatah*: is gone; *mama*: my.

Arjuna said,

"My confusion has been removed by the teachings that you have kindly explained to me about the supreme secret of spiritual science."

The transmission of this intimate knowledge is motivated by kindness and compassion, as *Bhagavad gita* has already mentioned before (10.11). This is because the only real problem in the world is ignorance, or the absence of proper knowledge and realization, that is causing all types of sufferings. Ignorance is the only real enemy to be defeated, both at individual and at collective level, and the only means to defeat it is knowledge.

For this reason, the Supreme Consciousness descends in human form into this world from time to time (*paritranya sadhunam vinasaya ca dushkritam, dharma samsthapanarthaya sambhavami yuge yuge*, "I manifest myself *yuga* after *yuga*, to protect the good people, destroy the evil doers and to establish *dharma*", 4.8), and/or empowers individual souls (*shakti avesha*) to carry on the mission of transmitting Vedic knowledge. It is the most important job in the entire universe, and it can really change the history of mankind.

True, life in the material body is inevitably marred by the inherent pains of birth, disease, old age and death, but these sufferings can be reduced to almost nothing by applying the proper knowledge offered by the genuine and original Vedic tradition. It's not just about the medical, social, or technological fields, that can greatly improve the quality of life: above all, it is about the fundamental knowledge of the Self, that dispels the illusion (*moha vigata*) clouding the natural and fundamental happiness (*ananda*) that is

the nature of the Self. The *adhyatma* is the original Self, the *atman* of the *atman*, the soul of the soul. It is individual and at the same time, it is beyond individuality, because all Consciousness is connected: this is the supreme secret, the *paramam guhyam*, that Krishna has been explaining (9.1-2, 15.19, 18.63-64, 18.67, 18.74).

Conditioned souls waste their time and energy running after the whims and desires of their minds, hoping to find happiness in the external objects of sense gratification, when actually the real happiness is already eternally (*sat*) present within the Self. The key to actually experiencing this happiness is knowledge or awareness (*cit*).

Here Arjuna is confirming this realization for us, and expressing gratitude towards Krishna for this wonderful gift. We know that Arjuna is simply playing the role of the student for our benefit, because he is not an ordinary ignorant person. So the gratitude he expresses for Krishna's kindness applies also to recognizing his affection in including him into the compassionate plan for the dissemination of the transcendental science among the conditioned souls. This declaration concludes the first part of the *Bhagavad gita*, that started when Arjuna, apparently overwhelmed by confusion, requested Krishna to dispel his doubts (1.28, 2.7-8). In this first part, Arjuna asked many questions (2.54, 3.1, 3.36, 4.4, 5.1, 6.33, 6.37, 8.1).

After contemplating the universal form, Arjuna will ask more questions, albeit on a higher level of understanding (12.1, 13.1, 14.21, 17.1, 18.1), giving Krishna the opportunity to elaborate more on the practical aspects of devotional service. At the conclusion of the conversation, in 18.73, Arjuna will again state that confusion has been destroyed (*nasto mohah*) and the memory regained (*smritir labdha*) thanks to the kindness of Krishna (*tvat prasadam*).

In that last verse (18.73) Arjuna's words can be referred to the confusion of the general people, and also to his memory of the mission in which he was meant to engage by Krishna's side. Thus we should be extremely grateful for all the opportunities we are offered in this world to come in touch with spiritual knowledge.

VERSE 2

भवाप्ययौ हि भूतानां श्रुतौ विस्तरशो मया ।

bhavāpyayau hi bhūtānām śrutau vistaraśo mayā ।

त्वत्तः कमलपत्राक्ष माहात्म्यमपि चाव्ययम् ॥ ११-२ ॥

tvattah kamalapatrākṣa mähātmyamapi cāvvyayam ।। 11-2।।

bhava: the coming to existence; *apyayau*: and the dissolution; *hi*: indeed; *bhutanam*: of (all) beings/ existences; *srutau*: (that I have) heard; *vistarasaḥ*: the elaboration; *maya*: by me; *tvattah*: from you; *kamala patra aksha*: o lotus-eyed; *mahatmyam*: the glorification; *api*: although; *ca*: and; *avyayam*: imperishable.

"O lotus-eyed (Lord), I have heard from you the explanation about the manifestation and the withdrawal of all existences/ beings, and the glories of the imperishable (spirit)."

The word *apiya* means "withdrawing", and refers to the time of the dissolution of the universes (*Bhagavata Purana*, 10.87.12), when all the worlds again enter into Narayana's body (*sva sristam idam apiya sayanam saha shaktibhih*, "having absorbed this world, that was originally created by him, he reclines together with his energies").

We have often elaborated on the meaning of *bhava*, as "existence", or "appearance", as in "becoming". This word applies to the transformations of material nature, and together with the idea of dissolution of the material manifestation, it creates a contrast with the eternal imperishable existence (*avyayam*) whose *vibhutis* manifest within the creation and make it glorious. Yet, the two elements - spirit and matter - are not in opposition, but rather they are contemplated in their fruitful union, motivated by the divine compassion for the individual souls who will thus obtain the opportunity to evolve and develop up to the perfect spiritual realization.

The word *srutah*, "heard", refers to the direct process of the acquisition of knowledge, from the mouth of the *guru* and from the original Vedic scriptures, called *sruti*, that are as valid as the process of direct hearing from the realized souls (*tattva darsis*, 2.16, 4.34) or having a direct personal perception (*darshana*, 5.18, 6.29, 11.4, 11.5, 11.9, 11.10, 11.45, 11.46, 11.47, 11.50, 11.52, 13.9, 13.12), that is precisely the subject of this chapter.

The recognized *sruti* scriptures are the *Veda samhitas*, the *Brahmanas*, *Aranyakas*, *Upanishads*, and the *Vedanta sutras*. Many also recognize the *Puranas*, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* as traditional *sruti*. The other scriptures, that constitute the commentaries to the original *srutis*, are called *smritis* ("about remembering") because their compilers wrote them by remembering the *srutis*.

The word *vistara* conveys the meanings of "elaboration", "enumeration", "explanation", "evaluation", "measurement", "expansion", "expanse", "scope", and so on. Of course, as Krishna has clearly said, the description in these chapters is only meant to give a glimpse of a subject that is truly unlimited and always expanding.

The expression *kamala patra aksha*, "lotus-eyed", is also significant here. The lotus flower is not simply a symbol of beauty, freshness and elegance, but also of extreme purity; although it grows in muddy ponds, the flower is always perfectly fresh and pure, crispy clean and emanating a sweet fragrance, even under the scorching rays of the sun. Therefore the example of the lotus flower is applied to the divine Personalities that appear in this material world but are never tainted by any material contamination - rather they bring their purity, freshness, beauty and sweet scent to the conditioned souls who live in the muddy pond. We often find the lotus example in descriptions of the form of divine Personalities, referred to various parts of the body. The lotus eyes refer to the function of seeing, and indicate that divine Personalities have a pure vision (*darshana*) and are not distracted by temporary manifestations like conditioned souls are. The *yogi* that rises to the platform of divine Consciousness naturally develops the same purity of vision (5.18, 6.29, 11.4, 11.8, 11.9, 11.46, 11.47, 11.50, 11.53, 13.9, 13.12).

The lotus feet represent the purity of the teachings of the divine Personality and the service that is offered to such teachings. *Bhagavata Purana* (6.3.19) states that Bhagavan directly appears to establish *dharma* (*dharmam tu saksad bhagavat pranitam*), and this is also confirmed in *Bhagavad gita* (4.8). This means that the mission of innovation and reformation in religious tradition needs a very clear and solid realization (*darshana*) of the supreme Consciousness - that is substantially the position of Bhagavan himself. Here we need to understand that Bhagavan is a state of consciousness; individual *jivatmas* can also be Krishna conscious (attaining the Bhagavan quality or level of consciousness), although their individual "quantity" of consciousness remains limited. This is why the name Bhagavan is also used for great personalities such as Narada etc.

At the spiritual level there is no difference between *vapu* ("form") and *vani* ("message"), and in fact the *vani* is much more important than the *vapu*.

To understand this point, we can bring the example of a good servant who eagerly follows the orders of the master, and is more pleasing to the master than another servant who is just sitting and looking at him without doing anything.

The lotus hands metaphor refers to the purity of action, as we can observe for example in the loving play between Krishna and the *gopis*.

Ordinary materialists, afflicted by bodily identification and base lust, remain unable to see how Krishna's caressing the intimate parts of the cowherd girls' bodies can be a purely spiritual action. The secret to this understanding is the difference between love and lust. While lust is selfish and wants to get pleasure for oneself and a feeling of possession and domination, love is selfless and wants to give happiness and pleasure only.

In this perspective, even (genuine) love between two individual souls must be respected as spiritual. This is why Krishna has already declared (7.11) that sexual desire is sacred and divine when it is in accordance to the principles of *dharma*.

The word *mahatmya* refers to the description of the glories. The origin of the word comes from *maha atman*, "great personality", but since in Vedic tradition all glorious manifestations are considered personalities, it applies also to holy places, scriptures, etc.

Thus we find the *Gita mahatmya*, the *Dhama mahatmya*, and so on. One of the most famous *mahatmyas* is the *Devi Mahatmya*, from chapter 81 to chapter 93 of *Markandeya Purana*.

VERSE 3

एवमेतद्यथात्थ त्वमात्मानं परमेश्वर ।

evametadyathāttha tvamātmānaṁ parameśvara ।

द्रष्टुमिच्छामि ते रूपमैश्वरं पुरुषोत्तम ॥ ११-३ ॥

draṣṭumicchāmi te rūpamaiśvaraṁ puruṣottama ।। 11-3 ।।

evam: thus; *etat*: this; *yatha*: as it is; *attha*: has been spoken; *tvam*: you; *atmanam*: Self; *parama isvara*: supreme Lord; *drastum*: to see; *icchami*: I wish; *te*: your; *rupam*: the form; *aisvaram*: majestic/ divine; *purusha uttama*: o supreme Purusha.

"O supreme Lord, I also wish to see you as you have described your self - that majestic form of the supreme Purusha."

In other words, Arjuna is saying, "what you have spoken about yourself, I wish to see directly".

We should be careful not to trivialize the meaning of this verse by bringing it down to a material challenge. Materialistic people want to see "miracles" but these are not to be considered actual evidence of divinity, because there are so many tricks that can be used to bamboozle the senses and the minds of ordinary people. Simple hypnotism can already make us believe we are seeing or perceiving things that do not really exist in tangible reality, or make us fail to perceive what is actually existing, as it has been amply demonstrated by clinical hypnosis, that is even used as anesthetic in surgical operations. Illusionists also have their own craft secrets, especially if they can work in their own special environment, or with suitable instruments.

Besides these cheap magicians, there are also genuine *yoga* adepts that have developed real magic powers, and can manifest wonders to impress their followers. Flying or walking on water, producing

fire without fuel, controlling the weather, materializing physical objects, traveling in subtle dimensions and other similar feats are perfectly within the reach of any human being, provided that the proper process is followed. Some humanoid races - such as the Siddhas, Gandharvas, Rakshasas, Yakshas, Nagas, etc - are naturally capable of manifesting these functions without being trained. But that does not prove they are God.

On the other side, we can see that a genuine divine Personality may simply refuse to grant such a request, saying that we do not have the required vision (*divya chakshu*), as Krishna says in 11.8. So we cannot rely on the "request for miracle" asking people to show their universal form to verify their divinity, because they can always reply that we are not qualified to see it. We need to be more intelligent than this, and to develop the proper knowledge and realization that are required to recognize a genuine divine manifestation.

Arjuna's request is not an idle one. He is not looking for some entertainment, or legal evidence, or the satisfaction of material curiosity: he wants to put theory into practice, and actually experience the meaning of divine Consciousness. This should also be our purpose. Theoretical knowledge will not be sufficient to take us to the liberated platform or further up to the level of transcendental relationships: we need to take the big leap into full dedication to practicing spiritual life.

The tradition of *bhakti* literature explains that there are 3 levels in spiritual progress - the *kanistha*, the *madhyama* and the *uttama*.

The *kanistha* level is characterized by a certain measure of theoretical knowledge, that enables one to understand that spiritual and religious life is about worshiping God and observing certain rules and regulations in one's activities. This is the position where most religious people stand, in all the different faiths and

ideological traditions; they mostly rely on the instructions given by their specific religious authorities or recognized holy books. They attend or perform religious rituals in temples/ churches/ mosques/ holy or sacred places of various types, and show respect and adoration to sacred symbols such as images, statues, etc.

If their religious authorities are genuine, and the followers are sincere enough to listen to their own conscience, everything is well, because the universal and eternal principles of religion can be perceived spontaneously and naturally by any human being. Also, the symbolic language of the subconscious is common to all human beings in all cultures, so anyone can appreciate and understand (more or less consciously) the iconography and the meaning of the universal archetypes that are connected to the Divine. We will elaborate more on this point in another publication, specifically dedicated to the subject. Here we can simply mention that God is naturally and spontaneously perceived as the supreme Father and/ or Mother, and associated with the fundamental elements of power that we can observe around us - such as the Sun, etc.

VERSE 4

मन्यसे यदि तच्छक्यं मया द्रष्टुमिति प्रभो ।

manyase yadi tacchakyaṃ mayā draṣṭumiti prabho ।

योगेश्वर ततो मे त्वं दर्शयात्मानमव्ययम् ॥ ११-४ ॥

yogēśvara tato me tvam darśayātmānamavyayam ॥ 11-4 ॥

manyase: you think; *yadi*: if; *tat*: that; *sakyam*: capable; *maya*: by me; *drastum*: to be seen; *iti*: like this; *prabho*: o Lord; *yoga isvara*: o Lord of *yoga*; *tatah*: then; *me*: to me; *tvam*: you; *darshaya*: let me see; *atmanam*: the Self; *avyayam*: imperishable.

"O Lord, supreme master of *yoga*, if you think that I am capable of seeing it, then please let me have the direct vision of your imperishable self."

The expression *sakyam maya drastum* means "I have the power to see", where *sakyam* comes from the same root as *sakti* (*shakti*).

Krishna has already declared (2.25) that the *atman* cannot be perceived by material senses: *avyakto 'yam acintyo 'yam avikaryo 'yam ucyate*, "It is said that this (soul) is invisible to material eyes, inconceivable to material intellect, and not affected by change".

This "invisibility to material eyes" was defined by the word *acintya*, literally meaning "inconceivable". The point here is that the eyes can see only what the mind is able to take in: a mind still wrapped in material identifications and projections can barely see beyond the veil of matter.

Physically speaking - as we have already mentioned - sense perception is nothing but a micro-electrical current that travels along the nervous system, and it can be easily be replicated for example by electronic equipments that are used to experience virtual reality in computer simulations.

A few verses later (2.29) in the second chapter, Krishna had stated that it is indeed possible to see the *atman*: *ascarya-vat pasyati kascid enam ascarya-vad vadati tathaiva canyah, ascarya-vac cainam anyah srinoti srutvapy enam veda na caiva kascit*, "Some see this (*atman*) as amazing, some others describe it as amazing. Some hear (of it) as amazing, and some remain unable to understand it even after hearing about it."

This basically means that spiritual reality, constituted by spiritual bodies (*tad rupa* or *svarupa*) and spiritual objects (*siddha vastu*) can indeed be directly perceived by our physical senses, provided that our mind is adequately pure and tuned into the required level of consciousness. This is a radical concept, challenging the popular misconception according to which, as a definition, matter is tangible and real, while spirit is intangible or abstract. According to this Vedic vision, the direct experience of spiritual reality is perfectly scientific and can be empirically verified by anyone. As a consequence, spirituality is perceived objectively, and not only subjectively: therefore it is not a matter of opinion only.

The sincere spiritualists progress by following the instructions and guidance of the voice of conscience (the *antaryami paramatma*) and the genuine religious authorities and scriptures, and thus reach the intermediate level of *madhyama*, where they become able to apply the transcendental science in their daily life without the threat of punishment or the promise of rewards. On this level, we directly experience the divinity within ourselves and in the other living beings, and in the glorious manifestations that Krishna has described in these chapters. We thus acquire the divine vision (*divya chakshu*) or in other words, we can see through the eyes of the scriptures (*shastra chakshu*) with the same vision of those who compiled them. In fact, our understanding of the genuine scriptures increases and deepens, and we become able to distinguish between spirit and matter, divine and asuric characters, and the different modes and qualities of nature. We continue to see and worship the Deity in the temple and in the sacred symbols, but we are able to understand that divinity is not bound or restricted by material limitations of time and space.

When our perception and realization attain the *uttama* level, we become able to directly see and worship the Divine in everything, because our consciousness is fully connected to the supreme

Consciousness. This can only happen when we realize that we are simply a fragment, a part, of that supreme Consciousness, and we are subordinate to the supreme. Humility is required, as demonstrated by Arjuna who says, "if you think I can do it". Krishna is not obliged to reveal himself to anyone, and the supreme Consciousness can be perceived only by the power of the supreme Consciousness, not by the limited power of the limited consciousness.

Of course, the individual soul will never be able to experience the entire expanse of the supreme Consciousness simultaneously, because the *jiva* is *anu atma*, while Krishna is *param atma*, so the consciousness of the *jiva* is *anu chaitanya*, while the consciousness of Krishna is *vibhu chaitanya*. But still, the consciousness of the individual will be perfectly full. We can make the example of the ocean - that represents the supreme Atman - and our cup of water. Although the water in our cup is much smaller as a quantity than the water that is in the ocean, still it is of the same nature, and it perfectly fills our cup, making it complete and happy.

VERSE 5

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।

śribhagavānuvāca ।

पश्य मे पार्थ रूपाणि शतशोऽथ सहस्रशः ।

paśya me pārtha rūpāṇi śataśo'tha sahasraśaḥ ।

नानाविधानि दिव्यानि नानावर्णाकृतीनि च ॥ ११-५ ॥

nānāvīdhāni divyāni nānavarṇākṛtīni ca ॥ 11-5 ॥

sri: the wonderful; *bhagavan:* Lord; *uvaca:* said; *pasya:* see; *me:* my; *partha:* o son of Pritha; *rupani:* the forms; *satasah:* hundreds;

atha: as well as; *sahasrasah*: thousands; *nanah*: various; *vidhani*: ways; *divyani*: divine; *nana varna*: various colors; *akritini*: manifestations; *ca*: and.

The wonderful Lord said:

"O son of Pritha, look: these are my forms, hundreds of thousands, all different, of various colors, but all divine."

The word *akritini* literally means "made", "manifested", where *akriya* means "form". A synonym is *srista*, "created" (4.7, *sriyami aham*, "I manifest myself"), that Krishna also uses to speak about material manifestations (5.14, 9.7, 9.8). Although these divine forms are eternally existing within the supreme Consciousness, in this world they become manifested at a particular time and place through the agency of Yogamaya. The "making" of such forms is not on the same level with the creation of the material forms, that are under the agency of Mahamaya.

The universal form was already present before Arjuna became able to see it. There are hundreds and thousands of true forms of God, and they have different shapes and colors - some human, some non-human, some male and some female. Some are composite forms with animal characteristics (especially faces) that symbolize special qualities, worthy of respect and admiration. All the powerful and majestic forms worshiped as manifestations of God by various cultures all along the recorded history are contained within the universal form of the Consciousness, and even more are there. Whatever a human mind can conceive, it has already been conceived by the universal Consciousness, and will remain there forever, to be contemplated and worshiped by those people who choose it as their *ista devata*.

Philosophers and theologians from conventional academia have tried to categorize the various perspectives on divinity, labeling

them as monotheism, polytheism, pantheism, enotheism, and so on. Unfortunately, they present such perspectives as separated, independent and even opposite paths, all subjective and therefore all having the same value, or we should say, the same lack of value. For such theoretical thinkers, a monotheist cannot be a polytheist, or any of the intermediate ideological positions more or less superficially identified as recognized and followed by various cultures and individuals. In such a thwarted and miopic line of thinking, there can never be any sincere agreement or understanding among the followers or believers of these different ideologies.

This problem has been created by the abrahamic model of so-called monotheism, that we have partially analyzed in several other occasions. It is not real monotheism, because by definition monotheism means "believing in one God", and the abrahamic model presents a fundamental dichotomy between the "good God" and the "bad God", i.e. Satan, that in turn is believed to manifest in a variety of other demoniac personalities considered "false Gods". In such faiths the devotee needs to pledge exclusive loyalty (with a pact or covenant) to the "good God" and total and blind obedience to his representatives (priests, mullahs, etc), and especially fight in all possible ways against all other faiths.

In this perspective, the Absolute Truth is one of the many possible truths that somehow or other wins over the others, destroying all traces of them - temples, books, teachers, holy places, entire populations - down to the very memory of them having ever existed, or distorting their memory to demonize them. But this is a very negative mentality, based on violence, fear, deceit, oppression, and ignorance.

The Vedic perspective is radically different: the Absolute Truth is seen as the greater picture in which all the relative truths can be contained, reconciled and harmonized, in a multi-dimensional

vision that can truly bring peace and good will among all the people on the planet. Indeed, there is no other way to save the human species from the impending disaster.

Genuine atheism - that is the denial of any relevance of a personal form of God over human affairs and universal creation - is not actually dangerous to genuine religion, because by definition it does not try to force people to believe in something or adhere to rules that are not simply those of natural and universal ethics. This is perfectly acceptable from the point of view of *sanatana dharma*, that is also based on the natural and universal ethics, and has a much broader vision about the concept of divinity. Therefore Vedic tradition respects materialistic atheism as a legitimate perspective (or lack thereof) about God, and lists its ancient form (taught by Charvaka) among its recognized philosophical ideologies, as one of the three *nastika* ("agnostic") *darshanas*, together with Buddhism and Jainism.

VERSE 6

पश्यादित्यान्वसूनूरुद्रानश्विनौ मरुतस्तथा ।

paśyādityānvasūnruḍrānaśvinau marutastathā ।

बहून्यदृष्टपूर्वाणि पश्याश्चर्याणि भारत ॥ ११-६ ॥

bahūnyadr̥ṣṭapūrvāṇi paśyāścaryāṇi bhārata ।। 11-6 ।।

pasya: see; *adityan*: the Adityas; *vasun*: the Vasus; *rudran*: the Rudras; *asvinau*: the two Asvinis; *marutah*: the Marutas; *tatha*: as well as; *bahuni*: many; *adr̥ṣṭa*: unseen; *purvani*: previously; *pasya*: look; *ascaryani*: the wonders; *bharata*: o descendant of Bharata.

"Look at the Adityas, the Vasus, the Rudras, the two Asvinis, the Marutas, and also at the many other forms that have not been seen before. O descendant of Bharata, look at all these wonders."

In the commentaries to the previous verses, we have elaborated on the divine Personalities listed in this verse - the 12 Adityas, the 8 Vasus, the 11 Rudras, the 2 Asvinis, and the 49 Marutas (7 in each group of 7). To summarize, we can say that the Adityas are manifestations of the Sun as the source of all the power in the universe, the Vasus are the main elements that constitute the cosmos, the Rudras are the dissolution principles that eliminate the obstacles, the Asvinis are the healing principle that brings balance back wherever it was lost, and the Marutas are the principles of movement such as waves, frequencies, etc.

The Devas described in Vedic literature are universal archetypes whose existence is not limited by time and space, therefore they can be recognized spontaneously by persons belonging to any culture, provided they are open to listen to their subconscious. Of course the strong blind belief in the impossibility to perceive such universal and eternal archetypes will prevent one from actually perceiving them, but that is simply a superimposed obstacle that can be removed, not a real inability. The same thing can be applied to the unlimited number of *avataras* (forms in which the Divine descends in this world to carry out specific missions), as confirmed in many scriptures, especially in the *Bhagavata Purana*, as stated by the *Bhagavata* itself (12.12.7).

Here are some important verses in this regard:

avatara hy asankhyeya hareh sattva nidher dvijah, yatha avidasinah kulyah sarasah syuh sahasratah, "O brahmanas, the avataras of Hari - the ocean of goodness - are innumerable, just like the myriad of rivulets that originate from a great lake" (1.3.26)

bhavayaty esa sattvena lokan vai loka bhavanah, lila avatara anuratah deva tiryana nara adisu, "The creator of the world maintains all this (universe) through the quality of *sattva*, assuming the role of various *lila avatars*, from among the *devas*, the animals, and the human beings" (1.2.34)

yasyavatara karmani gayanti hy asmad adayah, na yam vidanti tattvena tasmai bhagavate namah, "We offer our respect to Bhagavan, whose *avatars* and activities are recited by people like us, who still cannot fully know him" (2.6.38)

avatara anucaritam hares casya anuvartinam, pumsam isa kathah proktah nana akhyana upabrimhitah, "The discussions about God concern the many stories of the *avatars* and the activities of Hari, as well as those of his followers/ devotees" (2.10.5)

kridan vidhatte dvija go suranam kshemaya karmany avatara bhedaih, mano na tripyaty api srinvatam nah susloka matules charita amritani, "Our mind is never satiated even by constantly hearing about the wonderful immortal/ nectarine stories about the Lord, who manifests different *avatars* and activities for the benefit of the twice born, the cows and the *devas*" (3.5.7)

yah idam deva devasya harer adbhuta karmanaih, avatara anucharitam srinvan yati param gatim, "One who listens to the wonderful (stories of the) *avatars* and activities of Hari, the God of the Gods, whose deeds are extraordinary, will attain the supreme destination" (8.23.30)

raksha acyuta avatara iha visvasya anu yuge yuge, tiryana martya rishi devesu hanyante yaih trayi dvisah, "Age after age, the infallible Lord protects (the world) by descending in this universe among animals, human beings, *rishis* and *devas*, and killing the enemies of the three" (12.7.14).

The import of this verse is confirmed in the famous *Purusha sukta* (*Rig Veda*, 10.90):

sahasra sirsa purusha sahasraksha sahasra pat, sa bhumim visvato vritvaty atisthad dasangulam, "The Purusha has thousands of heads, thousands of eyes and thousands of feet. He contains the Earth and the universe, and yet he is established beyond that, in a space of ten fingers",

purusha evedam sarvam yad bhutam yac ca bhavyam, utamritatvasyesano yad annena tirohati, "The Purusha is the entire universe, everything that was and everything that will be. He is immortal, and sustains all".

As we can see, the universal form, the Virat Purusha, is the Paramatman, the supreme Atman that is present in all material manifestations, within the bodies of the conditioned living entities and also within each and every atom - as well as outside them. The mention of the "ten fingers" as the measurement of the form of the Purusha refers to the comparative size of the Paramatman within the embodied beings. Of course it is not a material measurement, as it applies to the individual perception of the individual soul, so we cannot really go around with a measuring tape trying to size up the Paramatman along the body of someone.

VERSE 7

इहैकस्थं जगत्कृत्स्नं पश्याद्य सचराचरम् ।

ihai-kastham jagatkṛtsnam paśyādya sacarācaram ।

मम देहे गुडाकेश यच्चान्यद् द्रष्टुमिच्छसि ॥ ११-७ ॥

mama dehe guḍākeśa yaccānyad draṣṭumicchasi ॥ 11-7 ॥

iha: in this; *eka stham*: one place; *jagat*: the universe/ all the people; *kritsnam*: entire; *pasya*: see; *adya*: now; *sa cara acaram*: both moving and non-moving; *mama*: my; *dehe*: in the body; *gudakesa*: o Gudakesa; *yat*: that; *ca*: and; *anyat*: other; *drastum*: to see; *icchasi*: you wish.

"O Gudakesa, see now in this one place the entire universe, with all the moving and non-moving beings and much more, all contained within my body, as you have wished to see.

The expression *iha eka stam*, "in this one place", shows the extraordinary nature of the experience of awareness that Krishna is offering to Arjuna. It would not be very extraordinary to see the different beings of the universe normally spread over the vast expanse of time and space, but to perceive all of them at the same time in the same place in a focused flash of awareness is truly a special experience. We could describe this difference as ordinary light compared to the concentrated laser beam that can cut through thick steel. Such an experience cannot be explained through words or even understood intellectually, but it can be perceived at a subtler, spiritual level.

Krishna is addressing Arjuna as Gudakesa, where *gudaka* means darkness or *tamas*, to highlight the key factor of the experience: the spiritual vision is clouded by ignorance, therefore we must dissipate all traces of ignorance through the proper application of knowledge and goodness - *sattva*. At that level, we become able to perceive the spiritual reality, that is even subtler than the mental reality. The conditioned soul that is covered by the darkness of ignorance is defined as *mudha* (7.15, 9.11, 14.15, 15.10, 16.20, 17.19, but also 3.6, 3.27, 3.29) and remains unable to approach the spiritual level.

This point is clarified not only in the above mentioned verses in *Bhagavad gita*, but in the *Bhagavata Purana* as well. For example,

in the description given by Narada about his mother in his previous life (*yosit mudha ca kinkari*, "a simple-minded maidservant", 1.6.6). Although the servant girl had the opportunity to listen to the *bhagavat katha* and served the Rishis as her child did, she was simply not interested in spiritual things.

Another useful verse in the *Bhagavata Purana* says, *maya javanikacchannam ajna adhokshajam avyayam, na laksyase mudha drisa, nato matyadharo yatha*, "You remain hidden by the veil of *maya* for the ignorant people, as you are transcendental and beyond material perception. Foolish observers cannot see you, just like they cannot recognize an actor under his costume" (1.8.19).

Again we read, *sa tvam mamaisvarya mada plutasya krtagasas te avidusah prabhavam, kshantum prabho atharhasi mudha cetasah, maivam punar bhun matir isa me asati*, "Intoxicated with my own exalted material position, I have committed a serious offense against you, not recognizing your actual power. O Lord, I beg you to forgive me, and bless me so that my consciousness will never be so grossly ignorant again. O Lord, I feel contaminated." (*Bhagavata Purana*, 10.27.8).

The expression *cara acara* is often used to describe all embodied beings, as we have already seen, for example in verse 10.39 (*yac capi sarva-bhutanam bijam tad aham arjuna, na tad asti vina yat syan maya bhutam caracaram*, "O Arjuna, I am the seed of all existences, of all beings - moving and non-moving. Without me nothing could ever exist.").

In our commentary to that verse, we already mentioned that the broad categorization between moving beings and non-moving beings, offered by the Vedic tradition, is more practical than the conventional classification of animals and plants, because it is functional and not ontological, therefore it can be verified empirically and directly by anyone at any time.

The Vedic system, however, goes beyond the immediately visible characteristics of the objects surrounding us, and takes us deeper into the atomic and sub-atomic realms, stating that among the "non-moving" beings there are not only plants but minerals as well.

This amazing scientific knowledge is based on the fundamental equation that connects life with consciousness or knowledge: this consciousness or knowledge is manifested in minerals, too, by the consistency and perfection of structure in crystals, as well as in molecules, atoms and sub-atomic particles.

The deeper and subtler we go, the more our perception expands to include a wider understanding of the universe - still, the Vedic categorization remains a solid anchorage, based on the functional distinction between moving and non-moving.

Thus the vibrating quanta of energy formations that we find in sub-atomic dimensions take us beyond the duality of the definition, as they are simultaneously moving and non-moving (being the most basic constituents of so-called inert matter).

Therefore the expression *cara acara* (and its equivalent *sthavara jangama*, 13.27) can also be applied as the description of the simultaneous existence of two apparently opposite characteristics within the same object, affirming the fundamental unity of all existence, described in Vedic scriptures as Brahman.

Two other verses of *Bhagavad gita* specifically focus on this point:

mayadhyaksena prakritih suyate sa-caracaram, hetunanena kaunteya jagad viparivartate, "O son of Kunti (Arjuna), under my order this *prakriti* manifests everything, both moving and non-moving; by this cause the universe revolves/ functions/ is created cyclically" (9.10),

yavat sanjayate kincit sattvam sthavara-jangamam, kshetra-kshetrajna-samyogat tad viddhi bharatarshabha, "O best of the descendents of Bharata, you should know that whatever is generated and whatever exists, moving and non-moving, comes from the union of the kshetra and the kshetra jna" (13.27).

VERSE 8

न तु मां शक्यसे द्रष्टुमनेनैव स्वचक्षुषा ।

na tu mām śakyase draṣṭumanenaiva svacaḥṣuṣā ।

दिव्यं ददामि ते चक्षुः पश्य मे योगमैश्वरम् ॥ ११-८ ॥

divyaṁ dadāmi te caḥṣuḥ paśya me yogamaīśvaram ।। 11-8 ।।

na: not; *tu:* but; *mam:* me; *sakyase:* you will be able; *drastum:* to see; *anena:* with these; *eva:* certainly; *sva-caksusa:* own eyes; *divyam:* divine; *dadami:* I give; *te:* to you; *caksuh:* eyes; *pasya:* look; *me:* my; *yogam aisvaram:* the wonders of *yoga*.

"However, you will not be able to see me with your physical eyes, therefore I am giving you divine eyes. Look at the wonders of my *yoga* power."

Krishna clearly states here that the vision of the universal form is not something that we can see with physical eyes; rather, it is something we can see through the eyes of our intellect - *buddhi* - or with a spiritual vision. *Buddhi* is the bridge between matter and spirit, that takes our vision beyond the level of the physical eyes. What is the difference between spiritual and divine? The Devas are called divine, yet they have a material body, as they are born and die (or better, their bodies are born and die).

However, the Devas are not on the same level with the ordinary conditioned souls, because they have developed the clear perception of their identity as limbs of the Supreme: this is the spiritual level of consciousness, and therefore we can say that they are spiritual personalities, and not material personalities. The same applies for any *jiva* who has overcome the gross material identifications and attachments, and has the clear perception of its own nature as part of the body of God (*mamaivamso jiva loke, jiva bhuta sanatanah*, 15.7). These realized souls are called *jivan muktas*.

Katha Upanishad (1.3.12) states: "The *atman* is hidden in all beings and its radiance can be perceived only by those who are able to see subtle things by focusing *buddhi*".

The fact that we cannot see the universal form with our ordinary material eyes does not make it less real - it simply puts it on a different level, just like the perception of ideas. What to speak of spiritual realities or the subtle mental level... even among ordinary sense objects, there are some that escape our range of perception, like for example the ultraviolet and infrared light rays, or the ultrasounds. The evolution of consciousness in the individual soul carries from the material level to the spiritual level, gradually removing more and more boundary walls created by our gross material identifications and limitations, and rising our awareness to contemplate wider horizons. In this individual evolutionary journey, our vision becomes more and more penetrating. At some point, the boundary between material and spiritual becomes so subtle that it's just a question of consciousness, and they can turn into one another instantly.

The universal form is called divine, and divine eyes are required to contemplate it, because it is beyond the limits of time and space (*eka stham*). It is the divine vision of the Devas, who can see through their consciousness and not just through the gross material

sense organs as ordinary human beings do. The expression *sva caksu* is particularly interesting in this regard, because it implies a separation or differentiation based on material identification; a similar example can be shown in the expression *sva dharma* as opposed to *sanatana dharma*. *Sva dharma* refers to the temporary duties towards society and family, based on bodily identification, while *sanatana dharma* belongs to the *sat* ("eternal") identity of the *atman*.

Krishna has already shown the *virat rupa* before. We see that happening two times in Vrindavana to mother Yasoda, once while breast-feeding (*Bhagavata Purana* 10.7.34-37) and once when little Krishna was caught eating mud (*Bhagavata Purana* 10.8.32-39). Also in the *Mahabharata*, before the armies arrived on the battlefield of Kurukshetra, Krishna manifested the *virat rupa* in the assembly of the Kurus, when Duryodhana attempted to arrest him for trying to bring reconciliation with the Pandavas. However, no contemplation of the *virata rupa* can be exactly the same for different persons, because of the fundamental spiritual nature of the experience, that is based on perception.

The expression *yogam aisvaryam* is very interesting. Literally, *yoga* means "union", "connection", and *aisvarya* means "power", indicating something great, impressive, majestic, glorious. Unfortunately, the idea of *yoga* has been trivialized to the level of some exotic or folkloristic physical exercise ("stretch and relax"), so when we speak of *yoga* powers, most people will think of getting in a better physical shape.

Those who have heard about the *yoga siddhis* may think of some magic powers that can be developed through some secret practice of *mantras* and breathing exercises. However, the *yoga siddhis* are not the purpose of *yoga*, but simply a side effect of the expansion of consciousness - the real power of *yoga*. In this light we can better understand Krishna's statement: the universal form is

certainly the vision of the greatest and highest possible level of expanded consciousness.

VERSE 9

सञ्जय उवाच ।

sañjaya uvāca ।

एवमुक्त्वा ततो राजन्महायोगेश्वरो हरिः ।

evamuktva tato rājanmahāyogeśvaro hariḥ ।

दर्शयामास पार्थाय परमं रूपमैश्वरम् ॥ ११-९ ॥

darśayāmāsa pāthāya paramam rūpamaiśvaram ॥ 11-9 ॥

sanjayah: Sanjaya; *uvaca*: said; *evam*: thus; *uktva*: said; *tatah*: then; *rajan*: o king; *maha yoga isvarah*: the great Lord of *yoga*; *harih*: Hari; *darsayam asa*: showed; *parthaya*: to the son of Pritha; *paramam*: supreme; *rupam*: form; *aisvaram*: majestic.

Sanjaya said,

O king, saying these words Hari, the great Lord of *yoga*, showed the supreme majestic form to Arjuna.

We are reminded here that Arjuna is not the only person who is about to see the universal form. At least Sanjaya is watching everything that happens on the battlefield and narrating it to king Dhritarastra: this is the "container" in which the conversation between Krishna and Arjuna is held. The first two verses of *Bhagavad gita*, in chapter 1, introduced us to this dialog between Sanjaya and Dhritarastra, who were sitting in the royal palace in Hastinapura.

Dhritarastra asked Sanjaya to describe the activities of his sons (*mamakah*) and the sons of Pandu (*pandavah*), and Sanjaya started by describing how Duryodhana had approached Drona to discuss about the arrangements of the two armies.

Sanjaya's ability to watch the events developing at Kurukshetra from such a great distance is also extraordinary, but not as much as the vision of the universal form that he will soon describe in this chapter. It is said that such power of clairvoyance was granted to Sanjaya by his *guru* Veda Vyasa, and we will see in 11.22 that the Rishis, the Siddhas and the Devas, but also the Yakshas and the Asuras are able to contemplate the universal form as shown to Arjuna.

The word *rishi* comes from the same root of *darshana*, and means "those who see". The definition is not far from the meaning of clairvoyant, although the perception of the *rishis* is much more scientific and deeper in comparison to the vague perceptions of untrained and sentimentalistic psychics, who can merely get impressions from the etheric level without really understanding what they are seeing. Again this verse reminds us about the real meaning and purpose of *yoga* - the awareness or consciousness of reality at the original transcendental level, from which all the material manifestations come into being.

Another important point in this verse is highlighted by the expression *darsayam asa*, "showed". *Darshana*, or direct perception of a transcendental spiritual reality, is not an ascending process, but a descending process, a revelation that is granted from a higher level, out of kindness and as a blessing.

Sanjaya is addressing Dhritarastra as "king" out of politeness and loyalty, but Dhritarastra is in fact only a regent, because blindness - physical as well as mental and spiritual - such as Dhritarastra's automatically disqualifies one from occupying the throne.

Arjuna is here called Partha, "son of Pritha", because of Krishna's affectionate and strong relationship with his aunt Kunti, also called Pritha, who is the mother of Arjuna.

Krishna is thus highlighting the close ties he chose to establish with Arjuna in this *avatara*, and encouraging him to get through the extraordinary experience with the proper attitude and confidence.

The *virat rupa*, or universal form, is here called *parama aisvarya rupa* ("the supreme majestic form") in relation to the things that we can experience in this world. After the universal form, Krishna will show Arjuna his four-armed form of Vishnu and then his intimate form of Krishna again.

The *aisvarya* or *vibhuti* form does not manifest in intimate *lilas* but it is always fully present, as we are constantly reminded in the genuine *shastra* and by the genuine *guru*.

Many superficial pretenders like to entertain their followers by telling stories on the intimate *lilas* manifested by Krishna especially in his Vrindavana period, but that should be done by following the original authentic text of the *Bhagavata Purana*, especially in the 10th canto, that describes such stories.

The genuine text keeps reminding us that Krishna is Brahman, so that we do not take him lightly; see for example verse 10.12.11 (*brahma sukha anubhutyā*, "the origin of the transcendental happiness", *para deva*, "the supreme Lord", *kṛita punya punjah*, "had accumulated lots of religious credits (previously)" .

VERSE 10

अनेकवक्त्रनयनमनेकाद्भुतदर्शनम् ।

anekavaktranayanamanekādbhutadarśanam ।

अनेकदिव्याभरणं दिव्यानेकोद्यतायुधम् ॥ ११-१० ॥

anekadivyābharāṇaṁ divyānekodyatāyudham ॥ 11-10 ॥

aneka: many; *vaktra*: faces/ mouths; *nayanam*: eyes; *aneka*: many; *adbhuta-darsanam*: wonderful to see; *aneka*: many; *divya abharanam*: divine ornaments; *divya*: divine; *aneka*: many; *udyata*: raised; *ayudham*: weapons/ symbols.

"So many faces, so many eyes - an amazing sight. So many divine ornaments, and so many divine symbols raised (in that form)."

The first impact of the vision shown to Arjuna is about the innumerable faces and innumerable eyes of the many forms of God. This puts the emphasis on the personal nature of the relationship with God, as God manifests so many faces and eyes to interact with us - to look at us and to be looked at. When we sincerely and intensely address a person, we look at his/ her face and eyes, because we want to establish a deep contact and sense of communication. There are several reasons why one does not look an interlocutor in the face or eyes: fear, lack of sincerity, excessive humility, lack of confidence. All these feelings are obstacles to the development of a genuine relationship with God.

There are some who believe that religion should inspire people with the fear of God, but that's not Krishna's idea. Only *asuras* need to fear God, and even in their case, their meeting with God will be beneficial because they will be purified from their crimes

and misconceptions, and therefore will attain a better status. In any case, God will allow them to look at his face and eyes and do their best to engage in fight, as a part of his playful activities as we see in so many episodes of the *Puranas* etc.

It is said the eyes are the windows to the soul, and looking into God's eyes is certainly an extraordinary experience. We can have this feeling when we look into the eyes of the installed Deity when we serve him/ her with sincere love and devotion, and we have developed sufficient sensitivity to spiritual reality. At that level, we will be able to easily tell the difference between ordinary food and sanctified food offered to the Deity, and between an ordinary statue and the installed *murti* of the Deity, and also between an ordinary person and a genuine self-realized soul.

The word *vaktra*, like *mukha*, can refer both to "face" or to "mouth". In this second case, the emphasis is given to the two main functions in the relationship between God and the devotee - the feeding or offering of food or oblations, and the transmission of the sacred sound or teachings.

The various forms of God hold many divine symbols or weapons, called *ayudha*, and this verse describes them as *udyata* ("raised", "uplifted") because they constitute the emblems of the divine powers. There is a difference between these *ayudhas* and ordinary weapons, that are usually called *astras* or *sastras* (with a short "a") as described in the texts composing the *Dhanur Veda*. Conventional "human" weapons (called *manava sastra*) are described as *dhanur* (bow) and *sara* or *bana* (arrows, including small rockets called *agnibana*), *kunta* (spear), *khagda* or *asi* (sword), *churika* (knife or dagger), *gada* (mace), *chakra* (disc), while more sophisticated weapons (called *divya astra*) entail the conscious control of vibrational frequencies and electro-magnetic fields that are able to alter the state of matter.

Among these, we can mention the Brahma astra (a nuclear missile), the Agneya astra, the Vayuva astra, and the Narayana astra, Pasupata astra and Naga astra, that had effects still unparalleled by modern mainstream technology. On the other side, the *ayudhas* are generally symbolic weapons - for example the sword indicates cutting material bondage, etc.

Another meaning of *aneka adbhuta darshanam* is "many wonderful realizations", and it can be applied to the deep understanding and knowledge that is expressed through these divine forms - that are concentrated forms of consciousness and knowledge. As we know, the word *darshana* also means "perspective", as in the definitions of the various philosophical schools. In this sense, the verse we are analyzing is a glorious affirmation about the amazingly comprehensive nature of the pluralistic approach typical of the Vedic system.

VERSE 11

दिव्यमाल्याम्बरधरं दिव्यगन्धानुलेपनम् ।

divyamālyāambaradharam divyagandhānulepanam ।

सर्वाश्चर्यमयं देवमनन्तं विश्वतोमुखम् ॥ ११-११ ॥

sarvāścaryamayam devamanantam viśvatomukham ॥ 11-11 ॥

divya: divine; *malya*: garlands/ necklaces; *ambara*: clothes; *dharam*: wearing; *divya*: divine; *gandha*: scents; *anulepanam*: anointed with; *sarva*: all; *ascarya mayam*: consisting of wonderful majesty; *devam*: radiant/ God; *anantam*: unlimited; *visvato mukham*: whose face is everywhere.

These wonderfully majestic forms of God were unlimited, and looking in all directions. They were wearing divine clothes and garlands/ necklaces, and were anointed with divine scents.

The innumerable heads and faces of the effulgent *virata purusha* are also mentioned in the Nrisimha *maha mantra*: *ugram viram maha vishnum jvalantam sarvato mukham, nrisimham bhisanam bhadram mrityor mrtyur namami aham*, “I pay my homage to the fierce and valiant Mahavishnu, whose radiant face is omnipresent, Lord Nrisimha who is unlimitedly benevolent. He is the death of death.”

Why God's face is omnipresent? Because his consciousness is alert everywhere, at all times. In our human experience, the face or the head of the body normally functions as the "central operative room" of consciousness, where the brain receives and elaborates the information from the chief sensors (eyes, ears, nose, mouth, all in the head) and prepares the orders for action to be sent all around the body, including the communication and relationship interactions with the external world, especially with other people.

The many forms within the *virata rupa* are decorated with various ornaments, and this shows that such forms are devoutly worshiped by sincere spiritualists. They can be also simple ornaments, made of flowers or other inexpensive materials, but in all cases for God to have accepted them, they must have been offered with love and devotion, because God is only interested in *bhakti*, not in the materialistic showing off of proud and arrogant people. This is why they are called divine (*divya*): anything offered through *bhakti* immediately becomes spiritual.

The traditional worship system is based on the devotional and ceremonial offering of various pleasurable items to the image of God; among these, clothes (*vastra*), necklaces (*malya*) made with flowers or various other materials, scents (*gandha* or *sugandha*),

ornaments (*abharana*) are characteristic in many cultures, not only in the Hindu/ Vedic tradition. Another meaning of the ornaments decorating the body of God refers to his *shakti* and his devotees, who never want to leave him even for one moment, and who highlight his beauty by constantly glorifying him and speaking about his amazing qualities. In this regard, we need to note that in the spiritual world, everything is made of consciousness, therefore even apparently inanimate things are conscious personalities - Krishna's flute, the jewels that decorate the Lord's body, and everything else.

The word *ambara* ("clothes") is a synonym for *vastra*, and is found in several Names of God. *Pitambara* means "dressed in yellow". *Visvambara* means "dressed by the universe" (a poetic expression to mean "naked"), similar to *Digambara* ("dressed by the directions") and it is a name of Shiva.

The sweet scent mentioned in this verse is an intrinsic quality of the divine presence; when a divine Personality appears or manifests (even remaining invisible to the eye) we can often perceive his/ her presence through the inexplicable appearance of a wonderful scent, or sweet sounds similar to music, ringing bells or sacred chants. These perceptions have been proved as being real and not mere hallucinations or figments of one's imagination, as they can be clearly experienced by several people at the same time.

In *Bhagavata Purana* we find numerous descriptions of the Virata Rupa, offered as the fundamental meditation on the glories of the Lord: for example in 2.1.23-39, 2.5.34-41, 3.6.1-40, 3.26.50-73, 5.16.3, and so on.

In verse 3.26.72 this meditation is even applied to one's self (*atmani*): *tam asmin pratyak atmanam dhiya yoga pravrittaya, bhaktya viraktya jnanena, vivicya atmani cintayet*, "Meditating on him, the supreme Soul, in this (universal form), the *yogi* should

apply devotion, detachment and knowledge to perceive him within one's self".

VERSE 12

दिवि सूर्यसहस्रस्य भवेद्युगपदुत्थिता ।

divi sūryasahasrasya bhavedyugapadutthitā ।

यदि भाः सदृशी सा स्याद्भासस्तस्य महात्मनः ॥ ११-१२ ॥

yadi bhāḥ sadṛśī sā syādbhāsastasya mahātmanah ॥ 11-12 ॥

divi: in the sky; *surya sahasrasya*: of thousands of suns; *bhaved*: there would be; *yugapat*: at the same time; *utthita*: risen; *yadi*: if; *bhah*: the light/ splendor; *sadrishi*: in the same way; *sah*: that; *syat*: would be; *bhasah*: radiance; *tasya*: of that; *maha atmanah*: the great Atman.

If thousands of suns were rising simultaneously in the sky, that radiance would be similar to the radiance of the great Atman.

The light of the universal form is described here as *sahasra surya utthita*, "the rising of one thousand suns". It is a bright but pleasing light, that inspires and comforts all, while a comparison with the blazing midday sun would have laid the emphasis on fierceness. The expression *yadi syat* means "if it were", "it might be".

The *virat rupa* is called here *mahatma* - *maha atman*, the "great atman", a synonym of *paramatma* or *param atman*. Sometimes the name *mahatma* is superficially applied to some famous material personality, as a kind of honorific title. However, we should not forget that the word *atman* actually refers to the spiritual identity

of the self, and it should not be used lightly, otherwise people may be misled into incorrect beliefs about what makes a person great.

As we have mentioned already, spirit and light are closely connected. The *Brihad Aranyaka Upanishad* (1.3.28) establishes the standard in this regard: *asato ma sad gamaya, tamaso ma jyotir gamaya, mrityor ma amritam gamaya*, "From what is temporary lead me to what is eternal, from darkness lead me to the light, from death lead me to eternal life".

The light of the *atman* is the light of the *brahmajyoti*, that is the origin of all sources of light in the universe (*jyotisham ravir amsuman*, 10.21, *jyotisham api taj jyotis tamasah param ucyate*, 13.18, *prabhasmi sasi-suryayoh*, 7.8, *jnana-dipena bhasvata*, 10.11, *yad aditya-gatam tejo jagad bhasayate 'khilam, yac candramasi yac cagnau tat tejo viddhi mamakam*, 15.12, *asmi tejas tejasvinam aham*, 7.10, *asmi tejas tejasvinam aham*, 10.36, *tvam dipta-bhutasa-vaktram sva-tejasa visvam idam tapantam*, 11.19).

In the *paravyoma*, the spiritual sky, there is no need for such secondary sources of light because the primary light of the *brahmajyoti* is all pervading: *na tad bhasayate suryo na sasanko na pavakah, yad gatva na nivartante tad dhama paramam mama* (*Bhagavad gita*, 15.6). This is also confirmed by *Katha Upanishad* (2.2.15): *na tatra suryo bhati na candra tarakam, nema vidyuto bhanti kuto agni*, "There is no sun radiance, no moon or star, or lightning/ electricity or fire".

The word *bhah*, "effulgence", is a synonym of *jyoti* and *tejas*. From *bhah*, or *bhar*, we derive the word *bhargah* as in *bhargo devasya dhimahi*, the famous line from the original Gayatri mantra (*Rig Veda* 3.63.20, *Yajur Veda* 3.35 and *Sama Veda* 6.3, 10.1): *om bhuh bhuvah svah, tat savitur varenyam bhargo devasya dhimahi dhiyo no nah prachodayat*, "We meditate on God, who is the three

worlds (*bhuh, bhuvah, svah*). He is the radiant divine Light. May our intelligence be inspired by him."

The components of the Gayatri mantra have many layers of meanings, but they are all based on the light of the Brahman, and apply to the contemplation of the universal form. The three worlds Bhuh, Bhuvah, Svah, are the physical, subtle and causal levels of existence, that manifest at cosmic level as the Earth, the intermediate planets/ dimensions, and the higher planets. Applied to the divine existence, Bhuh is described as the vital energy (Shakti as *prana* or *vayu*), Bhuvah as the destruction of sufferings and sorrows (Hari and Hara), and Svah is the source of happiness (Rama).

The word *tat* is a pronoun ("that"), of which *tasya* (mentioned in this verse in the singular referring to the *maha atman* or *param atman*) is the possessive/ genitive form ("of that"). *Tat* is the root for the word *tattva*, or Reality. The concept of Transcendence, *tat* or *tattva*, is described as Brahman, Paramatma and Bhagavan: *vadanti tat tattva vidas tattvam yaj jnanam advayam, brahmeti paramatmeti bhagavan iti sadyate*, "Those who know Reality say that Transcendence is Reality, the non-dualistic Knowledge that is called Brahman, Paramatma and Bhagavan" (*Bhagavata purana*, 1.2.11).

In our commentary to verse 5.17, we have listed the most important verses of *Bhagavad gita* in which this word is used to define God: 2.17 (*tat viddhi*), 3.19 (*tat artham*), 4.39 (*tat parah*), 5.5 (*tat yogaih gamyate*), 5.16 (*tat param*), 5.17 (*tad-buddhayas tad-atmanas tan-nishthas tat-parayanah*), 7.1 (*tat srinu*), 8.21 (*tat dhama paramam*), 10.39 (*tat aham*), 11.37 (*tat param*), 13.13 (*tat pravaksyami*), 13.14 (*tat sarvatah*), 13.16 (*tat avijneyam*), 13.17 (*tat jneyam*), 13.18 (*tat jyotih*), 15.4 (*tat parimargitavyam*), 15.5 (*tat padam avyayam*), 15.6 (*tat dhama paramam*), 15.12 (*tat tejah*), 17.23 (*om tat sat*), 17.27 (*tat arthiyam*), 18.5 (*tat yajnam*

danam tapah), 18.20 (*tat jnanam*), 18.55 (*tat anantaram*), 18.62 (*tat prasadat*), 18.77 (*tat samsmritya*).

By and large, the word *tat* is meant to indicate the Supreme, Brahman, the transcendental Spirit, as we see in the important *mantra "om tat sat"* (17.23, 24, 25, 26, 27) and in the famous *maha vakya "tat tvam asi"* (*Chandogya Upanishad*, 6.8.7). The *tat* identified with *om*, the universal form of God in the first part of the Gayatri, is further associated with Savitur, another name of Surya (the Sun), that gives his name to Gayatri mantra herself (as Savitri).

The word *varenyam* means "supreme", "best", but also "worshipable", "giver of blessing". *Bhargo* means "radiance", and *devasya* ("of God") refers to the divine nature of Bhagavan, Paramatma, Brahman. The word *dhiya* ("intellect") comes from the same root as *dhyana* ("meditation").

VERSE 13

तत्रैकस्थं जगत्कृत्स्नं प्रविभक्तमनेकधा ।

tatraikastham jagatkṛtsnam pravibhaktamanekadhā ।

अपश्यद्देवदेवस्य शरीरे पाण्डवस्तदा ॥ ११-१३ ॥

apaśyaddevadevasya śarīre pāṇḍavastadā ॥ 11-13 ॥

tatra: there; *eka stham*: in one place; *jagat kritsnam*: the entire creation; *pravibhaktam*: in so many different ways; *anekadha*: into many; *apasyat*: could see; *deva devasya*: of the God of the Gods; *sarire*: in the body; *pandavah*: the son of Pandu; *tada*: at that time.

Then, in that one place, the son of Pandu could see the entire universe with its innumerable manifestations, within the body of the God of Gods.

Verse 11.7 also stated, with almost exactly the same words (*iha eka stham jagat*) that the perception of the universal form was focused in one single place in space and time, in a concentrated "here and now" that is the essence of existence and eternity. However, this fundamental unity of Reality is full of unlimited variety - *visesa* - of forms (*rupa*) and qualities (*guna*) that are created by Prakriti: the material variety produced by Mahamaya, and the spiritual variety produced by Yogamaya. Thus it is said that Reality or God is one and many, categorized into direct or primary manifestations (*amsas*) and secondary manifestations (*vibhinnamsas*).

The concept of variety as division or categorization is also expressed by the word *pra-vibhaktam*, that comes from the same root as *vibhakta*, *vibhaga* and *vibhuti*. We can find references in this regard also in *Bhagavata Purana* (*guna pravahena vibhakta viryah*, "the various potencies as per their qualities") in verses 3.33.3 and 4.11.18.

Yet, *Bhagavad gita* (13.17) clearly affirms that Reality is undivided (*avibhakta*): *avibhaktam ca bhuteshu vibhaktam iva ca sthitam, bhuta-bhartri ca taj jneyam grasishnu prabhavishnu ca*. Again, we find ourselves facing the apparent contradiction of the *acintya bheda abheda tattva*, the simultaneous and inconceivable unity and diversity or separation, between Bhagavan and Shakti.

Chapter 13 is specifically entitled *Prakriti purusha vibhaga yoga*, "the *yoga* of the difference between *prakriti* and *purusha*". However, the most interesting thing is that in that chapter the conclusion is that there is actually no *vibhaga* and no *bheda* - no separation and no difference.

The word *anekadha*, "of many different types", can be applied to the various cosmic manifestations as "innumerable diverse planets of different compositions", which includes not only planets proper, but the subtle dimensions as well, and also the various types of bodies in which the *jivas* live, as all living entities are within the universal form (7.12).

The universal form or *virata rupa* is a manifestation of Vishnu, the Supreme Personality of Godhead. The definition *deva deva* (or its equivalent *deva isa*) is found not only in *Bhagavad gita* (10.15, 11.13, 11.25, 11.37, 11.45), but also in other scriptures. Naturally the *Bhagavata Purana* is expected to be on the first line in recognizing the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Hari and Hara, and we can consult the relevant verses at 1.7.26, 1.8.9, 1.9.24, 2.5.1, 3.1.12, 3.7.20, 3.15.4, 3.16.17, 4.5.5, 5.3.15, 6.4.10, 7.3.6, 7.10.26, 8.7.21, 8.7.45, 8.12.4, 8.18.28, 8.22.21, 8.23.30, 9.3.33, 9.6.14, 9.6.35, 9.11.1, 9.14.47, 9.16.20, 9.18.48, 10.1.20, 10.40.9, 10.41.16, 10.51.29, 10.54.33, 10.59.25, 10.64.22, 10.64.27, 10.71.39, 10.72.5, 10.73.8, 10.80.44, 10.81.18, 10.81.39, 10.86.54, 11.4.14, 11.6.42, 11.31.27, 12.9.4, 12.13.22.

VERSE 14

ततः स विस्मयाविष्टो हृष्टरोमा धनञ्जयः ।

tataḥ sa vismayāviṣṭo hr̥ṣṭaromā dhanañjayaḥ ।

प्रणम्य शिरसा देवं कृताञ्जलिरभाषत ॥ ११-१४ ॥

praṇamya śirasā devaṁ kṛtāñjalirabhāṣata ।। 11-14 ।।

tataḥ: then; *sah*: he; *vismaya*: by amazement; *avishtah*: overwhelmed; *hrishta*: raised; *roma*: bodily hairs; *dhananjayah*:

the conqueror of wealth; *pranamya*: offered his homage; *sirasa*: with the head; *devam*: to God; *krita anjali*: with folded hands; *abhashata*: began to speak.

Then Arjuna was overwhelmed by awe and wonder. His hairs standing on end, he bowed his head in homage to God, and with folded hands, he began to speak.

The direct experience (*prakasa*) of genuine connection to the supreme Consciousness is overwhelming. Even at a lower level, when the individual's consciousness suddenly shifts to a higher or wider perspective, getting a clear vision of some relative truth or knowledge that was previously unperceived, it is a shock often compared to being struck by lightning. It is a paradigm shift, an epiphany, that instantly changes all our perspective of the entire world, and often drastically rearranges our priorities in life. To make crude examples, this consciousness revolution may happen when we discover that we have been viciously betrayed by a person we deeply loved and trusted, or we have a close shave with death and become aware of the fragility of the human body, or we see the demonstration of a totally unknown scientific or technological wonder. This intense emotion is basically wonder or amazement (*vismaya*), although it can be mixed with fear, pleasure, happiness, or pain, according to the circumstances and the type of revelation.

The period in which we live, the dawn of the 21st century, is particularly significant regarding the change of consciousness or paradigm shift, at many levels. Many have stated that as a human species, either we radically change our priorities and attitudes, or we will face some extreme situation of degradation and destruction, because the non-sustainable model of development that man has carried on for the last few centuries has reached a critical level. So from many sides and many perspectives, men and women of good will are trying to inspire and help this important

passage in collective evolution, often compared to the birth of a new age consciousness. Vedic knowledge offers an immense wealth of theoretical and practical resources to facilitate this passage, both at individual and at collective level, because the evolution of consciousness is the central theme and the very purpose of Vedic civilization. Arjuna is experiencing here such a paradigm shift, as we can easily recognize from the symptoms described.

The word *vismaya*, "amazement", applies to one of the *rasas* (emotions, feelings) contemplated by the science of *bhakti*. Another similar word is *adbhuta* ("wonder", "amazement"). *Adbhuta* is one of the secondary or indirect *rasas*, together with *hasya* (amusement, laughter), *vira* (heroism, chivalry), *karuna* (compassion, pity), *raudra* (anger, fierceness), *bibhatsa* (disgust, repulsion), *bhaya* (fear). These emotions are indirect because they are not focused on Bhagavan (as the *rasa visaya alambana* or object of worship) but on the interactions of Bhagavan with other persons or on the attending circumstances. The devotee (as *rasa asraya alambana*) feels these sentiments, for example, while contemplating Krishna who is apparently in danger when fighting with the Kaliya serpent, or seeing another devotee who is in some difficult and painful situation.

In this science of emotions, the perception of the situation (as in this example, the vision of the universal form) is the stimulus (*uddipana*) to the arousal of the mood or attraction (*rati*), that in the case described in this verse is called *vismaya rati*. From this feeling, the sentiment (*rasa*) is developed as *adbhuta rasa*, that fuels love for God (*prema*).

The ensuing ecstasy (or peak of emotion) is called *bhava*, or "existence" of consciousness. The direct emotions or primary *rasas* are *santa* (quiet admiration), *dasya* (service), *sakhya* (friendship), *vatsalya* (motherly/ fatherly affection) and *madhurya*

(erotic), which in turn can be classified further into *svakiya* (legitimate, as in one's marital relationship) and *parakiya* (outside the marriage conventions).

As some readers may not be familiar or comfortable with the concept of eroticism in the religious connection of the devotee with God, it will probably help to spend here a few more words on the subject. Erotic love is fundamentally different from lust, although externally it might be difficult to distinguish the two. Also, an external observer may have difficulties in understanding dharmic heroism, and may confuse it with ordinary anger. Dharmic heroism is that emotion of indignation and combative spirit that rises when we see injustice.

The difference between love and lust, and heroism and anger respectively is simple: the absence of *ahankara* and *mamatva*, the fundamental roots of ignorance, keeps the consciousness on the spiritual level of selflessness and true happiness, that benefits all the persons involved. Otherwise, the power of the emotion in itself is raw energy, neutral like electricity that can be channeled to create heat or cold, respectively in heaters and refrigerators. The results of the emotions will depend on how it is channeled by detached and pure consciousness, and illuminated by knowledge and wisdom (*jnana* and *vijnana*). Emotions are like powerful horses: they cannot be kept immobile all the time (repression is extremely dangerous), but they can certainly be tamed, bridled and directed in a sattvic way or even in a transcendental way.

The science of devotion is essentially the science of emotions directed towards God; in the Vedic system every natural function is respected as the perfect result of the supremely intelligent plan on which the entire universe is engineered. The secret consists in the proper utilization of each and every creation, according to time, place, circumstance, subject and object. Thus in the cultivation of a personal relationship with the Godhead, the existing set of human

emotions is applied in a favorable manner (*anuvrittya*, as described in *Bhagavata Purana* 1.3.38) towards Bhagavan. Apparently negative emotions, such as disgust and fear, will be properly applied in the indirect form, to those factors that appear as opposed to the love for Bhagavan. The only emotions that are excluded from such application are the asuric transformations of basic emotions such as hatred, malice, envy, avarice, lust, etc, from which a devotee must become free as a preliminary requirement even before starting to engage in *sadhana bhakti*, what to speak of *raganuga bhakti*.

The most intense emotion of direct attraction and attachment is the erotic feeling, based on love (that is divine) and not on lust (that is asuric). And among the various hues of erotic love, the most intense is the secret love that is enhanced by some sort of difficulty, such as separation (*vipralambha*), that makes each encounter (*sambhoga*) even more thrilling. Of course, the same applies to the other primary *rasas*, such as *vatsalya* (as in Devaki and Yasoda), or *sakhya* (as in Sudama or other friends of Krishna who lived far from him). The experience of separation (*vipralambha*) greatly intensifies the feelings wherever it is applied.

This verse also describes the *anubhava*, the physical manifestation of *bhava* (ecstasy, or heightened state of consciousness or existence) that expresses the *rasa* (sentiment). The development of *bhava* is described as *sattvika bhava* (actual spiritual feeling), *sanchari bhava* (temporary manifestation of spiritual emotions), and finally *sthayi bhava* (permanent manifestation of spiritual emotions).

Arjuna feels his hairs standing up (*hrista roma*), which is a typical symptom of ecstasy or strong emotion, caused by the agitation of the *pranas* in the body. We may remember that Arjuna manifested a similar strong feeling in verse 1.29, when he was shocked at the

idea of the imminent fratricidal battle, in which practically all the valid *kshatriyas* of the planet were going to sacrifice their lives for the evil schemes of Duryodhana. At that time, Arjuna's feelings of amazement (*adbhuta*) were mixed with disgust (*bibhatsa*) and compassion (*karuna*). Readers may find useful to review the commentary to that verse.

More about *rasas* (emotions, feelings) in *bhakti* literature can be found for example in Rupa Gosvami's *Bhakti rasamrita sindhu* (4.2.1), or in Sanatana Gosvami's *Hari bhakti vilasa* (especially for direct and indirect application of *rasas*, verse 11.676).

VERSE 15

अर्जुन उवाच ।

arjuna uvāca ।

पश्यामि देवांस्तव देव देहे

paśyāmi devāṁstava deva dehe

सर्वास्तथा भूतविशेषसङ्घान् ।

sarvāṁstathā bhūtaviśeṣasaṅghān ।

द्वन्द्वैर्विमुक्ताः सुखदुःखसंज्ञैर्-

dvandvairvimuktāḥ sukhaduḥkhasañjñair-

गच्छन्त्यमूढाः पदमव्ययं तत् ॥ १५-५ ॥

gacchantyamūḍhāḥ padamavyayaṁ tat ॥ 15-5 ॥

arjunah: Arjuna; *uvaca*: said; *paśyami*: I see; *devan*: the *devas*; *tava*: your; *deva*: o Lord; *dehe*: in the body; *sarvan*: all; *tatha*: as

well as; *bhuta*: the beings; *visesa*: of different kinds; *sanghan*: the assembly; *brahmanam*: of Brahma; *isam*: the Lord; *kamala*: lotus; *asana*: sitting place; *stham*: situated; *rishin*: the Rishis; *ca*: and; *sarvan*: all; *uragan*: the Uragas; *ca*: and; *divyan*: divine.

Arjuna said,

"O Lord, in your body I can see all the Devas and also all the various types of beings. I see Lord Brahma, sitting in the lotus flower, and the Rishis, and the divine Uragas."

The ecstatic feelings of *vismaya* and *adbhuta* that were overwhelming Arjuna did not stop him from expressing his appreciation of the wonderful vision. The previous verse used the word *abhasata*, "addressed", "started to speak", that belongs to the same etymological family of the word *bhasa*, "language". By this, we understand that Arjuna is expressing his ecstatic feelings through language, although we may easily imagine that his voice faltered and choked in the first words, to grow steadier and stronger as his glorification of the Lord successfully channeled his sentiments.

Arjuna is addressing Krishna, but his first words are for our benefit only, as he describes what he is seeing (*pasyami*). We must always remember that Arjuna is not a conditioned soul or even an ordinary devotee, but he is an expansion of Krishna himself, and an eternal *lila* companion who descends with him to assist the divine mission of disseminating spiritual knowledge.

The vision described by Arjuna truly encompasses everything: not only all the *devas*, but also (*tatha*) all the different beings as all the different levels of consciousness experienced in this world (*bhuta visesa*). They are all contained within the body of the Lord as the universal form: once again, this shows that Paramatma, Purushottama, is omnipresent - simultaneously within the heart of

each being and atom, and all around them, containing all the manifestations of existence. This confirms that all levels of existence and reality are contained together (*sanghan*) within the supreme Consciousness: once again, we are reminded that in the Vedic perspective, inert matter is nothing but the expansion of the consciousness of the living beings.

The highest level of embodied consciousness in this universe is Brahma, the first created being, of whom the various planets represent the physical body, measuring merely seven cubits, or spans of his own forearm (*sapta vitasti*, *Bhagavata Purana*, 10.14.1). The cubit is an ancient measure based on the inherent proportions of the human body; it could vary between 8 and 11 inches (20 to 28 cm), on which one could calculate a total body height of 4'8" to 6'6" (140 to 196 cm) about respectively.

The word *brahmanam* here has a long "a" in the second position and refers to Brahma. The word *isa* ("the Lord") mentioned immediately afterwards is sometimes translated as referred to Shiva, but it can also indicate Brahma himself, especially in this verse, where we see a clear reference of the lotus seat (*kamala asana*), that is characteristic of Brahma and not of Shiva.

Some commentators explain that the lotus seat mentioned in this verse is mount Meru, the subtle (*karana*) body of the entire universe, the axis around which the cosmos revolves. The mountain itself is described as the stem of the lotus, along which the 14 planetary systems or dimensions are located. At the top of the Meru there is a 80,000 *yojana* square surface called Devaloka, topped by Brahmaloaka or Satyaloka.

According to the *Devi Bhagavata Purana*, that is the residence of Devi; it is interesting to note that at times the figure of Brahma overlaps the figure and functions of the Mother Goddess, as Laksmidevi, too, is portrayed as sitting on the lotus.

According to the orthodox vaidic brahmins, Subhadra in the Jagannatha Puri triad is Padmayoni Brahma.

Under Satyaloka, there are the residences of Indra and the other chief Devas. Then mount Meru tapers down to a circumference of 20,000 *yojanas*, at the height of 40,000 *yojanas* above the sea (Garbhodaka). At that point the girth of the mountain expands again into a series of terraces; the first is the abode of the four great Kings respectively of the Nagas, Yakshas, Gandharvas and Kumbhandas, and the subsequent terraces are the residences of their subjects. Arjuna is seeing all these peoples (*sanghan*), as well as the Rishis, and everything else.

VERSE 16

अनेकबाहूदरवक्रनेत्रं

anekabāhūdaravaktranetraṁ

पश्यामि त्वां सर्वतोऽनन्तरूपम् ।

paśyāmi tvāṁ sarvato'nantarūpam ।

नान्तं न मध्यं न पुनस्तवादिं

nāntaṁ na madhyaṁ na punastavādiṁ

पश्यामि विश्वेश्वर विश्वरूप ॥ ११-१६ ॥

paśyāmi viśveśvara viśvarūpa ॥ 11-16 ॥

aneka: many; *bahu*: arms; *udara*: bellies; *vaktra*: faces; *netram*: eyes; *paśyami*: I see; *tvam*: you; *sarvatah*: everywhere; *ananta rupam*: the unlimited form; *na*: not; *anta*: end; *na*: not; *madhyam*:

middle; *na*: not; *punah*: again; *tava*: your; *adim*: beginning; *pasyami*: I see; *visva isvara*: o ruler or the universe; *visva rupa*: o form of the universe.

"I see your innumerable arms, bellies, faces, and eyes everywhere. There is no beginning, end nor middle to this unlimited form, o Lord of the universe, who are the universe itself."

Arjuna continues to describe his vision for our benefit, and addresses Krishna as *visva isvara* ("Lord of the universe") and *visva rupa* ("form of the universe").

As such, he has no beginning, middle or end, but he covers the entire span of Reality. It is said that God is the Sum total of Reality or existence, and that he is simultaneously and inconceivably one and distinct from his energies (*shaktis*) consisting in the various stages of the supreme Nature (*para prakriti*). Once we declare that someone or something is inconceivable (*acintya*), or beyond the capacity of the senses (*adhoksaja*), obviously any ensuing description or declaration must be considered only indicative and not exhaustive - especially those statements that appear to be affirming a sharp distinction or difference between the terms that have been preliminarily defined as "inconceivably one and distinct".

Already *Bhagavad gita* (8.9) has clearly stated that God's form is inconceivable (*acintya rupam*). Similarly, *Bhagavata Purana* (8.5.26) states that the nature of Bhagavan is indefinable (*aniruktam*) and impossible to discuss (*apratarkyam*). Such statements must be kept in the proper perspective, otherwise we may end up in the foolish position of having to reject even the *Bhagavata Purana* itself and all the other scriptures that actually contain so many descriptions, definitions and discussions about God.

The important point here is that the Reality/ Nature of God is not so easy to understand or explain, and our efforts in engaging in such discussions must be supported by the utmost honesty, humility and open-mindedness. This is certainly not a place for sectarianism or materialistic motivations of any other kind. After clarifying this point, we may elaborate on the need of reconciliation between the two apparently different (or even opposite) perspectives called *vivartavada* and *parinamavada*.

Originally, the propounders of such perspectives were striving to present mutually complementary visions of the same inconceivable Reality, and their public debates were aimed at clarifying misconceptions and facilitating the proper perception. However, especially in Kali yuga the genuine *acharyas* rarely find worthy successors that will continue to present their teachings in the proper way.

Usually after one or two generations the original message already becomes distorted and tainted by the materialistic projections of unqualified followers who present themselves as the "empowered" (and often even "exclusive") representatives of the original *acharya* from whom they arrogantly and foolishly claim they derive their authority. Since such "descendants" usually control the materially impressive inheritance of temples, *ashramas*, etc, left by the original *acharya*, they are able to attract the innocent or ignorant masses and mislead them. The same problem is observed in the conventional academia, in which the transcendental Vedic knowledge and the teachings of the great *acharyas* are presented by non-realized professors who have no faith in the scriptures and no interest in actually realizing their true meaning, but stand on the material prestige of the institutions to which they are affiliated.

Actually, the genuine Vedic system requires individual realization - *guna* and *karma* - for any qualification, material or spiritual. It never accepts "qualification by proxy", as by seminal descent, legal

inheritance, vote, or rubber-stamped certification or any kind. Each and every individual must personally attain the required level of realization, otherwise he is not considered qualified. By honestly following this genuine and original method, we will happily overcome all the delusional hostility, dualism and sectarianism that prevent people from attaining the transcendental level of realization.

It is certainly possible to reconcile the two perspectives known as *vivartavada* and *parinamavada*, but only by the grace of the Mother Goddess Yogamaya, the *cit shakti* or *para prakriti* through which we can connect to the supreme Consciousness. Now, according to the conventional academic view, Shankara's *vivartavada* theory claims that the universe is not a transformation of God/ Brahman, but only an appearance/ illusion (*maya*); the universe is therefore *adhyasa*, a superimposition over the changeless Existence. This is summarized in the famous aphorism *brahma satya jagan mithya* ("Brahman is true, the universe is illusion"). On the other side, the Shakta perspective called *parinamavada* claims that God is simultaneously immanent and transcendent, as he transformed into the existence of the universe. In the words of the *Chandogya Upanishad* (6.2.3), *eko bahu syat*: "the One became many", through his own *kriya shakti* (the "will power").

But where is the contradiction? All misgivings can be dissolved instantly when we understand that Brahman is *avyakta*, "non-manifested", and only manifests a form - spiritual or material - through the agency of his *shakti* - spiritual or material. The same applies to the definition of *nirguna*, used to describe the Brahman, that is also called *avikarya* (changeless).

Already in the very beginning of *Bhagavad gita* (2.25) the *atman* was described as *avyakta* (non-manifested), *acintya* (inconceivable), and *avikarya* (changeless).

If we accept the fact that the *jivatman* or *anu atman*, that is so small and subject to the power of Maya, is changeless, inconceivable and non-manifested, we should also logically understand that the Brahman is changeless, inconceivable and non-manifested, too. The spiritual forms and qualities of Brahman are manifested by his internal energy, *antaranga shakti*, that is also called *para prakriti* or Yogamaya. The external energy, called *bahiranga shakti*, *apara prakriti* or Mahamaya, is in charge of the material manifestations.

But what is the real difference between Yogamaya and Mahamaya? Actually, they are one and the same person, just like Hari and Hara are one and the same person: only the functions (or actions, which are a characteristic of *prakriti*) are different. We have already elaborated on this topic within the commentary to verse 7.7, where we also quoted the famous Invocation at the beginning of the *Upanishads* of the *Sukla Yajur Veda*. including the *Isa Upanishad*: *om purnam adah purnam idam, purnat purnam udacyate, purnasya purnam adayah, purnam eva avasisyate*, "Each and every emanation of God is complete and perfect in itself, yet the Supreme remains complete and perfect (even after emanating them)". God does not lose his separate existence in his many expansions: on the transcendental level of eternal existence, one minus one is still one.

Vedanta sutra (2.1.14) declares: *tad ananyatvam arambhana sabdadibhyah*, "the differentiation in the Supreme began by sound etc", and *Chandogya Upanishad* (6.1.4) adds, *vacarambhanam vikaro namadheyam*, "transformation is done through the giving of names". The complete quote of the *Chandogya Upanishad* verse is as follows: *yatha saumy ekena mrt pindena sarvam, mrnmayam vijnatam syad vacarambhanam, vikaro namadheyam, mrittikety eva satyam*, "From the same one clay all the earthen pots are originated. The transformations of clay/ earth are known through

the process of giving names (to objects), that begins the differentiation between manifestations. However, the earth/ clay is the real substance."

VERSE 17

किरीटिनं गदिनं चक्रिणं च

kirīṭinaṁ gadināṁ cakriṇāṁ ca

तेजोराशिं सर्वतो दीप्तिमन्तम् ।

tejorāśiṁ sarvato dīptimantam ।

पश्यामि त्वां दुर्निरीक्ष्यं समन्ताद्

paśyāmi tvāṁ durnirīkṣyaṁ samantād

दीप्तानलार्कद्युतिमप्रमेयम् ॥ ११-१७ ॥

dīptānalārkaḍyutimaprameyam ॥ 11-17 ॥

kiritinam: of crowns; *gadinam*: of maces; *cakrinam*: of discs; *ca*: and; *tejah rasim*: the powerful radiance; *sarvatah*: everywhere; *dipti mantam*: illuminating/ radiating light; *pasyami*: I see; *tvam*: you; *durnirikshyam*: difficult to look at; *samantat*: all encompassing; *dipta*: luminous; *anala*: fire; *arka*: the sun; *dyutim*: the rays; *aprimeyam*: immeasurable.

"The luminous radiance of all those crowns, maces, and discs is everywhere, so dazzling that I can barely see you. It is like the rays of the sun or an immeasurable blazing fire."

This description of the *virata rupa* continues to give us the opportunity to better understand the concept of *shakti* and

shaktiman ("energy" and "he who has the energy"), the universe and the Lord of the universe.

Another important quote that can help us in understanding the process of transformation/ creation to reconcile the various perspectives is from *Vishnu Purana* (1.3.2): *saktayah sarva bhavanam, acintya jnana gocarah, yato 'to brahmanas tas tu, sargadya bhava saktayah, bhavanti tapatam srestha, pavakasya yathosnata*. "The energies in all creations are inconceivable for the human capacity of knowledge. They emanate from Brahman, but manifest the creation and all the rest. Such creative energies are comparable to the heat emanating from fire."

This is precisely the meaning of the word *tejah rasim*, "the radiance of power", that expands everywhere (*samantat*). Like a fire produces heat, light, sparkles, and even smoke, the Supreme Consciousness has many apparently different energies (*parasya shaktir vividhaiva srutyate, svabhaviki jnana bala kriya ca, Svetasvatara Upanishad, 6.8*).

Such energies have many names - Sri, Bhu, Lila, Hladini, Bhakti, Murti, Vidyavidya, Maya, Samvit, Sandhini, Kriya, Kanti, Kirti, Tusti, Gir, Pusti, Satya, Jnana, Jaya, Utkarshini, Vimala, Yogamaya, Prahvi, Isana, Ila, Anugraha and so on - but they are all manifestation of the one supreme energy, the *cit shakti*, called *para prakriti*, or *daivi maya*.

By taking shelter in this *daivi prakriti*, the *mahatmas* become able to understand the mystery of the *acintya bhedabheda tattva* and to properly serve God: *mahatmanas tu mam partha daivim prakritim asritah, bhajanty ananya-manaso jnatva bhutadim avyayam*, "However, o son of Pritha (Arjuna), the great souls take shelter in the divine nature and worship/ serve me with undivided attention, knowing that I am the inexhaustible origin of everything/ all beings" (9.13).

Bhagavata Purana (3.28.40) also confirms the example of fire: *yatholmukad vishpulingad, dhumad vapi sva sambhavad, apy atmattvenabhimatad, yathagnih prithag ulmukat*, "Fire is distinct from the blazing flames, from the sparks and from the smoke, although all these are intimately connected by nature and produced from the fire itself."

The concept of the *jivatmas* as sparks of the great fire of Bhagavan/ Brahman is further confirmed by *Brihad aranyaka Upanishad* (2.1.20): *yathagneh ksudra visphulinga*, "just as tiny sparks of fire fly in all directions", and *Isa Upanishad* (7): *yasmin sarvani bhutany, atmaivabhud vijanatah, tatra ko mohah kah soka, ekatvam anupasyatah*, "One who knows that all these beings/ existences are created by and from the *atman*, will not be overcome by illusion or anxiety, because he correctly sees that everything is one".

We have also mentioned this in commentaries to verses 2.12, 2.23, 7.5, 7.7, and will do again in verse 15.2, discussing of the original transcendental light of Brahman (*jyoti*) that shines through the sun, the moon and the fire in this universe. The important concept of *tejas* has also been discussed in the commentaries to verses 7.9 and 10.36, where we have quoted the famous verse from *Brihad Aranyaka Upanishad* (1.3.28): *asato ma sad gamaya, tamaso ma jyotir gamaya, mrityor ma amritam gamaya*, "from what is temporary lead me to what is eternal, from darkness lead me to the light, from death lead me to eternal life".

This dazzling light (*jyoti*, *tejas*, etc) of the Brahman constitutes only the rays, or the emanations, from the Supreme Personality of Godhead, manifesting his majestic glories (*aisvarya vibhuti*). However, such radiance is difficult to contemplate (*durnirikshyam*) for the embodied souls; this will be clearly stated in verse 12.5 (*kleso 'dhikataras tesham avyaktasakta-cetasam, avyakta hi gatir duhkham devavadbhir avapyate*).

Therefore, *Isa Upanishad* (15) prays, *hiranmayena patrena, satyasyapihitam mukham, tat tvam pusann apavrnu, satya dharmaya dristaye*, "O sustainer (of life), the face of Truth is covered by a golden veil. Please remove it, to show yourself to the true *dharma* (a devotee who is dedicated to truth and therefore personifies *dharma*)".

VERSE 18

त्वमक्षरं परमं वेदितव्यं

tvamakṣaram paramaṁ veditavyam

त्वमस्य विश्वस्य परं निधानम् ।

tvamasya viśvasya paraṁ nidhānam ।

त्वमव्ययः शाश्वतधर्मगोप्ता

tvamavyayaḥ śāśvatadharmagoptā

सनातनस्त्वं पुरुषो मतो मे ॥ ११-१८ ॥

sanātanastvaṁ puruṣo mato me ॥ 11-18 ॥

tvam: you; *aksharam*: eternal; *paramam*: supreme; *veditavyam*: to be known; *tvam*: you; *asya*: of this; *visvasya*: of the universe; *param*: supreme; *nidhanam*: the foundation; *tvam*: you; *avyayah*: imperishable; *sasvata dharma*: eternal *dharma*; *gopta*: protector; *sanatanah*: eternal; *tvam*: you; *purushah*: the Purusha; *matah me*: my belief.

"I believe you are the imperishable Reality, the supreme object of knowledge, the supreme foundation of this universe, the

protector of the eternal unchangeable *dharma*. You are the eternal Purusha.”

Arjuna's words are turning from the description of his vision and penetrating its meaning. The particular metric of these verses is beautifully suited to express the wonder, power and majesty of the universal form, and the ecstatic feelings that a devotee experiences in its presence.

The word *aksharam*, "eternal", is often used to indicate the sacred syllable *om*, that is the sound manifestation of Brahman, the *akshara tattva*, and in the specific expression of this verse (*aksharam paramam veditavyam*) it declares that the universal form, the eternal Purusha, Krishna, is the Param Brahman, the origin and the entire expanse of Vedic knowledge.

Yet, here Arjuna directly connects this mind-blowing realization with the word *tvam*, "you", that is exquisitely personal. There is nothing "impersonal" in Brahman: one who has attained the correct realization experiences rather an "over-personal" or "trans-personal" existence, containing unlimited personalities at the same time.

This was already clearly confirmed in verse 7.24: *avyaktam vyaktim apannam manyante mam abuddhayah, param bhavam ajananto mamavyayam anuttamam*, "Those who are not intelligent believe that the non-manifested has evolved by becoming manifest. They do not know my supreme existence/ nature as the highest imperishable (reality)."

When Arjuna repeatedly addresses the universal form as "you", he is speaking directly to the supreme Personality of God, that includes and contains all other personalities. *Svetasvatara Upanishad* (6.9) states: *sa karanam karana adhipa adhipo na casya kascijanita na ca adhipa*, "The supreme Personality is the

cause of all causes, and there is nothing and no one who is superior to him or greater than him". This concept is also expressed in this verse by the words *visvasya param nidhanam*, "the supreme foundation and place of dissolution of the universe".

Those who see a contradiction in these verses must be blinded by the limitations of gross material bodily identification, because the knowledge of Atman/ Brahman is very clear and consistent. This is the supreme knowledge, the supreme consciousness, that we all seek in our evolutionary journey, and that can truly change our life for the better. God is the eternal Purusha (*sanatana purusha*), but he kindly descends into the world among us (4.8) for the purpose of disseminating this knowledge and destroying the darkness of ignorance (10.11, *jnana dipena*). This is the meaning of the expression *avyaya sasvata dharma gopta*, "the imperishable protector of the eternal principles of religion".

The entire text of the *Bhagavad gita* is an amazingly skillful and beautiful journey into the transcendental knowledge. From the first chapter (*arjuna visada yoga*, the *yoga* of Arjuna's grief) the stage is set to present the perfect opportunity for the analysis of the human condition (*sankhya yoga*, the *yoga* of enumeration) and the indications on how to begin one's evolution through wise choices and proper engagement (*karma yoga*, the *yoga* of action).

A sincere seeker who passed the preliminary test of selfless engagement in duty and service will be introduced to the fundamental knowledge on the purpose of life (*jnana yoga*, the *yoga* of knowledge) and to the real meaning of detachment (*sannyasa yoga*, the *yoga* of renunciation). From this level, the *sadhaka* becomes totally dedicated to spiritual evolution (*dhyana yoga*, the *yoga* of meditation), (*vijnana yoga*, the *yoga* of applied knowledge), (*taraka brahma yoga*, the *yoga* of liberating spiritual existence).

With the 9th chapter, the student enters in the contemplation of the transcendental Personality of God (*raja guhya yoga*, the *yoga* of the supreme secret), that is not limited by time and space like the embodied *jivatmas* we meet every day. To expand this understanding, *Bhagavad gita* offers us the best meditation exercise (*vibhuti yoga*, the *yoga* of powers), (*visva rupa darsana yoga*, the *yoga* of contemplation of the universal form), (*bhakti yoga*, the *yoga* of devotion). The trained mind of the *sadhaka* becomes increasingly able to contemplate the idea of God as simultaneously immanent and transcendent, personal and above-personal, power and powerful, same and different from the individual *jivatman*.

Each concept is presented gradually, along the logical thread of conversation, with questions and answers, and examined under different perspectives, in what could appear as repetitions but only to a superficial and distracted mind. In fact, there is no imperfection in *Bhagavad gita*: its teachings are expressed in a wonderfully consistent way, and made extremely easy to understand for a sincere student. The 11th and 12th chapters are developing the foundations for the all important question of the oneness and difference of God and the world in regard to the cultivation of love and devotion towards the supreme Personality of God. Then in chapter 13 the issue will be explored fully (*prakriti-purusha-viveka yoga*, the *yoga* of understanding nature as distinct from the personal principle).

The last chapters of *Bhagavad gita* supply the missing links that are required to bring the transcendental knowledge into practice, in our daily life in the big and small choices. In order to attain *moksha* (in the 18th chapter) we need to transcend the material *gunas*, and that is precisely what the 14th, 16th, 17th chapters are all about (*guna traya vibhaga yoga*, the *yoga* of differentiating between the *gunas*), (*daivasura sampad vibhaga yoga*, the *yoga* of

differentiating between the characteristics of the divine and the demoniac personalities), (*sraddha traya vibhaga yoga*, the *yoga* of differentiating between the three forms of faith). In between these practical instructions, the brief 15th chapter shines to remind us about the ultimate goal (*purushottama yoga*, the *yoga* of the Supreme Person).

VERSE 19

अनादिमध्यान्तमनन्तवीर्यम्

anādimadhyāntamanantavīryam

अनन्तबाहुं शशिसूर्यनेत्रम् ।

anantabāhum śāsisūryanetram ।

पश्यामि त्वां दीप्तहुताशवक्त्रं

paśyāmi tvām dīptahutāśavaktram

स्वतेजसा विश्वमिदं तपन्तम् ॥ ११-१९ ॥

svatejasā viśvamidaṁ tapantam ॥ 11-19 ॥

anadi: without beginning; *madhya*: middle; *antam*: end; *ananta vīryam*: infinite prowess; *ananta bahum*: infinite arms; *sasi*: the moon; *surya*: the sun; *netram*: eyes; *paśyāmi*: I see; *tvam*: you; *dīpta*: blazing; *hutasa*: flames of fire; *vaktram*: mouth/ face; *svatejasa*: (your) own radiance; *viśvam*: universe; *idam*: this; *tapantam*: heating/ scorching.

"Without beginning, middle or end, your prowess is unlimited. Your arms are innumerable, and your eyes are the Sun and the Moon. I can see your face blazing with flames of fire from your own radiance, scorching the entire universe."

The first word of the verse, *anadi*, "without beginning", is strictly connected to the other two parts of the three word compound (*adi*, *madhya*, *antam*) to which the privative "a" is applied.

Arjuna's words in this verse are also found in other previous verses, but this repetition is not a literary flaw; rather, it reinforces the emotion and the importance of the revelation he is expressing. In Vedic tradition, when a statement is repeated (usually 3 times) it is called *tri satya*, "three times true". See for example in *Narada bhakti sutra* (81), *tri satyasya bhaktir eva gariyasi, bhaktir eva gariyasi*, "*bhakti* is most glorious: this is *tri satya*, fully established truth", or the famous declaration by Chaitanya, *harer nama harer nama harer namaiva kevalam, kalau nasty eva nasty eva nasty eva gatir anyatha*, "The Name of Hari, the Name of Hari, the Name of Hari only. In the age of Kali there is no other way, there is no other way, there is no other way."

Repetition is considered useful to facilitate understanding and memorization; for example it is said that all *shastras* should be studied at least 3 times, as exemplified by Brahma himself (*Bhagavata Purana*, 2.2.34). The practice of *japa yajna* is eminently based on the repetition of the same *mantra* for a prescribed number of times, so that the impression created by the contact with the sacred Names can sink deeply into the mind and the heart. Also on the natural platform, we see that we all tend to express our happiness, surprise or love by repeating the name of a loved one or some particular word - as this gives us great happiness.

Alliteration, that is simply the repetition of the same sound or similar sounds in different words within a sentence - is a popular poetic figure in several languages, and many songs and poems contain a refrain that is purposefully repeated to stress the most important concepts that are to be expressed. In this way, we see that Arjuna is particularly impressed by the infinity and by the

radiance of the *visva rupa*, two characteristics that are certainly extraordinary in this world and connected universally to the divine nature.

The expression *ananta virya*, "unlimited prowess", refers to the heroic power of warriors, the charisma of great leaders, and is a fitting tribute to Krishna from one of the greatest *kshatriya* of his times. Also the expression *ananta bahum* ("endless/ innumerable arms") reinforces this figure; in this regard just consider how many times in the conversation of the *Bhagavad gita* Krishna and Arjuna have called each other *maha baho*, "of powerful arms".

After the homage from the *kshatriya*, comes the appreciation that a *brahmana* could express: *dipta hutasya vaktram*, "whose mouth is the blazing sacred fire of the *agni hotra*". *Hotra* is a technical definition to indicate all those ritual sacrifices that require oblations into the sacred fire (*ahutis*), generally consisting of clarified butter (*ghi*) and grains.

Still today, this particular type of Vedic ritual remains the most popular, if not the only known and practiced form of traditional sacrifice ceremony among Hindus. Again we find here the image of the immense cosmic fire that radiates and heats the entire universe, but this time it is described as a sacred fire, the supreme *homa* in which all actions and all objects are sacrificed, knowingly or unknowingly.

Here are some relevant quotes from other verses in *Bhagavad gita*:

yajnarthat karmano 'nyatra loko 'yam karma-bandhanah, tad-artham karma kaunteya mukta-sangah samacara, "Actions must be performed as sacrifice, otherwise in this world they cause bondage (and further) actions. Therefore, o son of Kunti, you should perform your activities for that (purpose of sacrifice), remaining free from (material) association." (3.9)

bhoktaram yajna-tapasam sarva-loka-mahesvaram, suhridam sarva-bhutanam jnatva mam santim ricchati, "(One who) knows me as the enjoyer/ beneficiary of *yajna* (sacrifice) and *tapas* (austerity), the great Lord of all the worlds /all people, and the dearest friend of all beings, attains peace." (5.29)

aham hi sarva-yajnanam bhokta ca prabhur eva ca, na tu mam abhijananti tattvenatas cyavanti te, "I am the Lord and beneficiary of all *yajnas*. Those who do not understand my *tattva* will have to take birth again." (9.24)

ye yatha mam prapadyante tams tathaiva bhajamy aham, mama vartmanuvartante manushyah partha sarvasah, "O Partha, as much as they surrender to me, in the same way I reciprocate with them. All human beings follow my path." (4.11)

daivam evapare yajnam yoginah paryupasate, brahmagnav apare yajnam yajnenavopajuhvati, "Some *yogis* perform the *yajna* by perfectly worshiping the *devas*, others perform sacrifice in the fire of Transcendence by offering sacrifice itself (as sacred action) as an oblation." (4.25)

srotradinindriyany anye samyamagnishu juhvati, sabdadin vishayan anya indriyagnishu juhvati, "Others offer (the activities of) the senses, such as the hearing etc, in the fire of regulated activity, others offer the objects (of the senses) such as the sound etc in the fire of the senses as an oblation." (4.26)

sarvanindriya-karmani prana-karmani capare, atma-samyama-yogagnau juhvati jnana-dipite, "Others offer all the activities of all the senses and the activities of the *prana*, and the oblation is constituted by the control of the self in the fire of *yoga* in the light of knowledge." (4.27)

dravya-yajnas tapo-yajna yoga-yajnas tathapare, svadhyaya-jnana-yajnas ca yatayah samsita-vratah, "Others sacrifice their

wealth, or perform austerities as a sacrifice, or engage in *yoga* as an act of sacrifice, or perform sacrifice by the study of the scriptures and the cultivation of knowledge, or by engaging in strict vows." (4.28)

apane juhvati pranam prane 'panam tathapare, pranapana-gati ruddhva pranayama-parayanah, "Others sacrifice the *apana* in the *prana*, and the *prana* in the *apana*, controlling both *prana* and *apana*: this method is called *pranayama*." (4.29)

apare niyataharah pranam praneshu juhvati, sarve 'py ete yajnavido yajna-kshapita-kalmashah, "Others sacrifice the *prana* into the *pranas* by fasting/ suspending breath. However, all these are known as acts of sacrifice, that cleanse (the person from) the negative reactions (of actions)/ one who knows about these sacrifices, purifies his negative reactions through the power of the sacrifice (itself)." (4.30)

In this regard, it is very interesting to note the description of the development of the *virata rupa* offered in *Bhagavata Purana* (3.26.52-72), from the conception as an egg to the birth from the amniotic waters of the Garbhodaka.

This series of verses ends with the recommendation to meditate on the *paramatma* as present in this very body yet simultaneously distinct from it.

Also, in *Bhagavata Purana* (3.25.32) we learn from Kapila that the subtle senses of the human body are non-different from the *devas* that govern/ represent them (*devanam guna linganam*).

VERSE 20

द्यावापृथिव्योरिदमन्तरं हि

dyāvāpṛthivyoridamantaram hi

व्याप्तं त्वयैकेन दिशश्च सर्वाः ।

vyāptam tvayaikena diśaśca sarvāḥ ।

दृष्ट्वान्द्रुतं रूपमुग्रं तवेदं

dr̥ṣṭvāndbhutam rūpamugram tavedam

लोकत्रयं प्रव्यथितं महात्मन् ॥ ११-२० ॥

lokatrayam pravyathitam mahātman ॥ 11-20 ॥

dyau: from the sky; *a-prithivyoh:* to the earth; *idam:* this; *antaram:* between; *hi:* indeed; *vyaptam:* pervading; *tvaya:* by you; *ekena:* alone; *disah:* the directions; *ca:* and; *sarvah:* all; *dristva:* seeing; *adbhutam:* amazing; *rupam:* form; *ugram:* terrifying; *tava:* your; *idam:* this; *loka trayam:* the three planetary systems; *pravyathitam:* shaken; *maha atman:* o great Atman.

"From the sky to the earth and in between/ and the outer space, everything is pervaded by you alone in all the directions. O great Atman, by contemplating this amazing and terrifying form of yours, the three planetary systems are shaken."

Dyau and Prithivi are the Sky and Earth, the primeval Father and Mother of the world of human beings, in all cultures. The sky above us is the support for the Sun, the Moon and all the stars; it supplies light, rain, heat, and the coolness of the clouds. Beyond the planet's atmosphere, the sky expands unlimitedly, and includes and supports innumerable planets and other celestial bodies.

Yet, the sky is ever unchanged, free, and untouched by all the manifestations we can see. Its color is a temporary superimposition due to atmospheric gases and particles of various elements, as well as the optical effects of the reflection or refraction of the light. The name *dyau* is the origin of the Greek name Zeus (referred to the Father of all the Gods) and the Latin Deus, normally translated as "God". Mother Earth is the womb from which all creatures rise, by which they are nurtured, and to which all creatures return in the end. She gives forms, and in fact she is the constituent of all forms - supporting, filling and binding the other gross elements (water, air, fire, ether).

The expression *dyav a-prithivyor idam antaram* includes all directions - space, earth, and "in between". This *antaram* ("in between") is the *antariksha*, the outer space of our solar system, or also the "intermediate" space or subtle dimensions that cannot be observed with our ordinary eyes, and where we usually travel between incarnations. This "intermediate" dimension is described in detail in the *Garuda Purana*. It is the same territory called Bardo Thodol in the famous *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, and "afterworld" in many cultures, including the ancient Egyptian, from which we have also inherited a version of the *Book of the Dead*.

According to Vedic tradition, there are 10 directions in the universe; thus besides the 2-dimensional north, south, east and west, and the attendant north-east, north-west, south-east and south-west, we introduce the 3-dimensional perception with the up and down, or above and below.

The *loka trayam*, "three planetary systems" mentioned in this verse are the higher planets of the *devas* and *upadevas*, the intermediate planet Earth, and the lower planets. Other commentators mention these *lokas* as *bhu*, *bhuvah*, *svah*, that correspond to the physical, subtle and causal dimensions.

The definition *ugra*, "fierce", "terrifying", "destructive", "angry", is normally used to refer to the fierce aspect of a Deity or Personality of God, while the same Personality in his/ her benevolent, kind, and sweet aspect is called *saumya* or *bhadra*. This does not mean that there are evil Deities and benevolent Deities: the Personality of God contains both aspects, and manifests them in different situations. Even the sweetest Personalities of God can manifest a terrifying attitude in battle against the *asuras*, while they will be compassionate and loving towards the devotees and the good people. What is this terrifying form that is scaring all the inhabitants of the universe? It is Time, Kala.

VERSE 21

अमी हि त्वां सुरसङ्घा विशन्ति

amī hi tvām surasaṅghā viśanti

केचिद्भीताः प्राञ्जलयो गृणन्ति ।

kecidbhītāḥ prāñjalayo gṛṇanti ।

स्वस्त्युक्त्वा महर्षिसिद्धसङ्घाः

svastīyuktvā maharṣisiddhasaṅghāḥ

स्तुवन्ति त्वां स्तुतिभिः पुष्कलाभिः ॥ ११-२१ ॥

stuvanti tvām stutibhiḥ puṣkalābhiḥ ॥ 11-21 ॥

ami: all these; *hi*: indeed; *tvam*: you; *sura sanghah*: the hosts of *suras*; *visanti*: enter; *kecit*: some of whom; *bhitah*: fearful; *pranjalayah*: with folded hands; *grinanti*: offer prayers; *svasti*: may everything be well; *iti*: thus; *uktva*: saying; *maha risih*: the

great Rishis; *siddhah*: the Siddhas; *sanghah*: the hosts; *stuvanti*: they pray/ glorify; *tvam*: you; *stutibhih*: by prayers; *pushkalabhih*: by Vedic hymns.

"All of these hosts of Devas are entering into you. Some of them, terrified, offer prayers with folded hands, invoking auspiciousness. The crowds of the great Rishis and Siddhas sing your glories by chanting the Vedic hymns."

Arjuna continues here to describe the vision of the *visva rupa*. He sees the hosts of *devas* entering the fearsome cosmic form as its limbs and functional parts: the *devas* are personifications of the archetypal and elemental functions and components of the universe, and as such they must take their sacred job very seriously. This attitude is confirmed by *Taittiriya Upanishad* (2.8.1), *bhisasmad vatah pavate, bhisat eti suryah, bhisasmad agnis cendras ca, mrtyur dhavati panchamah*, "Out of fear of him the wind blows, the sun shines, Agni and Indra do their jobs, and the five forms of death run around (on their errands)."

Bhagavata Purana also repeats the same concept almost identically in two verses from 3rd canto (3.25.42 and 3.29.40): *mad bhayad vati vato 'yam, suryas tapati mad bhayat, varsatindro dahaty agnir, mrtyus carati mad bhayat/ yad bhavati vati vato 'yam, suryas tapati yad bhavat, yad bhayat varsate devo, bha gano bhati yad bhayat*.

However, we need to properly understand what the *shastra* mean by "fear" in this regard. It is not the senseless panic that oppressed servants feel when they approach a tyrannical and cruel ruler, who vents his anger and frustration at random. The fear the *devas* experience is like the emotion that rises in the minds and hearts of expert electricians when they approach the very high voltage transmission lines to do their work - they know they are dealing with an immense power that could instantly destroy them if they

behave carelessly, so they must be extremely attentive and avoid all mistakes. So more than "fear", we could describe it as awe and respect, and complete alertness and concentration to engage in an important work for the benefit of the entire universe. This is why they chant the invocation "*svasti*" ("auspiciousness") while contemplating the universal form and engaging within it, while the Rishis and Siddhas support and encourage them by singing the Vedic hymns.

Incidentally, it is interesting to note that every time we perform the *agnihotra yajna* and chant the Vedic *mantras* in honor of the *devas*, we are joining the hosts of the Rishis and Siddhas who perform the very same activities to support and encourage the mission of the *devas*. In this way, civilized human beings that belong to the category of *dvijas* ("twice born") are also participating directly to the proper functioning of the universal administration, and thus they are also called *suras*.

Other commentators have explained that *ami sura sangah* ("all these hosts of virtuous people") can also refer to the warriors that were assembled on the battlefield with the purpose of defending *dharma*, and that before the fighting are praying God for auspiciousness and dedicating their work and self-sacrifice for the benefit of the world. In this line of translation, the Maharishis and Siddhas are offering their blessings and invoking auspiciousness while watching the momentous battle at Kurukshetra. The Vedic hymns they are singing are certainly from the original collections called *samhitas* - *Rg*, *Yajur*, and especially *Sama Veda*; these are to be chanted or sung in all auspicious occasions, and also in difficult times to invoke auspiciousness.

By vibrating the *sabda brahman* ("spiritual sound vibration"), the Rishis and their followers became intimately connected to the supreme Consciousness and harmonize themselves with it. Unfortunately, in Kali yuga it is practically impossible to find

someone who is actually able to chant or sing such *mantras* in the correct way, therefore we should choose the humbler but much simpler and safer option of chanting or singing the holy Names of God, that are non-different from the traditional original Vedic hymns, and actually pack much more spiritual power because they are more essential and concentrated.

The word *svasti*, "may everything be auspicious", is not to be confused with the similar blessing *santi*, "may everything be peaceful".

VERSE 22

रुद्रादित्या वसवो ये च साध्या

rudrādityā vasavo ye ca sādhyā

विश्वेऽश्विनौ मरुतश्चोष्मपाश्च ।

viśve'śvinau marutaśchoṣmapāśca ।

गन्धर्वयक्षासुरसिद्धसङ्घा

gandharvayakṣāsurasiddhasaṅghā

वीक्षन्ते त्वां विस्मिताश्चैव सर्वे ॥ ११-२२ ॥

vikṣante tvāṁ vismitāścaiva sarve ॥ 11-22 ॥

rudrah: the Rudras; *adityah*: the Adityas; *vasavah*: the Vasus; *ca*: and; *sadhyah*: the Sadhyas; *visve*: the Visvedevas; *asvinau*: the two Asvinis; *marutah*: the Marutas; *ca*: and; *usmapah*: the Usmapas; *ca*: and; *gandharva*: Gandharvas; *yaksha*: Yakshas; *asurah*: Asuras; *siddhah*: Siddhas; *sanghah*: the hosts; *vikshante*: are contemplating; *tvam*: you; *vismitah*: amazed; *ca*: and; *eva*: certainly; *sarve*: all.

"The Rudras, the Adityas, the Vasus, the Sadhyas, the Visvedevas, the Asvinis, the Marutas, the Usmapas, the Gandharvas, the Yakshas, the Asuras, the Siddhas - all these crowds are contemplating you in amazement."

All the various categories of *devas* - administrators of the universe - are amazed, contemplating the immense and powerful *visva rupa* of which they are parts and parcels. In previous commentaries (10.21, 10.23, 10.26, 11.6) we have discussed about most of the categories of *suras* or *devas* mentioned in this verse, explaining how they are actually personifications of elemental energies in the cosmos. For example, the Vasus are water, the pole star, the moon, earth, wind, fire, dawn and space/ radiance.

The collective name Visvedeva ("all the *devas*") applies to a broad category of second-tier administrators, that are remembered as a class as descendants of Visva, one of the consorts of Yamaraja. The Sadhyas, too, are a class of similar cosmic officers, considered the descendants of Sadhya, another of the consorts of Yamaraja. In this verse these two categories of *devas* are mentioned together with the Usmapas ("who eat hot food"), another class of Pitris or *devas* residing on the planet of Yamaraja.

This particular information offers the opportunity to elaborate on the difference between the ritual ceremonies offered to the Pitris and the ordinary cult of the ancestors - or worship of the dead - that is found in all natural/ primitive cultures and religions. It is perfectly natural for materially identified people to feel the desire to pay homage and offer something to the departed spirits of their family members, relatives and friends. Some bring flowers and light a candle at a tomb in a cemetery, others do the same thing to a portrait they keep at home, but the idea is the same: they remember the dead, feel their absence or subtle presence, and wish to please them - out of affection, compassion or sometimes even fear.

The respectful and loving offering of pleasing articles - such as flowers, garlands, lamps etc - is called "worship" in the Vedic/Hindu tradition, and is normally offered not only to God, but also to any person or even object that is considered worthy of respect and recognition. Sometimes ignorant people who do not understand this approach end up criticizing Hindus for "worshiping cows" or "worshiping trees", when they see the ritual ceremonies in which people offer their appreciation, respect and affection to these important elements of their lives. The same spirit of appreciation is expressed in the formal veneration or worship of sacred books, sacred rivers, or sacred images of various types, as well as to one's respected elders - such as parents - including the deceased ones.

However, the Pitris are not simply "dead people". Not all those who die become Pitris: only those great souls who attained the realization of Brahman (*brahma-vido janah*), perfectly performed all their duties and lived strictly according to *dharma* during their opportunity in the human form of life. This seriously restricts the number of likely candidates even among the descendants of the most prominent *gotras* among the contemporary "high caste" Hindu brahmins. We have discussed about this point already in the commentaries to verses 8.24 and 8.25, that described the *uttarayana* and *dakshinayana* paths into the subtle dimension at the time of death.

The Pitris drink the *soma rasa* with the *devas*, help the confused departed souls and even astral travelers and shamans by giving counseling and guidance, and gather in assembly to discuss the events of the universe and how they can influence the people on earth in a positive way. They also have the power to visit earth in various shapes - as birds, as human beings etc - to test human beings and offer them blessings or curses, but they never engage directly in any conflict, either between human beings or between

devas and *asuras*. At the end of their allotted 10,000 years, they return to this earthly dimension to take a new material body and complete their service to the Lord and mankind by spreading their wisdom and knowledge, then they get another opportunity to leave the material dimension and attain Brahman.

The word *usmapah* mentioned in this verse is generally interpreted as one particular class of Pitris, who "eat hot food". This meaning can apply to the fact that the food offerings presented to the Pitris should be cooked on the spot; this interpretation is supported by the fact that the wife of the *karta*, or head of the family, is the one who is in charge of cooking the *pinda* (food offerings) for the Pitris, and her husband immediately presents the food in the ceremonial ritual.

Another meaning could refer to the fact that the feast of food cooked on the occasion of the *sraddha* ceremonies should be consumed only by truly qualified *brahmanas*, who can withstand the "heat" and burn the negativities connected to the departed souls by eating their food without being contaminated by it. Where it is not possible to find such qualified *brahmanas*, the food cooked for the Pitris should be fed to the birds, who are often considered messengers from other dimensions.

VERSE 23

रूपं महत्ते बहुवक्रनेत्रं

rūpaṁ mahatte bahuvaktranetraṁ

महाबाहो बहुबाहूरुपादम् ।

mahābāho bahubāhūrupādam ।

बहूदरं बहुदंष्ट्राकरालं

bahūdaram bahudamṣṭrākarālam

दृष्ट्वा लोकाः प्रव्यथितास्तथाहम् ॥ ११-२३ ॥

dr̥ṣṭvā lokāḥ pravyathitāstathāham | | 11-23 | |

rupam: the form; *mahat*: very great/ universal; *te*: your; *bahu*: many; *vaktra*: faces; *netram*: eyes; *maha baho*: o mighty armed one; *bahu*: many; *bahu*: many; *uru*: thighs; *padam*: feet; *bahu*: many; *udaram*: bellies; *bahu damstra*: many teeth; *karalam*: fierce; *dristva*: seeing; *lokah*: all the people; *pravyathitah*: shaken; *tatha*: as well as; *aham*: I (am).

"O mighty Lord, seeing this immense form of yours, with so many faces and eyes, legs, feet, bellies and teeth, everyone is shaken - including me."

The words *pravyathitah* ("agitated") and *karalam* ("scary") express the overwhelming feelings of amazement and fear (or awe) that everyone experiences in the contemplation of the immense universal form, that is so powerful and radiant.

The expression *rupam mahat* can be connected to the definitions of *mahat tattva* or *pradhana*, that designate the total aggregate of the material elements prior to the manifestation of the various bodies and objects in the universe. Usually these are considered direct forms of Shakti, Nature, rather than manifestations of the Purusha, but in this case we see that the focus of the teachings of *Bhagavad gita* has moved to the oneness between Shakti and Shaktiman. There is a popular image in traditional iconography that illustrates this concept. It is the *ardhanarisvara* form, usually depicting Shiva and Shakti: literally half male and half female (*ardha* = half, *nari* = woman, *isvara* = Lord). There are also other similar images about Radha and Krishna, as two bodies united in a tight embrace, with two arms (one Krishna's and one Radha's) holding the flute.

Here lies the greatest mystery of creation, both at the spiritual and at the material level: the *acintya bheda abheda tattva* perspective (*darshana*) explains that *purusha* and *prakriti* are inconceivably one and different. Its practical application is demonstrated in the person of Chaitanya, the great teacher who propagated the *sankirtana* movement. Chaitanya is described by his agiographers and followers as the "combined form of Radha and Krishna" and in fact although he appeared in a male body, he developed the emotional sentiments called *parakiya sringara mahabhava* that are the exclusive characteristic of Radha in her love for Krishna. It is the most intense erotic love, but it is solely directed to Krishna as the only real male in all the material and spiritual universes; therefore Chaitanya's intense erotic emotions have nothing to do with the ordinary lust between conditioned souls - either heterosexual or homosexual.

To all effects, Chaitanya is Radha, and suitably enough, he is Krishna as well, although Krishna's presence in Chaitanya's body is eclipsed by the overwhelming emotions of Radha and therefore appears to be absent, triggering the intense feelings of separation (*vipralambha*).

How can this be? Only through Yogamaya, the "illusion" that enables the union between God and Shakti (especially in the form of the *tatastha shakti*, or the individual *jivatmans*). For this reason, the *sadhaka* needs to engage in the process of Yoga, that is amazingly described in *Bhagavad gita*.

Its explanation in a nutshell is found in verse 9.13: *mahatmanas tu mam partha daivim prakritim asritah, bhajanty ananya-manaso jnatva bhutadim avyayam*, "However, o son of Pritha (Arjuna), the great souls take shelter in the divine nature and worship/ serve me with undivided attention, knowing that I am the inexhaustible origin of everything/ all beings."

All we have to do is to take shelter in Yogamaya, the divine *prakriti* called *cit shakti*, *hladini shakti* and Bhakti Devi, and engage sincerely and lovingly in the service of the Supreme. The first step consists in understanding that material consciousness is limited and unable to fulfill our deepest thirst for happiness.

Then we must realize our own transcendental identity (as *purusha*) and nature (as *prakriti*) as the *atman*, that is male and female at the same time. We must overcome the identification with the gross material body in which we travel around, as clearly explained by Krishna in the 2nd chapter of *Bhagavad gita*. This is because ordinary conditioned souls who are still on the material platform of gross material bodily identification will never be able to actually understand and appreciate the spiritual activities of Bhagavan.

To overcome this delusional bodily identification, we need to surrender to the Divine: *daivi hy esa guna-mayi mama maya duratyaya, mam eva ye prapadyante mayam etam taranti te*, "This divine energy of mine, manifesting as the three *gunas*, is very difficult to overcome but those who take shelter in me (can) cross over this illusion." (7.14).

Prakriti ("Nature") is the inherent potency of Brahman, and also manifests in the Atman. She is described as *sat*, "existence", *cit*, "awareness" and *ananda*, "happiness". But she is also *rupa*, "form", *shakti*, "power", *vidya*, "knowledge", *buddhi*, "intelligence", *trishna*, "aspiration", *tushti*, "satisfaction", *kshanti*, "benevolence", *daya*, "generosity", *shanti*, "peace", *jala*, "water" and *matri*, "the Mother". (*Devi mahatmya*, 5.9-80)

Delusional conditioned souls, hopelessly enslaved by the shackles of *ahankara* and *mamatva*, only take shelter in their ego and endless desires: they never take shelter in Maya, but they try to dominate and possess her. Foolish and confused people believe they can "conquer the witch Maya" - usually by insulting Nature

and especially the feminine form that represents it - but that is impossible: they will just get beaten more and more severely. The only way to cross the ocean of the material *gunas* and finally land on the beach of transcendence, beyond the Viraja river, is to actually surrender to the Divine Mother - Tarini, Vidya, Bhakti, Buddhi, Vedamata, Yogamaya - and take shelter in her. She is the only one who can take us across.

VERSE 24

नभःस्पृशं दीप्तमनेकवर्णं

nabhaḥspṛśaṁ dīptamanekavarṇaṁ

व्यात्ताननं दीप्तविशालनेत्रम् ।

vyāttānaṁ dīptaviśālanetram ।

दृष्ट्वा हि त्वां प्रव्यथितान्तरात्मा

dr̥ṣṭvā hi tvāṁ pravryathitāntarātmā

धृतिं न विन्दामि शमं च विष्णो ॥ ११-२४ ॥

dhṛtiṁ na vindāmi śamaṁ ca viṣṇo ।। 11-24।।

nabhah: the sky; *sprisam*: touching; *diptam*: luminous; *aneka*: many; *varnam*: colors; *vyatta*: gaping/ open; *ananam*: mouths; *dipta*: glowing; *visala*: fierce; *netram*: eyes; *dristva*: seen; *hi*: indeed; *tvam*: you; *pravyathitah*: shaken; *antah*: within; *atma*: the *atman*; *dhritim*: steadiness; *na*: not; *vindami*: I can find; *samam*: control of my mind; *ca*: and; *vishno*: o Vishnu.

"O Vishnu, I feel shaken and I have lost my mental balance and peace, looking at this (immense) radiance of yours, of so many colors, reaching up to touch the sky, with immense gaping mouths and fierce glowing eyes."

Arjuna recognizes that the universal form (the *virata purusha*) is Vishnu himself, the transcendental non-manifested existence (Brahman) that appears as this world in this world. In the previous verse, he has also recognized Krishna as Vishnu, the *visva rupa* and *visva isvara*, and in the subsequent verses he will beg forgiveness for his informal behavior within their friendly relationship.

The direct perception of the meditation recommended by Krishna is a shocking realization, required to trigger the paradigm shift in consciousness towards the level of Transcendence, but it is not meant to be a constant focus. Embodied beings, who must work through the limited set of senses (including the mind, called the 6th sense) afforded by a material body, cannot concentrate on such a vision for a long time. To understand this point, we can offer the example of a high voltage power-line, into which we can plug our machinery to get it kick-started: if we tried to keep it connected to that voltage, our system would quickly burn out. Like a defibrillator (resuscitation electrical paddle) discharge, it must be maintained only as long as strictly required to bring the proper effect on our system, otherwise it will damage us.

After living the experience described here by Arjuna, many (called "impersonalists") remain engaged in *yoga* on the level of *jnana*: *ye tv aksharam anirdesyam avyaktam paryupasate, sarvatra-gam acintyam ca kuta-stham acalam dhruvam/ sanniyamyendriya-gramam sarvatra sama-buddhayah, te prapnuvanti mam eva sarva-bhuta-hite ratah*, "Those who worship me correctly and sincerely as the *akshara* (Brahman/ Omkara), indescribable, non-manifested, all-pervading, inconceivable, unchanging, never

moving and eternal Existence, will achieve me by controlling their senses, remaining equally disposed to all, and working for the benefit of all beings." (12.3-4)

This is confirmed in verse 12.5: *kleso 'dhikataras tesham avyaktasakta-cetasam, avyakta hi gatih duhkham devavadbhir avapyate*, "For the embodied beings it is very difficult to make progress if they remain mentally attached to the non-manifested (*avyakta*)".

To avoid or minimize such difficulties we must develop *bhakti*, devotion to the Personality of God: *Bhagavad gita* offers plenty of valuable teachings about *bhakti*, what it is, and how to engage in it.

Just as Krishna has demonstrated the *visva rupa* after describing it to Arjuna, in the next verses Krishna will manifest his intimate and sweet form, the natural object of love and devotion for all the *jivas*.

The overwhelming experience of Brahman realization will leave its permanent effects on our consciousness, and we will truly be able to see the intimate human-like form of God as he really is (*vetti tattvatah*, 4.9, 7.3, 10.7, 18.55).

VERSE 25

दंष्ट्राकरालानि च ते मुखानि

daṁṣṭrākarālāni ca te mukhāni

दृष्ट्वैव कालानलसन्निभानि ।

dr̥ṣṭvaiva kālānalasannibhāni ।

दिशो न जाने न लभे च शर्म

diśo na jāne na labhe ca śarma

प्रसीद देवेश जगन्निवास ॥ ११-२५ ॥

prasīda deveśa jagannivāsa || 11-25 ||

damstra: teeth/ fangs; *karalani*: fierce; *ca*: and; *te*: your; *mukhani*: (many) faces; *dristva*: seeing; *eva*: certainly; *kala*: time; *anala*: the fire; *sannibhani*: looking like/ similar to; *disah*: the directions; *na*: not; *jane*: I know; *na*: not; *labhe*: I can get; *ca*: and; *sarma*: grace; *prasida*: be pleased/ placated; *deva isa*: o Lord of the Gods; *jagat nivasa*: o abode/ shelter of the universe.

"O Lord of the Gods, o abode of the universe, be pleased and grant me grace. I am lost (having lost the sense of direction), seeing the fierce fangs of your mouths that look like the fire of time."

As we have seen also in previous verses, the universal form described by Arjuna is the perception of the non-manifested Brahman when it manifests as this world in this world. It is *purusha* and *prakriti* at the same time, and its terrifying and radiant forms are compared to fire, especially to the mouth of fire where he oblations are offered.

Now gradually Arjuna is leading us to another amazing realization: this sacred universal fire is Time and Death. Everything is ultimately sacrificed into this final fire, that consumes everything: for this reason God is also called Hari and Hara ("who takes away"). If we do it consciously, we obtain greater benefits. The name *kala* ("time") also means "black". The name *krishna*, too, means "black", but the difference between *kala* and *krishna* is like the difference between the terrifying universal form and the

intimate and sweet form of Syamasundara. They are one and the same, yet inconceivably different.

All our sufferings in this world are caused by the illusory dissociation of personality that conditioned souls apply both to God and to themselves, and that is mentioned many times in *Bhagavad gita* as a major obstacle (2.45, 4.22, 5.3, 7.27, 7.28, 15.5). This delusional approach of duality is a characteristic of the *asuras*; the name of the mother of the *asuras*, Diti, literally means "cutting off", "dividing".

The *Bhagavata Purana* (11.2.37) confirms:

bhayam dvitiyabhinivesatah syad isad apetasya viparyayo 'smrtih, tan mayayato budha abhajat tam, bhaktyaikayesam guru devatatma, "Fear arises when the consciousness is focused on duality (*dvitiya*). One who separates himself from the Lord is confused by illusion and forgetfulness (ignorance). Therefore intelligent people offer a devotional worship to the Lord, who is the *atman* of the *guru* and the *devas*."

Fear of death and time is only due to the illusory identification with the material body (*Bhagavata Purana* 3.26.16), because the spirit is eternal (*sasvata*) and not subject to change (*avikara*). The fearsome fangs of mother tiger are only dangerous for her prey, while young tiger cubs are not afraid at all, because they are surrendered and affectionate to their mother.

The expression *jagat nivasa* ("abode/ shelter of the universe") refers to the fact that the entire universe rests on the supreme Brahman, and will again be absorbed into him at the time of dissolution. This same expression will be used in *Bhagavata Purana* 10.2.19 to refer to Krishna's advent, the wonderful *lila* in which the shelter of the universe takes shelter in the womb of Devaki.

Arjuna prays the powerful Vishnu (the name *vishnu* literally means "powerful") to be pleased or placated (*prasida*) and to grant him grace (*sarma*). The word *sarma* or *sharma* means not only "grace" but also "happiness", "comfort", and is traditionally referred to the role of *brahmanas* in society, as they are expected to comfort and give happiness to the confused conditioned souls, helping them to overcome the ignorance of material identifications and attachments and the unlimited sufferings and ills that derive from it.

Unfortunately, with the degradation of the original system, the name Sharma has become a mere family name for "high caste Hindu brahmins" like Gosvami, Acharya, etc, and the people called by such name can hardly be expected to live up to it. Yet, this would be the only true salvation for traditional Hinduism.

VERSE 26

अमी च त्वां धृतराष्ट्रस्य पुत्राः

amī ca tvāṁ dhṛtarāṣṭrasya putrāḥ

सर्वे सहैवावनिपालसङ्घैः ।

sarve sahaivāvanipālasaṅghaiḥ ।

भीष्मो द्रोणः सूतपुत्रस्तथासौ

bhīṣmo droṇaḥ sūtaputrastathāsau

सहास्मदीयैरपि योधमुख्यैः ॥ ११-२६ ॥

sahāsmadiyairapi yodhamukhyaiḥ ॥ 11-26 ॥

ami: these; *ca*: and; *tvam*: you; *dhritarastrasya*: of Dhritarastra; *putrah*: the sons; *sarve*: all; *saha*: together; *eva*: certainly; *avani pala*: of warrior kings; *sanghaih*: with the hosts; *bhishmah*: Bhishma; *dronah*: Drona; *suta putrah*: the son of the *suta*; *tatha*: also; *asau*: that; *saha*: together; *asmadiyaih*: our (own); *api*: although; *yodha-mukhyaih*: the most famous warriors.

"All these sons of Dhritarastra, together with the many warrior kings, and Bhishma, Drona, Karna, and the most famous warriors of our own army as well,"

The word *avani* means "earth" and *pala* means "protector", therefore the *avani palas* mentioned in this verse are the warrior kings from the various territories of the planet, who were participating to the Kurukshetra war.

In the Pandavas' army, besides the 5 brothers and their 5 sons from Draupadi, we also find Abhimanyu (the 16 year old son of Subhadra and Arjuna), Iravan (son of the Nagini Ulupi and Arjuna) and Ghatotkacha (son of the Rakshasi Hidimbi and Bhima). There was the entire family of Draupadi - Drupada king of Panchala, Dhirstadyumna the son of Drupada specifically born for that war, Sikhandi(ni) the adopted son of Drupada, and the other sons of Draupada named Dhristaketu, Yudhamanyu, Satyajit and Uttamauja. There were king Virata of Matsya desa with his sons Sveta, Uttara and Sankha, Kuntibhoja (Kunti's adoptive father) and his son Purujit, Dhristaketu son of Sisupala and king of Cedi, Sahadeva son of Jarasandha and king of Magadha, and Satyaki and Cekitana of the Yadavas. On the Pandavas' side there were also the king of Kasi (Varanasi) who was a vassal of the kingdom of Koshala (Ayodhya), Sarangadhvaja the king of Pandya (with capital at Madurai, south of the present Tamil Nadu, from river Kaveri to Kanyakumari), the king of Telinga or Telangana (presently Tamil Nadu) and 5 princes of Kekaya, headed by the eldest Brihadkshatra, who had been exiled from their kingdom.

There were also the generals of Parama Kamboja (present Tajikistan) who did not have a king; they belonged to the "external" territories or Bahlikas that did not follow the Vedic system (Kirata, Gandhara, Barbara, Yavana, Saka, etc). The Pandavas' army had 7 *akshauhinis* or battalions for a total of 1,530,900 warriors, plus a non-specified number of non-organized troops coming from the barbarians' provinces. One *akshauhini* consisted of 21,870 war chariots, 21,870 war elephants, 65,610 horses and 109,350 foot soldiers.

In the army of Duryodhana, that commanded 11 *akshauhinis* (2,405,708 warriors) there were also his 99 brothers with their sons. There was the old and extremely powerful warrior Bhishma, and there were also his uncle Bahlika (Santanu's brother), Somadatta son of Bahlika and Bhurisrava son of Somadatta. There were Drona and his son Asvatthama, and Kripa the brother of Drona's wife. Sakuni (brother of Gandhari the mother of Duryodhana) was there with his son Uluka and several other relatives from the Gandhara kingdom, and there was also Sudakshina of Kamboja (brother of Duryodhana's wife). All Duryodhana's friends were there, beginning with Jayadratha the king of Panjab, Sindhu and Sauvira (Abhira) and Sibi (this is why he was also called Saibya), Bhagadatta the king of Pragjyotisha with his war elephants, Susharma of Trigarta with his brothers and their sons, Brihadbala and Vatsaraja of Kosala, king Nila of Mahishmati, the other Kekaya princes that were the rivals of Brihadkshatra, and Vinda and Anuvinda of Avanti in Madhyadesa. King Salya of Madra, brother of Madri, had been forced to join the Kauravas, while Kritavarma and his son Matrikavat had been instructed by Krishna to fight in favor of Duryodhana leading Krishna's personal army, called Narayani sena and consisting of 1 million cowherd men coming from the district of Mathura. Among the other supporters of Duryodhanas there were the Rakshasas called Alambusha and Alayudha, the tribal king of Kalinga, and

several chieftains of the barbarians' territories, such as Kamboja, Yavana, Saka, Mahishaka, Tushara, Dravida, Usinara, Pulinda and Kolisarpa. Karna king of Anga, his son Vrishasena and the other sons of Adiratha took part in the battle only after Bhishma's fall.

In this verse Karna is called "the son of the *suta*", where *suta* refers to a particular class of *sudras* serving the *kshatriya* warriors as charioteers and chariot makers. We know that actually Karna was the direct son of Surya, the Sun God, the most powerful warrior and first forefather of the Suryavamsa, but he was born from princess Kunti before her marriage, and was abandoned at birth. He was rescued by the charioteer Adiratha and his wife Radha, who accepted him as their son, therefore he developed a very deep affection for them and considered himself their son to all effects. This posed a serious problem in Karna's social identification, because by *guna* and *karma* he was certainly not a *sudra*, and could never renounce his true nature as a *kshatriya*.

VERSE 27

वक्राणि ते त्वरमाणा विशन्ति

vaktrāṇi te tvaramāṇā viśanti

दंष्ट्राकरालानि भयानकानि ।

daṁṣṭrākarālāni bhayānakāni ।

केचिद्विलग्ना दशनान्तरेषु

kecidvilagnā daśanāntareṣu

सन्दृश्यन्ते चूर्णितैरुत्तमाङ्गैः ॥ ११-२७ ॥

sandṛśyante cūrṇitairuttamāṅgaiḥ ॥ 11-27 ॥

vaktrani: the mouths; *te*: your; *tvaramanah*: rushing; *visanti*: they enter; *damstra*: the teeth; *karalani*: fierce; *bhayanakani*: terrifying; *kecit*: some of them; *vilagnah*: trapped; *dasana antareshu*: between the teeth/ lips; *sandrisyante*: can be seen; *churnitaih*: smashed/ crushed; *uttama angaih*: the upper part of the bodies.

"They are rushing into your fierce mouths and between your terrifying teeth. I see some of them having their heads crushed between your jaws."

The word *dasanantaresu* literally means "in the gaps (between the teeth/ lips)", and *vilagna* means "stuck", "trapped". This verse repeats the reference to the fearsome teeth of Time (*damstra karalani*), and we are powerfully reminded of the fierce form of Kali or Chamunda, who grinds everything between her teeth (*Aparajita stotra*, chapter 7 verse 9.22 of *Devi mahatmya*). Coincidentally, the name *kali* is the feminine form of *kala*, that means "time" as well as "black". We also find a very peculiar verse in *Bhagavata Purana* in which Mother Kali is explicitly identified as Kala, or eternal Time (*kala sajnām tada devīm, bibhrac chaktim urukramah, trayorvimsati tattvanam ganam yugapad avisat*, "Then the Goddess, known as Time, the amazing Power of destruction, simultaneously entered in all the 23 *tattvas*", 3.6.2).

Like moths are inexorably attracted to a blazing fire and throw themselves into it to their deaths, all people and all things constantly run towards their end, one moment after the other, whether they are aware of it or not. And the more they try to delay death or time by using the wrong means - materialistic and adharmic - the faster and deeper they slide into suffering.

We could say that everyone starts to die at the very moment they are born: the clock starts ticking, so to speak. Traditionally, it is said that the duration of life for each person is measured by a specific number of heart beats and breathing cycles, that have been

already ordained as a result of each person's previous activities. This is why in the physical practices of *yoga*, the *sadhakas* strive to slow down and even stop the breathing in order to prolong the duration of their lives; however this practice will not be possible without a conscious effort in overcoming the identification with the material body.

By repeatedly going through births and deaths, we finally come to understand that we are not any of the bodies we have acquired and lost so many times, and we turn our consciousness to the transcendental level. Nothing is ever lost, just like all the various exercises and tests we face at school are not important in themselves but they are only useful as instruments for learning what we need to realize.

There is a famous folk tale about a soldier who had been foretold his imminent death in three days; he immediately fled to another city, where he reached exactly three days later - only to find that he was indeed destined to die precisely in the place where he had sought shelter. All his efforts had only made his end even more certain than ever. This does not mean that we should not defend ourselves when we are attacked, or that we should not protect the good and innocent people from aggressions. Rather, it means that we should only fight for such good causes, and remain detached from the result of the battle. As Krishna has already stated in verse 2.38: *sukha-duhkhe same kritva labhalabhau jayajayau, tato yuddhaya yujyasva naivam papam avapsyasi*, "If you fight this battle while remaining equally disposed (unattached and prepared) to joy and sadness, gain and loss, victory and defeat, you will never be touched by sin."

This description of the destruction of all the warriors may seem horrible to the faint-hearted, but it is not different from the descriptions of Narasimha tearing Hiranyakasipu's body in two, disemboweling it and even wearing its intestines as a garland. Or

Ravana vomiting blood after being struck by Rama's arrow, or the nine lakes filled with blood by Parasurama after killing the sons of Kartavirya Arjuna, Balarama crushing and smashing heads and bodies with his club while fighting against Rukmi and his allies (*Bhagavata Purana* 10.61.38), or the battle of Krishna with Jarasandha attacking Mathura (*Bhagavata Purana* 10.50.20-28) with the ghastly scenes of bodies chopped to pieces, rivers of blood with floating hands and heads looking like fish and turtles.

Krishna's childhood activities in Vrindavana are no less ghastly - Bakasura's body bifurcated in two starting from the beak, or the various *asuras* vomiting blood after being hit by Krishna or Balarama (Kaliya, Pralamba, Arista, and so on). However, these combative activities manifested by Krishna are not less spiritual or worshipable than his love exchanges with the *gopis*, and in fact they are enhancing the attraction felt by the *gopis* towards Krishna, as such *lilas* are remembered by them again and again.

VERSE 28

यथा नदीनां बहवोऽम्बुवेगाः

yathā nadīnām bahavo'mbuvegāḥ

समुद्रमेवाभिमुखा द्रवन्ति ।

samudramevābhimukhā dravanti ।

तथा तवामी नरलोकवीरा

tathā tavāmī naralokavīrā

विशन्ति वक्राण्यभिविज्वलन्ति ॥ ११-२८ ॥

viśanti vaktrāṅyabhivijvalanti ॥ 11-28 ॥

yatha: just like; *nadinam*: of the rivers; *bahavah*: many; *ambu*: of water; *vegah*: the impact/ the current; *samudram*: the ocean; *eva*: certainly; *abhimukha*: towards; *dravanti*: are drawn; *tatha*: like that; *tava*: your; *ami*: all these; *nara loka*: of the human species; *virah*: the heroes; *visanti*: they enter; *vaktrani*: the mouths. *abhivijvalanti*: blaze radiantly.

"Just like the masses of water from the rivers rush into the ocean, all these people are drawn into you, and the great warriors enter into (your) blazing mouths."

The expression *ambu vega* means "waves", "force of water", "current of rivers", while the word *drava* indicates flowing, dropping into the ocean as attracted by the law of gravity, and it is also used in connection with the act of drinking liquids. Rivers cannot avoid rushing towards the ocean, as this is a natural law of the universe. Similarly, all things and bodies in this world must face destruction, at the destined time and place as a result of their combined previous activities.

The opportunity constituted by a human life is extremely valuable and just as fragile. At any time we can be called into the blazing mouth of Time, so we should always be ready, and keep our consciousness on the proper level. Death is also a wonderful opportunity to move on towards a better situation. As Krishna has already explained in *Bhagavad gita*:

esha brahmi sthithi partha nainam prapya vimuhyati, sthitvasyam anta-kale 'pi brahma-nirvanam ricchati, "O son of Pritha, this is the spiritual level. A person who has attained this level never becomes confused, and by remaining in that position, he attains spiritual liberation at the end of his time." (2.72)

sadhibhutadhidaivam mam sadhiyajnam ca me viduh, prayana-kale 'pi ca mam te vidur yukta-cetasah, "They know me and

simultaneously they know the principle of material manifestation, the principle of the archetypes governing it, and the principle of sacred action. Thus they will also know me at the time of (their) death, because their consciousness is connected (with me)." (7.30)

anta-kale ca mam eva smaran muktva kalevaram, yah prayati sa mad-bhavam yati nasty atra samsayah, "One who, at the end of time (of this life), remembers me while leaving his/ her body attains my nature. There is no doubt in this." (8.5)

yam yam vapi smaran bhavam tyajaty ante kalevaram, tam tam evaiti kaunteya sada tad-bhava-bhavitah, "O son of Kunti (Arjuna), whatever state of existence/ nature one remembers at the time of leaving the body, s/he attains (precisely) that state of being/ condition, (because) of always contemplating that existence." (8.6)

prayana-kale manasacalena bhaktya yukto yoga-balena caiva, bhruvor madhye pranam avesya samyak sa tam param purusam upaiti divyam, "One who, at the time of death, (remembers the Lord) without any distraction of the mind, with devotion and powerfully connected through *yoga*, and perfectly keeping the *prana* between one's eyebrows, attains that divine/ radiant supreme Person." (8.10)

The image of the rivers rushing into the ocean brings to our mind the concept of *daivam* - usually translated as "destiny" or "fate", or even "providence" - as something inevitable, the plan of a higher intelligence and divine will.

For example, in *Bhagavata Purana* (1.9.17), we find this verse: *tasmad idam daiva tantram vyavasya bharatarsabha, tasyanuvihito 'natha, natha pahi prajah prabho*, "All this is due to the power of destiny, that is according to his will. Now you should take care of those who have remained without protection".

And again (3.3.23): *daivadhinesu kamesu, daivadhinah svayam puman, ko visrambhena yogena, yogesvaram anuvratah*, "The living entities are controlled by destiny in their lives and their sense enjoyment. So only those who have been serving the Lord of *yoga* through *yoga* can really develop faith in God."

However, the Vedic idea of destiny is about *karma* (action) and *kala* (time) and not about the "lot in life" incomprehensibly assigned by a tyrannical God to each individual at birth, and that must be accepted without discussion and without attempting to improve one's situation. *Karma* is not some inevitable sentence, a sort of punishment that we simply need to storm out in a passive and fatalistic way. Rather, it is constantly changing with each action (or inaction) we perform in this or any of our subsequent lifetimes, and it can even be neutralized or transformed by new and suitable actions.

For those who want to improve their situation in the material world, the scriptures recommend pious activities such as sacred rituals of purification (*prayascitta*), worshiping God, going to pilgrimage, bathing in sacred *tirthas*, distributing charity to deserving persons, selflessly performing good deeds for the benefit of all, sacrificing one's possessions for good causes, and engaging in austerities (such as fasting etc).

VERSE 29

यथा प्रदीप्तं ज्वलनं पतङ्गा

yathā pradīptaṁ jvalanaṁ pataṅgā

विशन्ति नाशाय समृद्धवेगाः ।

viśanti nāśāya samṛddhavegāḥ ।

तथैव नाशाय विशन्ति लोकास्-

tathaiva nāśāya viśanti lokās-

तवापि वक्त्राणि समृद्धवेगाः ॥ ११-२९ ॥

tavāpi vaktrāṇi samṛddhavegāḥ || 11-29 ||

yatha: just like; *pradiptam*: burning; *jvalanam*: of flames; *patangah*: moths; *visanti*: they enter; *nasaya*: to their destruction; *samriddha vegah*: with great force/ speed; *tatha*: just like; *eva*: certainly; *nasaya*: to their destruction; *visanti*: they enter; *lokah*: the worlds/ the people; *tava*: your; *api*: although; *vaktrani*: the mouths; *samriddha*: full; *vegah*: the force.

"Just like moths rush at full speed to their destruction, inexorably attracted into the burning flames, so the worlds/ the people fall at tremendous speed into your mouths."

The tiny insects are forcefully pushed by *paramatma's mahamaya* towards the fire of their deaths because their time in those bodies is over. Each particular species of life has its pre-ordained duration of bodies: for some it may be hundreds of years (as for some big trees) and for others just one single day (as for some insects), in which they live a full experience of birth, growth, attainment of maturity, reproduction, decline and death. On other planets, the *devas* live still longer lives: one of their days lasts one full year on the planet Earth. The highest place in the universe, Brahmaloka, has a longer day still, calculated as 1000 cycles of *yugas* on the planet Earth, estimated at 8 billion 600 million of our years.

Yet, all the embodied creatures only have a limited span of time to complete their work in a particular body. Foolish conditioned souls waste the valuable opportunity of a human life to engage in materialistic activities like the lower animals like the moths and other insects - eating, sleeping, having sex and defending

themselves - until their allotted time has elapsed, and they are drawn into the fire of death. They do not know the purpose of their life, and most of them are not even interested in asking questions about it, so they leave this world without any real gain.

Bhagavata Purana (2.3.17) says, *ayur harati vai pumsam, udyann astam ca yann asau, tasyarte yat ksano nita, uttama sloka vartaya*, "Every sunrise and sunset take away a piece of the duration of life for a man, (which is lost without gain) except for those who use time to understand the Lord".

Brihad aranyaka Upanishad (3.8.10) says, *yo va etad aksaram gargy vidtvasmal lokat praiti sa brahmanah, etad aksaram gargy avidtvasmal lokat praiti sa kripanah*, "A *brahmana* is one who leaves this world with the knowledge of the Brahman, while a *kripana* ("one to be pitied") leaves this world without learning anything about Transcendence".

The moths are throwing themselves into the fire because they are totally fascinated by it. They are thirsty for beauty and splendor and warmth, because deep inside their forgotten memory they hanker for happiness. Similarly, human beings keep running after the ideas of happiness, love, beauty, splendor and glory that resonate with their innermost nature, but because they seek them in the wrong place - in material identifications and attachments - they end up burning their time, their energies, their enthusiasm and their lives, without attaining their ideal. Then they become cynical and start to believe that no ideal can exist. But this problem is due to ignorance only: what they are seeking is not out there, but it truly exists within their own soul.

Bhagavata Purana 3.31.42 says, *tam atmano vijaniyat, paty apatya grhatmakam, daivopasaditam mrityum, mrgayor gayanam yatha*, "The *jiva* (who has taken birth as a woman) should know that her life centered on husband, children and home making has

been arranged by destiny for her destruction, like the sweet songs of the hunter (that attract the animals)." Of course the same applies to those *jivas* who have taken birth as men - simply the attachments may be a little different, but they are always outside their own *atman*, and therefore illusory.

Bhagavata Purana (1.5.18) says, *tasyaiva hetoh prayateta kovido, na labhyate yad bhramatam upary adhah, tal labhyate duhkhave anyatah sukham, kalena sarvatra gabhira ramhasa*, "An intelligent person should only endeavor for what cannot be obtained by traveling around, because sorrows as well as joys will come in the course of time, wherever we are staying, and even coming to us unexpectedly."

In Vedic times, the basic necessities of life were easily available for everyone. Sukadeva (*Bhagavata Purana* 2.2.3-5) clearly says that one could freely live in mountain caves, drink water from the rivers, eat plenty of fruits from public trees, wear abandoned old clothes or tree bark garments. Of course today this is much more difficult, because of the disgraceful degradation of society and especially because of the legislative hypertrophy created by overpaid politicians who need to show their voters they are actually doing something.

VERSE 30

लेलिह्यसे ग्रसमानः समन्ताल-

lelihyase grasamānaḥ samantāl-

लोकान्समग्रान्वदनैर्ज्वलद्भिः ।

lokānsamagrānvadanairjvaladbhiḥ ।

तेजोभिरापूर्य जगत्समग्रं

tejobhirāpūrya jagatsamagraṁ

भासस्तवोग्राः प्रतपन्ति विष्णो ॥ ११-३० ॥

bhāsastavogrāḥ pratapanti viṣṇo | | 11-30 | |

lelihyase: you are licking; *grasamanah*: the devoured; *samantat*: from all sides; *lokan*: the people/ the planets; *samagran*: all; *vadanaih*: with the mouths; *jvaladbhih*: blazing; *tejobhih*: with radiance; *apurya*: covering; *jagat*: the universe; *samagram*: all; *bhasah*: the rays; *tava*: your; *ugrah*: fierce; *pratapanti*: are burning (everything); *vishno*: o Vishnu.

"From all sides you are licking these devoured people/ worlds into your mouths, whose blazing light covers the entire universe. O Vishnu, your fierce radiance is burning everything."

The world *loka*, here in the plural (*lokan*), applies to a multitude of people and is normally used to refer to inhabited planets, planetary systems or dimensions, such as Satyaloka, Janaloka, etc, down to Patalaloka in the lower regions of the universe.

In the previous verse it was said that "the *lokas*" were rushing into the blazing mouths of the universal form, while in verse 28 the expression used was *nara loka virah*, "the great warriors from *naraloka*/ among the human beings".

Nothing escapes the blazing mouths of Time: Death reaches out with licking flames to draw everything in, and consumes all. The word *grasa* ("devour") is often used in propitiatory prayers for protection (generally called *kavaca*, "armor"), in which the devotee prays God's power to devour all inauspicious things.

For example, we find in *Bhagavata Purana* 5.18.8, the prayer offered by Prahlada Maharaja to Narasimha: *om namo bhagavate narasimhaya, namas tejas tejase avir avirbhava, vajra nakha vajra damstra karmasayan, randhaya randhaya tamo grasa grasa, om svaha, abhayam abhayam atmani bhuyistha, om ksraum*, "Om! I offer my homage to Bhagavan Narasimha! I bow to you, o power of all powers! Please appear to us in a visible form! You have nails like diamonds/ thunderbolts. You have teeth like diamonds/ thunderbolts. Please destroy our materialistic desires! Please devour/ destroy ignorance! Om! I offer worship to you. May you appear in my mind as fearlessness. Om! Ksraum!"

A similar description is found in the *Devi mahatmya* in *Skanda Purana*, especially in chapters 7 and 8, where Mother Kali slays the *asuras* Chanda and Munda and many others, crushing the Daitya warriors between her teeth and devouring all the weapons thrown at her. In chapter 8 she faces the *asura* called Raktabija ("blood seed"), who was particularly difficult to kill because every drop of his blood that touched the earth produced a new clone of the *asura*, possessing the same strength as the original. So Mother Kali (called Chamunda after she had killed Chanda and Munda) shot her tongue out to catch every single drop of blood before it fell down, and the *asura* Raktabija was finally singled out and killed.

The word *ugra* means "fierce", "terrifying", and is also used to refer to all the ferocious forms of God, male and female, including of course Kali and Narasimha. Sometimes such forms are worshiped secretly in temples behind doors by a small group of intimate servants, while their *saumya* or *bhadra* counterpart is made accessible for *darshana* in the next room.

When exploring the ancient traditions of Devi worship in India, we discover that in remote times the female equivalents of the various male Personalities of God were extremely popular - Narasimhi,

Varahi, Mahesvari, Brahmani, Kaumari, Vaishnavi, Aindri, Vignesvari (also called Ganeshani) and so on. It is important to understand that such divine Personalities are not the consorts or wives of their male counterparts, but rather the "sisters", having exactly the same powers of their male equivalents.

This knowledge (Sri Vidya) went underground - so to speak - and became secret during the age of Kali, because of the patriarchalist influences that became more and more prominent in India, especially during the Islamic dominations and the Victorian British colonialistic regime. As many among the general people vaguely remembered their worship and missed their presence, various unqualified individuals started some imaginative approximation of the ancient rituals, becoming easy targets for the cheap ridicule and demonizing propaganda spread by the invaders. It is now time to clean the misconceptions up.

Particularly interesting are the Personalities of Pratyangira and Sarabha, still known only to a relatively small group of people even among the Indian Hindus. Both these Personalities are strictly connected to the Vishnu *avatara* Narasimha, as well as with the Sri Chakra.

The tantric tradition that still preserves this knowledge says that when Narasimha (Vishnu appeared as the half-human half-lion form) had killed Hiranyakasipu and his Daitya warriors, and drank their blood, Shiva appeared to remove the excess anger from Narasimha's form. The particular *avatara* of Shiva in this regard is a combination of human and bird (very similar to Garuda), and his two *shakti* wings are called Sulini and Pratyangira. When Sulini ("she who holds the trident") was unable to appease Narasimha, Pratyangira ("beautifully proportioned") came forward to absorb Narasimha's ferocious mood by manifesting *satya* and *dharma*, thus restoring Vishnu's *bhadra* form.

The word *samagram* has been explained by previous commentators as a compound of *saha* ("with") and *agrena* ("from the beginning").

VERSE 31

आख्याहि मे को भवानुग्ररूपो

ākhyāhi me ko bhavānugrarūpo

नमोऽस्तु ते देववर प्रसीद ।

namo'stu te devavara prasīda ।

विज्ञातुमिच्छामि भवन्तमाद्यं

vijñātumicchāmi bhavantamādyam

न हि प्रजानामि तव प्रवृत्तिम् ॥ ११-३१ ॥

na hi prajānāmi tava pravṛttim ॥ 11-31 ॥

akhyahi: (please) tell; *me*: to me; *kah*: what; *bhavan*: you; *ugra rupah*: terrifying form; *namah astu*: all homage; *te*: to you; *deva vara*: o best of the *devas*; *prasida*: be pleased; *vijnatum*: to understand; *icchami*: I wish; *bhavantam*: of you; *adyam*: the beginning; *na*: not; *hi*: indeed; *prajanami*: I know; *tava*: your; *pravrittim*: work/ mission/ engagement.

"Please tell me, Lord, what is this terrifying form. I offer my respects to you, o greatest of the Devas! Be gracious to me! I wish to understand, but I do not know your mission or your origin."

The word *bhavan* is a very respectful address, and although we can translate it simply by "you", it would not be out of place to render it with "your grace", or "Lord".

As we have already mentioned, the expression *prasida* ("be pleased") is often used in prayers to express the desire for auspiciousness and protection. It is a respectful request, and certainly not an order. It derives from the same root as *prasanna* ("satisfaction") and *prasanta* ("pacified"). Later, in chapter 17, Krishna will use the expression *mana prasada* to indicate the peace of mind that comes from inner satisfaction.

Similarly, the word *prasada* (referring to the sanctified food offered to God) implies a meaning of satisfying one's senses and needs through the consumption of sacred food, that carries no impurity or karmic consequence. The senses and the mind are difficult to tame, like wild tigers, and it is not wise to either starve them completely or to give them complete freedom to prey on anything they want: the solution consists in pacifying them with *prasadam*, so they will become automatically purified. For more about this subject, we can refer to verses 2.64, 2.65, 6.14, 6.27, 18.37, 18.54, 18.56, 18.58, 18.62, 18.73, 18.74.

The word *pravritti* literally means "activity", and includes the meanings of "purpose", "mission", and applied to the human sphere, "duty". Of course God does not have any selfish purpose in performing his activities, still he acts dutifully, as Krishna states very clearly in verses 3.22-24, and as confirmed by *Svetasvatara Upanishad* (6.8): *na tasya karam karanam ca vidyate, na tat samas cabhyadhikas ca drsyate, parasya saktir vividhaiva srutyate, svabhaviki jnana bala kriya ca*, "He has no duty to perform, and there is no one who is equal to him or greater than him. We have heard that the Supreme has many *shaktis*, and out of his nature come knowledge, power and action."

It is rather curious to see Arjuna declaring "I do not know your mission or your origin" (*bhavantam adyam nahi prajanami tava pravrittim*) after having expressed in so many previous verses the clear realization of the supreme Personality of God, and calling

him *anadi*, "without beginning" (11.16, 11.19) and having heard the same from Krishna (10.3).

This means that the vision of the universal form changed while Arjuna was contemplating it. At first it was simply a majestic and powerful expanse of divine forms, radiating with the pleasing splendor of the rising sun. Then the innumerable divine faces opened as immense gaping mouths of blazing fire, and like the midday sun in its most scorching summer best, started to heat up the cosmos as at the time of the annihilation. Then again, a sort of vortex appeared, the fiery wind of death, to draw the mighty warriors into the blazing mouths. At this point, Arjuna perceives that this particular manifestation of the universal form must have some specific purpose (*pravritti*), and this must have some beginning or origin (*adi*). Furthermore, it is also apparent to Arjuna that such mission must be related to the war of Kurukshetra, as he has clearly seen the sons of Dhritarastra, Bhishma, Drona, Karna, and many others of the great warriors assembled on the battlefield before him.

His perspective is therefore changing dramatically: at the beginning, in the first chapter of *Bhagavad gita*, he expressed the feeling that he would somehow be held responsible for the disastrous effects of the war. However, the perception of the immense universal form has now broadened his horizon, and by tapping into the supreme collective Consciousness, he is coming to realize a much greater plan behind the appearances. But what is his part in this plan? Krishna has already told him to engage in the battle (2.18, 2.31, 2.38, 3.30, 4.42, 8.7) explaining that his duty of *kshatriya* requires him to protect the *prajas*. However, from this greater level of consciousness, things appear in a different light, and Arjuna can perceive there is much more in all this than simply engaging in his social duty.

VERSE 32

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।

śrībhagavānuvāca ।

कालोऽस्मि लोकक्षयकृत्प्रवृद्धो

kālo'smi lokakṣayakṛtpravṛddho

लोकान्समाहर्तुमिह प्रवृत्तः ।

lokānsamāhartumiha pravṛttaḥ ।

ऋतेऽपि त्वां न भविष्यन्ति सर्वे

ṛte'pi tvām na bhaviṣyanti sarve

येऽवस्थिताः प्रत्यनीकेषु योधाः ॥ ११-३२ ॥

ye'vasthitāḥ pratyānikēṣu yodhāḥ ॥ 11-32 ॥

sri: the wonderful; *bhagavan*: Lord; *uvaca*: said; *kalah*: Time; *asmi*: I am; *loka*: the worlds/ the people; *kshaya krit*: who puts the end; *pravridha*: the greatest; *lokan*: the peoples/ the worlds; *samahartum*: to destroy; *iha*: here; *pravrittah*: engaged; *rite*: without; *api*: although; *tvam*: you; *na*: not; *bhavisyanti*: they will become; *sarve*: all; *ye*: those; *avasthitah*: situated; *prati anikeshu*: on the opposite sides/ armies; *yodhah*: the warriors/ combatants.

The wonderful Lord said,

"I am Time, the greatest destroyer of all. My mission is to put an end to these people here. Except for you, all these warriors arrayed in both armies will be destroyed."

The expression *loka kshaya krit* means "(he) who destroys the worlds/ the people" and is similar to *samahartum*, "to withdraw", or "to dissolve".

The word *pravriddhah* means "very ancient", "grown in stature", "developed in fullness", while *pravrittah* means "engaged", "acting", "working". The expression *rite api tvam* "but without/except you", means that all will die except Arjuna; Krishna is saying that even if Arjuna chose to withdraw from the battle, still all the warriors will be destroyed anyway.

The expression *na bhavisyanti* means, "they will not be", indicating that they will disappear, or in other words, their present bodies will cease to exist.

Bhagavata Purana confirms that God is Time:

manye tvam kalam isanam, anadi nidhanam vibhum, samam carantam sarvatra, bhutanam yan mithah kalih, "I believe that you are the Lord, Time, without beginning or end, all-pervading, equally disposed to all and available to all. Any quarrel among the living beings is only due to their own exchanges." (1.8.28)

sarvam kala krtam manye, bhavatam ca yad apriyam, sapalo yad vase loko, vayor iva ghanavalih, "I think that all this is the work of time, that controls everything and everyone, including you and all the kings, and whatever bad things happen to us all is just like when the wind carries all the clouds." (1.9.14)

pratikriya na yasyeha, kutascit karhicit prabho, sa esa bhagavan kalah, sarvesam nah samagatah/ yena caivabhipanno 'yam, pranaih priyatamair api, janah sadyo viyujyeta, kim utanyair dhanadhibhiih, "There is nothing we or anyone else can do about it, when Bhagavan arrives upon us in the form of Time. When one is overtaken by him (Time), one must give up his life airs, that are the dearest thing to everyone, what to speak of other things, such as material possessions." (1.13.19-20)

so 'yam adya maharaja, bhagavan bhuta bhavanah, kala rupo 'vatirno 'syam, abhavaya sura dvisam, "This same Bhagavan, the

creator of all beings, has descended into the world in the form of Time to eliminate those who are envious of the *suras*." (1.13.49)

The principle of destruction should not be seen as evil, because it is simply the other face of creation. Krishna has already stated: *jatasya hi dhruvo mrityur dhruvam janma mritasya ca, tasmad apariharye 'rthe na tvam socitum arhasi/ avyaktadini bhutani vyakta-madhyani bharata, avyakta-nidhanany eva tatra ka paridevana*, "Because one who has taken birth must necessarily die, and one who has died will again be reborn. There is no point in despairing over something that is inevitable. O descendant of Bharata, all the living entities/ states of being are initially non-manifested, then they become visible in an intermediate stage and then again disappear in the end. What is the point of lamenting about that?" (*Bhagavad gita*, 2.27-28)

Kala, Time, is one of the most important and primeval factors of creation. It is called eternal because it exists permanently as a continuum, in which past, present and future co-exist in their subtle form. Time is linear only in the experience of the material bodies, that inevitably undergo the 6 transformations (birth, growth, attainment of maturity, reproduction, decline and death) but the subtle consciousness is able to access all the different dimensions of time, called *tri nemi* or *kala nemi* (*Bhagavata Purana* 3.8.20). On the gross level, time can be calculated starting from the movements and aggregation of atoms (*Bhagavata Purana* 3.11.3-7) and controls the development of the creation of the universe (*Bhagavata Purana* 3.10.10-14).

On the subtle level, Time exists eternally just like the *mahat tattva* or *pradhana*. Under the power of Time, the static balance of the *pradhana* is agitated and the *gunas* start moving. From the continued movement of the *gunas*, the activities (*karma*) are created as both cause and effect, and the *atman* becomes *jivatman* (*jiva* literally means "active").

From this activity on the causal and subtle levels, the elements (*bhutas*) and the bodies are created/ manifested.

It is said that *Bhagavad gita* elaborates about 5 subjects, namely: 1) Isvara, the supreme Personality of God, 2) the *jivas* or *jivatman*, that are the subordinate *purushas* or *isvaras*, 3) *prakriti* or nature, 4) *kala* or time and 5) *karma* - action and reaction, the only non-eternal factor among these.

VERSE 33

तस्मात्त्वमुत्तिष्ठ यशो लभस्व

tasmāttvamuttiṣṭha yaśo labhasva

जित्वा शत्रून् भुङ्क्ष्व राज्यं समृद्धम् ।

jitvā śatrūn bhun̄kṣva rājyaṁ samṛddham ।

मयैवैते निहताः पूर्वमेव

mayaivaitē nihataḥ pūrvameva

निमित्तमात्रं भव सव्यसाचिन् ॥ ११-३३ ॥

nimittamātraṁ bhava savyasācin ॥ 11-33 ॥

tasmat: therefore; *tvam*: you; *uttistha*: get up; *yasah*: fame; *labhasva*: gaining; *jitva*: achieving victory; *satrun*: the enemies; *bhunksva*: enjoy; *rajyam*: the kingdom; *samriddham*: prosperous; *maya*: by me; *eva*: certainly; *ete*: all these; *nihatah*: killed; *purvam*: already/ previously; *eva*: certainly; *nimitta*: instrument; *matram*: only; *bhava*: become; *savya sacin*: o excellent archer.

"So, get up, o great archer, and achieve fame by your victory against the enemies, and then enjoy the prosperity of the

kingdom. I have already killed all these (warriors): you (should) become just the instrument (of the victory)."

Many people have been led to believe that the perfection of spiritual life consists in withdrawing from the activities of the world and just meditate on theoretical philosophical technicalities or idyllic visions of beautiful dancing cowherd girls in enchanted forests. They have failed to understand the real meaning of the scriptures that encourage the devotee to fully dedicate to spiritual life, sacrificing their ordinary duties by performing them in Krishna Consciousness. The evidence is in this verse and in many other verses of *Bhagavad gita*, where Krishna clearly says after his teachings on renunciation and transcendental consciousness, "therefore, you should engage sincerely and dutifully in your work in society: so now get up and fight".

The word *utthista* literally means "get up", "stand up", "wake up", and it is also used in the prayers during the Deity worship, to invite the Deities to wake up in the morning - as in the famous *Venkatesvara suprabhatam*:

*kausalya supraja rama purva sandhya pravartate
uttishta narasardula kartavyam daivamanikam
utthistotthista govinda utthista garuda dhvaja
uttistha kamala kantha trai lokyam mangalam kuru*

"O worthy son of Kausalya, Rama! Dawn has come, please get up. O great among men, divine ornament (of your family/ of the world), it is time to attend to your daily duties. Please get up, o Govinda, whose banner carries the image of Garuda! Please get up, o lover of Lakshmi, and bring good fortune to all the three worlds."

The expression *yaso labhasva* ("become famous") implies that fame or good reputation is not a bad thing. One should not be attached to it or make it the motivation for one's actions, but there is nothing wrong in being recognized for one's good work.

Conquering the enemies is not contrary to the principles of religion, either.

It is true that a devotee does not see anyone as an enemy, but there are still envious people who will behave as enemies even against the most peaceful and tolerant saint. Yudhisthira was called *ajata satru* ("one whose enemy was never born", indicating that he was nobody's enemy) but he was forced on the battlefield of Kurukshetra after many years of persecution, including various assassination attempts against him and his brothers. And he did not step back from his *kshatriya* duty, either.

The famous *Argala stotra* in *Devi Mahatmya* prays the Mother Goddess to help the devotee achieve these two - good name and victory over envious people - as well as long life in a suitable body (*rupam*) and the good things of life (*bhogam*): *rupam dehi yaso dehi jayam dehi bhogam dehi dvisho jahi*. Krishna also recommended Arjuna to pray Durga before the battle, to get her blessings for victory. The *stotra* is found in *Mahabharata*, Bhishma Parva, 23.4-16, and we have included it in the appendix to this work.

The expression *bhunksva rajyam samridham* refers to the enjoyment of the good things in life, not only for Arjuna, but for all the *prajas* in the kingdom. This is actually the most important thing in the end - the highest duty and responsibility for a *kshatriya*. We should never forget that the true *kshatriya* only fights for the protection and prosperity of the *prajas*: all the others are just war-mongers and criminals of various statures. Some ignorant people may be convinced that they can procure prosperity and wealth for their own people through the adharmic aggressions and exploitation of other innocent and good living beings, but that is a truly disastrous course of action, and the *brahmanas* are responsible for the required clarifications about *dharma* and *karma*, the hidden costs of unethical choices and actions, and the

complex network of negative consequences for the entire society. If there are no qualified *brahmanas*, or if the *brahmanas* are not properly respected and followed, disaster becomes inevitable, sooner or later.

Samriddhi literally means "perfect prosperity"; we may remember here that Siddhi and Riddhi are the names of the two consorts of Ganesha - personifying success respectively in spiritual and in material life. The two things are not necessarily incompatible - in fact they complete each other.

The expression *nihata purva* ("already killed") indicates that time is not linear but it is a continuum where past, present and future are all existing simultaneously, and can be accessed by those who are free from the limitations of a gross material body. It is true that the future is constantly changing due to the choices we all make at each moment, but there is a critical mass of karmic consequences beyond which a particular situation cannot be avoided altogether.

Another extremely important expression here is *nimitta matram bhava savya-sacin* - a frequently quoted passage, that summarizes the approach that the devotee should keep in working in devotional service. The name *savyasacin* literally means "ambidextrous archer", one who is able to shoot with both hands.

VERSE 34

द्रोणं च भीष्मं च जयद्रथं च

droṇam ca bhīṣmam ca jayadratham ca

कर्णं तथान्यानपि योधवीरान् ।

karṇam tathānyānapī yodhavīrān ।

मया हतांस्त्वं जहि मव्यथिष्ठा

mayā hatāṁstvam̐ jahi mavyathiṣṭhā

युध्यस्व जेतासि रणे सपत्नान् ॥ ११-३४ ॥

yudhyasva jetāsi raṇe sapatnān̐ | | 11-34 | |

dronam: Drona; *ca*: and; *bhishmam*: Bhishma; *ca*: and (also); *jayadratham*: Jayadratha; *ca*: and; *karnam*: Karna; *tatha*: as well as; *anyan*: the others; *api*: although; *yodha viran*: heroes in battle; *maya*: by me; *hatan*: (have been) killed; *tvam*: you; *jahi*: destroy/ conquer; *ma*: do not; *vyathistha*: be shaken/ waver; *yudhyasva*: (you should) engage in the fight; *jeta asi*: you are victorious; *raṇe*: in the battle; *sapatnan*: opponents.

"Drona, Bhishma, Jayadratha, Karna and all the other warriors in this battle have already been killed by me. So do not hesitate to defeat them. Engage in the fight, because you will conquer over your opponents."

The enemies mentioned in the previous verse are those warriors who have come to the battlefield of Kurukshetra to attack the Pandavas and their allies, in spite of all their attempts of reconciliation. Here they are called *yodha viran*, "the heroes who want to engage in battle", to indicate that - just like the moths that rush into the fire to their death - they have come willingly, impelled by the results of their previous activities and choices, to be killed on the battlefield.

According to the Vedic rules for dharmic fight, only active combatants may be attacked in a battle; if the enemy surrenders or is unarmed, unconscious, or unable to fight back, the use of force is condemned as asuric. However, it becomes justified against an enemy that has already broken the ethical rules of combat. For example, a cunning criminal may pretend to surrender, and then

escape and attack again under stealth or deceit: in this case, the *kshatriya* is authorized to overlook the ordinary rules and deal with the situation as required to protect the *prajas*.

Rules are meant to help and serve us in the performance of our duty, and not the other way around; an honest and wise person can understand how *dharma* can be better served, as Krishna himself demonstrated several times in the *Mahabharata*. Foolish and envious people sometimes claim that Krishna was a clever politician and manipulated the rules to the advantage of his family, but if we actually examine the circumstances, the facts and the results we will see that all the persons involved in the action obtained the greatest possible benefit.

Drona was the greatest expert in martial arts of his time, and for this reason he had secured the job of official trainer for the royal princes of the Kuru dynasty; Arjuna had learned everything from him, and he was seriously intimidated at the idea of having to fight against his old teacher.

Bhishma was easily the strongest and greatest *kshatriya* there - the direct son of Ganga Devi, he had obviously superhuman strength and prowess, comparable to the powerful current of the river that was his mother. He had even defeated Parasurama, the *brahmana* warrior *avatara* of Vishnu.

Jayadratha was feared by all because of a curse that his powerful father had placed on anyone who killed him; he who would cause Jayadratha's head to fall to the ground would die instantly.

Karna was Arjuna's arch-enemy, and being the direct son of Surya, his personal radiance (*tejas*) and prowess in battle were legendary; Duryodhana had made him king of the Anga region (present Bengal). However, Krishna is saying here that all these famous and powerful warriors have already been killed by him - by Time and

destiny. This is confirmed in *Bhagavata Purana* (1.9.35), in Bhishma's prayers on his death bed: *sapadi sakhi vaco nisamyamadhye, nija parayor balayo ratham nivesya, sthitavati parasainikayur aksna, hrtavati partha sakhe ratir mamastu*, "Let my loving attachment be directed to (Krishna) Arjuna's friend, who diminished the duration of life of the warriors of the opposite army simply by looking on them. On the request of his friend, he entered the battlefield in the middle of the two armies, and positioned the chariot there."

All these great warriors would have to pay the price of their adharmic choice to support the evil Duryodhana, even when he had offended the innocent Draupadi in the assembly of the Kurus. In the Sabha Parva, the dramatic chapter of the *Mahabharata* where Yudhishthira is cunningly dragged into a rigged dice game, stripped of all his properties and rights, and cruelly insulted, we see how the various persons present in the assembly react to the injustice.

Among the sons of Dhritarastra, only Vikarna protested against the disgraceful behavior of Duryodhana: as we will see later in the story, he is the only one who will survive the battle, because he will remove himself from it. Duhsasana and even Karna eagerly participated in abusing and torturing the Pandavas and Draupadi, a deeply adharmic act generating the consequences that will ultimately cause their destruction. Even after the miracle of the unending cloth, when it became apparent to all that Draupadi and the Pandavas were protected by God, and even after the ominous oaths of revenge pronounced by Bhima, Duryodhana's supporters continued to keep their disastrous course of action.

Vidura loudly protested, but he was insulted by Duryodhana, too, and he had no other choice but to leave the assembly. Drona and Bhishma, who were also present at the disgraceful assembly, failed to take proper action, and thus they signed their own death sentence.

Bhishma tearfully recognized that the evil actions of the Kurus would soon bring their destruction - actually they already looked dead. Dhritarastra feebly tried to patch up the situation, but he did not stop his evil son. All he could do in his fear was to offer a warning, declaring that Duryodhana was already as good as dead,

Silence in front of injustice constitutes an indirect and passive approval of the injustice - as Vidura clearly explained to the assembly, quoting the discussion between Prahlada and Kasyapa on the subject. "One who is called as a witness and does not answer, out of fear or anger, deserves punishment.

When a good person goes to the assembly to ask for help and relief from injustice, it is the duty of every man present to take the required action: if they fail to do so, they will have to suffer the same karmic consequences."

VERSE 35

सञ्जय उवाच ।

sañjaya uvāca ।

एतच्छ्रुत्वा वचनं केशवस्य

etacchrutvā vacanaṁ keśavasya

कृताञ्जलिर्वेपमानः किरीटी ।

kṛtāñjalirvepamānaḥ kirīṭī ।

नमस्कृत्वा भूय एवाह कृष्णं

namaskṛtvā bhūya evāha kṛṣṇaṁ

सगद्गदं भीतभीतः प्रणम्य ॥ ११-३५ ॥

sagadgadaṁ bhītabhītaḥ praṇamya ॥ 11-35 ॥

sanjayah: Sanjaya; *uvaca*: said; *etat*: that; *srutva*: hearing; *vacanam*: the speech; *kesavasya*: of Kesava; *kritanjalih*: with folded hands; *vepamanah*: trembling; *kiriti*: Arjuna; *namah kritva*: offering respect; *bhuyah*: again; *eva*: certainly; *aha*: said; *krishnam*: to Krishna; *sa gadgadam*: feebly/ stuttering/ with faltering words; *bhita bhita*: full of fear; *pranamya*: prostrating.

Sanjaya said,

Arjuna listened to the words of Kesava, and trembling, with folded hands, he offered his respects. Then he again addressed Krishna with faltering words, throwing himself to his feet, full of fear.

Arjuna's strong emotions of fear (*bhita bhita*, *vepamana*, *gadgatam*) are not due to some supposed cruelty in God. They come from the perception of the immense sufferings of the conditioned beings who hopelessly revolve in the frightening wheel of *samsara* - material life in this world - enslaved by their own identifications, attachments and desires. Later in the discussion, Krishna will declare that a wise person is one who can see the sufferings intrinsically connected with the *samsara* (*janma-mrityu-jara-vyadhi-duhkha-doshanudarsanam*, 13.9). Arjuna is overwhelmed by the perception of the sufferings and loss of all the warriors that are going to die in the war, and terrified by the relentless crushing wheel of Time and Death.

In his famous *Bhaja Govindam* song, Adi Shankara writes, *punar api jananam punar api maranam punar api janani jathare sayanam, iha samsare bahu dustare krpaya 'pare pahi murare*, "Not having to be born again! Not having to be dying again! Not having to lie in a mother's womb again! O Murari, please protect me, by your compassion, from this horrible cycle of birth and death!"

Adi Shankara also refers to the dreadful *samsara* in many verses of his *Lakshmi Nrisimha stotra*, praying for deliverance and protection.

Both *sruti* and *smriti* describe the *samsara* - the cycle of births and deaths - variously as a burden, a dangerous ocean, a whirlpool, a thick forest, a forest fire, steep rocks or cliffs, prison or captivity, poison, a blind well, or an entangling tree grown out of the seed of ignorance consisting of bodily identification. The example of the tree - *samsara vriksha* - is mentioned in *Muktika Upanishad* (2.2.32-37) and *Svetasvatara Upanishad* (6.6), and introduces the theme of the banyan tree of material existence described in chapter 15 of *Bhagavad gita*, entitled *Purushottama yoga*.

The Tree of Life is a well known symbol to all the cultures of the world, because it constitutes a powerful archetype of Reality, a figure for the Mother that manifests herself as the form of the spiritual world as well as the form of the material world. In the spiritual world she is the Kalpa Vriksha, the "wish-fulfilling tree" that produces everything is required for the service to the Supreme, while in the material world she is the illusory phantasmagoria of the ever-changing growth of material phenomena, enticing the conditioned souls to keep toiling and running after the proverbial carrot at the end of the stick.

Yet, in spite of the fear and loss and pain we all suffer in this *samsara*, a devotee, a self-realized soul, can perceive God in the experience of the material world, as Krishna has explained and then directly demonstrated especially in these last few chapters. This is the true thrill of joy (*prahrisyati*, 11.36) and ecstatic emotion we can find when we establish ourselves in the divine Consciousness, the happiness (*ananda*) that all beings are instinctively seeking, and that is only found within the *atman*. We are now approaching the most mysterious part of Krishna's teachings in *Bhagavad gita*, so deep and difficult to perceive and

understand that most commentators choose to remain on the surface of the meanings. Here logic and reason fail to carry us, and must be left on the threshold: only emotion - *bhakti* - is able to take us across. This is the significance of the iconography of the Mother Goddess - Sri Vidya - in her Chinnamasta form, holding her own severed head in her hand.

What does it mean that God is beyond *sat* and *asat*? Already simply this one statement should make us understand the inconceivable depths of the ocean we are going to venture into, and the need to overcome the materially intellectual platform to attain the "wisdom of the heart".

To prepare our minds for this paradigm shift, we need to remember that according to the Vedic scriptures themselves, the present version of the *shastra* - both *smriti* and *sruti* - was specifically compiled for the people of Kali yuga, while previously Vedic knowledge was transmitted and discussed at much greater depths, of which we can now only find hints and clouded references.

Even Krishna is presenting the *Bhagavad gita* to Arjuna in this perspective, so he is making things as easy and simple as possible for us neophytes to understand, realize and practice Transcendence in the correct way. This will be particularly apparent in the 15th chapter, in which Krishna will instruct us to cut the mighty banyan tree of Vedic knowledge, but it was already surfacing in 2.42 to 2.46 when talking about the *veda vada ratah* and how they are missing the point.

Certainly Krishna is not condemning Vedic knowledge, as in the same chapter (15) he will state, *vedais ca sarvair aham eva vedyo vedanta-krid veda-vid eva caham*, "I am he who knows all the *Vedas*, I am he who created the *Vedanta*, and I am the object of knowledge of the *Vedas*" (15.15).

Vishnu is the source of the Vedic knowledge, having transmitted it to Brahma (the first created being), and he always descends in this world as *avatara* to save or rescue the *Vedas* when they appear to be lost or endangered. From time to time, he takes various forms and presents the Vedic teachings in accordance to the specific circumstances and the particular audience, and to a superficial observer it may seem that such teachings vastly differ from one instance to another.

The various paths known as *bhakti*, *yoga*, *tantra*, *upasana* all stem from that place that is far beyond the ordinary experience of our contemporary lives in Kali yuga.

All the *shastras* repeat that *bhakti* - devotion - is the only path to enter into this higher dimension, and great *acharyas* have distributed this *bhakti* freely to the masses without material discriminations, through the chanting of the holy Names, activities, qualities, forms, etc, of the Personality of God, and the personal dedicated service that is beautifully explained by Krishna in *Bhagavad gita*.

Yet, we know that *bhakti* is also a very secret path (*rahasya*) and that its science is detailed in specific collections of knowledge from a tradition that existed long before the beginning of this Kali yuga and before the compilation of the present Vedic scriptures.

These scriptures are called *Tantras* or *Agamas*, and contrarily to the misled opinion of ignorant and foolish people, they are not about having better sex, but about experiencing a direct contact with God, who is simultaneously and inconceivably distinct as Vishnu, Shiva and Shakti, and is present within our own body with all the worlds - material and spiritual.

This is the true foundation of *upasana*, or ritual worship.

VERSE 36

अर्जुन उवाच ।

arjuna uvāca ।

स्थाने हृषीकेश तव प्रकीर्त्या

sthāne hṛṣīkeśa tava prakīrtyā

जगत्प्रहृष्यत्यनुरज्यते च ।

jagatprahṛṣyatyanurajyate ca ।

रक्षांसि भीतानि दिशो द्रवन्ति

rakṣāṃsi bhītāni diśo dravanti

सर्वे नमस्यन्ति च सिद्धसङ्घाः ॥ ११-३६ ॥

sarve namasyanti ca siddhasaṅghāḥ ॥ 11-36 ॥

arjunah: Arjuna; *uvaca*: said; *sthane*: (proper) position; *hrishikesa*: o Hrisikesha; *tava*: your; *prakirtya*: the glories; *jagat*: the universe; *prahrisyati*: is rejoicing/ is thrilled; *anurajyate*: is becoming attached; *ca*: and; *rakshamsi*: the Rakshshasas; *bhitani*: terrifying; *disah*: in all directions; *dravanti*: are drawn; *sarve*: all; *namasyanti*: offer their respects; *ca*: and; *siddha sanghah*: the hosts of Siddhas.

Arjuna said,

"It is very proper, o Hrishikesha, that the universe is attracted to you and rejoicing in your glories. The Rakshshasas are scared and wiped away in all directions, and the hosts of Siddhas offer you their respects."

The verse begins with the word *sthane*, "position", that establishes the foundation for the mind-blowing experience of genuine *tantra*. The word can also be translated as "it is proper", "it stands".

The word *tantra* means "power", and after contemplating the *visva rupa* in all these verses, and meditating on the meaning of *tejas*, we should have come to the point of understanding that God is *shakti* and *shaktiman*, "power" and "powerful".

This is the first basic truth on which all the other names of God are manifested. Bhagavan means "having all powers - i.e. strength, wealth, beauty, fame, etc. Krishna means "all-attractive", which in the mind of a physicist easily translates into "powerful": the attraction itself is the power that pulls together.

The name Hrisiksha, "Lord of the senses", also refers to the power that controls and activates the senses, at material and spiritual level. It is all about power.

So the position, or foundation, of this experience, is the knowledge of the glories of God (*prakirtya*) as power and powerful. We should never underestimate God or minimize his/ her position, because this automatically and immediately destroys the foundations of our divine experience and sends us sliding into its materialistic and illusory reflection. In this light, we can easily understand why the *Bhagavata Purana* keeps reminding us about the inconceivable power of Krishna, even in his most intimate - and apparently ordinary - *lilas*.

The second point is about the senses. The *Narada Pancharatra*, quoted in *Bhakti rasamrita sindhu*, clearly states: *sarvopadhi vinirmuktam, tat paratvena nirmalam, hrishikesa hrishikena sevanam bhaktir ucyate*, "*Bhakti* is defined as serving the Lord of the senses by engaging one's senses. (This must be done) without any designation/ label/ denomination (*upadhi*), and in a perfectly pure way."

This perfect purity and freedom from designations obviously applies to the crucial pre-requisite mentioned so many times in

Bhagavad gita and in all other scriptures: the overcoming of the ignorance constituted by *ahankara* and *mamatva*, bodily/ material identification and attachment/ possession/ affiliation.

The *Bhagavata Purana* (10.84.13) states: *yasyatma buddhih kunape tri-dhatuke sva-dhih kalatradisu bhauma ijya-dhih, yat tirtha buddhih salile na karhicij janesv abhijnesu sa eva go-kharah*, "Those persons who identify the self as the gross material body, who maintain a sense of belonging to their family, who worship their native land, and who visit the sacred places simply to take a bath, are not better than animals like cows and donkeys (even if they appear to be human beings)."

It is totally impossible to actually engage in *tantric sadhana* if we remain on the platform of *ahankara* and *mamatva* - that tantric (and non-tantric) texts define as *pasutva*, "animal consciousness". Such *nara pasus* must never be initiated in the tantric knowledge and worship, because they will cause damage to themselves and to others by faulty understanding and application; it would be like allowing foolish and ignorant people to access high voltage electrical lines to "play with them" like animals do with their bodies, senses and minds to obtain cheap pleasure. Therefore the true tantric *sadhana* requires strict sexual abstinence, as well as severe restrictions on all types of sense gratification. The practice of genuine *yoga* is required as a technical support for this *sadhana*, so the two are often indicated as a single practice, of which *yama* and *niyama* constitute the first steps. We will elaborate on this subject more specifically in another dedicated publication, because this requires a considerable volume in itself.

The words *hrisha* ("joy") and *anuraga* ("attachment, attraction") clearly refer to the ecstatic immersion in the devotional meditation/ service to Shakti and Shaktiman. However, we must be very careful not to slide into their illusory material reflections - something that is much easier than it seems.

It is said that this *sadhana* is like the blade of a sharp knife, or the point of a needle, and even the slightest distraction will shift the focus from the divine to the animal level. Due to this reason, the *sadhaka* should not disclose the secrets of the *sadhana* to people who are not qualified or even speak about it with others (except with one's *guru*). Usually, tantric teachers who compile books or give lectures purposefully omit important parts in their explanations, so that foolish unqualified people will not be able to access the actual practice. In fact, there is a lot that can be told to the public, especially to dispel the many gross misconceptions and dangerous misinformation circulated by cheap pretenders and exploiters.

One of the best explanations comes from the Kashmiri Shaivite tradition, in the form of the *Spandakarika* ("sacred ecstatic tremor"). In front of this supreme Consciousness, all other levels of consciousness bow and surrender. The Siddha level of consciousness offers homage, and the Rakshasa level of consciousness dissolves.

VERSE 37

कस्माच्च ते न नमेरन्महात्मन्

kasmācca te na nameranmahātman

गरीयसे ब्रह्मणोऽप्यादिकर्त्रे ।

garīyase brahmaṇo'pyādikartre ।

अनन्त देवेश जगन्निवास

ananta deveśa jagannivāsa

त्वमक्षरं सदसत्तत्परं यत् ॥ ११-३७ ॥

tvamakṣaram sadasattatparam yat ॥ 11-37 ॥

kasmat: why; *ca*: and; *te*: to you; *na*: not; *nameran*: they should offer respects; *maha atman*: o great Atman; *gariyase*: you are the most glorious; *brahmanah*: than Brahma; *api*: even; *adi kartre*: the first creator; *ananta*: unlimited; *deva isa*: o Lord of the *devas*; *jagan nivasa*: abode of the universe; *tvam*: you; *aksharam*: imperishable; *sat asat*: *sat* and *asat*; *tat*: that; *param*: superior; *yat*: because.

"Why shouldn't they offer their respects to you, o great Atman? You are more glorious than Brahma, the first creator (of this universe). O Lord of the Devas, abode of the universe, you are imperishable, because you are above the cause and the effect."

Why not, indeed? God is within ourselves, and everything is actually spiritual, as we can perceive when our consciousness is on the spiritual level. When *ahankara* and *mamatva* are dissolved by the immense power of Consciousness, only pure Consciousness remains, in the form of Shakti and Shaktiman. This is the level called *tat paratvena nirmalam*, "supreme purity".

We do not need to lose our individuality in this ecstasy: we simply must liberate it from all material designations and limitations. We "enter" (*visate, visanti*, 8.11, 18.55) into this Consciousness and we find it full of variety, inconceivably one and different, but without the constraints of time and space.

Everything eternally is, in the same "time and place", and we find that we are simultaneously *shakti* and *shaktiman*, *atman* and *brahman*, *visaya* and *asraya*. We are then so closely connected with the *param atman*, the *maha atman*, that we totally channel our consciousness into the Supreme: this is the actual Krishna Consciousness. At this level *brahma tattva*, *jiva tattva*, *prakriti tattva* are inconceivably one and distinct, eternally, beyond the scope of cause and effect.

What is the meaning of the expression *sad-asat tat param* ("above *sat* and *asat*")?

We have already elaborated on the various meanings of *sat* and its opposite *asat*. For example, in 2.16 we explained that *sat* means "existence, reality, goodness, permanence, spirit", and in its adjective form means "actual, real, true, good, right, eternal, spiritual, transcendental". Its opposite *asat* therefore means "non-existent, illusory, false, wrong, impermanent or temporary, material".

After carefully teaching us how to distinguish *sat* from *asat*, now Krishna is taking us beyond this final duality, to a platform where only very advanced spiritual intelligence can stand without falling into the abyss of disaster.

We can make the example of mathematics here: in primary school we first learn that one cannot subtract a larger number from a smaller number, but then after becoming learned enough, we are told that it is actually possible to do that in algebra - only we will get a negative number. Similarly, in the beginning of spiritual development it is essential to differentiate between *sat* and *asat*, but after establishing ourselves firmly in *sattva*, we can take the final leap and fly up to *visuddha sattva*. If we try to make this passage artificially, without really understanding it and without having the required strength and stability, we will simply crash into *rajas* and *tamas*, with considerable damage.

On the *visuddha sattva* level we will be able to really understand the teachings of the *Upanishads*, such as *sarva khalv idam brahma* ("all this is Brahman", *Chandogya Upanishad* 3.14.1.) and *neha nanasti kinchana* ("nothing else exists", *Katha Upanishad* 2.2.11, *Brihad Aranyaka Upanishad* 4.4.19). So Brahman is not only spirit, but matter as well, and yet beyond both.

The word *gariyase* means "you are greater/ more glorious", and here it applies to the relationship between the creator and general manager (*adi karta*) of this universe - Brahma - and the Brahman from whom he originates.

The word *akshara* ("imperishable") applies to the original *sabda brahman*, the syllable *om*, the form of the primeval Shakti and Shaktiman, who is the abode and foundation not only of this universe, but of all universes.

VERSE 38

त्वमादिदेवः पुरुषः पुराणस्-

tvamādidevaḥ puruṣaḥ purāṇas-

त्वमस्य विश्वस्य परं निधानम् ।

tvamasya viśvasya paraṁ nidhānam ।

वेत्तासि वेद्यं च परं च धाम

vettāsi vedyam ca paraṁ ca dhāma

त्वया ततं विश्वमनन्तरूप ॥ ११-३८ ॥

tvayā tataṁ viśvamanantarūpa ॥ 11-38 ॥

tvam: you; *adi devah*: the first *deva*; *purushah*: the *purusha*; *puranah*: the most ancient; *tvam*: you; *asya*: of whom; *visvasya*: of the universe; *param*: supreme; *nidhanam*: shelter; *vetta*: the knower; *asi*: you are; *vedyam ca*: and also the object of knowledge; *param*: supreme/ transcendental; *ca*: and; *dhama*: the abode; *tvaya*: by you; *tatam*: pervaded; *visvam*: the universe; *ananta rupa*: o endless form.

"You are the primeval God, the most ancient Purusha, the supreme shelter of the universe, the knower and the object of

knowledge, the supreme abode. O endless form, the universe is pervaded by you.”

The expression *adi deva* is very interesting. All the *devas* are originated and guided by the supreme Personality of Godhead in the aspects of Brahman, Paramatma and Bhagavan.

At a more intimate level, we can say that the *devas* are limbs in the body of the supreme Personality of God, Narayana, Vishnu, as manifested here by Krishna. Just like all the cells of our body develop gradually from the original stem cell, all the *devas* appear from the universal form of God - first Brahma, and then all the other *devas*. This is also indicated in this verse by the expression *visvasya param nidhanam*: God is the matrix of everything and everyone, simultaneously Mother and Father of all.

It is not easy to understand the nature of the supreme Personality of God, and similarly it is not easy to understand the Personalities of the *devas*, that are eternal archetypes in the blueprint of the universe - administrative positions, if we may say so. Except for Vishnu and Shiva and Adi Shakti (and their direct emanations), any other such administrative position in the universe can be occupied by an individual *jiva* that has developed the required qualifications, because everything is based on consciousness.

However, this concept should not encourage anyone to disrespect or underestimate the *devas* and their positions, because they are way beyond the comprehension of conditioned souls.

All individual *jivas* are *amsas*, or "parts" of God (*mamaivamso jiva loke*, 15.7) and as such they have exactly the same nature or "quality" of God, although they cannot have the same "quantity". When we speak of the individual *jivas* as a category, we should not think that they are all the same in their degree of development and manifestation of powers.

All the *jivatmas* start as *anu atmas*, with the same potential, but due to their choices they develop in a different way.

Some *jivas* choose to develop a spiritual consciousness immediately and therefore they become *siddhas* without the need of going through the conditioned state: these are called *nitya siddhas*, or *akshara (dvav imau purushau loke ksharas cakshara eva ca, 15.16)*. The supreme Personality of God is beyond these *nitya siddhas (uttama purushah tu anyah, paramatma, 15.17)*, as he is the origin of them all (*adi deva*). Such *nitya siddhas* have always been conscious of being limbs of the Supreme and have deliberately and harmoniously engaged in the functions required in the service of the Supreme.

Some other *jivas* choose to have the material experience, and they develop a material ego instead of a spiritual personality. After exhausting their experience in the material world, they become liberated (*sadhana siddhas* or *kripa siddhas*) and thereby attain the same position of the *nitya siddhas*. At that point, they can consciously function as limbs of the Supreme, exactly as any *nitya siddha*.

We can remember the example of the cells or organs of our body: as long as they are connected and directed by the superior consciousness, in a healthy state, they will be simultaneously individuals and a collective body, and will be able to perform functions that are characteristic of the superior consciousness. For example, a hand by itself cannot do much.

When it is properly connected to the body, it can already perform so many activities and functions, even instinctively - for example it can feel/ perceive temperature etc. When the hand is closely guided by a superior intelligence and knowledge, it can create artistic masterpieces or technological wonders, or write sublime poetry. Can we dismiss its work, by saying that "it is just a hand"?

Here Arjuna clearly confirms this point, by adding the further quality of *purusha puranah*.

We have already mentioned that the definition *purusha* applies to consciousness, as the nature of the *atman/ brahman*; *purusha* is the principle of perception as opposed/ integrated by *prakriti* as the principle of action.

Specifically, the word *purusha* implies the meaning of "living in the *pura*", the city of the body.

This *pura* ("city") can be the body of some unicellular organism or atom, the large body of a whale, and also the immense body of the Virata Purusha, the cosmic form. In addition, this *purusha* is *vetta asi vedyam*, "the knower and the object of knowledge" and *tatam visvam*, "pervading the entire universe".

The entire universe is God's body. As *jivatmas*, we are the cells or organs of God's body, where there are innumerable faces, eyes, mouths, arms, bellies, and legs. There is no limit to the number of organs that God's body can have: all the *jivatmas* are *amsas*, "limbs", or "parts" of God's body.

According to their individual level of development, each *jivatma* can be or/and function as a limb or another, so the *devas* are the higher functions of God's body - the heads, the hands, the mouths.

The expression *vetta asi vedyam* indicates that God is simultaneously subject and object, as his Personalities are unlimited and can interact without any limitation. God is Consciousness, and can manifest in innumerable forms and functions.

VERSE 39

वायुर्यमोऽग्निर्वरुणः शशाङ्कः

vāyuryamo'gnirvaruṇaḥ śaśāṅkaḥ

प्रजापतिस्त्वं प्रपितामहश्च ।

prajāpatistvaṁ prapitāmahaśca ।

नमो नमस्तेऽस्तु सहस्रकृत्वः

namo namaste'stu sahasrakṛtvah

पुनश्च भूयोऽपि नमो नमस्ते ॥ ११-३९ ॥

punaśca bhūyo'pi namo namaste ॥ 11-39 ॥

vayuh: Vayu; *yamah*: Yama; *agnih*: Agni; *varunah*: Varuna; *sasa ankah*: Chandra; *prajapatih*: the Prajapati; *tvam*: you; *prapitamahah*: the forefather; *ca*: and; *namah namah te*: my homage to you again and again; *astu*: there be; *sahasra kritvah*: a thousand times; *punah ca*: and again; *bhuyah*: again; *api*: although; *namah namah te*: I offer you repeated obeisances/ salutations.

"You are Vayu, Yama, Agni, Varuna, Chandra, and Prajapati the ancestor (of all beings). I offer my respect to you again and again, a thousand times, again and again."

The divine functions mentioned in verse are closely connected to each other in a deliberate way. Vayu is life and Yama is death; Vayu is not only the wind and the air in the atmosphere, but also the *pranas* or subtle life airs within the body, that sustain and move the consciousness in the body. Yama and Agni are connected because death consumes everything like fire, and fire kills and destroys bodies (as we have seen in previous verses).

Agni is fire and Varuna is water: two apparent opposites, between which everything else is contained, as when we describe some wave lengths of light as infrared and ultraviolet we are also implicitly remembering all the wave lengths or frequencies of light we can see in the rainbow, from red to violet. Chandra is connected to Varuna because the moon moves the waters - from the tides of the oceans to the lymph of the plants and to the flows within the human body, especially the sexual fluids. Chandra and Prajapati are also connected, as they are both generating and sustaining life in all beings; Chandra is also called Soma, and in his manifestation as the plant *somalata* he constitutes the focus for many religious rituals meant to increase the mental and physical vigor of human beings and of *devas* as well.

The Prajapati mentioned in this verse is Brahma, the first created being, the ancestor of all the beings in the universe, who equally bestows his blessings on all, like the rays of the moon that shine over the great and the small alike.

To give his authoritative example for us to follow, Arjuna offers his respect to the *devas* and to their origin and collective body as the Virata Purusha. To each and every divine manifestation of Consciousness, he offers his respect again and again, a thousand times, to each and every divine form. These repetitions (*punah bhuyah*, "again and again") are specifically meant to impress us with the realization of divinity as a living, acting experience, and not just as some theoretical philosophical dream.

Knowledge is extremely important in the development of spiritual realization, but it should not remain theoretical only, otherwise it can even become an obstacle to progress, because in that case it deteriorates into material scholarship due to the inevitable influence of *maya* (7.15) and generates material pride, thus turning *sattva* into *tamas*.

The method to upgrade *jnana* into *vijnana* ("theoretical knowledge" into "applied knowledge") is simple, and clearly described in practice by Krishna in verses 13.8 to 13.12.

In this regard, we need to note that many people have developed a curious misconception about the meaning of *amanitvam* ("not caring for honors") and *anahankara* ("being free from false ego"). Discussing the spiritual science and sharing one's realizations and experiences does not amount to being egotistic.

There are some imbeciles who will accuse you of being arrogant simply because you truthfully say that you are actually following the principles of *dharma* and teaching what you have learned and realized.

At the same time, they drink the footwash of someone who openly says he has no qualifications, but still demands worship and total obedience and personal service because he claims to represent his *guru*, who in his eyes was qualified only because his *guru* was qualified.

This distorted idea of humility comes - guess from where - from the abrahamic concept by which all human beings are inherently sinners, and can never develop any real knowledge or qualifications in spiritual life, therefore their only hope is to be "saved" by a "prophet/ Christ" and his representatives the priests/mullahs etc in exchange for their blind allegiance and obedience.

The Vedic idea of humility is very different. In the Vedic perspective, all human beings are parts and parcels of God, equal in quality, and they only need to realize it to elevate themselves to the level of perfection. This is why it is called "self-realization".

VERSE 40

नमः पुरस्तादथ पृष्ठतस्ते

namaḥ purastādatha pṛṣṭhataste

नमोऽस्तु ते सर्वत एव सर्व ।

namo'stu te sarvata eva sarva ।

अनन्तवीर्यामितविक्रमस्त्वं

anantavīryāmitavikramastvaṁ

सर्वं समाप्नोषि ततोऽसि सर्वः ॥ ११-४० ॥

sarvaṁ samāpnoṣi tato'si sarvaḥ ॥ 11-40 ॥

namaḥ: I salute; *purastat*: at the front; *atha*: as well as; *pristhatah*: at the back; *te*: you; *namaḥ astu*: there be salutations; *te*: you; *sarvatah*: from all sides; *eva*: certainly; *sarva*: all; *ananta virya*: of unlimited prowess; *amita vikramah*: of unsurpassable deeds; *tvam*: you; *sarvam*: all; *samapnosi*: you are encompassing; *tatah*: therefore; *asi*: you are; *sarvah*: everything.

"I salute you from the front and from the back. My homage to you from all sides! Your prowess is unlimited, and your deeds are without compare. You are encompassing everything, therefore you are everything."

Arjuna is offering respects to God from all sides, because God is present everywhere, covering all directions and the entire expanse of the universe. Traditionally in ritual ceremonies one starts from the front (*purastat*) or in the east (*purva*, literally meaning "first"), as the most visible manifestation of God in this world is the Sun, the greatest power that sustains life.

Thus we offer our respect and meditation to Savitar from various directions at the different times of day - sunrise in the east, noon above, and sunset in the west.

Vedic tradition also includes the primeval and universal homage to the Sun, but takes it to a very high level, as the Savitri Gayatri mantra constitutes a meditation on the power of divinity so that we can raise ourselves to the divine dimension of consciousness. It is a search for inspiration towards personal perfection - not an expression of fear or propitiation, or glorification as we can see at more primitive levels, where the worshiper makes a huge difference, and puts a great distance, between him/herself and God.

The *Brihad Aranyaka Upanishad* (1.4.10) states very clearly, "those who worship the Gods thinking, 'He is one, I am another', does not know the facts, and he is like an animal to the *devas*".

So we can attain true *bhakti*, the supreme *bhakti* (*mad bhaktim labhate param*, 18.54) only when we have realized our divine transcendental nature, dissipating the illusion of material bodily identification. At that point, we have a *divya* or *siddha deha* by which we will be able not only to see (*divyam caksuh*, 11.8) but also to associate with Bhagavan personally in his intimate abode. This *siddha deha* is not something that we get from outside: it is simply the spiritual form of our evolved consciousness, of which the atomic seed has always existed. Of course the individual soul (*jivatman*) will never achieve exactly the same greatness of God, because constitutionally it is simply an *amsa*, a "part". As Arjuna declares yet again in this verse, God is *ananta-virya* and *amita-vikrama*, characterized by unlimited strength/ power and unique deeds, because the Whole will always be greater than the parts.

There is no offensive way to show one's respect and love for God, because God eagerly accepts the *bhakti* from a devotee even when it is expressed clumsily or with some superficial mistakes.

It is said that when visiting Indraprastha, Krishna was invited to a State banquet by Duryodhana, but he chose to have lunch at Vidura's house instead. Vidura was so overwhelmed by the emotions of love and happiness that in his confusion, he was offering him banana peels instead of the fruits. Krishna happily ate them, moved by his devotee's love. In the same way, Krishna snatched Sudama's bag to eat the cheap and damaged broken rice that he was carrying, as Sudama had not been able to find any better gift for his beloved friend.

In verse 9.26, Krishna clearly says that he will be delighted (*prayatatmana*) to actually eat (*asnami*) whatever a devotee offers with genuine love (*bhakti upahritam*). We have also seen this principle demonstrated quite a few times. Of course a loving devotee will only offer to Krishna things that he considers good, and will naturally try to find out what Krishna likes best, so that the offering will be as pleasing as possible.

However, God does not need our offerings, worship, or even respects or allegiance, because he is self-sufficient and independent. Whatever we offer him is for our benefit only, to develop a sentiment of love and affection towards the Supreme, so that we can establish the only perfect relationship possible, and attain the happiness we all seek. This of course does not mean that we should become sloppy or careless in our relationship with God; it is always better to remain attentive and humble and do one's best. Traditionally, after performing formal worship, one is supposed to beg forgiveness for any impropriety or mistake:

mantra hinam kriya hinam bhakti hinam janardana, yat pujitam maya deva paripurnam tad astu me, "O Lord, whatever I have done to worship you, make it perfect and complete, correcting all faults in the chanting of mantras, performance of actions, or scarcity of devotion",

yad datta bhaktimatrena patram puspam phalam jalam, aviditam nivedyam tu tat grhananukampaya, "Please, out of your kindness, accept what I have offered out of devotion - leaf, flower, fruit, water and food",

ajnanad athava jnanad asubham yan maya krtam, ksantum arhasi tat sarvam dasyenaiva grhana mam, "Whatever mistake I may have committed, knowingly or unknowingly, please forgive it and consider me as your humble servant".

VERSE 41

सखेति मत्वा प्रसभं यदुक्तं

sakheti matvā prasabham yaduktam

हे कृष्ण हे यादव हे सखेति ।

he kṛṣṇa he yādava he sakheti ।

अजानता महिमानं तवेदं

ajānatā mahimānam tavedam

मया प्रमादात्प्रणयेन वापि ॥ ११-४१ ॥

mayā pramādātpraṇayena vāpi ॥ 11-41 ॥

sakha: friend; *iti*: like this; *matva*: thinking; *prasabham*: presumptuous; *yad*: whatever; *uktam*: said; *he krishna*: o Krishna; *he yadava*: o Yadava; *he sakha*: o my friend; *iti*: like this; *ajanata*: ignorant; *mahimanam*: of the glories; *tava*: your; *idam*: this; *maya*: by me; *pramadat*: because of madness; *pranayena*: with dedication; *va*: or; *api*: although.

"Presumptuously thinking of you as a mere friend, I addressed you informally, as 'Krishna', 'Yadava', 'my friend', because I was unaware of your glories. I have done so out of carelessness, but with love."

Whatever formal imperfection one could find in Arjuna's behavior with Krishna, it is due simply to their loving relationship as friends and relatives and close companions. Therefore Arjuna here says, *pranayena*, "out of dedication", or absorption in the personal relationship.

As we have already mentioned, Krishna/ God does not take formalities so seriously when the devotee is acting out of love, and in fact he prefers intimate and simple exchanges directly from the heart, rather than pompous and presumptuous official worship, no matter how materially impressive.

Arjuna, however, reminds us that simple and direct or informal worship, too, can be superficial, presumptuous and careless (*prasabha*), and that we should never take God for granted. The fact that we (or our predecessors) have installed the Deity in our home or temple or city does not mean that God is bound or forced to remain there for our benefit, even if we become careless or selfish or otherwise offensive.

Offenses can be forgiven (*kshamasva*) when they are committed accidentally, unwittingly, or because of some overpowering circumstances. Cynicism and selfishness are very serious obstacles, that invalidate any plead for forgiveness, because they make it insincere. God is not stupid and is not obliged to accept our prayers or to forgive us simply because we are telling him to do so. If we continue to commit offenses out of arrogance even after asking forgiveness, and we refuse to reform our behavior and improve our spiritual position, a mere *mantra* or formula will not bring any relief from the bad consequences of our actions.

The same applies for the offerings of food or any form of ritualistic worship: the only guarantee that God will accept our offering is in the love and devotion that we are putting into it. God does not care at all for high caste birth, government appointment, social position, wealth, or even scholarship and excellence in following the details of a procedure: without genuine love and devotion, no offering will be accepted.

We should also be careful in our relationships with *devas* and *bhaktas*, and treat them according to their level of consciousness and not on the basis of bodily identification or other material considerations. In *Bhagavata Purana* (4.4.13) Sati comments about her father Daksha's offensive mentality towards Shiva: *nascaryam etad yad asatsu sarvada, mahad vininda kunapatma vadisu, sersyam mahapurusa pada pamsubhir, nirasta tejahsu tad eva sobhanam*, "I am not surprised about all this. Bad people, who identify with their material bodies, always deride the great souls because they are envious of God. It is very good that such materialists lose their glory and merits (*tejas*)."

Out of pride for his own material position, Daksha had disrespected Shiva, criticizing him and demeaning his character, ignoring his spiritual glories. In *Bhagavata Purana* (10.88.38-39) Krishna addresses Shiva as the *guru* of the entire universe, saying, "If someone commits *aparadha* to such a *mahajana* and *jagat guru* as you are, they will never get any auspiciousness".

Again in *Bhagavata Purana* (11.17.27) Krishna says, *acaryam mam vijaniyam, navamanyeta karhicit, na martya buddhyasuyeta, sarva deva mayo guruh*, "One should consider the *acharya* as my self and never disrespect him by considering him an ordinary human being, because the *guru* is the manifestation of all the *devas*". Of course if the "*guru*" is teaching his disciples to disrespect, abuse and insult the *devas*, he should not expect any better treatment for himself.

But we are talking here of the genuine *acharya*, not of the fake ignorant pretenders that present themselves as *gurus* in order to get cheap adoration, followers, and profit.

The word *acharya* means, "one who teaches by example", or "one who puts theory into practice by his behavior", and is here closely connected with the definition *guru*, "teacher". A person should be considered the genuine representative of the *devas* and of Krishna (who speaks this verse to Uddhava in *Bhagavata Purana*) only if he is truly functioning as *guru* and *acharya*, or in other words if he is actually taking care of his disciples and guiding them effectively and expertly on the journey of self-realization and devotion to God, and is demonstrating the goal with his personal behavior and life.

The best way to avoid committing offenses to devotees, *guru*, *deva* or Bhagavan is to rise above the level of material bodily identifications and attachments/ affiliations. This is sufficient to protect us from the consequences of the fundamental ignorance that is the root cause of envy. However, there is nothing offensive in familiar dealings with devotees, *guru*, *deva* or Bhagavan when these are based on affection - we just need to know where the line lies.

VERSE 42

यच्चावहासार्थमसत्कृतोऽसि

yaccāvahāsārthamasatkṛto'si

विहारशय्यासनभोजनेषु ।

vihāraśayyāsanabhojaneṣu ।

एकोऽथवाप्यच्युत तत्समक्षं

eko'thavāpyacyuta tatsamakṣam

तत्क्षामये त्वामहमप्रमेयम् ॥ ११-४२ ॥

tatkṣāmaye tvāmahamaprameyam || 11-42 ||

yat: whatever; *ca*: and; *avahasa artham*: to have a laugh; *asat kritah*: done at a material level; *asi*: you are; *vihara*: while strolling; *sayya*: lying down; *asana*: sitting; *bhojanesu*: while eating; *ekah*: alone; *atha va*: or also; *api*: although; *acyuta*: o Acyuta; *tat samaksam*: in the presence of others; *tat*: that; *ksamaye*: I am begging forgiveness; *tvam*: you; *aham*: I; *aprimeyam*: unfathomable.

"O Acyuta, your greatness is inconceivable. Whatever impropriety I may have committed while joking, strolling together, lying down, sitting, or eating with you, alone or in the presence of others, I beg forgiveness."

When we speak about offenses, we don't mean avoiding someone, or refusing to worship him or to submit to him, or discussing his verified factual behavior, asking questions about his statements, noticing his inconsistencies and mistakes, or behaving informally with him. These are not offenses.

An offense - *aparadha* or *ninda* - consists in deliberately hurting or damaging a person with some type of aggression, such as verbal or physical insults. These also include whatever could target him/ her by mocking, dirty allusions or ridicule based on his/ her bodily appearance, slandering him/ her with false rumors and allegations, stealing or destroying his/ her property or what s/he requires for service. None of these are relevant to ethical, philosophical or spiritual points, and can only cause damage to all.

This is particularly bad when the offense is directed towards a person who has helped us and guided us in our personal development, such as the *guru*, or a good parent or respectable well-wisher (also considered on the same level of the *guru*), to whom we should be grateful. This crime is called *guru droha*, where *droha* means "hostility", "hatred", "becoming an enemy", and "enviousness", and destroys the merits and good fortune of the offender.

It is inevitably caused by the ignorance of bodily identification and shows a serious lack of spiritual realization and knowledge. A decent person (what to speak of a devotee) does not cause harm deliberately to anyone, as this is one of the first requirements in *sadhana* (*yama* and *niyama*), what to speak of harming or killing one's *guru* and benefactors. In verse 2.5, such act was heavily condemned.

Actually, Arjuna has never done anything offensive towards Krishna. Simply, his behavior has sometimes seemed casual and familiar, as it is normally between friends; this is perfectly all right, because Krishna's internal potency, Yogamaya, arranges for the devotees to superficially overlook the *aisvarya* (power) of Bhagavan, so that the loving exchanges with his companions and devotees can develop with great sweetness, for Krishna's pleasure.

Similarly, other intimate companions of Krishna are happy to see him as their lover, husband, son, friend, and only temporarily they remember his greatness in a flash of realization, just like Arjuna is showing here. Such a moment of bewilderment is not disrupting their loving relationship and exchanges, but rather it enhances them because it makes them proud and increases their attachment to Krishna, just like a loving mother is thrilled to see her beloved son rise to some important position in society or achieving some extraordinary success, but at that time she can remember his sweet childhood activities even more keenly.

This feeling is described by Kunti in his prayers (*Bhagavata Purana* 1.8.28-31) and is found in many passages of the 10th canto of the *Bhagavata Purana*, describing the childhood activities of Krishna in Vrindavana with the remembrance of his divine glories, as seen by the intimate devotees there. The more intimate is the loving relationship, the greater will be the amazement and happiness of the devotee, and consequently the pleasure of Bhagavan. The fact is that God is pleased when his devotees joke with him, walk with him, sit or lie down with him, eat with him and so on, because they are expressing their love for him - the thing that Krishna loves best.

Similarly, Arjuna's regret for his great familiarity with Krishna will not last long - it will remain only as long as necessary to appreciate his glories and greatness (*mahima*) and describe them in his prayers for our benefit. Soon enough, he will ask Krishna to show his sweet human-like form again, and his natural loving feelings will return (11.51). This intimate relationship with God is an exclusive feature of Vedic tradition, as it is not found in any other religious culture.

The two names by which Arjuna is addressing Krishna in this verse are Acyuta, that means "not fallen", and Aprameya, that means "inconceivable", where *prameya* is the "object of knowledge".

VERSE 43

पितासि लोकस्य चराचरस्य

pitāsi lokasya carācarasya

त्वमस्य पूज्यश्च गुरुर्गरीयान् ।

tvamasya pūjyaśca gururgarīyān ।

न त्वत्समोऽस्त्यभ्यधिकः कुतोऽन्यो

na tvatsamo'styabhyadhikah kuto'nyo

लोकत्रयेऽप्यप्रतिमप्रभाव ॥ ११-४३ ॥

lokatraye'pyapratimaprabhāva || 11-43 ||

pita: the father; *asi*: you are; *lokasya*: of the universe; *cara acarasya*: of the moving and the non-moving; *tvam*: you; *asya*: of this; *pujyah*: to be worshiped; *ca*: and; *guru*: the (supreme) teacher; *gariyan*: glorious; *na*: not; *tvat samah*: equal to you; *asti*: there is; *abhyadhikah*: greater; *kutah*: how (it will be possible); *anyah*: other; *loka traye*: in the three worlds; *api*: although; *apratima*: beyond compare; *prabhava*: power.

"You are the father of all beings, moving and non-moving. You are worthy of worship, as you are *guru*, and even more glorious than *guru*. There cannot be anyone equal or greater than you. How can anyone, in all the three worlds, compare with your power?"

The word *apratima* means "immeasurable", as the definition *pratima* means "measure", "comparison", "equal to". It complements the word *aprameya* from the previous verse, meaning "not to be known or learned".

The word *idyam* means "to be worshiped". *Svetasvatara Upanishad* (6.7) states, *tam isvaranam paramam mahesvaram, tam devatanam paramam ca daivatam, patim patinam paramam parastad, vidama devam bhuvanesam idyam*, "We know God, the Lord of the universe, the supreme master, who controls everything, the supreme Deity worshiped by the Gods, who protects all those who give protection to others, greater than the greatest."

The word *gariyan* means "greater", "more glorious", "worthier of being praised"; it is a comparative term referred here to the

position of *guru*, indicating to a teacher or respected elder. Krishna is the supreme *guru*, the *antaryami paramatman*, of whom all the *gurus* are simply representatives.

In *Bhagavata Purana*, Narada instructs Dhruva to meditate on the *guru* of all *gurus* (*abhidhyayet manasa guruna gurum*, 4.8.44); similarly king Satyavrata addresses Vishnu as his *guru* (8.24.50) and Prithu tells his subjects that Hari is the supreme *guru* (4.21.36).

Again in *Bhagavata Purana* Kapila tells his mother that his devotees consider him as son, friend, *guru*, and *ista daivam* (3.25.38), and Kavi Yogendra confirms, *guru devatatma*, "the *atman* of the *guru* and the *devas*", 11.2.37). Brahma, too, describes Vishnu in the same terms: *tad visva guru adhikritam bhuvanaika vandyam* "the universal *guru*, who is the original maker, worshiped by all" (3.15.26).

At the dawn of this creation, Brahma received the Knowledge directly from Narayana (*tene brahma hrida*, "revealed to Brahma through his heart", 1.1.1), but anyone can also be blessed in the same way: *hrdi stithah yacchati jnanam sa tattva adhigamam*, "situated in the heart, he gives the knowledge by which one can understand the truth" (3.5.4), and *hrdy antah stho hy abhadrani vidhunoti*, "situated within the heart, he destroys all bad things" (1.2.17).

Particularly enlightening is verse 4.28.41, that shows how directly realizing transcendental knowledge from Bhagavan ensures it is free from sectarianism: *saksad bhagavatoktena guruna harina nripa, visuddha jnana dipena, sphurata visvato mukham*, "as directly explained by Bhagavan, Hari, who is the original *guru*, radiating with the light of pure transcendental knowledge, from all perspectives". Therefore he is the greatest teacher of all: *jagat guru tamah*, "the supreme *guru* of the universe", (10.69.15).

Another beautiful verse is expressed by Sudama, Krishna's childhood friend: *kim asmabhir anirvritam, deva deva jagat guro, bhavata satya kamena yesam vaso guror abhut*, "O God of the Gods, o universal *guru*, what will be impossible to achieve for us, when we have been living in the same school with him whose desires are always fulfilled?" (10.80.44).

In this particular verse, besides the intimate *lila* meaning of Krishna living in the *gurukula* of Sandipani Muni, we can also see the realization of the universal and eternal truth taught by the *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad gita*, about the "two birds sitting on the same tree". The statement about Krishna being the father of all beings is also found in other verses of *Bhagavad gita*.

In 9.17 Krishna says, *pitaham asya jagato mata dhata pitamahah* ("I am the father of this (world), I am the mother, the supporter, the grandfather"), and in verse 14.4 he says, *sarva-yonishu kaunteya murtayah sambhavanti yah, tasam brahma mahad yonir aham bija-pradah pita* ("In whatever form of matrix they appear, all beings are children of the supreme Mother (*brahma mahad yoni*) and I am the father, who gives the seed.")

A popular devotional song prays, *tvam eva mata cha pita tvam eva, tvam eva bandhus cha sakhas tvam eva, tvam eva vidyam ca dravinam tvam eva, tvam eva sarvam mama deva deva*, "You are my mother and my father, my family and my friend, my knowledge and my wealth: o God of the Gods, you are everything to me". *Bhagavata Purana* confirms in several more verses:

bhavaya nas tvam bhava visva bhavana, tvam eva matatha suhrit patih pita, tvam sad gurur nah paramam ca daivatam, yasyanuvrttya kritino babhuvima, "O creator of the universe, please take care of us. You are our mother, benefactor, husband and father. You are our *guru*, our supreme Deity, and by following you we achieved success" (1.11.7),

jane tvam isam visvasya, jagato yoni bijayoh, sakteh sivasya ca param, yat tad brahma nirantaram, "O Lord of the universe, I know you as both the mother and the father of the universe - the supreme eternal Brahman that includes Shiva and Shakti at the same time" (4.6.42),

ksetra jnaya namas tubhyam, sarvadyaksaya saksine, purusayatma-mulaya, mula prakrtaye namah, "I offer my respect to the you, the Knower of the field, the witness, who controls everything. I offer my homage to the supreme Purusha, the root of the *atman*, and to the supreme Prakriti" (8.3.12),

yuvayor eva naivayam, atmajo bhagavan harih, sarvesam atmajo hy atma, pita mata sa isvarah, "This Bhagavan Hari is not your son only. He is the son of all, the *atman* of all, as well as the father, the mother and the ruler" (10.46.42),

narayanas tvam na hi sarva dehinam atmasy adhisakhila loka saksi, narayano angam nara bhu kalayanat tac capi satyam na tavava maya, "O Narayana, are you not the *atman* of all the embodied beings, the supreme Lord of all the planets and the witness (conscience/ consciousness)? Narayana is your *angam* (limb), because from his human-like body he manifests the waters of creation: he is real, and not a product of your illusion" (10.14.14).

VERSE 44

तस्मात्प्रणम्य प्रणिधाय कायं

tasmātpṛaṇamya praṇidhāya kāyaṁ

प्रसादये त्वामहमीशमीड्यम् ।

prasādaye tvāmahamīśamīḍyam ।

पितेव पुत्रस्य सखेव सख्युः

piteva putrasya sakheva sakhyuḥ

प्रियः प्रियायार्हसि देव सोढुम् ॥ ११-४४ ॥

priyaḥ priyāyārhasi deva soḍhum || 11-44 ||

tasmat: therefore; *pranamya*: offering respects; *pranidhaya*: prostrating; *kayam*: the body; *prasadaye*: seeking mercy; *tvam*: you; *aham*: I (am); *isam*: to the Lord; *idyam*: to be worshiped; *pita*: father; *iva*: like; *putrasya*: of a son; *sakha iva*: like a friend; *sakhyuh*: of a friend; *priyah*: a lover; *priyayah*: the beloved; *arhasi*: you should/ you are able to; *deva*: o Lord; *sodhum*: to tolerate/ forgive.

"For that, I offer my humblest respects, throwing myself at your feet and seeking your mercy. O Lord, you are worthy of being worshiped! Please bear with me, like a father (is tolerant) with his son, a friend with a friend, and a lover to the beloved."

Such is the power of the intimate loving relationship with God, that it cannot be forgotten even in the most difficult moments. Arjuna is clearly seeing the terrifying vision of God as eternal Time devouring everything, and has already contemplated the vastness and wonder of the unlimited universal form, and he directly realizes the unfathomable divine glories of Krishna and understands that his familiarity is technically out of place. Yet, he still sees Krishna as his beloved friend, because this is what gives most pleasure to Krishna.

The perception of the *mahima* (glories, opulence, powers) of Krishna is not really absent from the devotee's mind: it is simply brushed aside from time to time, so that service to God can be more effective.

Similarly Krishna's personal servants restrain their feelings of ecstasy because tearful eyes and trembling hands are distracting them from effectiveness in their duties.

Everything is based on pure love: in verse 11.41 it was Arjuna's love for Krishna (*pramadat pranayena*) that caused his familiarity, and in this verse it is Krishna's love for Arjuna that finds tolerance and indeed pleasure in such familiarity.

We have already mentioned that the 5 primary *rasas* in loving devotion are *santa* (tranquil admiration), *dasya* (service), *sakhya* (friendship), *vatsalya* (affection towards a younger person) and *sringara* (erotic love). The sentiment expressed by a disciple towards the *guru* is a mixture of *sakhya* and *dasya*, and this is what we find expressed here. Arjuna's relationship with Krishna is clearly in the friendship mode (*sakhya*), but already in the second chapter (2.7) he had submitted himself to Krishna as a disciple (*sisyas te 'ham tvam prapannam*). This means that Arjuna has always been very aware of Krishna's divine nature and position.

God is extremely tolerant, and never gets angry when someone is trying to offend him. In *Bhagavata Purana* 10.89.3-12 we have read the famous story of Maharishi Bhrigu who went to visit the three highest and most powerful authorities in this universe - Brahma, Shiva and Vishnu - testing each of them with increasingly insulting behaviors, with mind, words and body. Vishnu did not become offended at all even when Bhrigu kicked him hard in the chest, and rather showed concern for the well-being of the Rishi, considering that Bhrigu's foot might have been hurt.

Of course Vishnu's body is totally transcendental and does not suffer any pain or damage, but the tolerance and kindness demonstrated in that episode are amazing. Yet, this is God's nature, because among the 6 perfections (*bhagas*) of Bhagavan we also find the perfection of renunciation.

Projecting one's own ideas and defects on God is called anthropomorphism, and it tends to confuse people who have not overcome the ignorance of material bodily identification. The followers of anthropomorphic doctrines hear that men are made in God's image, or about the human-like activities of God when he appears in this world, and they automatically (and mistakenly) conclude that God is also a person like us, with lots of defects and limitations. Some degraded and confused people even construe a projection of God in such a way that, if such a person really existed in society, he would be considered a dangerous psychopathic criminal and would be immediately committed to some high security mental facility.

VERSE 45

अदृष्टपूर्वं हृषितोऽस्मि दृष्ट्वा

adr̥ṣṭapūrvam hr̥ṣito'smi dr̥ṣṭvā

भयेन च प्रव्यथितं मनो मे ।

bhayena ca pravyathitam mano me ।

तदेव मे दर्शय देव रूपं

tadeva me darśaya deva rūpam

प्रसीद देवेश जगन्निवास ॥ ११-४५ ॥

prasīda deveśa jagannivāsa ॥ 11-45 ॥

adr̥ṣṭa: not seen; *pūrvam*: before; *hr̥ṣitah*: overjoyed; *asmi*: I am; *dr̥ṣṭva*: by seeing; *bhayena*: by fear; *ca*: and; *pravyathitam*: shaken; *manah*: the mind; *me*: my; *tat*: that; *eva*: certainly; *me*: me; *darsaya*: let see; *deva rūpam*: the form of the Lord; *prasida*: be

pleased; *deva isa*: o Lord of the *devas*; *jagat nivas*: o abode of the universe.

"Contemplating this extraordinary form, my mind is thrilled with joy and shaken with fear at the same time. O Lord of the Devas, abode of the universe, please let me see the form of God."

The expression *adrista purvam*, "not seen before", applies to the particular experience described by Arjuna, that cannot be repeated in exactly the same way. As we have already mentioned, Krishna had already shown the universal form on various occasions during his activities, so Arjuna's reference is not about the general concept of the universal form or Virata Purusha. Other commentators have interpreted this expression to indicate that God is without compare, as stated in so many passages of the scriptures, and quoted specifically in *Svetasvatara Upanishad* (6.8) that declares, *na tat samas cabhyadhikas ca drsyate*, "it is impossible to see/ find one who is equal or greater (than God)".

The word *hrisitah*, "thrilled", refers to the physical symptoms experienced by Arjuna; it specifically indicates the standing of hairs, or *harsa roma*.

As we have already seen, Arjuna's emotional symptoms are not actually about fear of God but rather amazement and awe in front of his immense power. We could compare it to the thrill, fear and joy that people experience for example on a high speed car race, or looking up a sheer cliff while free climbing it, or other similar experiences.

The revelation of the glories of Krishna and the vision of the universal form are the stimulus (*uddipana*) to the devotional feelings in Arjuna's *sakhya rasa*, and not simply to the *adbhuta rasa*, that is an attendant feeling and not the permanent and

preminent taste in the relationship between Arjuna and Krishna. Amazement and fear (*vismaya rati*, *adbhuta rasa*) are a very useful ingredient also in many other activities of divine Personalities.

This is why God mixes extraordinary deeds even to his very intimate and sweet love exchanges that appear to be based on a very simple and familiar perception of his Personality - for example with the young *gopis* and with Yasoda and Nanda, Krishna's foster parents in Vrindavana. Krishna's lifting the Govardhana hill, fighting with the great Kaliya serpent, devouring the forest fire, and killing the many *asuras* attacking him are all examples of intimate *lilas* that introduce amazement, fear, and the perception of Krishna's immense power, with the purpose of enhancing the intimate loving exchanges with his devotees.

In fact God could have solved such problems without exhibiting such extraordinary deeds (*uru vikama*), but then there would not be much to be impressed about, or to talk about.

This is confirmed in *Bhagavata Purana*: *kritavam kila karmani saha ramena kesavah, atimartyani bhagavan gudhah kapata manusah*, "Together with Balarama, Bhagavan Kesava manifested many superhuman activities, under the guise of a human being" (1.1.20), and *anugrahaya bhaktanam manusam deha asthitah, bhajate tadrisih krida yah srutva tat paro bhavet*, "The Lord manifests a human-like form out of kindness for his devotees, as one will become attracted to God by listening to the stories of his playful activities" (10.33.36).

A very interesting expression in this verse is *deva rupam*, "the form of God". Arjuna has been eminently contemplating God's forms both in meditation and in direct vision, but the universal form is not singular in number: in fact, it includes unlimited forms. Now Arjuna wants to see *the* "form of God", that is the four-armed form of Vishnu or Narayana, a single form expressing the

unlimited powers of God, but in a pleasing *saumya* ("benevolent") aspect.

The expression *tatha eva*, "as that", indicates that the four-armed Vishnu form is still powerful and majestic - *aisvarya* - yet all the traditional scriptures recommend the *sadhakas* to meditate and contemplate on this form.

VERSE 46

किरीटिनं गदिनं चक्रहस्तं

kirīṭinaṃ gadinam cakrahastam

इच्छामि त्वां द्रष्टुमहं तथैव ।

icchāmi tvāṃ draṣṭumahaṃ tathaiva ।

तेनैव रूपेण चतुर्भुजेन

tenaiva rūpeṇa caturbhujena

सहस्रबाहो भव विश्वमूर्ते ॥ ११-४६ ॥

sahasrabāho bhava viśvamūrte ॥ 11-46 ॥

kiritinam: with the crown; *gadinam*: with the mace; *cakra hastam*: holding the disc in (your) hand; *icchami*: I wish; *tvam*: you; *drastum*: to see; *aham*: I; *tatha*: like that; *eva*: certainly; *tena*: by that; *eva*: certainly; *rupena*: by the form; *catur bhujena*: with four arms; *sahasra baho*: (you who have) thousands of arms; *bhava*: become; *visva murte*: o form of the universe.

"O Visvamurti, who have thousands of arms, I wish you to be(come) the four-armed form, holding the disc and the mace in your hands, and wearing a crown. I wish to see you in that form."

Krishna will show Arjuna the divine forms as he asked because he is pleased (*prasannena tava*, 11.47); earlier he asked to see the universal form (11.3), now he is asking to see Vishnu. However, Krishna is also going to manifest his sweet human-like form (11.50) without Arjuna explicitly asking for that: it was sufficient to remember their affectionate and intimate relationship of friendship and kinship. At the spiritual level, the devotional sentiment is non-different than the form or body manifested by Krishna or his devotee; of course this is difficult to understand for a person who is still immersed in material bodily identification, but existence and form are originally pure consciousness.

As consciousness can instantly transform and manifest any form, Krishna can easily manifest the universal form, the four-armed form of Narayana/ Vishnu, and the most intimate human-like form of Krishna, by which he relates with his closest devotees.

The four-armed form of Narayana or Vishnu is the primary focus of all traditional Vedic scriptures, as the form of Krishna became object of meditation and worship only in these last 5000 years after his appearance, mostly based on the *Bhagavad gita* and *Bhagavata Purana*. Before that, Vedic scriptures narrated the stories of Vishnu's *avatars*, such as Matsya, Kurma, Varaha, Nrisimha, Vamana, Parasurama and Rama.

Colonial indology and the subsequent conventional academia believe that the presently existent Vedic texts have been composed rather recently, in a supposed "evolution of thought" that goes from the *samhitas* (*Rig Veda*, *Sama*, *Yajur*) to the *Upanishads* and the *Puranas*, that in spite of their name (literally meaning

"ancient") would have been created well into the current era. This is certainly not the verdict of the Vedic scriptures themselves. All the knowledge contained in all the Vedic scriptures already existed much earlier, and it has been collected in specific compilations from time to time according to the requirements of the circumstances. The texts called *Tantras* or *Agamas* (two names that mean respectively "power" and "scriptures") are even more ancient in origin than the presently studied Vedic texts, and they are specifically focused on Vishnu and his Couple manifestation in this universe, known as Shiva and Shakti.

The *samhitas* (*Rig Veda*, *Sama*, *Yajur*, *Atharva*) speak of Vishnu only marginally because they are collections of hymns in praise of the various Personalities of God controlling this universe, meant to be chanted and sung at the ritual ceremonies to which such Personalities were remembered and called. The philosophical and theological elaboration of such hymns is contained in the commentaries, compiled in the same period and with the same vision - *Brahmanas*, *Aranyakas* and *Upanishads*. Although the number of hymns dedicated specifically to Vishnu is limited, everyone agrees that Vishnu - Yajna - is the ultimate purpose, foundation and personification of all the religious ceremonies. Similarly, in all groups of scriptures, Vishnu appears both as *avatara* and manifestation within this universe (and as such he is counted among the Devas) as well as the origin of all the Devas, the Personality of the supreme Brahman. These two dimensions of Vishnu's presence are found all over the *Puranas*, *Upanishads*, and in *Bhagavad gita* too, as we have been contemplating in these last few chapters.

The scripture that focuses most on Krishna, the *Bhagavata Purana*, explicitly recommends to meditate on the four-armed Vishnu form; we can see for example the instructions given by Krishna himself to Uddhava, considered a sort of spiritual testament left by Krishna

just before his disappearance (11.11.46, 11.14.37, 11.27.38), and the instructions of another great teacher *avatara*, Kapila (3.28.12-21, 27).

Krishna manifests the four-armed form of Vishnu in many passages of the *Bhagavata Purana*, as for example in the Asvatthama episode (1.7.52), to Brahma who is meditating on him (2.9.16), to the Devas who pray for his help at the appearance of Vritrasura (6.9.28) and especially when he takes birth and appears to Vasudeva and Devaki (10.3.9), and to Aditi (8.17.4-6), and also to Nabhi, the father of Rishabhadeva (5.3.3-5).

Krishna manifests this form for Rukmini (10.60.26). He also appears as Vishnu to Muchukunda and separately to Kalayavana (10.51.24 and 10.51.2) during the war against Jarasandha. The four-armed form of Vishnu also appears to Parikshit before his birth (1.12.9), and is the object of meditation recommended by Sukadeva to Parikshit during his final fasting (2.2.8-13).

The same meditation on the four-armed Vishnu is recommended by Narada to young Dhruva (4.8.43-53) and in this form Vishnu appears to Dhruva to bless him. Shiva personally instructs the Pracetas to meditate on this form in 4.24.45-53, and this is how Vishnu appears to them in 4.30.5-7 (albeit with 8 arms). The eight-armed form of Vishnu also appears after Daksha's successful *yajna* (4.7.19-23) and after being called by Daksha's *Hamsa guya* prayers (6.4.40). He is also the object of meditation of the *Narayana kavacha* (6.8.12) taught by Visvarupa to Indra.

The *pancha upasana* form of worship and meditation, summarized by Adi Shankara, already existed for many thousands of years. It focuses first and foremost on Vishnu/ Narayana as the supreme Brahman, the origin, foundation and sum total of all the divine Personalities and forms.

This transcendental, non-manifested (*avyakta*) supreme Personality of Godhead, the One, manifests in many (*eko bahu syam*, "I will become many", *Chandogya Upanishad*, 6.2.3) starting by two - the divine Couple of Shakti and Shaktiman. In the material manifestation, this Couple is known as Durga and Shiva - the other two main Personalities of God traditionally worshiped, as the Mother and the Father of the cosmos, known under various names.

The other two Personalities of God in this *pancha tattva* ("five realities") meditation are Surya and Ganesha, who have been worshiped since time immemorial and express an immense wealth of symbolic meanings and forms of consciousness. Surya is the Sun, the universal manifestation of the power of God, that everybody can see and perceive every day; the most brilliant examples of Surya worship are given by Ramachandra, the Vishnu *avatara*, who chanted the famous hymn *Aditya hridayam*, and by Krishna, who instructed his son Samba to worship Surya in order to regain full health.

The divine Personality of Ganesha, also called Ganapati and Vinayaka, is not easy to understand. He is most popular among virtuous materialists who worship him to propitiate success in business and wealth, but he is remembered and honored at the beginning of all enterprises, both material and spiritual, because he personifies the destruction of obstacles from the path of progress.

According to the *Skanda Purana*, Avanti kanda, quoted in *Bhakti rasamrita sindhu*, among the offenses to be avoided in devotional service, we find "to worship the Deity without worshiping Vaikuntha deities like Ganesha".

VERSE 47

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।

śrībhagavānurvāca ।

मया प्रसन्नेन तवाजुनेदं

mayā prasannena tavārjunedaṁ

रूपं परं दर्शितमात्मयोगात् ।

rūpaṁ paraṁ darśitamātmayogāt ।

तेजोमयं विश्वमनन्तमाद्यं

tejomayaṁ viśvamanantamādyam

यन्मे त्वदन्येन न दृष्टपूर्वम् ॥ ११-४७ ॥

yanme tvadanyena na dṛṣṭapūrvam ॥ 11-47 ॥

sri: the wonderful; *bhagavan*: Lord; *uvaca*: said; *maya*: by me; *prasannena*: for the happiness; *tava*: your; *arjuna*: o Arjuna; *idam*: this; *rupam*: form; *param*: supreme/ transcendental; *darsitam*: seen; *atma yogat*: by own yoga; *tejah mayam*: made of splendor; *visvam*: the universe; *anantam*: unlimited; *adyam*: most ancient; *yat*: that which; *me*: my; *tvat anyena*: other than you; *na*: not; *drista*: seen; *purvam*: before.

The wonderful Lord said,

"To make you happy, I am now showing you this supreme form, made of splendor, manifested by my own *yoga/ shakti*, unlimited and primeval like the universe, that nobody has seen before you."

The expression *tava prasannena arjuna*, "for your satisfaction, Arjuna", indicates that the Lord is happy to give happiness to his devotee. This is the actual meaning of love.

God does not need anything. He does not need to accept any offering, or to perform any activity, but he always thinks about the benefit and the happiness of the devotees. This is not favoritism, because the Lord also thinks constantly about the benefit of all creatures. Krishna had already declared: *samo 'ham sarva-bhuteshu na me dveshyo 'sti na priyah, ye bhajanti tu mam bhaktya mayi te teshu capy aham*, "I am equally disposed towards all living beings. I do not hate anyone, and I do not favor anyone. Yet, when someone offers me a sincere service in devotion, I reciprocate with love." (9.29) and *ye yatha mam prapadyante tams tathaiva bhajamy aham*, "O Partha, as much as they surrender to me, in the same way I reciprocate with them." (4.11)

And also: *ananyas cintayanto mam ye janah paryupasate, tesham nityabhiyuktanam yoga-kshemam vahamy aham*, "Those who are interested only in me and my worship are always favorably engaged. I personally carry what they need." (9.22)

The supreme form mentioned in this verse is the four-armed Vishnu form. Just like the Visva rupa, this form is extremely popular and recommended as the object of meditation for all the *yogis* and *bhaktas*, therefore its description is found many times in several scriptures, especially in the *Puranas* focusing on Vishnu, such as the *Bhagavata*, *Vishnu*, *Padma*, *Narada*, *Brahma vaivarta*, *Varaha*, *Matsya*, and *Kurma*. In these texts, we find that several persons actually obtained the *darshana* of Vishnu in his four-armed form.

So when Krishna says, "nobody has seen this form before", the meaning of his statement must be deeper, just like when it is said that God has no material qualities (*nirguna*): the secret is revealed in this verse itself, where we read *tejomayam visvam anantam adyam*, "the original form, without beginning and without end, made of light, that encompasses the universe".

The four-armed Vishnu form seen by Arjuna is ever fresh, *nava yauvanam*, and although it is unchanged eternally, it is eternally new.

The expression *tejo mayam*, "made of light", is very interesting. We have already elaborated on the meaning of *tejas* as splendor, heat and light, and power. The transcendental body of Vishnu, or Narayana, is not an ordinary body made of gross material elements, but it is pure consciousness, manifested as light.

From Narayana all the *jivas* emanate, at first in the form of light or *anu atma* (atomic souls): just like an atomic explosion produces a blinding flash of light when atoms are dissolved and sub-atomic particles are exposed, we can understand that spirit is a sub-atomic manifestation of energy, that is naturally as bright and radiant as the sun (*brahma maya arka varnah, Bhagavata Purana, 10.46.32*). This was also stated in a previous verse in this chapter: *divi surya-sahasrasya bhaved yugapad utthita, yadi bhah sadrisi sa syad bhasas tasya mahatmanah*, "If thousands of suns were rising simultaneously in the sky, that radiance would be similar to the radiance of the great Atman." (11.12). It is reported that while watching the first modern nuclear explosion at the Trinity Test in New Mexico, on 16 July 1945, Julius Robert Oppenheimer (1904-1967), famous as the "father of the atomic bomb", emotionally quoted this verse from the *Bhagavad gita*.

This transcendental form of Vishnu is manifested through God's internal Yogamaya, or *atma yoga*, the cohesive spiritual vibration that constitutes the higher energy or *shakti*. On the spiritual level, everything is radiant and manifested as pure energy - from the transcendental body of the Personality of Godhead to the *siddha svarupa* of the individual souls, to the *siddha vastu* of the environment, so much that all existence is self-effulgent and radiant, and there is no need for sun, moon, or electricity.

This is confirmed in *Bhagavad gita* (15.6, *na tad bhasayate suryo na sasanko na pavakah*) as well as in *Katha Upanishad* (2.2.15, *na tatra suryo bhati na chandra tarakam, nema vidyuto bhanti kuto 'yam agnih*).

VERSE 48

न वेदयज्ञाध्ययनैर्-
दानैर्-

na vedayajñādhyayanair-
dānair-

न च क्रियाभिर्न तपोभिरुग्रैः ।

na ca kriyābhirna tapobhirugraiḥ ।

एवंरूपः शक्य अहं नृलोके

evamrūpaḥ śakya ahaṁ nṛloke

द्रष्टुं त्वदन्येन कुरुप्रवीर ॥ ११-४८ ॥

draṣṭum tvadanyena kurupravīra ।। 11-48।।

na: not; *veda yajna*: by the Vedic sacrifice(s); *adhyayanaih*: by the study of the scriptures; *na*: not; *danaih*: by giving charity; *na ca*: not even; *kriyabhih*: by *kriyas*; *na*: not; *tapobhih*: by austerities; *ugraiḥ*: very severe; *evam rupah*: this very form; *sakyah*: (one) can; *aham*: I; *nri loke*: among the human beings; *drastum*: to see; *tvat*: than you; *anyena*: by others; *kuru pravira*: o greatest among the Kuru warriors.

"O greatest among the Kuru warriors, I have allowed no other human being except you to see this form. One cannot (see it) by the performance of Vedic sacrifice, or by the study of the scriptures, or as the result of giving charity, engaging in *yoga kriyas/ sadhana*, or even engaging in great austerities."

The expression *tvad anyena* means "other than you", and implies that the four-armed Vishnu form manifested by Krishna specifically for Arjuna is very intimate. As we know already, Arjuna is not an ordinary human being, but he is a manifestation of the Lord himself for a particular mission, an eternal expansion and companion of Vishnu, so his particular perspective must be special indeed.

We have seen from several examples related in *Puranas* that sincere devotees obtained the *darshana* of Vishnu after engaging in austerities (like Dhruva and the Pracetas), performing Vedic sacrifices (like Prithu and Daksha), and so on; therefore Krishna's statement in this verse indicates that such meritorious religious activities in themselves are simply the container or vessel for the really essential ingredient - that is *bhakti*, pure love and devotion for God.

Of course we should not conclude that these auspicious religious activities are not recommended or useful, because in fact they constitute the preliminary preparation that purifies our hearts and minds from material contamination. They are required, but they are not sufficient to give us the final result. The auspicious actions listed in this verse can be summarized as *jnana* and *vairagya*, the two liberating factors that Krishna has been describing in *Bhagavad gita* from the very beginning, from the statement *gatasun agatasums ca nanusocanti panditah*, "Those who really know the truth do not grieve for the dead or for the living" (2.11).

The first teaching offered by Krishna is that we should learn the difference between the temporary material body and the eternal spirit soul - the sum and substance of knowledge. The *sthita prajna*, or the person who is solidly on the level of knowledge, is presented as the example to be followed in 2.54, 2.55, 2.57, 2.58, 2.61, 2.67, 2.68. The entire chapter 4 is dedicated to explain *jnana*, and the importance of *jnana* is specifically highlighted in verses

3.3, 3.26, 3.33, 3.39, 3.40, 3.41, 4.10, 4.19, 4.23, 4.27, 4.28, 4.33, 4.34, 4.36, 4.37, 4.38, 4.39, 4.41, 4.42, 5.15, 5.16, 5.17, 6.8, 7.2, 7.16, 7.17, 7.18, 7.19, 9.1, 10.11, 13.12, 13.18, 13.28, 13.35, 14.1, 14.2, 14.11, 15.10, 15.15, 18.18, 18.50, 18.63, 18.70, 18.72.

The particular type of *jnana* that comes from *Vedas* is also called *vidya*, and it is praised in 5.18, 6.23, 9.2, 9.20, 10.17, 10.32. As long as one is immersed in the contaminating ignorance of material identification and attachment, it will be impossible to have the real *darshana* of the Lord, even if we are daily in contact with his image in the temple or in our house. In fact, one of the most notable scholars in the *bhakti* tradition, Rupa Gosvami, writes in his *Bhakti rasamrta sindhu* (1.2.101): *sruti smrti puranadi pancaratra vidhim vina, aikantiki harer bhaktir utpatayaiva kalpate*, "so-called exclusive devotion to Hari is simply a disturbance to society when it is not solidly based on the knowledge contained in *sruti*, *smriti*, *Puranas* and all the other scriptures."

Similarly, *vairagya* (6.35, 13.9, 18.52) and *tyaga* (18.1, 18.2, 18.4) are amply discussed in *Bhagavad gita*, especially at its conclusion, as a fundamental principle that we need to understand very clearly and practice correctly, and the entire chapter 5 is dedicated to *sannyasa*. *Bhakti*, devotion, is the inner motivation that must sustain *jnana* and *vairagya*, otherwise they will be simply expressions of pride and arrogance. When *yajnas* are performed to show off one's opulence or advancement in religion, or simply to obtain a material benefit, they cannot produce *bhakti* and please God. Similarly, when one studies the scriptures and explores the science of self realization merely for theoretical and academic scholarship, to get a degree or social recognition, or even simply increase one's personal pride (individual or collective, as in sectarian considerations), the door to the direct experience of God remains closed.

When there is no *bhakti*, even charity offered selflessly to meritorious persons is still incomplete and does not attract God's personal attention. Krishna has already explained that one should offer all such activities directly to him (*yat karosi, yad asnasi, yaj juhosi dadasi yat, yat tapasyasi kaunteya, tat kurusva mad arpanam*, ""O Arjuna, whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you sacrifice in *yajnas*, whatever you give in charity, whatever you endure in the name of austerity - do it for me." 9.27).

When we perform our duty for God in a sentiment of devotion, we still get benefits from the results of our actions, but we also purify ourselves from the *ahankara* and *mamatva* that prevent us from actually perceiving God.

VERSE 49

मा ते व्यथा मा च विमूढभावो

mā te vyathā mā ca vimūḍhabhāvo

दृष्ट्वा रूपं घोरमीदृङ्ममेदम् ।

dr̥ṣṭvā rūpaṁ ghoramidṛṅmamedam ।

व्यपेतभीः प्रीतमनाः पुनस्त्वं

vyapetabhiḥ prītamanāḥ punastvaṁ

तदेव मे रूपमिदं प्रपश्य ॥ ११-४९ ॥

tadeva me rūpamidaṁ prapaśya ॥ 11-49 ॥

ma: do not; *te*: for you; *vyatha*: fear/ disturbance; *ma*: do not; *ca*: and; *vimudha bhavah*: confusion; *dristva*: seeing; *rupam*: form; *ghoram*: horrible; *idrik*: like this; *mama*: my; *idam*: this; *vyapeta*

bhiih: free from all fear; *priita manah*: pleased mind; *punah*: again; *tvam*: you; *tat*: that; *eva*: certainly; *me*: my; *rupam*: form; *idam*: this; *prapasya*: look.

"Look at this form of mine, and let your mind become satisfied and free from fear. Do not be perturbed and confused by the vision of my terrifying form."

The key words in this verse are *vyatha* ("fear"), *vimudha* ("confusion") and *vyapeta bhiih* ("free from fear"). God is not interested in terrorizing us into blind obedience and submission, even if this fear is caused simply by the contemplation of his powerful Virata rupa (*ghoram rupam*) and his/ her majestic glories as Time eternal (*kala* or *kali*). Our surrender should be motivated by love, not by fear. It should be the blissful abandon by which a parent submits to the whims of his/ her small child while playing, or a lover to the intimate desires of the lover, or a trusting child or disciple to the expert guidance of a venerable elder.

The first word in the verse is *ma*, "do not", and expresses the affectionate concern of Krishna for his dear friend Arjuna: "do not be upset", "do not be perturbed". When we actually realize God, we find that everything is happiness and peacefulness there - all the upsetting conditions of material existence disappear, and we truly feel home at last. This peacefulness is not the stillness and detachment that we may experience in this world due to material *sattva*, that quickly turns into *tamas* as inertia and oblivion. It is rather a bubbling fountainhead of happiness and love, that inspires us to unconditional and constant devotional service.

In that consciousness, we directly participate to the supreme Consciousness and therefore we perceive the sufferings of the conditioned souls in their true meaning - as the dark nightmare of confused souls who just need to wake up in order to find their perfect happiness.

Therefore, just like God descends as *avatara* to carry the knowledge of *dharma* for the benefit of the good people (*paritranaya sadhunam vinasaya ca dushkritam, dharmasamsthapanarthaya sambhavami yuge yuge*, 4.8), the self-realized soul, the pure devotee, also walks in this world among the confused people to bring the light of knowledge and consciousness.

This work must never be done through violence or fear, because *rajas* and *tamas* actually lead the souls in the opposite direction. Violence and fear can be properly used only to stop physical aggression against innocent and good people, because they are required to counteract the violence and fear perpetrated by criminals of all kinds. This is why *kshatriyas* (who protect the people from aggressions) and *brahmanas* (who teach and guide people in spirituality, religion and ethics) are two separate groups that cooperate but never encroach on each other's work. Only *asuras* resort to material repression and coercion in the name of spirituality and religion, to pressurize people to engage in a type of worship or confession of belief - that they foolishly mistake for actual belief and religion. Such distorted ideologies and practices do not deserve the name of *dharma*, because they are fundamentally adharmic and deeply sinful.

The Vedic path to religion and spirituality is blissful attraction (*prita manah*), that is expressed through beautiful divine forms, activities, names, qualities, as well as songs, dance, flowers, colors, lights, sweet scents, delicious food, and loving service not only from the devotee to the Lord, but also from the Lord to the devotee, and from devotees to devotees, and even to all other people and beings - because God lives in the hearts of all (*sarva-bhutatma-bhutatma*, 5.7), (*suhridam sarva-bhutanam*, 5.29), (*samam sarveshu bhuteshu tishthantam paramesvaram*, 13.28), (*mamaivamso jiva-loke jiva-bhutih sanatanah*, 15.7), (*sarva-*

bhuta-sthitam yo mam bhajaty ekatvam asthitah, 6.31), (*aham atma gudakesa sarva-bhutasaya-sthitah*, 10.20).

This characteristic of friendliness and affection towards all beings becomes increasingly important in Krishna's instructions in *Bhagavad gita*. It starts with equanimity, that is freedom from foolish discriminations based on bodily prejudice: *vidya-vinaya-sampanne brahmane gavi hastini, suni caiva sva-pake ca panditah sama-darsinah*, "The *panditas* (wise learned persons) look with equal (friendliness) to the *brahmana* who is learned and gentle, to the cow and the elephant, as well as to the dog and to the (uncivilized) dog eater" (5.18), and *sarva-bhuta-stham atmanam sarva-bhutani catmani, ikshyate yoga-yuktatma sarvatra sama-darsanah*, "One who is connected through Yoga contemplates the *atman* that is situated in all living entities and all the living entities as situated in the *atman*, therefore s/he is equally disposed towards everyone." (6.29)

However, in later verses Krishna clearly indicates that equanimity is not enough: we must actively work for the benefit of all beings, overcoming all sense of duality (*chinna-dvaidha yatatmanah sarva-bhuta-hite ratah*, 5.25), and renouncing all forms of enmity and not only of attachment (*mad bhaktah saiga-varjita nirvairah sarva-bhuteshu*, 11.55). A real devotee is recognized because s/he does not hate any living being, but s/he is friendly and compassionate towards all: because s/he is free from *ahankara* and *mamatva*, s/he is tolerant and balanced in all circumstances (*advेषhta sarva-bhutanam maitrah karuna eva ca, nirmamo nirahankarah sama-duhkha-sukhah kshami*, 12.13).

Again the next verse says that he works actively for the benefit of all beings (*sarva-bhuta-hite ratah*, 12.4), and he is compassionate and kind to all (*ahimsa satyam akrodhas tyagah santir apaisunam, daya bhuteshv aloluptvam mardavam hrir acapalam*, 16.2).

VERSE 50

सञ्जय उवाच ।

sañjaya uvāca ।

इत्यर्जुनं वासुदेवस्तथोक्त्वा

ityarjunaṁ vāsudevastathoktvā

स्वकं रूपं दर्शयामास भूयः ।

svakaṁ rūpaṁ darśayāmāsa bhūyaḥ ।

आश्वासयामास च भीतमेनं

āśvāsayāmāsa ca bhītamenaṁ

भूत्वा पुनः सौम्यवपुर्महात्मा ॥ ११-५० ॥

bhūtvā punaḥ saumyavapurmahātmā ॥ 11-50 ॥

sanjayah: Sanjaya; *uvaca*: said; *iti*: like this; *arjunam*: to Arjuna; *vasudevah*: the son of Vasudeva; *tatha*: then; *uktva*: speaking; *svakam*: his own; *rupam*: form; *darsayam asa*: he showed; *bhuyah*: again; *asvasayam asa*: he comforted; *ca*: and; *bhitam*: frightened; *enam*: him; *bhutva*: becoming; *punah*: again; *saumya*: sweet/ kind; *vapur*: body; *maha atma*: the great Atman.

Sanjaya said,

Thus speaking to Arjuna, Vasudeva manifested again his original form, comforting and relieving him from all fears. The great Atman again appeared in his sweetest body.

The word *mahatma*, or *maha atman* ("great self") is used here as the equivalent of *param atman* ("supreme self"), indicating the supreme Consciousness. This meaning has been applied already in previous verses of this chapter (11.2, 11.12, 11.20, 11.37) while it had been used to indicate individual souls in 7.19, 8.15, 9.13.

It will be used again at the conclusion of *Bhagavad gita*, in verse 18.74, applied to both Krishna and Arjuna.

We can therefore understand that *atman* is the quality of the self, *maha atman* is the quality of the realized self, and *param atman* is the quality of the supreme self - Brahman, Paramatma, Bhagavan. There is no contradiction or opposition between the individual and the Supreme: any such opposition is merely due to illusion (*mahamaya*), that turns the consciousness or *jivatman* "outside" (*bahir mukha*) instead of "inside" (towards the self). Of course, this does not make any sense for those who are convinced that they are the body, because when we speak of "self" they immediately think about the material coverings they are wearing. They cannot perceive themselves as the consciousness, because such consciousness is colored by the *gunas* or material qualities that constitute the body and all the objects around them.

The expression *svakam rupam* is equivalent of *svayam rupam*, "own form", and refers to the particular form in which Krishna relates with Arjuna. On the spiritual level, the *rupa* (form or body) is non-different from the *bhava* (sentiment, feeling or consciousness) generally expressed through the *rasa* or relationship. This applies both to God and to the individual soul.

On the level of the supreme Brahman (Bhagavan), the differences between the various forms are not contaminated by material considerations of hierarchy, therefore there is no real difference between Vishnu and Krishna. At the same time, we can say that the form of Krishna is more intimate, and therefore more difficult to perceive and relate to, because the devotee must be totally free from all impurities. While for a conditioned soul it is relatively easy to remain respectful towards the powerful and magnificent form of Vishnu, he can easily underestimate the sweet and familiar form (*saumya vapuh*) of Krishna and therefore fail to understand his actual nature.

However, the intensity of feeling (*bhava*) that a devotee can experience in the intimate relationship with Krishna is much deeper and stronger than we can find in the awed and respectful admiration and veneration for Vishnu, that keeps us at a certain distance. This is the key to understand why in the tradition of *bhakti*, Krishna is considered most important, even more than Vishnu or Narayana: the Supreme Personality of God.

The greatness of God is the greatness of Consciousness, and the stronger and more intense and complete this Consciousness is, the "more completely divine" we come to perceive it. However, Krishna and Vishnu continue to be the one and same Personality of God.

VERSE 51

अर्जुन उवाच ।

arjuna uvāca ।

दृष्ट्वेदं मानुषं रूपं तव सौम्यं जनार्दन ।

dr̥ṣṭvedaṁ mānuṣaṁ rūpaṁ tava saumyaṁ janārdana ।

इदानीमस्मि संवृत्तः सचेताः प्रकृतिं गतः ॥ ११-५१ ॥

idānīmasmi saṁvṛttaḥ sacetaḥ prakṛtiṁ gataḥ ॥ 11-51 ॥

arjunah: Arjuna; *uvaca*: said; *dristva*: seeing; *idam*: this; *manusam*: human-like; *rupam*: form; *tava*: your; *saumyam*: sweet; *janardana*: Janardana; *idanim*: presently; *asmi*: I am; *samvrittah*: settled; *sa cetah*: with my consciousness; *prakritim*: natural; *gatah*: (I have) come.

Arjuna said,

"O Janardana, by seeing this human-like form of yours, that is so sweet, I am now pacified and my consciousness has returned to its natural state."

The *saumya vapu* (sweet and serene form) of Krishna that is manifested to Arjuna is a human-like form (*manusam rupam*), benevolent, unassuming and familiar, that does not inspire awe or reverence. The feeling or *bhava* of such form is love and affection and it can be obstructed by awe and reverence, therefore the Yogamaya of the Lord is covering his majestic glories and presenting a lovable boy or young man, who inspires affection and intimacy instead of fear and awe. In particular circumstances the *bhava* or *rasa* can be perturbed by events, visions, thoughts, and memories that are in contrast with it, but for a pure devotee this is just a temporary situation, usually provided by the Lord precisely to stimulate the emotions of the devotee.

At a more primitive level of understanding of spiritual and religious life, a devotee expects a relationship with God to give material prosperity and success, good health, respect from society, and fulfillment of material desires. However, this is not sufficient to help the devotee progress in spiritual realization and *bhakti*, because once he has obtained his desired boons or blessings, an ordinary person normally loses interest in religion and forgets about God.

Therefore in *Bhagavata Purana* (1.8.25) we find queen Kunti saying, *vipadah santu tah sasvat, tatra tatra jagad guro, bhavato darsanam yat syad, apunar bhava darshanam*, "O jagat guru, we don't mind having to face difficulties in life, because at such times we (most easily) find you, and this means that we will not have to take birth again."

Later (10.88.8) Krishna himself will say, *yasyaham anugrihnami harisye tad dhanam sanaih, tato adhanam tyajanty asya svajana*

duhkha dukkhitam, "When I want to favor someone, I gradually take away everything he owns, so that he loses all relationships and goes through disappointments and troubles."

As we can easily remember, this place of grief, disappointment and perplexity towards material life was precisely the starting point of *Bhagavad gita* - Arjuna's *visada*. This does not mean that we should become crazy and suicidal masochists and hope to get more and more troubles in life: suffering is not a value in itself, and certainly we should not aspire to loss, difficulties and failures. Rather, we should develop a positive attitude, approaching difficulties as opportunities to grow and evolve, and setbacks as valuable lessons to better understand what we need to do to improve. As they say, failure can be the pillar of future success.

At a more intimate level of *rasa*, this consideration becomes irrelevant, and the difficulties in life take a totally different dimension, called *vipralambha* or separation, in which the ordinary perception of life disappears and the devotee is totally immersed in the ecstasy of remembering God. We can see this transcendental madness in Radharani, as well as in mother Yasoda and mother Devaki, who undoubtedly represent the closest and most intimate relationships with Krishna. Krishna Chaitanya, too, manifested a similar ecstasy, at a level that ordinary people cannot possibly access or understand. The apparent sufferings of these great spiritual personalities are in fact a source of ecstatic happiness, in which the distinction between the lover and the loved totally disappears. However, to a superficial observer, who is identified with the material body and sense gratification, such expression of ecstasy will appear material, and even grotesque or degraded.

This is the reason why we should always be extremely careful to avoid judging the actual position of other people in regard to spirituality and religion, based on the external observation of their personal activities.

Of course, this only applies to personal activities that do not cause harm, suffering or damage to others: the madness of spiritual ecstasy can cause erratic personal behaviors and in extreme case even self-inflicted damage, but it will never cause any harm, suffering or damage to others.

The word *prakritim*, "nature", refers to the natural inclination of the consciousness, that produces a comfortable feeling of balance and peace of mind. The word *prakriti* can be understood from its fundamental components, *pra-kriti*, meaning "making at first", or "creating". In this particular context, it can be explained at various levels. At an ordinary level, Arjuna's nature is the human perspective that is familiar with a sweet and affectionate human-like form, his friend and relative, with whom he has shared so many intimate moments (11.41-42). At a deeper level, it refers to the *para prakriti*, transcendental nature, known as Yogamaya, who manifests the loving *sakhya rasa* that connects Arjuna with Krishna.

VERSE 52

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।

śrībhagavānuvāca ।

सुदुर्दर्शमिदं रूपं दृष्टवानसि यन्मम ।

sudurdarśamidaṁ rūpaṁ dṛṣṭavānasi yanmama ।

देवा अप्यस्य रूपस्य नित्यं दर्शनकाङ्क्षणः ॥ ११-५२ ॥

devā apyasya rūpasya nityaṁ darśanakāṅkṣiṇaḥ ॥ 11-52 ॥

sri: the wonderful; *bhagavan*: Lord; *uvaca*: said; *su durdarsam*: very difficult to see; *idam*: this; *rupam*: form; *dristavan asi*: (that) you have seen; *yat*: that; *mama*: my; *devah*: the *devas*; *api*: even; *asya*: of this; *rupasya*: of the form; *nityam*: always; *darsana-kanksinah*: desiring to see.

The wonderful Lord said,

"This form that you are contemplating is extremely difficult to see. Even the *devas* always aspire to obtain its *darshana*."

The intimate human-like form of God is certainly not more ordinary than the other divine forms. In fact, it is even more extraordinary and difficult to understand than any other form, because it remains covered by Yogamaya (7.15, 7.25) in a way that confuses less intelligent people. This magic is so amazing that it can show exactly the opposite of what really is: paradoxically, the highest level in the spiritual dimension then appears to be the lowest, so as to lead the ill-motivated persons deeper into the spell of illusion.

Vishnu is hidden - *avyakta*, "non manifested" - in more than one sense. In the second chapter of *Vedanta sutras* (aphorism 11) we find that Brahman and Atman (*atmanau*, "the two Atmans") enter into "the cave" (*guhā*) of the material body or the cosmos, that is the material body of the Virata Purusha, and Brahman in the form of Paramatma (*antaryami*, "that is inside", aphorism 1.2.18) supports the existence of the body and of all the elements, although it remains invisible to the human eye.

In the conversation between Yama and Nachiketa we find in *Katha Upanishad*, Yama says, "One who is intelligent focuses the mind to know the Atman, that is difficult to perceive, hidden within the cave of the heart, the supreme primeval Lord. Such a person goes beyond the level of joy and sorrows." (1.2.12).

Again in *Katha Upanishad* (1.3.1) we find the following statement: *ritam pibantau sukritasya loke guham pravistau parame parardhe, chayatapau brahmavido vadanti pancagnayo ye ca tri-nacitekah*, "Those who know the Brahman, who perform the five fire sacrifices and honor three times Nachiketa's sacrifice, speak about light and shadow, the two (Atmans) who have entered inside the body, the innermost cave of the heart, that is the supreme abode."

Narada Muni thus addresses Krishna after the killing of the Kesi asura in Vrindavana: *tvam atma sarva bhutanam eko jyotir ivadhasam, gudho guha sayah saksi maha purusa isvarah*, "You are the Self in all the beings, the One, hidden in the cave of the heart like the radiant light of fire in the kindling wood. O great *purusha*, o *isvara*, you are the witness" (10.37.11).

Krishna appears to Devaki and Vasudeva, and then he is immediately transferred to Gokula Vrindavana, to hide him from the evil Kamsa. There he remains hidden as a simple cowherd boy, playing with the village people, occasionally exhibiting amazing feats that remain like brief flashes of lightning in the peaceful and refreshing night of his daily activities and relationships. The peak of Krishna's *lila* in Vrindavana is the *rasa* dance with the *gopis* - again, a secret and intimate episode protected by the veil of the moonlit night in the beautiful forest on the bank of the Yamuna river. At the height of the *rasa lila*, again Krishna becomes hidden even from his dearest *gopis*, creating the climax of excitement and ecstasy that fuels the emotions of love in separation.

After leaving Vrindavana, Krishna continued to act generally like an ordinary human being, while his occasionally extraordinary deeds could easily remain unnoticed by envious or ignorant people, who often underestimated him. To understand why Krishna would want to act in this way, we may bring the example of a very great and famous personality, who chooses to travel incognito to avoid wasting time and energy with undeserving curious people, and

revealing himself only in special circumstances, and only to carefully selected persons, for the sake of loving exchanges. This is precisely the case of Arjuna and his brothers.

In *Bhagavata Purana* (7.15.75) we find this statement: *yuyam nr loke bata bhuri bhaga, lokam punana munayo abhiyanti, yesam grihan avasatiti saksad, gudham param brahma manusya lingam*, "You Pandavas are most fortunate among human beings, because many great saints, who can purify the entire world, have visited your house as guests. Indeed, the supreme Brahman, appearing in the form of a human being, has been residing confidentially in your house".

VERSE 53

नाहं वेदैर्न तपसा न दानेन न चेज्यया ।

nāham vedairna tapasā na dānena na cejyayā ।

शक्य एवविधो द्रष्टुं दृष्टवानसि मां यथा ॥ ११-५३ ॥

śakya evaṁvidho draṣṭuṁ dr̥ṣṭavānasi mām yathā ॥ 11-53 ॥

na: not; *aham*: I; *vedaih*: by the study of *Vedas*; *na*: not; *tapasa*: by austerities; *na*: not; *danena*: by charity; *na*: not; *ca*: and; *ijyaya*: by performing ritual worship; *sakyah*: (one becomes) capable; *evam*: and; *vidhah*: in this way; *drastum*: to see; *dristavan asi*: you are seeing; *mam*: me; *yatha*: like this.

"One cannot see it in this way as you are contemplating it, not even by the study of the *Vedas* or through austerities or charity, or the performance of ritual worship."

This verse is almost identical to 11.48, where Krishna stated: "O greatest among the Kuru warriors, I have allowed no other human being except you to see this form. One cannot (see it) by the performance of Vedic sacrifice, or by the study of the scriptures, or as the result of giving charity, engaging in *yoga kriyas*/ spiritual *sadhana*, or even engaging in great austerities." While in verse 11.48 Krishna was speaking about the four-armed form of Vishnu, now he is speaking about his human-like form, apparently ordinary and unassuming, that is so familiar to Arjuna as his intimate friend and close relative.

As we have observed several times, repetition in Vedic scriptures is not considered a literary flaw, but it is used purposefully to show the particular importance of a statement or concept. Therefore we can conclude that these two verses constitute a key passage in the revelation offered through Arjuna about the meditation on the form of God.

In chapters 10 and 11 Krishna has manifested his universal form, the Virata Rupa, to help us understand that God is not limited by matter, time, space and individuality. Now that we have (hopefully) cleared such ignorant misconceptions, artificially built on our own material bodily identification, Krishna has returned to the apparently easier forms of Vishnu and Krishna, but he is repeatedly stating that such forms are even more difficult to see and understand than the amazing and majestic Virata rupa.

Materialists are perplexed and sometimes even horrified at the image of God having thousands, hundreds or just dozens of arms, so when the number of arms is reduced to four or to a normal-looking single pair, their minds become pacified. But that peacefulness is totally different from the feelings of Arjuna or any other genuine realized devotee, because it is based on the reinforcement of the old prejudice of bodily identification.

A material human body with four arms is not a divine miracle, but a monstrous deformity, that impairs movements and causes lameness and malfunctions, and needs to be addressed through medical procedures to ease the suffering of the patient. Therefore when a materialist moves his attention from the four-armed form of Vishnu to the two-armed form of Krishna, he feels better because his mind can return to its material antropomorphic vision of God as a regular person who merely has some more power than others. On the other hand, a *jnani* (a person who has the proper knowledge) sees the many-armed forms of God as the expression of his/ her multiple powers (*parasya saktir vividhaiva sruyate, Svetasvatara Upanishad, 6.8*) that appear simultaneously and not in contradiction to each other. It is easier to see these forms as manifesting a greater power and mystery than we can find in ordinary material bodies - a concept that anthropologists and psychologists have explored in the field of symbolic language.

However, the deceiving simplicity of Krishna's two armed form presents a greater challenge to the average mind, because it can be truly appreciated only through the depth of vision that is afforded by transcendental knowledge and devotional attachment. Anything less, and the observer will remain on the surface of the mystery, with the danger of being led astray in labeling Krishna as an exaggerated historical personality or an "Indian mythological figure" like the characters in fairy tales and fictional novels or comics. This temptation has already produced misleading presentations of the Gods honored in ancient cultures, and is attacking many divine Personalities from the Hindu tradition, reducing them to fictional characters in fantasy films, cartoons, and TV serials, for the purpose of entertainment and commercial profit.

Too often such productions are controlled by people who are utterly unqualified spiritually, or even ill-motivated just like the colonial indologists of mainstream academia.

Ignorant and simple minded people are unable to detect the dangerous and misleading contents of such productions, and sometimes even consider them commendable because they "propagate Indian culture". They cannot understand how the pure nutritious nectar of God's *lilas* has been poisoned, like milk touched by the lips of a venomous serpent, and the teachings originally carried by such sacred stories have been distorted or completely lost.

VERSE 54

भक्त्या त्वनन्यया शक्य अहमेवंविधोऽर्जुन ।

bhaktyā tvananyayā śakya ahamevaṁvidho'rjuna ।

ज्ञातुं द्रष्टुं च तत्त्वेन प्रवेष्टुं च परन्तप ॥ ११-५४ ॥

jñātuṁ draṣṭuṁ ca tattvena praveṣṭuṁ ca parantapa ॥ 11-54 ॥

bhaktya: through *bhakti*; *tu*: but; *ananyaya*: nothing else; *sakyah*: capable; *aham*: I; *evam vidhah*: in this manner; *arjuna*: o Arjuna; *jnatum*: to know; *drastum*: to see; *ca*: and; *tattvena*: in truth; *pravestum*: to enter; *ca*: and; *parantapa*: o Arjuna.

"O Arjuna, only through *bhakti* it is possible to know and to see me truly, and to enter into me."

Svetasvatara Upanishad (6.23) explains that *bhakti* is the key that unlocks the understanding of God (*yasya deve para bhaktir yatha deve tatha gurau, tasyaite kathita hy arthah prakasante mahatmanah*). This love and devotion should be directed towards God and also towards the spiritual teacher, who is dedicated to helping us attain God.

But what is *bhakti*? In a world where the meaning of love and the meaning of devotion have been muddled and confused by so many cheap applications and superimpositions, we need to return to the basics.

Love is not lust or superficial sentimentalism, and devotion is not sectarianism or blind allegiance and belief. Neither of them consists in cheering louder than others, or managing to get in the front row in the photo opportunity or parades.

Actual love is a sincere and selfless service and attention to the happiness to the person we love, which obviously includes making serious efforts in trying to understand and tune in with his thoughts and feelings and desires - with his consciousness, his true self. Actual devotion means dedicating all one's energies, resources, time, and purpose of life to the service of the cause we are supporting.

We can easily understand that knowledge and renunciation are required to progress in love and devotion, but they are not sufficient to attain the ultimate purpose. Constant meditation and service can be sustained only by sincere love, that gives us the strength to overcome any obstacle - and love is the means and the end, because love is Consciousness.

In *Bhagavata Purana* Krishna instructs Uddhava about the science of *bhakti*:

bhakti aham ekaya grahyah sraddhayatma priyah satam, bhaktih punati man nistha sva pakan api sambhavat, "I can be obtained only through pure *bhakti*, by those faithful saints that are in love with me. Love and firm faith in me can even purify a *chandala* from the contamination of his birth." (11.14.21)

yam na yogena sankhyena dana vrata tapo adhvaraih, vyakhya svadhyaya sannayasaih prapnuyad yatnavan api, "(This realization)

cannot be attained through *yoga*, *sankhya*, charity, *vratas* and *tapas*, Vedic sacrifices, study of Vedic scriptures or teaching Vedic knowledge to others, or by accepting the order of *sannyasa* - not even with great efforts." (11.12.9)

Kapila's teachings on *bhakti*, occupying a considerable section of *Bhagavata Purana* (3rd canto, chapters 25, 28 and 29), also confirm the same truth: *asevayayam prakriter gunanam, jnanena vairagya vijimbhitena, yogena mayy arpitaya ca bhaktya mam pratyag atmanam ihavarundhe*, "This (person) does not engage in the service of the material *gunas*, but develops *jnana* and *vairagya* through the practice of *yoga*, offering (everything) to me with devotion. Such a person attains me, the supreme Atman, in this very lifetime/ body/ world." (3.25.27)

The same idea had already been expressed by the ladies of Hastinapura, who were contemplating Krishna as he was preparing to depart to return to Dvaraka: *sa va ayam yat padam atra surayo, jitendriya nirjita matarisvanah, pasyanti bhakty utkalita amatmana nanv esa sattvam parimarstum arhati*, "This same (Krishna) who is here (in this place) can be seen through *bhakti* by those *suras* (dharmic persons) who have conquered their senses and perfected themselves to the full purity of the self. Only this (*bhakti*) has the power to totally purify the mind/ existence." (*Bhagavata Purana*, 1.10.23).

The statement in this verse is confirmed by a verse at the conclusion of *Bhagavad gita* (18.55), that reads: *bhaktya mam abhijanati yavan yas casmi tattvatah, tato mam tattvato jnatva visate tad-anantaram*, "One can truly know me, as I am, only through *bhakti*. Then s/he enters into me as a result."

The two words *pravestum* ("to enter") and *visate* ("enters") are indeed extraordinary in this context, as they cannot be used with reference to an ordinary person who has a material body, but make

perfect sense if we apply them to the supreme Personality of God as the sum total of all Consciousness.

There is no contradiction between the concept of Brahman and the concept of Paramatma and Bhagavan, for those who have actually attained that level of realization. God is neither "impersonal" or "personal" (in the limited sense that most people give to this definition): he is "trans-personal", or "omni-personal", as he contains all beings and existences and is the source of them all.

In mainstream scientific terms, we could say that God is a sort of magnetic field created by consciousness or constituted by consciousness. Consciousness means intelligence, knowledge and will power. It can never be impersonal or void, otherwise it would not be conscious, therefore God is a person, but not limited to a material body. He can manifest any body/ form according to his will and control it perfectly, and his most intense and intimate form is naturally the Personality that is fully engaged in loving exchanges, as love is the highest expression of the unity of consciousness.

As individual *jiva atmans*, we can enter into this Consciousness field and thus become "Krishna Conscious". This complete union with the Absolute does not require the loss of our spiritual individuality or transcendental personality, because these constitute our inherent nature and cannot be destroyed (2.12). Only the *material* individuality and personality are dissolved in the process, but this is not a loss because they were always temporary and fictitious anyway. It is not easy to explain the sublime position of the liberated *atman* that enters into the supreme Existence and Consciousness, because our ordinary dealings in this material world constitute a totally different paradigm, except for a few special moments in which we experience the thrill of ecstasy that makes us forget about ourselves in love and happiness.

VERSE 55

मत्कर्मकृन्मत्परमो मद्भक्तः सङ्गवर्जितः ।

matkarmakṛṇmatparamo madbhaktaḥ saṅgavarjitah ।

निर्वैरः सर्वभूतेषु यः स मामेति पाण्डव ॥ ११-५५ ॥

nirvairah sarvabhūteṣu yah sa māmeti pāṇḍava ॥ 11-55 ॥

mat: my; *karma kṛin*: worker; *mat paramah*: (seeing) me as the Supreme; *mat bhaktah*: my devotee; *sanga*: from attachments; *varjitah*: free; *nirvairah*: without enmity; *sarva bhutesu*: towards all beings; *yah*: that (person); *sa*: s/he; *mam*: to me; *eti*: comes; *pandava*: o son of Pandu.

"My devotee is engaged in working for me, and sees me as the supreme (reality). S/he has abandoned all association/ affiliation/ identification, and has no enmity towards any being. (In this way, my devotee) comes to me, o son of Pandu."

The greatest demonstration of love and devotion is practical service, or sincere work for the benefit of the object of our love. The word *karma krit* is the equivalent of the word *karmachari*, often used in Hindu religious groups or organizations to refer to activists who do not live in the *ashrama* but work for it in some way, by offering voluntary *seva*.

However, just working is not sufficient: a devotee should work with the proper consciousness, intelligence and transcendental realization.

Gopala Tapani Upanishad (1.1) elaborates on this point: *sac cid ananda rupaya krisnayaklista karine, namo vedanta vedyaya gurave buddhi sakshine*, "I offer my respect to Krishna, the form of

Existence, Consciousness and Happiness, who removes all sorrows. Knowing him is knowing the purpose of the *Vedas*. He is the (supreme) *guru*, and the witness of intelligence."

As we have seen, *bhakti* is sustained by *jnana* and *vairagya*. The knowledge and awareness of the transcendental nature of God enable the devotee to transform his sincere work into genuine devotional service to the Supreme, and to recognize God's presence in all living beings. As we elaborated in the commentary to verse 49, the devotee perceives God in the hearts of all (*Bhagavata Purana*, 5.7, 5.18, 5.29, 6.29, 13.28, 15.7, 6.31, 10.20). This is also confirmed in Kapila's teachings on *bhakti* (3.28.42, 3.29.41-34), especially in the following verses:

aham sarvesu bhutesu bhutatmavasthitah sada, tam avajnaya mam martyah, kurute arca vidambanam, "I am always (living) within the self of all beings. If a man disrespects me in that (*paramatma*), any Deity worship he may perform will remain useless." (3.29.21)

yo mam sarvesu bhutesu santam atmanam isvaram, hitvarcam bhajate maudhyad bhasmany eva juhoti sah, "If someone disregards my presence in all beings as the Lord of all creatures, and then performs ritual worship, he is an idiot (like one who pours oblations into the ashes (where there is no fire))." (3.29.22)

dvisatah para kaye mam manino bhinna darsinah, bhutesu baddha vairasya na manah santim ricchati, "One who offers obeisances to me but is hostile towards the bodies of others, seeing these beings as separate (from me/ from himself), can never attain peace of mind, because of his hatred towards my creatures." (3.29.23),

atmanas ca parasyapi yah karoty antarodaram, tasya bhinna driso mrtyur vidadhe bhayam ulbanam, "For one who makes discriminations between himself and others based on bodily identification, I am terrifying death." (3.29.26),

atha mam sarva bhutesu bhutatmanam kritalayam, arhayed dana manabhyam maitryabhinnena caksusa, "Therefore one should worship me as the self of the self in all creatures, by offering respects, gifts and friendship, and seeing everyone with an equal vision." (3.29.27)

This is also confirmed in *Bhagavad gita* 5.25, 11.55, 12.13, 12.4, 16.2. In this verse, Krishna very clearly states that one should relate with other living beings by remaining free from attachment and enmity. Being friendly to all creatures does not mean that we need to seek their companionship or engage in materialistic pursuits or activities just to make them happy. We should remain *sanga varjitah* - free from the bondage of belonging and possessions, personal attachments, affiliations, groups, organizations, and so on. At the same time we must be *nirvairah* - free from all sense of enmity and hostility.