

BHAGAVAD GITA

The Global Dharma for the Third Millennium

Chapter Twelve

Translations and commentaries
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Chapter 12

Bhakti yoga: the yoga of devotion

In the first part of the *Bhagavad gita*, Krishna has already given Arjuna all the necessary instructions to overcome the illusion of material identifications and attachments, and to perform his duty in full renunciation and in a spirit of religious sacrifice, constantly thinking about the Supreme Consciousness.

In the second part, Krishna has elaborated on this Supreme Consciousness, explaining that the purpose of life and meditation is to establish oneself on that level (*sthita prajna*). When one attains the consciousness of Brahman, Paramatma, and Bhagavan, liberation is automatically achieved, and one does not need to take birth again in a material body.

This meditation and selfless service to the Supreme Consciousness is also called Bhakti, or devotion.

Already in the previous chapters (7, 8, 9, 10, 11) Krishna has offered a series of meditation visualizations that enable us to develop a genuine appreciation for God's glories and powers, and therefore give a solid meaning to our devotional sentiments. This is an essential preliminary step for those who are sincere devotees and want to avoid the pitfall of simplistic and sentimentalism, that is based on a material perception of Bhagavan.

The problem of a primitive, materialistic concept of God is a widespread and cross-cultural phenomenon, because ignorance and material identification are natural tendencies in untrained persons. Of course, the problem becomes much more serious when the individual lives in a society that reinforces such ignorant delusions, or even teaches them as genuine and legitimate religious precepts.

The last few chapters of *Bhagavad gita* should have cleared any misconception in this regard, so now the text presents us with the chapter specifically named after Bhakti.

Focusing the individual consciousness on the most intimate and loving level of the Supreme Consciousness is the highest form of meditation, and it should not be taken cheaply. To reach this level, one needs to develop gradually, often along a number of lifetimes (*bahunam janmanam ante, 7.19*), and Krishna clearly indicates here the stages of this journey.

The first step is the acquisition of knowledge, that enables us to practice genuine meditation (*vijnana*) and pursue Self realization. This applied knowledge will help us to become detached from the fundamental delusion of *ahankara* and *mamatva*, and to perform our duty selflessly, offering the results to the Supreme. By dedicating all our actions to the Supreme, we become able to engage in *vaidhi bhakti* - the regulated practice of devotional service, and gradually our service becomes spontaneous devotion.

In the previous chapters Krishna was glorifying *bhakti*, while in this chapter he will explain specifically how to engage in devotional service.

VERSE 1

अर्जुन उवाच ।

arjuna uvāca ।

एवं सततयुक्ता ये भक्तास्त्वां पर्युपासते ।

evam satatayuktā ye bhaktāstvām paryupāsate ।

ये चाप्यक्षरमव्यक्तं तेषां के योगवित्तमाः ॥ १२-१ ॥

ye cāpyakṣaramavyaktam teṣāṁ ke yogavittamāḥ ॥ 12-1 ॥

arjunah: Arjuna; *uvaca:* said; *evam:* like this; *satata:* always; *yuktah:* engaged; *ye:* those who; *bhaktah:* the devotees; *tvam:* you; *paryupasate:* (they) worship properly; *ye:* those; *ca:* and; *api:* also; *aksharam:* eternal/ transcendental; *avyaktam:* non-manifested; *tesham:* to them; *ke:* who; *yoga vit tamah:* the best of those who know *yoga*.

Arjuna said:

"The devotees worship you in complete dedication, while others (meditate) on the non-manifested eternal (Reality): which (of these two approaches) is the highest understanding of *yoga*?"

The word *yukta* indicates the engagement of the senses in the service of the Supreme: this is the definition of *bhakti*, as offered by the *Narada Pancharatra*: *hrishikeshya hrishikena sevanam bhaktir ucyate*.

However, we also know that *yukta* is from the same root from which the word *yoga* has developed. The fundamental meaning of *yoga* is therefore stated as the constant engagement in a higher and deeper level of consciousness. When *bhakti*, or loving devotion, is added to the practice of genuine *yoga sadhana*, we attain the perfection of life.

It is important to understand that the definition of *yoga* does not refer to an "alternative" path or method that is not *bhakti* - in fact, *yoga* ("union") requires *bhakti* in order to attain perfection.

Krishna has applied the definition of *yoga* innumerable times in *Bhagavad gita*, and each chapter is entitled specifically after a different perspective on the multi-dimensional layers of meaning of the word "*yoga*". Therefore we should be careful not to minimize the import and scope of this definition.

Other commentators have highlighted the importance of *bhakti* by opposing it to *yoga*, *karma* and *jnana*, but we need to understand that such distinction is only instrumental, and not ontological. For this reason, the same commentators speak of *bhakti yoga* as compared to *jnana yoga* and *karma yoga*, but they also translate all these definitions as "devotional service" (see for example verse 5.4). Specifically *karma yoga* is explained as "the practice of devotional service", and *buddhi yoga* is said to be "depending completely on God". Also, Krishna has already explained early in the text that *jnana yoga (sankhya)* is non-different from *karma yoga (sankhya yogau prithag balah pravadanti na panditah, ekam apy asthitah samyag ubhayor vindate phalam, yat sankhyaih prapyate sthanam tad yogair api gamyate, ekam sankhyam ca yogam ca yah pasyati sa pasyati, 5.4-5)*.

The word *satata* ("always", "constantly") means that such service covers all aspects of life and activities, as Krishna has already stated before (*yat karosi, yad asnasi, yaj juhosi dadasi yat, 9.27*).

By explicitly using the definition of *bhakta* in reference to a specific level of *yoga*, Krishna is establishing the fact that *bhakti* (genuine devotion to the Supreme) is the highest level of *yoga*, and not an "alternative path" opposite to *yoga* itself. When he speaks about *bhaktas* and *bhakti*, he is unequivocally referring to the sentiment of devotion in a personal relationship of love (*rasa*), so

we understand why in this verse Arjuna makes a distinction between the *bhakta* and the *sadhaka* who meditates on the *akshara* - the abstract eternity and existence feature of Reality.

We have already seen that *akshara* is a definition for the sacred syllable AUM, the primeval and transcendental sound vibration that is the origin and the foundation of the entire universe.

As in the previous chapters Krishna has recommended meditation on the transcendental essence of the universe, in the contemplation of the Virata rupa, some people may equivocate and conclude that God should be worshiped only in its abstract form of majesty and power, as the existence in all existences. This is the Brahman realization, in which we clearly perceive that God is not limited by time, space or individuality.

In this verse, this non-manifested aspect of Reality is called *aksharah*, "unchangeable" or "changeless". Other synonyms often used to describe the non-manifested (*avyakta*) Brahman are *nirvishesa* ("without variety", "without differences") and *nirakara* ("formless"). Of course these definitions apply to the non-material quality of the existence of Brahman as the Universal Consciousness. In Vedic scriptures, Brahman or *brahmajyoti* is compared to the rays of the sun, while Paramatma is comparable to the solar disc visible in the sky over everybody's head, and Bhagavan is the actual Sun, the original source of all the light, heat and power. Krishna states this fact very clearly: *brahmano hi pratistha aham* (14.27, "I am the foundation and origin of the Brahman").

Some people think that the path of *bhakti* developed later in history, during the Kali yuga, as opposed to the previous religious methods of *yoga* meditation, ritual sacrifice, and temple worship. This is not a fact. *Bhakti*, devotion, is the essential ingredient in all such religious and spiritual methods, and it has always been.

The *yuga dharma* for the age of Kali is the discussion (glorification, recitation etc) about God, which includes names, forms, qualities, activities, teachings, and so on. *Bhakti* is the main factor for the proper application of this method, but also in Deity worship, ritual sacrifice and *yoga* meditation.

In fact, in *Bhagavad gita* Krishna says that a genuine *bhakta* is the greatest *yogi* (*yoginam api sarvesam mad gatenantaratmana, sraddhavan bhajate yo mam sa me yuktatamo matah, 6.47*), (*bhaktya mama abhijanati yavan yas casmi tattvatah, 18.55*), (*man mana bhava mad bhakto mad yaji mam namaskuru, 18.65*).

The expression *yoga vit tamah* ("the highest knower of *yoga*") is the superlative degree of the quality of knowledge referred to *yoga*, while the comparative degree would be *vit tarah*. Since in this verse the comparison is made between two degrees of knowledge of *yoga*, the use of the superlative expression should be taken to mean that all the other aspects of *yoga* are included, like we usually see in the suffix *adi* (equivalent to our "*et cetera*").

VERSE 2

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।

śrībhagavānuvāca ।

मय्यावेश्य मनो ये मां नित्ययुक्ता उपासते ।

mayaṁveśya mano ye mām nityayuktā upāsate ।

श्रद्धया परयोपेताः ते मे युक्ततमा मताः ॥ १२-२ ॥

śraddhayā parayopetaḥ te me yuktatamā matāḥ ॥ 12-2 ॥

sri: the wonderful; *bhagavan*: Lord; *uvaca*: said; *mayi*: to me; *avesya*: focusing/ entered; *manah*: the mind; *ye*: those who; *mam*: me; *nitya*: always; *yuktah*: united; *upasate*: worship; *sraddhaya*:

with faith; *paraya*: supreme/ transcendental; *upetaḥ*: attained; *te*: they; *me*: me; *yukta-tamah*: the most (intimately) united; *mataḥ*: considered.

The wonderful Lord said:

"Those who are always keeping their mind in me and worship me with faith, always united with me, have attained the supreme level and I consider them as the most intimately/ highly united/ connected."

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

Already in the previous chapter (11.54) Krishna had stated, *bhaktya tv ananyaya sakya aham evam-vidho 'rjuna, jnatum drastum ca tattvena pravestum ca parantapa* ("O Arjuna, only through *bhakti* it is possible to know and to see me truly, and to enter into me").

In that verse, the word *pravestum* ("to enter", equivalent to the *visate* of verse 18.55) had established the difference between the omnipresent and unlimited Bhagavan and the ordinary living entities who are limited by space and individuality. Here we find another synonym, *avesya*, that also means "entering into".

In this verse Krishna clearly states that a *bhakta*, a devotee, always keeps his/ her mind inside God (the Supreme Consciousness) and is always engaged practically in worship. We may remember here that the *upasana kanda* is defined as that part of the Vedic scriptures that deals with the worship rituals, as opposed to the *karma kanda* (the performance of prescribed duties) and the *jnana kanda* (the pursuance of knowledge).

The word *upasana* specifically indicates worship as meditation, as in "approaching and sitting", that is the literal meaning (*upa asana*).

In this sense, *nitya* could mean "regularly", as in the regulated *sadhana* that we perform every day before starting our ordinary activities. However, the qualification expressed by the word *yukta* (*nitya yukta upasate*) indicates that such "constant worship" does not refer merely to the ritualistic ceremonies called *arcana* or *pujana* and centered around the offering of various substances and services to the Deity. This cannot be done by "constantly connecting/ engaging".

Arcana is only one of the nine *angas* ("limbs") of devotional service: *sravana*, *kirtana*, *smarana*, *arcana/ pujana*, *vandana*, *pada sevana/ paricarya*, *dasya*, *sakhya/ sakhi jana*, and *atma nivedana*. Therefore we must understand that here *upasana* extends to all the other forms of worship: hearing and speaking (that also includes reading and writing) about God, remembering God, offering ceremonial worship, paying homage, following the instructions, always being ready to serve, developing a friendly attachment, and trusting God completely.

While the first three steps (*sravana*, *kirtana*, *smarana*) can be focused also on the *akshara* and *avyakta* aspect of the Supreme, the second group of three (*arcana*, *vandana*, *pada sevana*) can be applied to the Virata rupa or the immanent manifestation of the Supreme in this world, described by Krishna in the previous chapters as the form of the Param Atman, the Supreme Soul living in the hearts of all beings. However, the last group of three (*dasya*, *sakhya*, *atma nivedana*) refers to a very personal relationship with the Supreme under the direct control of Yogamaya or Bhakti Devi. We should not think that it is impossible to have a real practical relationship with God as a Person, because Bhagavan includes both Paramatma and Brahman, and is even more than that.

This union in devotion becomes possible through an act of faith (*sraddha*), by which we accept to humbly consider ourselves as simple parts of the sum total of Reality. Contrarily to what happens in some other ideologies based on dogma, the faith required in the process of *bhakti* is not blind acceptance prompted by allegiance, but an initial working hypothesis or trust, by which we shift our perception from self-centered to God-centered.

It is the essential paradigm shift if we want to find a permanent center of gravity (*sankarshana krishna*) in the universe, because as long as the consciousness of reality is fragmented like rays of light pointing to different directions, each of the tiny "self-centered" beings will fight with all the others trying to conquer a central place in the universe.

As soon as we re-focus our consciousness on the actual center of the universe (Brahman, Paramatma, Bhagavan), we find our balance and proper orbit, like so many planets sailing in space through a perfect course around the Sun.

All the factors must be present then: the constant consciousness of the universal presence of God in which we exist, the focusing of the mind and its functions, the practical engagement in worship and service, the faith that enables us to follow the method properly and correctly, and the direct personal connection with Bhagavan ("me"). In this regard, we should observe that the word *upeta* means "working hard", "making efforts", and "fully dedicated".

Bhakti yoga or devotional service is not some sort of hobby or entertainment, or a part time interest that gives us some good opportunities for social interactions on Sunday afternoons or on festival days. It is a full time pursuit that demands complete dedication and constant effort - also highlighted here by the expression *nitya yukta upasate*.

VERSE 3

ये त्वक्षरमनिर्देश्यमव्यक्तं पर्युपासते ।

ye tvakṣaramanirdeśyamavyaktaṁ paryupāsate ।

सर्वत्रगमचिन्त्यञ्च कूटस्थमचलन्ध्रुवम् ॥ १२-३ ॥

sarvatragamacintyañca kūṭasthamacalandhruvam ॥ 12-3 ॥

ye: those; *tu*: but; *aksharam*: eternal/ transcendental; *anirdesyam*: not visible (to the senses); *avyaktam*: non-manifested; *pari upasate*: worship in complete dedication/ correctly and sincerely; *sarvatra*: everywhere; *gam*: present; *acintyam*: inconceivable; *ca*: and; *kuta stham*: unchanging; *achalam*: non-moving; *dhruvam*: established.

"Those who offer their worship in complete dedication/ correctly and sincerely to the the *akshara* (Brahman/ Omkara), indescribable, non-manifested, all-pervading, inconceivable, unchanging, never moving and eternal Existence,

This verse is often studied together with the subsequent verse (12.4) as two halves of one statement. The complete statement reads: "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 engaging in work for the benefit of all beings." (12.3-4)

The word *kuta* is particularly interesting here, as it has a number of different meanings that can add various levels of interpretation. The fundamental meaning is "motionless", as in a mountain; we can see the application of the term in the word *annakuta*, the hill of

rice and other grains that is cooked and offered to the Deity on the auspicious occasion of Govardhana puja.

It also means "center", as the permanent gravity center we were mentioning in our commentary to verse 12.2. Another meaning is "unchanging". Later (15.16) Krishna will use this same expression (*kutastho akshara ucyate*, "it is said to be unchangeable and permanent") while describing the position of the living beings (*bhutani*) in the spiritual world, or at the spiritual level. In that verse, the expression *kuta sthah* suggests a permanent existence in which nothing changes because everything exists simultaneously.

However, the same word *kuta* can also have a more sinister meaning, as we see for example in 4.25.6, where Prahlada speaks of the delusional duties of materialistic family life based on bodily identification and possession/ belonging: *grihesu kuta dharmesu putra dara dhanartha dhiih, na param vindate mudho bhramyam samsara vartmasu*, "These fools always remain meditating on the deceptive duties of family life, such as children, wife, and acquisition of wealth, and are unable to see anything more important or higher than that. Thus, they continue to run around on the various paths of the material world."

A similar derivative of *kuta* is *kaitava*, a word that is used at the beginning of the *Bhagavata Purana* (1.1.2) to indicate deceptive or false religiosity (*dharma projjhita kaitavo atra paramo nir matsaranam satam*, "here (in this *Purana*) the false religiosity is completely rejected, and (only) the supreme (worshiped by) of those sattvik people who are completely free from envy (is discussed)").

In this application, the meaning of *kuta* is shifted from the comforting stability of eternal existence to the damaging stubbornness of the materialistic attachments and identifications. It is a dire warning: if we commit the fatal mistake of superimposing

our material identifications and attachments to the practice of spiritual / religious life, we will be lost and crushed into a darkness that is even worse than simple ordinary selfish materialism.

Isa Upanishad (mantra 9) also warns us in the same way: *andham tamah pravisanti ye avidyam upasate, tato bhuya iva te tamo ya u vidyayam ratah*, "Those who worship/ serve ignorance enter into blind darkness, but those who choose to remain attached to (theoretical) knowledge (for its own sake) fall into an even greater darkness."

Sometimes a pretender cynically exploits the good name of spirituality and religiousness to pursue some materialistic goals, such as position, distinction, adoration, fame, name, profit, power over disciples and resources, etc. This disastrous choice leads to even greater darkness because these materialistic intentions harden the heart and make it cynical, heavy and deeply rooted into deceit and illusion. In this way the definitions offered in in the verse as *kuta stham* ("unchanging"), *achalam* ("non-moving") and *dhruvam* ("established") become the rocky mountainous masses of the ego that crush the deluded *jiva* into complete immobility deep in the darkest hell. *Nischala* is also a synonym for *achala*, and *dhruva* ("established", "fixed") is also used to indicate the Pole Star, the only fixed light in the sky vault, around which all other stars and planets travel.

VERSE 4

सन्नियम्येन्द्रियग्रामं सर्वत्र समबुद्धयः ।

sanniyamyendriyagrāmaṁ sarvatra samabuddhayaḥ ।

ते प्राप्नुवन्ति मामेव सर्वभूतहिते रताः ॥ १२-४ ॥

te prāpnuvanti māmeva sarvabhūtahite ratāḥ ॥ 12-4 ॥

sanniyamya: regulating/ controlling; *indriya*: the senses; *gramam*: the complete set; *sarvatra*: everywhere; *sama buddhayah*: with balanced and stable intelligence; *te*: they; *prapnuvanti*: attain; *mam*: me; *eva*: certainly; *sarva bhuta*: of all beings; *hite*: for the benefit; *ratah*: concerned.

(they) can attain me if they strictly control their senses and remain balanced and undisturbed in all circumstance, and especially if they are (sincerely) interested in the benefit of all beings."

A pretender engaged in *kuta dharma* (false religiousness) in the pursuance of some materialistic motivation is unable to control his senses and to remain happy and undisturbed in all circumstances.

The fundamental interest of a materialistic person is sense gratification, which can be at an ordinary gross level as attraction towards sex etc, or on a dangerously subtle level as attachment to position, distinction, adoration, and power over persons and resources.

A certain amount of healthy sattvik sense gratification, necessary to keep the mind and body in good working conditions, is naturally obtained by consuming sanctified foods offered to God and enjoying the other forms of *bhagavat prasada* - nice flowers and scents, clothing, etc.

For those who wish to have an active family life, there is also the legitimate and sattvik provision of marriage, that remains perfectly pure and spiritual when our family members and our home are seen and treated as God's servants and properties, and not as our own servants and properties.

However, a pretender will usually make a big show of renunciation by formally accepting the order of *sannyasa* and exhibiting some kind of superficial external austerity to impress the gullible public.

His real motivations will become apparent when he engages in dirty institutional politics, viciously fights against opponents for position and control over disciples and *mathas/ ashramas*, cynically exploits followers without giving anything in return, disrespects and mistreats people on the basis of bodily identification (caste, gender, etc) and so on.

We have often seen that such exploitation and disrespect can even turn into emotional, physical and/or sexual abuse especially against the most vulnerable victims. The cheater may keep such criminal activities either overt and public, or covert and hidden, but a sensitive person can perceive these negative qualities even at some distance.

The only medicine for such a terminal disease is offered here by Krishna: *sama buddhaya* ("undisturbed consciousness in all circumstances") and *sarva bhuta hite* ("working actively for the benefit of all beings").

In cases like this, it is even better for the fake *sannyasi* to step down from such an artificial position and get regularly married to re-educate himself to a healthy sense of honesty and responsibility. Krishna had clearly stated in verses 3.6 and 3.7: "One who (makes a show of) controlling the senses but continues to remain attached to sense objects is called a fool and a hypocrite. One who regulates the senses through the mind, engaging the senses of action through *karma yoga* without attachment is much better."

This "*satyam* treatment" is also the only medicine that will heal the "age-old" disillusionment of many Hindus towards official, traditional and organized religiosity, where such abuse and criminal behavior have become most common.

VERSE 5

क्लेशोऽधिकतरस्तेषामव्यक्तासक्तचेतसाम् ॥

kleśo'dhikatarasteṣāmavyaktāsaktacetasām ।।

अव्यक्ता हि गतिर्दुःखं देहवद्भिरवाप्यते ॥ १२-५ ॥

avyaktā hi gatirduḥkhaṁ dehavadbhiravāpyate ।। 12-5 ।।

klesah: difficult; *adhika tarah*: much more; *tesam*: of/ for them; *avyakta*: non-manifested; *asakta*: attached; *cetasam*: the mentality; *avyakta*: non-manifested; *hi*: indeed; *gatih*: the goal; *duhkham*: without happiness; *deha vadbhih*: those who have a body; *avapyate*: is achieved.

"Embodied beings find much more difficult and painful to make progress if they remain mentally attached to the non-manifested."

The science of *yoga* contained in *Bhagavad gita* is perfectly logical and explained most skillfully by Krishna. In this verse we find the reason why a *jnani* must be careful in regulating his sense activities, remain balanced in all circumstances and work tirelessly for the benefit of all beings: because the *jnani* still has a body, he needs to relate to his own body and to the bodies of other beings.

Meditation on the non-manifested Transcendence, the *akshara brahman*, does not give a sense of solidity to the embodied being, because the center of gravity is immensely distant and yet so intimately hidden within one's own self (*tad dure tad v antike, Isa Upanishad*, 5). It is the same sensation of being in space, with no "up" or "down", but rather floating around a powerful center of gravitation and light, that remains the only stable thing while everything else is moving and keeps changing position in space and time.

In space, we are completely detached and free, a feeling that can be exhilarating for some but scary for others, who are unable to let go of their attachments.

Therefore embodied beings need ties - connections, relationships, common interests, and engagement. If they cannot find such things on the spiritual level, they will inevitably fall back to the material level.

Bhagavata Purana (10.2.32) declares this truth in the prayers offered by the Devas to Krishna at the time of his appearance: *ye anye aravindaksa vimukta maninas, tvayy asta bhavad avisuddha buddhayah, aruhya krcchrena param padam tatah, patanty adho anadrta yusmad anghrayah*, "O lotus-eyed Lord, those who consider themselves liberated (as in *sannyasa*) but have no devotion for you fall back from their lofty position even if they engage in superficial austerities, as their intelligence has not been purified and they are not blessed by (the connection to) your lotus feet."

This is the only way to overcome the need of engagement on the material level. Another verse in *Bhagavata Purana* (4.22.39) confirms: *yat pada pankaja palasa vilasa bhaktya, karmasayam, grathitam udgrathayanti santah, tadvan na rikta matayo yatayo api ruddha sroto ganas tam aranam bhaja vasudevam*, "True spiritualists have uprooted the hardened desires for selfish activities by tasting the happiness of devotion to the petals of the Lord's lotus feet. However, those who do not have the appropriate mentality are unable to do so, in spite of their great efforts to control the senses. Therefore (o king Prithu), you should serve Vasudeva, who is the true shelter."

This verse mentions "embodied beings" as *deha vadis* ("those who follow the body"), and not *dehinah* ("those who have a body"). The real problem is not about "having a body", but about identifying

with the body and being attached to it, making it the most important thing in one's life. Because materialists equate form with matter, they cannot overcome their own material identification and vice versa, they are attached to the non-manifested (*avyaya asakta*) because they foolishly think that form must be matter. This prevents them from actually appreciating the spiritual form of the Personality of Godhead.

We have already mentioned how *kuta* also means "cheating". Here we find yet another level of meaning, referring to the elegant way in which the false spiritualists become cheated in turn, as they delude themselves about being situated in the *brahmananda* (spiritual bliss) of the *nirviesa brahma*, but in fact they only get only sufferings (*klesa*) and sadness (*dukham*).

VERSE 6

ये तु सर्वाणि कर्माणि मयि संन्यस्य मत्परः ।

ye tu sarvāṇi karmāṇi mayi sannasya matparaḥ ।

अनन्येनैव योगेन मां ध्यायन्त उपासते ॥ १२-६ ॥

ananyenaiva yogena mām dhyāyanta upāsate ॥ 12-6 ॥

ye: they; *tu*: but; *sarvani*: all; *karmani*: activities; *mayi*: to me; *sannasya*: renouncing; *mat parah*: dedicated to me; *ananyena*: without other concerns; *eva*: certainly; *yogena*: with *yoga*; *mam*: me; *dhyayantah*: meditating; *upasate*: worship.

"But those who have surrendered all their activities to me, and are dedicated to me without any other attachment, certainly worship me through the meditation in *yoga*."

Krishna had already made a similar statement in verse 4.11: *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."

The Supreme Brahman offers himself as the permanent and blissful center of our loving exchanges, because the sum total of all Consciousness is certainly conscious and capable of reciprocating our sentiments.

The word *upasate* is mentioned again in this verse as the focus of our relationship with the Supreme. We have already mentioned in previous comments how the natural propensity (*dharma*) of each being consists in serving in a sentiment of love. A healthy person feels happy when he has done something that brought happiness to his loved ones - child, wife, parent, friend, and so on - or has successfully performed an important service to society, humanity, or the world at large. Those who cannot engage in such service end up serving their own mind and senses, or some animal, or some impersonal mechanism from which they cannot escape: but we all engage in service.

Worship (*upasana*) is nothing but respectful service, and attains its perfection when love and affection (*bhakti*) make it more personal and blissful.

Some people believe that Adi Shankara, the great *acharya*, was an impersonalist or taught a sort of impersonal *sadhana* or *siddhanta*, but that is not a fact. Adi Shankara wrote many devotional prayers, including the *Gita mahatmya* and the famous song known as *Bhaja govindam*, and installed many Deities and temples, including Jagannatha at Puri.

Probably this misconception is due to the fact that Adi Shankara recommended the *sadhana* (spiritual practice) known as *pancha*

upasana or worship of the *panca tattva*, namely Vishnu, Shiva, Shakti, Surya and Ganesha. To a mind that has been influenced by the exclusivist and intolerant monotheistic concept, it may seem that equally worshipping these apparently different forms indicates a lack of clarity in a personal relationship with the Supreme, but this is not a fact. Even the strictest *advaitin* will recognize that such Personalities of Godhead are aspects of the same Supreme Transcendental Reality, and therefore they do not contradict each other.

In this regard we need to properly understand the concept of *ista devata* ("desired Deity"), as the form of the Godhead that is most attractive for each devotee in a particular situation and according to the particular *rasa* or devotional sentiment. The best definition of Reality has been conclusively given by Chaitanya as *acintya bheda abheda*, or "inconceivably same and different", referring to the fact that spiritual Reality is not limited by any material definition of place, time and individuality.

In this verse Krishna is mentioning the word *sannyasa* again, to help us understand the real meaning of renunciation. As he had already declared (5.30), the real *sannyasi* is not someone who does not perform any practical activity, but rather one who works hard and selflessly for the benefit of all beings (*sarva bhuta hite ratah*, 5.25). Working for the real benefit of all beings means working for the Supreme: not only God is the sum total of all existences, he is also the loving friend of all beings (5.29).

Therefore, it is a very serious mistake to translate this verse (12.6) to mean that one should stop all activities and responsibilities, in a false external show of renunciation, and live as a mindless parasite priest, encroaching on the spiritual and religious life of others by posing as a legally established intermediary between the individuals and God.

In the Vedic system, *brahmanas* perform ritualistic activities for the benefit of their students, but merely in a position of guides and assistants, as they could never replace the *yajamana*. The idea that one's spiritual or religious progress can be delegated to a priest is typically abrahamic, and has nothing to do with the Vedic system.

If entertained or spread among Hindus, it can only have the disastrous effect of encouraging degradation and irresponsibility, moving people from the *rajas* level to the *tamas* instead of the *sattva*. In later chapters, we will see many practical examples of this ignorant confusion, and we will be offered the instruments to avoid falling in the trap.

Krishna has declared very clearly and repeatedly in *Bhagavad gita* that one should never stop performing one's dharmic duty: renunciation means dedicating all actions to the Supreme (*mat parah*).

VERSE 7

तेषामहं समुद्धर्ता मृत्युसंसारसागरात् ।

teṣāmahaṁ samuddhartā mṛtyusaṁsārasāgarāt ।

भवामि नचिरात्पार्थ मय्यावेशितचेतसाम् ॥ १२-७ ॥

bhavāmi nacirātpārtha mayyāveśitacetasām ।। 12-7।।

tesam: of them; *aham*: I; *samuddharta*: the one who raises; *mṛityu*: of death; *samsara*: of material life; *sagarat*: from the ocean; *bhavami*: I become; *na*: not; *cirat*: after a long time; *partha*: o son of Pritha; *mayi*: on me; *avesita*: focused; *cetasam*: the consciousness.

"O son of Pritha, for those who keep their consciousness in me, I soon appear to uplift them from the ocean of repeated deaths."

A famous previous commentator has quoted here a similar verse from the *Varaha Purana*, that says: *nayami paramam sthanam arcir adi gatim vina, garuda skandam aropya yatheccham anivaritah*, "For those who are very determined in their desire (of me), I will come (personally) on Garuda's back, to take them to the supreme abode, to the light that has no beginning".

This is a very comforting verse for all those devotees who are facing difficulties in this life, and for those intelligent persons who realize the intrinsic suffering caused by the impermanent conditions of this world.

However, we should be particularly careful here to avoid artificial cultural superimpositions to the meaning of the verse. Abrahamic ideologies are based on the concept that every human being is inherently a hopeless sinner, fallen into a world of sufferings (as a punishment for the "original sin" of his ancestors), and whose only salvation consists in being rescued or reclaimed by a divine figure of prophet or messiah, to whom he must pledge total allegiance. Therefore a human being can only pray and surrender to God, and in return he will be instantly purified from all sins and made perfect, and directly transported to heaven, where he will enjoy eternally. If he does not resort to God in this way, he will die and be cast into eternal hell, where the devils will torture him for his lack of obedience.

The concept expressed in *Bhagavad gita* is quite different. First of all, the ocean of repeated deaths is not a punishment (as a multiple death sentence), but a figure of speech for the impermanence of all things in this world. The perspective of Vedic tradition presents the material world as a place where suffering is merely due to

impermanence; still the *Vedas* present the four *purusha arthas* ("the four purposes of human life") as *dharma*, *artha*, *kama* and *moksha*, without demonizing the world as an evil place.

Secondly, the consciousness of the devotee is described in this verse as *avesita cetasam*, "entered/ focused" on the Personality of Godhead: it is this same Consciousness that lifts the devotees out of the impermanence of the material world. This verse does not refer to the moment of death, but to a change of consciousness that can occur at any time during one's life. The idea that a person can be magically rescued by God at the time of death simply on the basis of sectarian allegiance is merely a myth. Each one of us must work seriously on his/ her spiritual development during this lifetime and attain a stable level of consciousness, permanently abandoning all material identifications and attachments, otherwise at the time of death we will simply move on to take another body.

Hoping that somehow or other we will be able to "become liberated" by dint of our allegiance to a particular religious tradition is a dangerous delusion. Even Ajamila - who suddenly called out to Narayana on his deathbed and was miraculously "rescued" by the Vishnudutas - simply got another chance at reforming his consciousness, with a life extension sufficient to change his habits and activities.

VERSE 8

मय्येव मन आधत्स्व मयि बुद्धिं निवेशय ।

mayyeva mana ādhatsva mayi buddhiṁ niveśaya ।

निवसिष्यसि मय्येव अत ऊर्ध्वं न संशयः ॥ १२-८ ॥

nivasiṣyasi mayyeva ata ūrdhvaṁ na saṁśayaḥ ॥ 12-8 ॥

mayi: on me; *eva*: certainly; *manah*: the mind; *adhatsva*: focus; *mayi*: on me; *buddhim*: intelligence; *nivesaya*: apply; *nivasisyasi*: you will always live/ remain; *mayi*: in me; *eva*: certainly; *atah urdhvam*: hereafter/ after that/ rise higher; *na*: no; *samsayah*: doubt.

"Keep your mind focused on me and apply your intelligence accordingly. In this way you will always reside in me, and thus you will be elevated. There is no doubt about this."

The expression *nivasa* indicates a permanent residence, a place of consciousness where our mind always lives and functions. This verse confirms the fact that by meditating on God, serving and worshipping, our consciousness will become purified and elevated, due to the constant contact with the Supreme Consciousness.

Many times in *Bhagavad gita* Krishna has stated the paramount importance of intelligence and personal effort in pursuing enlightenment, realization, liberation, and devotion. Here again he repeats that we need to apply our intelligence to the cultivation of such transcendental meditation or tuning of the consciousness.

Previous commentators explain that *atah urdhvam* means "after the fall of the body". In fact this was confirmed in verse 8.5: *anta kale ca mam eva smaran muktva kalevaram, yah prayati sa madbhavam 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.")

However, the next verse (8.6) immediately clarified: *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.")

We must be very careful to avoid the trap of simplistic sentimentalism by which one deludes himself into thinking that death will automatically solve all problems and instantly supply us with all the realizations that we did not bother to pursue during the time of our life. When we find out it's not going to happen, it will be too late: a very sorry state of affairs indeed.

VERSE 9

अथ चित्तं समाधातुं न शक्नोषि मयि स्थिरम् ।

atha cittam samādhātuṁ na śaknoṣi mayi sthiram ।

अभ्यासयोगेन ततो मामिच्छाप्तुं धनञ्जय ॥ १२-९ ॥

abhyāsayogena tato māmichchāptuṁ dhanañjaya ।। 12-9 ।।

atha: therefore; *cittam*: the consciousness; *samadhatum*: to establish; *na*: not; *saknosi*: you are able; *mayi*: in me; *sthiram*: steadily; *abhyasa-yogena*: by the practice of connection; *tatah*: then; *mam*: me; *iccha*: desire; *aptum*: to obtain; *dhananjaya*: o Dhananjaya.

"However, o Dhananjaya, if you are unable to firmly establish your consciousness in me, then you should practice *yoga* with the desire to achieve me."

Dhananjaya ("conqueror of wealth") is a name of Arjuna, that Krishna has used several times to address him during the conversation of *Bhagavad gita*. Here this name is referred to the acquisition of the greatest treasure, or *parama purusha artha*, that is *prema*, or pure devotion to Godhead.

Vedic scriptures mention four main *purusha arthas*, or "goals of life for human beings", namely *dharma* ("development of ethical

conscience and behavior"), *artha* ("acquisition of wealth"), *kama* ("sensual pleasure") and *moksha* ("liberation from material conditionings").

However, the *gupta* ("hidden", "secret") knowledge of the *Bhagavad gita* shows us a *pancama purusha artha* ("fifth goal of human life") that is also the highest and most important, and that can be attained only after becoming established on the liberated platform. The conclusion of *Bhagavad gita* (18.54) will confirm this: "(A person who is situated in the) Brahman realization is always satisfied in the self, never complaining or running after desires. S/he is equally disposed toward all beings and states of being, and thus attains my spiritual devotion" (*brahma bhuta prasannatma na socati na kanksati samah sarvesu bhutesu, mad bhaktim labhate param*).

The word *citta* means "consciousness" in the sense of the quality of the activities of the mind - the things we think about, the contents of our thoughts, desires, and sentiments (as in an active mode). From the same root we have the word *caitanya*, that means "consciousness" in the sense of awareness, alertness, and feelings (as in a passive mode).

When the devotee engages his/ her active consciousness or meditation on the Supreme, all actions become devotional service. This is wonderfully described by Adi Shankara in his prayers: *japo jalpah, silpam sakalam api mudra vicarana, gati pradaksinya kramanam, asanady ahuti vidhih, pranamah samvesah sukham akhilam atmarpana drsa, saparyaparyayas tava bhavatu yan me vilasitam*, "Let every word of mine be a prayer to you, every movement of my hands be a ritual gesture to you, every step I take be a mark of respect for your image, every morsel of food I eat be a ritual sacrifice to you, every time I lay down be a prostration at your feet, and every act I perform be an act of worship to you" (*Soundarya Lahari*, verse 27).

This is also called *samadhi*, the final and highest stage of *yoga* in which meditation on the Supreme becomes firmly established and constantly undisturbed. From the same root we have the word *samadhatum*, mentioned in this verse.

The word *saknosi* ("you are able to") derives from the same root of the word *sakti* (or *shakti*, "power"). This etymological connection contains an important teaching: the power or ability to do something resides in the Prakriti, that manifests as the *para prakriti* or supreme nature supporting Isvara, and the *apara prakriti* as the material nature supporting the *jiva*. While Isvara is always in control, the *jiva* is always controlled. This Shakti or power exists eternally, and constitutes the active agent in all activities, while the Purusha (both the individual and the supreme) is the consciousness factor, expressed as knowing, feeling, and willing. The correspondent energies or *shaktis* are described in *Svetasvatara Upanishad*: (*parasya shaktir vividhaiva sruyate, svabhaviki jnana bala kriya ca*, 6.8).

The *shakti* called *bala* is also called *iccha*, or "will power". By taking shelter in Mother Shakti, we make the deliberate choice to desire to attain the spiritual level of consciousness. Even if we are completely devoid of any qualification, we can still desire: just through this sincere desire we will be blessed with success. Another definition for this desire is *lalasa*, often quoted in *bhakti* literature as the fundamental requisite to engage in the process of regulated devotional service. This means that spiritual or religious life must be a spontaneous choice, sincerely desired by each individual, and should never be imposed externally or artificially, because no benefit will come from such attempt. You cannot force anybody to love.

The expression *abhyasa yogena* means "by regular or long practice in *yoga*", where *yoga* means "connection", as in the tuning of the individual consciousness with the supreme Consciousness.

Krishna had already stated (6.35) that such *abhyasa yogena* is the only way to control the restless mind: *asamsayam maha-baho mano durnigraham calam, abhyasena tu kaunteya vairagyena ca grihyate*, "O mighty armed (Arjuna), certainly the mind is restless and very difficult to manage, but it can be controlled by practice and detachment, o son of Kunti."

VERSE 10

अभ्यासेऽप्यसमर्थोऽसि मत्कर्मपरमो भव ।

abhyāse'pyasamartho'si matkarmaparamo bhava ।

मदर्थमपि कर्माणि कुर्वन्सिद्धिमवाप्स्यसि ॥ १२-१० ॥

madarthamapi karmāṇi kurvansiddhimavāpsyasi ॥ 12-10 ॥

abhyase: with practice; *api*: even if; *asamarthah*: unable to; *asi*: you are; *mat-karma*: work for me/ service to me; *parama*: dedicated to; *bhava*: become; *mad-artham*: for me; *api*: even if; *karmani*: activities; *kurvan*: performing; *siddhim*: perfection; *avapsyasi*: you will achieve.

"If you are unable to practice regulated meditation, then dedicate your life to me and work for me. In this way you will achieve perfection even while performing your (normal) activities."

The highest position for a *yogi* is to be constantly focused in the supreme Consciousness, in which every gesture and activity becomes perfectly aligned with the divine plan and in harmony with the entire universe. It is a position of supreme happiness, eternal and full of knowledge and awareness. Before becoming firmly established on this level of consciousness, called *samadhi*, one needs to practice meditation (*dhyana*) for a sufficient time,

with sufficient intensity. In his *Yoga sutras* (1.21-22) Patanjali clearly states that the time required to achieve success is inversely proportional to the effort invested: *tivra-samveganam asannah* ("Those having an intense desire for it attain (*asamprajnata samadhi*) quite soon", 1.21), *mridu-madhyadhimatratvat tato 'pi visheshah* ("Such (desire) is variously defined as mild, medium and intense", 1.22).

It is this desire (*iccha aptum*, 12.9) that supports the *sadhaka* in his/ her *yoga* practice. Patanjali clearly explains this: *tatra sthitaui yatno 'bhyasah*, "It is the practice (consisting of) being firmly established in one's own effort", 1.13), *sa tu dirgha-kalanairantarya-satkara, sevito dridha-bhumih*, "Practice (*abhyasa*) becomes firm when it is done for a long period of time without interruption and with devotion (towards the aim in sight)", 1.14).

The expression *sevita* ("service", "devotion") in this *sutra* is echoed in verse 1.23: *isvara pranidhanad va*, "or, (success can be obtained through) devotion to God". The alternative indicated by the word *va* ("or") applies to the sentiment of surrender in full humility rather than making a personal effort through one's own will power (*tivra iccha*). We will remember here that *isvara pranidhana* is the final and supreme requirement among the *yama* and *niyama* rules or life habits.

Especially in Kali yuga, when human beings are facing so many disadvantages and weaknesses, it is certainly advisable to simply and humbly dedicate oneself to Isvara and take shelter in the supreme *Iccha Shakti* rather than trying to control it.

In very unfavorable circumstances, we may be unable to make the required effort intensely and constantly, therefore Krishna is suggesting that instead of artificially trying to practice meditation, we should engage practically in working for the Godhead (*mad artham*).

The same concept had already been expressed in verses 11.55 (*mat karma krit*, "working for me") and 4.18 (*sa yukta krtсна karma krit*, "although engaged in working"). In verse 3.5 Krishna had clearly stated that in fact nobody can stay without performing actions even for one moment (*na hi kascit ksanam api jatu tisthati akarma krit*), so if one is unable to engage in active meditation (*dhyana*), it is better to engage in some practical work (*karma*) that is dedicated to the Supreme.

Such work is active engagement in devotional service, for the benefit of all beings: *mat-karma-krin mat-paramo mad-bhaktah sanga-varjitah, nirvairah sarva-bhuteshu yah sa mam eti pandava*, "My devotee is engaged in working for me, and see me as the supreme. S/he has abandoned all association/ affiliation/ identification, and has no enmity towards any being. (In this way, my devotee) comes to me." (11.55).

Service to Krishna is a full time job and gives better results when it is not hampered by adharmic stains, such as an unbecoming professional occupation (where one is forced to perform actions that are contrary to the principles of ethics), violent or impure life habits (eating of non vegetarian foods, recreational consumption of alcohol or other drugs, unethical sexual relationships, lack of cleanliness), offensive behavior against innocent and good people (both humans and animals, what to speak of Devas), and so on.

When a devotee sincerely wants to engage in *bhagavat dharma*, Bhagavan will directly offer suitable opportunities for maintenance and professional occupation, so that the devotee can really be a full time *karmachari* working for Krishna.

This job can be in the fields of education (teaching, writing, preaching, giving courses and seminars, etc), food production and distribution (vegetarian *prasadam* restaurants and catering etc), managing or assistance (temples or *ashramas*, spiritual or

environmentally friendly hospitality/ tourism sector etc), where devotional service can be very direct and intense.

A devotee can also dedicate his/ her professional activities to Bhagavan in other fields, either self-employed or working under other genuine devotees - in social management and protection (the *kshatriya* work), agriculture and animal protection, production and trade of ethical objects, providing ethically valid assistance services of various kinds, and so on.

Land, capital, organization, labor, knowhow and marketing will be provided by Bhagavan through various and sometimes unexpected opportunities. However, the *karmachari* who works for Krishna must clearly understand what is his/ her job description and what Krishna will not provide: there will be no space for material identifications or attachments, fear, doubt, laziness, selfishness, and other negative luggage, technically called *anarthas* ("things without value").

VERSE 11

अथैतदप्यशक्तोऽसि कर्तुं मद्योगमाश्रितः ।

athaitadapyasakto'si kartuṁ madyogamāśritaḥ ।

सर्वकर्मफलत्यागं ततः कुरु यतात्मवान् ॥ १२-११ ॥

sarvakarmaphalatyāgaṁ tataḥ kuru yatātma van ॥ 12-11 ॥

atha: however; *etad*: this; *api*: even; *asaktah*: unable; *asi*: you are; *kartum*: to do; *mad-yogam*: in connection/ union with me; *asritah*: taking shelter/ aiming; *sarva-karma*: all activities; *phala*: the results; *tyagam*: renunciation; *tatah*: then; *kuru*: do; *yata atma van*: making efforts to focus on the Self.

"If you are not even able to do that, you should confide in me and become detached from the results of all your actions, making efforts to establish yourself on the level of Self realization."

The beauty of the Vedic system, epitomized by the instructions of *Bhagavad gita*, is that it offers a suitable personalized approach for each and every individual, by which anyone can be properly engaged and situated comfortably and progressively, enjoying material happiness and spiritual development at the same time.

Some people, influenced by abrahamic concepts, have come to believe that spiritual or religious life requires complete renunciation to the "material world", spite and hatred for all the beautiful and joyful things of life, especially for the material body, to the limit of masochism and self-torture.

Such people invariably develop the typically abrahamic tendency to disrespecting and mistreating women, confusing misogyny with the genuine idea of *sannyasa*. Unfortunately, this negative attachment will not help them to attain the level of liberation: in fact, they will have to take another birth, generally as a female, and in particularly serious cases even as animals, because their lusty tendencies will not disappear but will become stronger and distorted by getting superficially repressed and thus pushed deep down into the animal level of the subconscious.

This is how the otherwise healthy and sattvik desire (*kama*) is separated from any higher level of consciousness and creates disastrous consequences. We have seen many strictly "moralistic" and self-righteous religionists, thundering against innocent romance and affectionate relationships, turn into beastly perverts addicted to sexually abusing women and children, and still try to retain their artificial positions.

It is important to understand that such an attitude is totally contrary to the principles of Sanatana Dharma (that we may call Hinduism or Vedic culture).

Krishna has already stated that it is much better to engage in regulated sense enjoyment (3.6-7) than to become such a criminally stupid cheater: *karmendriyani samyamya ya aste manasa smaran, indriyarthan vimudhatma mithyacarah sa ucyate, yas tv indriyani manasa niyamyarabhate 'rjuna, karmendriyaih karma-yogam asaktah sa visishyate*, "One who (makes a show of) controlling the senses but continues to remain attached to sense objects is called a fool and a hypocrite. One who regulates the senses through the mind, engaging the senses of action through *karma yoga* without attachment is much better."

This verse repeats the same point: it is better to perform "all activities" (*sarva karmani*) in a spirit of renunciation, than to pretend to be already renounced. What is this "spirit of renunciation"?

It is not very easy to correctly understand the expression *phala tyaga*, especially because in Kali yuga almost all people are foolish, lazy, irresponsible, arrogant, and convinced of their own great cleverness. Thus, when *phala tyaga* is translated as "renouncing the fruits (of action)", they imagine it is about the artificial and superficial acceptance of the order of *sannyasa*, considering it as a very convenient opportunity to get free food and accommodation, and often even luxury and "executive class lifestyle", enjoying respect and adoration, name, fame, and political power.

They consciously or unconsciously identify these "fruits" as marriage and family, as in the "agricultural" expressions "the fruit of one's loins" (referring to children) and "tilling one's field" (referring to sexual intercourse with wife).

Consequently, they think that if they have sex with children, there will be "no fruit" in the form of pregnancy, or cultivation of a fruitful relationship. The objects of such sexual exploitation are then used and dumped, like disposable commodities, without any consideration or remorse, in the extreme delusion that in this way, the *sannyasi* will be able to continue to protect and preserve his "renunciation".

The real meaning of *phala tyaga* is exactly the opposite: it is about giving up expectation and selfishness, and acting in a spirit of love and service, in which one is able to see all creatures as children of Bhagavan and treat them accordingly with respect and affection.

On a side note, we can mention that the instructions contained in this chapter formed the core of the teachings given by Krishna Chaitanya to one of his foremost followers, Sanatana Gosvami.

VERSE 12

श्रेयो हि ज्ञानमभ्यासाज्ज्ञानाद्ध्यानं विशिष्यते ।

śreyo hi jñānamabhyāsājñānāddhyānam viśiṣyate ।

ध्यानात्कर्मफलत्यागस्त्यागाच्छान्तिरनन्तरम् ॥ १२-१२ ॥

dhyānātkarmaphalatyaḡastyāgācchāntiranantaram ॥ 12-12 ॥

sreyah: better; *hi*: indeed; *jnanam*: knowledge; *abhyasat*: than practice/ *sadhana*; *jnanat*: than knowledge; *dhyanam*: meditation; *visisyate*: is better; *dhyanat*: than meditation; *karma-phala-tyagah*: renunciation to the fruits of action; *tyagat*: from renunciation; *santih*: peacefulness; *anantaram*: thereafter.

"Knowledge is better than regulated *sadhana* (in devotional service), meditation is better than mere cultivation of knowledge, and renunciation of the fruits of action is better than meditation, because detachment brings peace."

This verse does not contradict the previous ones. Verse 12.8 declared that full Krishna Consciousness is the highest platform of existence, because the *yogi* is constantly connected to the supreme benefit of the entire universe. Such consciousness is perfectly full of happiness, intelligence, clear awareness, knowledge and transcendental continuity, and therefore enables the *yogi* to remain detached from material designations and bondage. It is the purest form of detachment (*karma phala tyaga*) to which this verse (12.12) refers, and it brings lasting peace.

As explained in verse 12.8, Krishna Consciousness means engaging ones' intelligence (*buddhi*), that is equivalent to the *buddhi yoga* of which Krishna has been speaking from the beginning (2.39, 2.49, 2.50, 2.51-53, 2.65, 3.1, 6.43, 10.10). To attain this platform, we need to train ourselves and control our mind, because as long as we are exposed to material sense signals, we can become distracted and confused, and lose sight of the proper consciousness. Krishna has already stated that the mind is restless by nature (*cancah hi manah*, 6.34) and therefore it needs to be trained patiently, with constant practice and detachment (*abhyasena tu kaunteya vairagyena ca grihyate*, 6.35). Verse 12.9 repeats that constant practice (*abhyasa yoga*) supported by a sincere desire (*iccha*) is a fundamental requirement for success. It is required for the acquisition of knowledge (*jnana*) and it is also needed for the development of the proper *bhakti* consciousness.

Verse 4.33 stated that *jnana yajna*, the sacrifice that consists in engaging in the pursuit of knowledge, is better than the *dravya yajna*, the ritual sacrifice where material substances are offered, because the rituals are meant to lead us to knowledge or

transcendental consciousness. Without the proper knowledge, rituals are just mechanical practice, that does not bring very good results. Knowledge of the Supreme is the purpose of *svadhyaya* and *isvara pranidhana*, the two conclusive steps of the system of *yama* and *niyama*. *Jnana* or knowledge enables us to practice genuine *dhyana*, leading to overcoming the ignorance of *ahankara* and *mamatva*.

However, anyone who has practiced genuine *sadhana* will agree that regulated and constant practice is not easy. We are not speaking here of the fake fantasy "meditation" offered by the fancy and trendy therapists who teach you to relax and visualize beautiful sceneries or pretty lights or serene blue skies. Genuine *dhyana* on the Supreme Consciousness is another thing altogether: it requires the total demolition of the boundary walls of our mind, so that it can "contain" the ocean. How can a mere cup contain the ocean? By removing the separation between the inside and the outside - removing the duality that focuses the attention and desires on selfish and egotic considerations. To visualize this concept, imagine a cube-shaped cup, and after immersing it in the greater reservoir of water, remove the four faces of the cup that function as small walls. The ocean will flood in and fill our being without any separation, yet the space of the cup still exists and continues to exist.

Removing these walls can be very scary, because when we become accustomed to identifying with the material body and its extensions, we feel we are going to lose everything that makes us what we are. We are afraid of becoming nothing, of entering some sort of non-existence.

Since the embodied being finds this idea intolerable (12.5), Krishna is offering us the alternative to fully engage our reluctant mind and senses into practical activities (*karmani*) that are directly connected to his service (*mat karma*, 12.10, *mat-karma-krin* 11.55,

sa yukta krtsna karma krit 4.18, mad-artham api karmani kurvan 12.10).

This working for the Supreme is equivalent to the *karma phala tyaga*: when we act on behalf of someone else, we are simply performing our duty selflessly, without expectation of any separate gain from the success or failure of the action. Such dutiful service is based on intelligence - the clear understanding of our position in relationship to the position of the Supreme, for whom we are working. And whenever we speak of relationship, we are speaking of *bhakti*, which is why this chapter is entitled "Bhakti yoga".

How does this *bhakti yoga* concept connect with the concept of *karma phala tyaga*? As verse 6.1 explained, *anasritah karma-phalam karyam karma karoti yah, sa sannyasi ca yogi ca, na niragnir na cakriyah*, "The real *sannyasi* and the real *yogi* is one who selflessly performs all his duties in society and takes the proper actions where required, without any attachment to enjoy the fruits of his activities - not one who escapes from action in the name of some rules and renunciation."

The word *anantaram* means "immediately", "as a natural consequence".

VERSE 13

अद्वेषा सर्वभूतानां मैत्रः करुण एव च ।

adveṣṭā sarvabhūtānāṃ maitraḥ karuṇa eva ca ।

निर्ममो निरहङ्कारः समदुःखसुखः क्षमी ॥ १२-१३ ॥

nirmamo nirahaṅkāraḥ samaduḥkhasukhaḥ kṣamī || 12-13 ||

a-dvesta: without envy/ hostility; *sarva-bhutanam*: of all beings; *maitrah*: friendliness; *karuna*: compassion; *eva*: certainly; *ca*: and; *nir-mamah*: without sense of possession or belonging; *nir-ahankarah*: without sense of material identification, duality or arrogance; *sama-duhkha-sukhah*: with equal attitude towards distress and joy; *kshami*: forgiving.

"(One who works for me must) be free from envy or hostility, but rather friendly and compassionate towards all beings. (S/he must be) free from material attachments and identifications, tolerant and ready to forgive, and equally prepared to face joys and sorrows."

A person who is working for the Supreme (*mat karma krit*) must strictly abide by the following norms: 1. *advesa*, 2. *nirmama* and *nirahankara*, 3. *sama duhkha sukha*, 4. *kshama*. These are all connected, and develop one from another, starting with *advesa*.

The concept of *dvesa* (the opposite of *a-dvesa*) is very complex and vast. It contains all the meanings of "envy", "malice", "hostility", "hatred", "repulsion", "rejection" (as opposite of *raga*, "attraction"). This is confirmed by *Bhagavata Purana* (3.24.47), where the dutiful action in *bhakti yoga* is defined as free from *iccha* ("desire", "attraction") and *dvesa* ("repulsion", "hatred"): *iccha dvesa vihinena sarvatra sama cetasa, bhagavad bhakti yuktena, prapta bhagavati gatih*, "(He) attained the destination of Bhagavan by engaging in (genuine) *bhakti yoga*, equally (benevolent) towards everyone and free from (all) desires and hatred."

The word *dvesa* does not mean "detachment", because detachment is a neutral position towards the objects of senses, while repulsion or rejection is the other face of the "attraction" or "attachment" coin. One must apply detachment (*vairagya, tyaga*), in the sense of neutrality and positive attitude towards all beings - living entities

and situations of life. This means that one should try to find the good in everything, and engage everything in the best possible way: we could say that a genuine devotee sees opportunities in all difficulties, and is able to find a suitable engagement for anybody.

In this verse, *a-dvesa* is further qualified as friendliness or benevolence and compassion towards all beings. A genuine spiritualist or religionist is favorably disposed towards all beings because s/he sees the *antaryami* in all bodies and in all existences (5.18): *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."

This is expressed by the tradition among spiritualists to greet each other by offering homage to Narayana, Hari, Krishna, or Shiva - *namo Narayana, Hari Om, Hare Krishna, om namah Shivaya, jaya Jagannatha* etc. By this, we recognize the presence of Bhagavan in the heart of the person who is in front of us, and we offer our respect and devotion accordingly. Some people misconstrue this tradition, believing that such manner of greeting people means that we confuse the *jiva* (the individual soul) with *isvara* (Bhagavan), and therefore we are addressing the *jiva* as *isvara*, but this is not a fact. Of course, there might be confused people who have this idea, but that has nothing to do with the original tradition.

With the degradation of the system from *varna* to caste, this benevolent and positive attitude towards all beings has disappeared, and in some cases even turned to mistreatment of the lower castes and the most vulnerable members of society, such as women and children. In the degraded caste system, even brahmins and people posing as *sannyasis* arrogantly violate these fundamental principles established by Krishna, persecuting and

mistreating innocent people they see as obstacles on their path. It is important to understand that such a degraded behavior is not prescribed, endorsed or even tolerated in the genuine Vedic system.

In fact, later on in *Bhagavad gita* (16.14) Krishna will describe it as asuric, "demonic".

True, one has the right and duty to oppose aggressors, *asuras* and adharmic people, but there should never be any hatred or prejudice. Each and every individual should be considered according to *guna* and *karma*, and engaged accordingly. Even unevolved and degraded people can be successfully engaged in some sort of service, that will make them happy, enable them to progress in their personal evolution, and contribute some positive benefit to society at large. A genuine *brahmana*, who is wise and intelligent by definition, is responsible for this engagement and progress of all the members of society, without compromising on the good results of work for the benefit of society.

A genuine *yogi* (*bhakta*, *pandita*, or servant of the Supreme) does not hate anyone, not even those who hate or envy him/ her: s/he only wishes them well, and feels compassionate towards them. However, this does not mean that s/he should submit to injustice or to behaviors or policies that are adharmic and detrimental to the progress of society. S/he wants the bad people to understand their mistakes and reform, for their own benefit, and if other innocents or society in general are threatened, s/he will take action to stop the evil doers.

Yudhisthira was called *ajata satru* ("whose enemy was never born") to mean that he was equally disposed towards everyone, and free from hostility created by prejudice and selfishness, but that does not mean that he refused to engage in battle at Kurukshetra, when the protection of the *praja* and the destiny of the kingdom

were at stake. Just like Arjuna has shown at the beginning of *Bhagavad gita*, Yudhisthira was friendly and compassionate towards all, and he would happily have forgiven Duryodhana and the other members of the conspiracy that had repeatedly attempted to assassinate him and his family.

However, this friendliness and compassion should not become detrimental to the real benefit of everyone: it is said that good intentions are not sufficient to bring a good result, and often well-meaning people can sometimes cause serious disasters. The key to solve the dilemma rests in the qualities and rules prescribed by Krishna in the previous verses: intelligence and wisdom (*buddhi*, 12.8), and selflessness (*karma phala tyaga*, 12.11).

The same consideration applies to the meaning of the word *kshama*, "tolerance", "forgiveness". A genuine religionist is gentle, compassionate and ready to forgive, but not submitting to injustice or damaging activities, and especially not encouraging others to commit them.

These qualities are confirmed in the direct instructions given by Krishna to Uddhava (*Bhagavata Purana*, 11.11.29 to 32: *kripalur akrita drohas titikshuh sarva dehinam, satya saro anavadyat ma samah sarvopakarakah; kamair ahata dhir danto mriduh sucir akinchana, anihomita bhuk santah sthiro mac charano munih; apramatto gabhiratma dhritiman jita sad gunah, amani mana dah kalyo maitrah karunikah kavih; ajnayaivam gunan doshan mayadistan api svakan, dharman santyajya yah sarvan mam bhajeta sa tu sattamah*). Here is the translation: "The best person is compassionate (*kripalu*), never hating/ damaging others, ready to forgive, friendly towards all embodied souls. He is one who lives by truth, free from envy, balanced, always working for the benefit of others, whose intelligence is unmoved by material desires, who controls his senses, gentle, clean, without possessiveness, free from worldly attachments, eating moderately, peaceful, stable, taking

shelter in me, thoughtful, cautious, not superficial, determined, having conquered the six defects (hunger, thirst, lamentation, illusion, old age, death), not interested in honors, respectful to others, friendly (*maitra*), compassionate (*karunika*), learned, knowledgeable. Such a person offers his duties to me by detaching himself from all qualities - good and bad - and fully dedicates to me, as taught by me."

The word *karuna* (with long last *a*) is a noun, meaning "kindness, compassion to suffering creatures", while *karuna* (with a short last *a*) is the adjective form.

VERSE 14

सन्तुष्टः सततं योगी यतात्मा दृढनिश्चयः ।

santuṣṭaḥ satatam yogī yatātmā dṛḍhaniścayaḥ ।

मय्यर्पितमनोबुद्धिर्यो मद्भक्तः स मे प्रियः ॥ १२-१४ ॥

mayyarpitamanobuddhiryo madbhaktaḥ sa me priyaḥ ।। 12-14 ।।

santustah: satisfied; *satatam*: always; *yogi*: the yogi; *yata atma*: engaged in the self; *dridha-niscayah*: with firmness and determination; *mayi*: to me; *arpita*: offering; *manah*: the mind; *buddhih*: intelligence; *yah*: s/he; *mat-bhaktah*: my devotee; *sah*: s/he; *me*: to me; *priyah*: dear.

"The *bhakti yogi* is always contented, engaged in the self with firmness and determination, offering his mind and intelligence to my (service). Such a person is very dear to me."

The word *santustah* ("satisfied, contented") is from the same root as *santa* ("peaceful"). Previously (2.66) Krishna had already stated that happiness can be attained only through peace (*asantasya*

kutah sukham), a peace created by renouncing to expectations and selfishness. Selfishness is a manifestation of *ahankara* and *mamatva*, the sense of material identification and material attachments and belonging.

This means that a devotee and a *yogi* is always focused on the transcendental consciousness (*yata atma*). This is confirmed in the famous *atmarama* verse of *Bhagavata Purana* (1.7.10): *atmaramas ca munayo nirgrantha apy urukrame, kurvanty ahaitukim bhaktim, ittham bhuta guno harih*, "Those who find happiness in the *atman*, including the *munis* and those who have gone beyond book learning, offer a loving service to Hari, whose qualities and activities are so wonderful."

The same is confirmed in 3.27.26 (*evam vidita tattvasya prakritir mayi manasam, yunjato napakuruta atmaramasya karhicit*, "One who knows Reality constantly meditates on me, and as s/he finds happiness in the self, s/he is not obstructed by material (circumstances)."

Also we find similar descriptions in other verses of the *Bhagavata Purana* - 4.22.14, 5.19.11, 6.16.40, 10.32.19, 10.73.23 - and even applied to Bhagavan as in 10.30.34.

Contentment also comes from feeling confident and fearless in all circumstances. This is confirmed by Shiva Mahadeva in the *Bhagavata Purana* (6.17.28): *narayana para sarve na kutascana bibhyati, svargapavarga narakesv api tulyartha darsinah*, "The devotees of Narayana are not afraid of anything, and are equally ready to go to Svargaloka and to Naraka".

We had already seen a similar statement in verse 7.17: *tesam jnani nitya-yukto eka-bhaktir visisyate, priyo hi jnanino 'tyartham aham sa ca mama priyah*, "Of them, the person of knowledge who is constantly engaged (in *yoga*) and focused in devotion is the best. I

am very dear to the *jnani*, and s/he is very dear to me". However, in this verse Krishna elaborates more on the qualities and activities (*guna* and *karma*) that can keep the devotee genuinely engaged in Krishna Consciousness.

In the previous verse (12.13) we have seen that the most important requirement is benevolence - friendliness, compassion and sympathy towards all beings. In the very least, one should avoid unnecessary violence towards innocent and harmless creatures: vegetarianism is therefore a must for all civilized persons, because it helps us follow the fundamental dharmic principles of compassion (*daya*) and cleanliness (*sauca*). These are also mentioned later in *Bhagavad gita* (18.42) as the characteristics of a genuine *brahmana*: *saucam tapas titiksam ca, maunam svadhyayam arjavam, brahmacharyam ahimsam ca, samatvam dvandva-samjnayoh*, "cleanliness, self-control, tolerance, dignity, transcendental consciousness, simplicity, purity of thoughts, non-violence, balanced attitude towards life, and freedom from dualistic concepts".

Cleanliness and compassion are two of the basic four principles of *dharma* described in the *shastra*, especially in *Bhagavata Purana*, the specialized text that elaborates on *bhagavata dharma*. When Maharaja Parikshit detects the arrival of the present age of degradation, he observes that the cow and bull personifying Bhumi and Dharma have been seriously injured: *tapah saucam daya satyam, iti padah krte krtah, adharmam amsais trayo bhagnah smaya sanga madais tava*, "In Satya yuga all the basic legs of *dharma* were created - self-control, cleanliness, compassion and truthfulness - but now three of them have been broken by the increase of arrogance, delusion and bad association", (1.17.24).

This declaration by king Parikshit implies that *satyam*, truthfulness, is the only principle of *dharma* that can still remain functional in Kali yuga: everything is lost when truthfulness is

grossly violated by the unqualified descendants of brahmins with the purpose of legitimizing or even extolling the virtues of the open and arrogant violation of the other basic principles of *dharma* - self control, cleanliness and compassion.

We can see that happening in front of our very eyes, when caste brahmins vociferously declare that according to the "religious authorities on vedic tradition" there is no problem in *brahmanas* and religious teachers and authorities ordinarily eating meat and other non-vegetarian substances, and continuing to pose as *brahmanas*, *acharyas* and *pujaris*. At the same time, they violently and offensively deny "low caste" people the basic right to study Sanskrit and the religious science or even to enter a public temple for ordinary *darshan* of the Deities, on the grounds that they "eat objectionable foods", when in fact such "low caste" people may have been strictly vegetarian for many decades.

And that is not the only thing we see in front of our own eyes in these very days, and that has been increasingly aggrieving the heart of the Mother Goddess from the very beginning of Kali yuga.

Bhumi was crying, and Parikshit correctly understood the reason why: *araksyamanah striya urvi balam, socasy atho purusadair ivartan, vacam devim brahma kule kukarmany, abrahmanye raja kule kulagryan*, "You are lamenting about the women and children who are left without support, and about the Goddess of knowledge being manhandled by unqualified descendants of *brahmana* families who follow the same principles/ way of life of *rakshasas* and engage in abominable activities, and about adharmic people from royal dynasties or from other most prominent families," (1.16.21), and *kim ksatra bandhun kalinopasrstan, rastrani va tair avaropitani, itas tato vasana pana vasah snana, vyavayonmukha jiva lokam*, "because unqualified people belonging to the families of *kshatriyas* have messed up with the government, so that people have completely forgotten the regulative principles of a civilized

society in the matter of eating, drinking, having sex, taking bath, or other life habits" (1.16.22).

Bhagavata Purana (10.1.4) clearly states that a *pasu ghna* (one who kills or causes animals to be killed for him) is the only human being that remains unable to truly follow the path of *bhagavata dharma*, that starts from hearing the glorification of Bhagavan. The verse reads: *nivritta tarsair upagiyamanad, bhauvasadhac chrotra mano abhramat, ka uttama sloka gunanuvadat, puman virajeta vina pasu ghnat*, "The medicine for the disease of material existence consists in hearing about the fascinating qualities and activities of Bhagavan, who is glorified by wonderful verses. Such discussions liberate the mind from material delusion. Only one who kills animals can refuse to engage in this path."

A modicum of truthfulness (honesty) will help us to understand that the other components of traditional vedic civilization are abstention from the recreational consumption of intoxicants, such as alcoholic beverages etc, and abstention is from engaging in illegitimate sexual activities (or in other words, sex that is not in accordance to the principles of *dharma*).

A *vrata* is the observance of a religious or spiritual vow, that consists in avoiding negative activities and regularly engaging in positive activities. If one is unable to engage in positive activities, at least s/he should abstain from committing bad actions.

A *dridha vrata* (7.28) is a person who is serious about engaging in *yoga* and *bhakti*: *yesam tv anta-gatam papam jananam punya-karmanam, te dvandva-moha-nirmukta bhajante mam dridha-vratah*, "Those who have put an end to all bad activities/sins, perform/ have (accumulated) pious/ virtuous activities, and are completely liberated from the delusion of duality and firm in their determination, worship me."

Obviously this statement implies that those people who continue to engage in sinful activities - such as eating non vegetarian things, etc - are actually unable to approach God for worship because God does not accept their worship, even if they maintain strict control over physical access to the temple and the Deity, and they regularly go through the motions of the worship rituals.

They are not really worshipping God, but they only see a material form made of stone, marble, brass, wood, *panchaloha* (a traditional alloy of metals used for religious statues) and so on, believing they are its owners and controllers.

The expression *dridha niscayah* indicates a strong realization based on intelligence, sincerity, and direct experience, that cannot be confused by false conclusions proposed by opponents, or by unnecessary doubts created by the fear of displeasing aggressive people.

VERSE 15

यस्मान्नोद्विजते लोको लोकान्नोद्विजते च यः ।

yasmānnodvijate loko lokānnodvijate ca yaḥ ।

हर्षामर्षभयोद्वेगैर्मुक्तो यः स च मे प्रियः ॥ १२-१५ ॥

harṣāmarṣabhayodvegairmukto yaḥ sa ca me priyaḥ ॥ 12-15 ॥

yasmat: by whom; *na*: not; *udvijate*: are agitated; *lokah*: people; *lokat*: by people; *na*: not; *udvijate*: is agitated; *ca*: and; *yaḥ*: s/he; *harsha*: excitement caused by joy; *amarsha*: distress; *bhaya*: fear; *udvegaih*: anxiety; *muktah*: free from; *yaḥ*: s/he; *sah*: one who; *ca*: and; *me*: my; *priyah*: very dear.

"One who does not cause sufferings to others, and is not affected by others, who is not overwhelmed by joy or distress, who is free from fear and anxiety, is very dear to me."

After repeatedly stating the importance of *buddhi* (intelligence), most recently in verse 12.6, Krishna expects us to utilize it properly to understand his instructions in the correct way.

In this world all beings are constantly experiencing joys and sufferings, and are normally faced with causes for agitation, anxiety and fear. This material body is so fragile that a relatively small change of temperature in the environment, the absence of some substance, or many other apparently trivial events can seriously damage it.

Similarly, the mind is restless, attached to temporary things that will be lost or destroyed - objects, relationships, positions, wealth, and so on. Especially in Kali yuga, the world is full of adharmic, arrogant, selfish people who do not care for the benefit of others and do not hesitate on trampling on whatever seems to be an obstacle to their materialistic goals.

Also, because we have a material body and we need to feed it and move it around, we will inevitably be responsible for a certain amount of sufferings in other beings. As *Bhagavata Purana* (1.13.47) confirms, all living bodies need to consume the bodies of other living entities as food in order to survive. A vegetarian diet saves us from the grossest forms of violence, but even the plants have some degree of sensitivity and feel anxiety and pain when they are hurt. Even if we choose to live on totally non-violent foods, such as fruits, leaves and seeds that have spontaneously fallen from the plants, we are still causing a small amount of suffering and anxiety to other beings who may be sitting on these non-violent foods, or standing on the path while we walk to collect our basic necessities.

Also, we should understand that the karmic consequences of causing sufferings to other beings will affect us even when we are only "indirectly" involved, as for example when we purchase items produced without consideration of the sufferings caused to creatures. This of course applies mostly to meat and other non-vegetarian items, but in a much lesser degree can also apply to other foods, even vegetarian foods. We may even be hurting small insects and microbes without knowing it, by breathing or by the involuntary action of our immune system.

Stupid and ill-motivated people try to use this argument to prove that it is OK to eat any meat even from factory farms and slaughterhouses, because we cannot completely avoid creating sufferings and anxieties in other beings anyway, so we should not even start to bother about it.

But this is like saying that since we got a little paper cut on our finger, we might as well sign up to undergo a long period of horrible torture until death, because we are already suffering.

However, we should not think that Vedic culture or Hinduism have a "taboo" on meat-eating or any other singular action, as it happens in other cultures. In specific cases of emergencies, we are entitled to consume whatever is required to continue to perform our social duties properly, because the sincere work we are contributing constitutes a sacred *yajna*, and its attending paraphernalia is considered *yajna sista*, or *prasadam*.

The Vedic system offers the solution to the ethical problem by teaching that we should accept "our share" (*tena tyaktena bhunjitha*, *Isa Upanishad*, 1), that is whatever is really and honestly necessary to keep our bodies and minds working properly so that we can properly engage in cooperating for the benefit of all beings. This is why *satyam* (truthfulness, sincerity, honesty) is the most fundamental principle of *dharma*.

To help us in balancing our karmic account, Vedic tradition prescribes the *pancha maha yajnas* (5 great sacrifices), to repay our debts to all other beings, including the animals. This is also commonly called *bali*, and it is usually offered by regularly feeding crows, dogs and cows, who are particularly useful to human society as scavengers, protectors and providers of nutrition and so many other good things respectively.

Another beautiful and popular *bali* tradition consists in drawing artistic and decorative designs with rice paste, that is eventually consumed by ants and other small insects.

Of course with the degradation caused by fake brahmins, this custom has lost its meaning because the drawings are now made with artificial colors that do not give benefit to any being and that may even be toxic and polluting for the environment.

The *pancha maha yajnas* are:

1. Brahma yajna: the study and the teaching of the scriptures (*svadhyaya*) and the spiritual practice (*sadhana*) for the realization of Brahman - to repay one's debt towards the Rishis and the *Vedas*.
2. Pitri yajna: the offerings to the Pitris (ancestors) during the Agnihotra, the *tarpana* etc; also, begetting at least one son who will continue the family line, and behaving in such a way to bring glory and good name to the family.
3. Deva yajna: the offerings to the Devas (the administrators of the universe) during the Agnihotra, the ritual worship to the family Deities (*upasana*), the Sandhya vandana etc.
4. Bhuta yajna: the offering of food to the animals and the living beings in general; this consumes one's past negative karmic reactions created by eating, cooking, lighting fire, drinking and collecting water, cleaning house etc. It also includes the regular

practice of nonviolence, compassion and harmony with nature, and even good relationships with ghosts.

5. Nri yajna, that consists in assistance to guests (*atithi*), a category that includes all travelers, as well as in the regular practice of charity, compassion, tolerance and forgiveness towards other human beings. Of course the performance of our duties towards family and society, especially in the professional field of *varnas*, is extremely important in this regard and is usually implied as the fundamental requirement.

The word *udvijate* ("causes sufferings") is derived from *udvega*, that means "agitation, anxiety", where *vega* means "impulse". We can understand this verse better by analyzing this etymology: anxiety or suffering is whatever unsettles and creates an impulse for reaction - anger, fear, shock, despair and so on.

The two mutual opposites of *harsa* and *amarsa* should also be understood properly. *Harsa* meaning "elation, thrilling", as in *harsa roma*, meaning "standing hair" that is seen in some strong emotion. It is a happy, pleasing, enlivening, electrifying and energizing feeling, that we can call ecstasy or pleasure.

However, we should not allow ourselves to be confused and sidetracked by happy feelings or by the pleasures of this world; we need to remain focused in our awareness and devotional service.

Amarsa is just the opposite. It is the acid corrosive feeling of hostility or impatience towards others, the envy or disappointment in seeing the success of other people, or lamentation and fear about our losing something. It is the fretting and tormenting oneself about things that are actually unimportant.

Harsa can cause anxiety or fear because we become addicted to the feeling of pleasure and joy, and we do not want to be left without, but *amarsa* is directly causing sufferings, anxiety and

fear, either by our direct feelings and actions, or by the karmic reaction to our bad activities that made other beings suffer.

VERSE 16

अनपेक्षः शुचिर्दक्ष उदासीनो गतव्यथः ।

anapekṣaḥ śucirdakṣa udāsīno gatavyathaḥ ।

सर्वारम्भपरित्यागी यो मद्भक्तः स मे प्रियः ॥ १२-१६ ॥

sarvārambhaparityāgī yo madbhaktaḥ sa me priyaḥ ।। 12-16।।

anapeksah: detached/ neutral; *sucih*: clean; *dakshah*: skillful; *udasinah*: light hearted; *gata vyathah*: free from worries; *sarva arambha*: all enterprises; *parityagi*: who has renounced; *yah*: who; *mat bhaktah*: my devotee; *sah*: s/he; *me priyah*: very dear to me.

"Impartial, clean, skillful, light hearted, detached from worries, uninterested in personal achievements: such a devotee is very dear to me."

The word *anapeksha* or *nirapeksha* means "indifferent", and it applies to the various conditions of life that we may encounter in our journey. It is very important to avoid misunderstanding the concept, because the degraded tendencies of Kali yuga may tempt us to think that we should become callous towards *adharma* and *ajnana*, neglectful in regards to our duties and responsibilities, and insensitive towards the sufferings of others. This would be a huge mistake.

To better understand this instruction offered by Krishna, we should also contemplate the complementary meanings of the word, as "impartial, detached, neutral", and apply them to our personal

expectations and sense gratification. In brief, *anapeksha* here means that we should continue to stoically perform our true duty in the best possible way even in the most difficult and painful circumstances. Also, we should not be scared of going through situations that could be considered inauspicious (*asubha*, 2.57, 4.16, 9.1, 9.28, 12.17) as we will see in the next verse.

Another important meaning of *anapeksha* is that we should be free from sectarian prejudices, that is, we should be able to appreciate good and sound arguments and realizations even in people who belong to a different group or culture. Similarly, we should be able to recognize a mistake in our own camp, and a bad behavior in a member of our own family, and take steps to correct them. At the same time we should be able to recognize a dharmic and learned action or conclusion or choice when it is outside our camp or our family, or even among our declared enemies. This is the meaning of "impartial" or "neutral".

This neutrality is also required to avoid the sin of excessive force against the associates of an aggressor, for example his family or the members of his race or community; as Krishna has already declared in verse 13, one should be *advesta*, "free from hatred".

A competent and ethically healthy surgeon has no negative feelings towards his patients; he only performs the required operation in the best possible way so that the patient can get relief from suffering and disease, and recover health and functions.

True, in Kali yuga there are many criminals posing as doctors and surgeons, who perform unnecessary surgeries or work in a sloppy or even cruel way, because they have other selfish interests and do not care for the benefit of the patients, but these should not be considered actual doctors. The actions and the motivations of each person are the real criteria to evaluate and judge people.

The concepts of enemy and friend should be applied through verification of the respective actions and motivations, rather than by their nationality, race, ethnic group, lineage, etc. Even the previous position of a person in actions and intentions can change suddenly, as a friend can betray us and an enemy can have a change of heart, so we need to remain neutral and impartial. There is a famous tale in the *Panchatantra*, that shows how we need to choose an intelligent and reasonable enemy over a stupid friend. To illustrate the point, the narrator of these beautiful stories brought the twin examples of the merchant and the king, who were respectively saved by an enemy and killed by a friend.

We have already encountered the word *suci* ("clean") before (6.41) and we will find it even more often later on (16.3, 16.7, 16.10, 17.14, 18.27, 18.42) as Krishna will proceed to explain how a devotee can successfully navigate life in the material world without falling back into the ocean of material degradation. Contrarily to what abrahamic ideologies believe, it is not sufficient to pledge allegiance to a particular religious sect or divine figure to remain always pure: we need to closely watch our activities and choices, and carefully avoid all contamination. This cleanliness is primarily inner cleanliness, or purity of mind and heart.

Such purity is usually helped and accompanied by external bodily cleanliness, but it does not necessarily depend on it, especially when circumstances are unfavorable (*asubha*) and we do not have the power to change them. Let us make an example: in the last few decades, the traditional holy places in India have been seriously damaged by the irresponsible and adharmic behavior of the local residents, who callously discharge their sewage and garbage everywhere.

The measure of the disaster can be seen in the Yamuna river, that in 1984 was still wonderfully pure and fresh, and had sweet clear blue water perfectly fit for drinking, and only 20 years later was

declared unfit even for irrigation purposes because of the incredible level of pollution. Also, the rise in availability of consumers' goods and packaging solutions has greatly increased the quantity of non-biodegradable rubbish laying around in the streets and around buildings. The local people, who were used to throw a little dust and kitchen waste in front of their house after sweeping, are now callously doing the same with greater quantities of non-biodegradable waste, including plastic, etc.

When the houses of these foolish people are on a major road, the air draft caused by the fast passage of motorized vehicles blows all the dust and impurities back into the house, and the small garbage heap next to the house inspires others to contribute by dumping their own extra garbage in the same place - while there is practically no public garbage removal service. The same happens to the ponds or rivers near these houses, where the foolish local caste brahmins keep taking their "purificatory bath", believing that such exercise is making them "clean" (*suci*).

Now, when we travel to these places of pilgrimage, we should not let our minds be confused by this situation. We should apply our intelligence with detachment: if we can do something to clean the place up, we should certainly do so, as a service to the holy place (*dhama seva*). If we cannot, we should just offer our respect to the holy place that is still present under the layer of Kali yuga contamination, in the transcendental dimension beyond the trash and excrements of this material dimension.

However, this does not mean that we are required to actually take bath in seriously polluted water, or to remain for a long time in a garbage dump, because that will sooner or later affect our body and mind, and eventually our consciousness, too. So we can simply sprinkle a few drops of the water on our head or body, and offer homage to whatever little portion of ground appears to be clean, and then continue in our journey.

The word *daksha* means "expert, skillful", and refers to *jnana*, the knowledge by which we become able to properly utilize the objects of the world and navigate our paths to progress and liberation, while performing our duties in devotional service. An expert person is a highly effective person, because s/he makes the best and most intelligent use of things and opportunities, focusing time and effort, as described for example in many of the popular "self-help" books that are meant to improve your effectiveness in life.

The expression *udasina* means "aloof", especially from society. In verse 6.9 it applied to a neutral person, who is impartial between factions, and in 9.9 it was applied directly to Krishna as impartial towards all the various favorable and unfavorable activities that develop in the material world and are performed by people. In verse 14.23, it is used (*udasina vad asino*) to describe a person who is established on the level of Transcendence.

We find it also in the *Bhagavata Purana* used in the same way: in 6.16.5 similar to *Gita* 6.9, in 6.16.11 similar to *Gita* 9.9, and in 10.54.43 and 10.60.20 similar to *Gita* 14.23. The *Bhagavata Purana* is the natural complement to the *Bhagavad gita*, and is the most popular among the *Puranas*, traditionally recited and studied in many villages and Hindu communities.

VERSE 17

यो न हृष्यति न द्वेष्टि न शोचति न काङ्क्षति ।

yo na hṛṣyati na dveṣṭi na śocati na kāṅkṣati ।

शुभाशुभपरित्यागी भक्तिमान्यः स मे प्रियः ॥ १२-१७ ॥

śubhāśubhaparityāgī bhaktimānyaḥ sa me priyaḥ ॥ 12-17 ॥

yah: anyone; *na*: not; *hrishyati*: becomes overwhelmed by joy; *na*: not; *dvesti*: hates; *na*: not; *socati*: laments; *na*: not; *kanksati*: aspires (to some selfish results); *subha asubha*: both favorable and unfavorable; *parityagi*: completely detached; *bhakti-man*: one who is characterized by *bhakti* (devotion); *yah*: anyone; *sah*: s/he; *me*: to me; *priyah*: very dear.

"A devotee who is not confused by joy, does not hate anything, does not lament and does not aspire to any selfish results, who has become detached from both advantages and disadvantages, is very dear to me."

Krishna continues to elaborate on the transcendental position of a devotee who has overcome the delusion of material identifications and attachments. Such a person is not confused by joys or sorrows, but continues to perform his/ her duty faithfully and responsibly, selflessly, and even heroically.

Pleasure and pain are mechanisms by which our body and mind react to positive and negative situations, in which beneficial and damaging stimuli are created. The survival instincts of an embodied conditioned soul push him/ her to follow the stimuli and enjoy the benefits or escape the damage, but a devotee is ready to sacrifice everything for his/ her duty in the service of the Supreme.

At a more ordinary level, intense pleasure or joy can confuse our mind and cloud our intelligence, and this is the first step towards material attachments. Therefore a sober person (*dhira*, 2.13) is keeping a balanced mind and does not allow his/her emotions to control his/ her actions, so that s/he can continue to work effectively.

The same thing applies to the feelings of repulsion (*dvesa*) or hostility, that can prevent us from performing some unpleasant or dangerous task.

Similarly, a selfless devotee does not lament about losses or disappointments, and is not attached to his/ her desires, projections and expectations, because s/he knows that the divine plan is greater than any of our small minds. So many times we find that an apparent setback was actually a blessing in disguise, or a success that we had pursued for a long time brought more problems than solutions. Problems and difficulties may prove to be wonderful opportunities for growth and evolution, and failure often teaches us better than any other type of lesson. Therefore the ordinary understanding about *subha* and *asubha*, "auspicious" and "inauspicious" ("favorable/ unfavorable", "positive/ negative") becomes a merely relative consideration that is only superficially relevant to the organizational and logistical aspects of our work.

A disease or another incapacitating physical condition is certainly inauspicious, but we can use it in a positive way - to finish paying some old bad karmic reactions, to get an easy pretext to avoid too much superficial and useless social interaction, or to prove that we cannot travel around. The loss of a near and dear person is certainly painful, but we can use it to become more detached from material circumstances and conditionings, just as Narada did in his previous lifetime (*Bhagavata Purana* 1.6.10) when he suddenly became an orphan at a very young age.

A transcendental devotee does not become attached to expectations or dreams, and he is not anxious to get disciples or to build temples or great projects. Whatever desires and aspirations s/he has, they are only for the performance of his/ her duty and the service of the Supreme, even if it is only a small part in a great play.

This does not mean that we should not be attached to our service or we can perform it sloppily, lazily, or inattentively: we should just be detached from the personal gains and benefits we can derive from it, as well from the disadvantages and difficulties that it entails.

This concept is presented several times in *Bhagavad gita*:

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" (2.38),

jitatmanah prasantasya paramatma samahitah, sitoshna-sukha-duhkeshu tatha manapamanayoh, sama-duhkha-sukhah sva-sthah sama-lostrasma-kancanah, tulya-priyapriyo dhiras tulya-nindatma-samstutih, "Balanced in joy and sorrow, focused on his/her own (duty), considering mud, stone and gold as equally valuable, impartial towards pleasant and unpleasant, sober, and unmoved when offended or glorified" (14.23),

"The Paramatma/ Supreme Self manifests in/ is accessible to one who has controlled himself and has attained peace/is contented in heat and cold, in happiness and in distress, and in honor/ adoration and dishonor/ spite as well" (6.7),

yadriccha-labha-santushto dvandvatito vimatsarah, samah siddhav asiddhau ca kritvapi na nibadhyate, "(Such person) is perfectly satisfied with whatever s/he obtains naturally, is free from duality and envy, and is balanced in success and failure. Although engaged in activities, he is never bound (by them)" (4.22),

bahya-sparseshv asaktatma vindaty atmani yat sukham, sa brahma-yoga-yuktatma sukham akshayam asnute, "Unattached to the contact with the external (things), s/he finds happiness in the pleasure of the Self. Such a person is engaged in Brahma yoga, and enjoys inexhaustible happiness" (5.21),

matra-sparsas tu kaunteya sitoshna-sukha-duhkha-dah, agamapayino 'nityas tams titikshasva bharata, "O son of Kunti,

the contact of the senses (with the sense objects) causes joy and distress just like (cold in) winter and (heat in) summer. Such feelings are temporary: they come and go, o descendant of Bharata, and you should just try to tolerate them (without being confused and distracted from your duty)" (2.14),

yam hi na vyathayanty ete purusham purusharshabha, sama-duhkha-sukham dhiram so 'mritatvaya kalpate, "O best among men, one who is not distracted by all these (feelings) and is always equally balanced in suffering and in joy, is a sober person and he can aspire to immortality" (2.15),

advesta sarva-bhutanam maitrah karuna eva ca, nirmamo nirahankarah sama-duhkha-sukhah ksami, "(One who works for me must) be free from envy or hostility, but rather friendly and compassionate towards all beings. (S/he must be) free from material attachments and identifications, tolerant and ready to forgive, and equally prepared to face joys and sorrows" (12.13),

sva-dharmam api cavekshya na vikampitum arhasi, dharmyad hi yuddhac chreyo 'nyat kshatriyasya na vidyate, "Considering your own dharmic duty you should not hesitate, because for a *kshatriya* there is nothing better than fighting a dharmic battle" (2.31),

nirmana-moha jita-sanga-dosha adhyatma-nitya vinivritta-kamah, dvandvair vimuktah sukha-duhkha-samjnair gacchanty amudhah padam avyayam tat, "Free from vanity and illusion, having vanquished all bad association, always situated in Transcendence, having dropped all (selfish) desires, free from duality, balanced in joy and sorrow: thus intelligent people attain that position that is eternal" (15.5).

VERSE 18

समः शत्रौ च मित्रे च तथा मानापमानयोः ।

samaḥ śatrau ca mitre ca tathā mānāpamānayoḥ ।

शीतोष्णसुखदुःखेषु समः सङ्गविवर्जितः ॥ १२-१८ ॥

śītoṣṇasukhaduḥkheṣu samaḥ saṅgavivarjitah ॥ 12-18 ॥

samaḥ: equally disposed; *śatrau*: towards an enemy; *ca*: and; *mitre*: towards a friend; *ca*: and; *tathā*: as well as; *mana*: in being honored; *apamanayoh*: as well as in absence of honor; *sita*: in cold; *ushna*: in heat; *sukha duḥkhesu*: in joys as well as in sorrows; *samaḥ*: equally balanced; *sanga vivarjitah*: completely free from all association.

"Equally balanced and impartial towards enemies and friends, honor and neglect, cold and heat, joys and sorrows, and completely free from any (material) association,

When a person is situated on the transcendental level, free from selfish motivations and expectations, there is also no prejudice towards enemies or friends. The concept of enmity is only relative to material identifications and attachments, as well as to personal expectations of joys and sorrows, because in the service to the Supreme there is no consideration of enemies or friends, but only of behaviors that are favorable or unfavorable to *dharma* and to the benefit of the universe. We have already seen how it is better to have a reasonable intelligent enemy than a foolish friend, and that loyalties can change: a person from an opposite camp can come forward and help the cause of *dharma*, while a person expected to be on our side may actually make disastrous choices that are damaging to *dharma* and divine service.

If we have overcome material ego we will not have any problem in cooperating with favorable persons, or in dropping former friends or family members who have become unfavorable. Similarly, a transcendental devotee is not attached to honors and fame, or afraid of being neglected or even disrespected by the general people. The word *mana* means "respect", "consideration", and includes all the forms of attention offered to a venerable person. So *apa-mana* means "lack of respect"; it is not an act of aggression but rather a sort of inaction, omission, or neglect.

It is not a pleasant attitude, but it is certainly less aggressive than *ninda* ("insult") as we will see in the next verse. Usually respect come from friends and lack of respect comes from enemies, and this is precisely how we are able to distinguish one from the other.

A so-called friend who has no respect and affection for us is not worthy of the name, and the same consideration should be applied to family. A blood relative who disrespects us and does not care for us is actually an enemy, especially if his or her behavior creates problems: *rina karta pita satrur, mata ca vyabhicarini, bharya rupavati satruh, putrah satrur apanditah.*

Hitopadesha teaches that one might have four enemies in his own home: a father who is addicted to making debts, a mother who likes to go around and see other people, a wife who is too enamored of her own physical beauty, and a son who is an ignorant fool. Of course these are natural defects and not deliberate hostile choices, as such persons may still be favorably disposed towards us, and have no intention of harming us or putting us into difficulties - or to destroy our life and everything we hold dear.

The situation will be even more dangerous when some of these family member are actually hostile, envious, resentful or hateful, especially if they have suffered for some injustice or mistreatment.

Women can become very vindictive when they are forced in a difficult situation - into a forced marriage, for example - or when they are subjected to humiliation and emotional damage. This applies also to events that preceded marriage, and not only to negative experiences (as victims of abuse) but also to negative training especially through example, by which they learned to abuse and mistreat others. In Vedic society these situations are extremely rare, but in Kali yuga the conditions of life become increasingly intolerable, and sane decent people actually become the exception.

Foolish people tend to generalize and categorize according to the wrong parameters (usually bodily prejudice), therefore men become the enemies of women and women become the enemies of men, old people become the enemies of youngsters and young people become the enemies of elders, siblings fight each other, what to speak about in-laws.

Positive relationships, or interactions with persons who are truly favorable to us - family or friends - are extremely beneficial for our life, because they provide emotional and moral support, the warmth of affection and healing, encouragement, and practical help and assistance as well. If we follow the system taught by Krishna in *Bhagavad gita*, we will be able to enjoy these benefits without becoming selfish and attached (2.47), therefore we will reciprocate in the same way with our friends and family.

At a higher level still, when we are firmly established in Krishna Consciousness, all material identifications and attachments will be dissolved, and we will be completely free from any conditioning defined by *sanga* or association (*tad artham karma mukta sanga*, 3.9, *gata-sangasya muktasya* , 4.23, *mukta-sango 'naham-vadi*, 18.26, *karmani sangam tyaktva*, 2.48, *karmani sangam tyaktva* , 5.10, *yoginah karma kurvanti sangam tyaktvatma-suddhaye*, 5.11, *sanga-varjitah*, 11.55, *sanga-vivarjitah*, 12.18, *nirmana-moha jita-*

sanga-dosha , 15.5, *sangam tyaktva* , 18.6, *sangam tyaktva pahalm caiva* , 18.9, *niyatam sanga-rahitam* , 18.20). A clear explanation about the true meaning of detachment is also given in verses 2.51, 2.64, 5.26, 7.28, 15.4.

All along *Bhagavad gita*, Krishna is very clearly explaining that renunciation and detachment apply only to the fruits or benefits of the action, not to the action itself. Unfortunately, as we will see later on (16.6, 18.32) ignorance, foolishness and a tendency to asuric conclusions and behaviors push people exactly in the opposite direction, to mistake *adharma* for *dharma* and vice versa. So we will see delusional people claiming to be religionists or *sannyasis* or even *gurus* who remain strongly attached to the results of action (in the form of power, profit, adoration, etc) for themselves and their own faction, and "renounce" the dutiful action that they are supposed to continue doing.

To avoid this danger, one should simply give up all associations (*sanga vivarjita*), as recommended in this verse. Each and every one of us is actually alone, as no other conditioned soul can really help us or remain with us always and in all circumstances. And at the same time, we are never really alone, because the supreme Friend, Father, Mother, Lover, Maintainer and Teacher constantly resides in our hearts, lifetime after lifetime.

VERSE 19

तुल्यनिन्दास्तुतिर्मौनी सन्तुष्टो येन केनचित् ।

tulyanindāstutirmaunī santuṣṭo yena kenacit ।

अनिकेतः स्थिरमतिर्भक्तिमान्मे प्रियो नरः ॥ १२-१९ ॥

aniketaḥ sthīramatirbhaktimānme priyo naraḥ ।। 12-19।।

tulya: balanced; *ninda*: insult; *stutih*: glorification; *mauni*: silent; *santustah*: satisfied; *yena*: by which; *kenacit*: whatever; *aniketah*: without residence; *sthira matih*: strongly determined; *bhakti man*: one who has devotion; *me*: to me; *priyah*: dear; *narah*: a human being.

"Balanced in front of insult and adoration, silent, satisfied with whatever s/he obtains, without residence, strongly determined: a devotee is very dear to me among (all) human beings."

In the previous verse we have seen that a true devotee is balanced and remains detached both from *mana* ("respect") and *apa-mana* ("lack of respect"). The word *ninda*, "insult", is much stronger than *apa-mana*, and it indicates an active aggression, that can be mental, verbal or even physical, and consists in falsely attributing defects or criminal activities to a person who is innocent and good. Of course when we are calling "thief" an actual thief, there is no question of insult; in fact if this is done in the proper way and with the proper motivation, it could even be a public service and bring a benefit even to the thief himself. Like any aggression, *ninda* brings negative karmic reactions, especially when it is committed against a genuine devotee (*yogi* and *bhakta*) and religious person, who is always working for the benefit of all beings (*bhuta hita*, 5.25, 12.4, 12.13).

A *sadhu*, *brahmana* or *sannyasi*, is usually very respected in Vedic society, as a superior and guide to the entire society. However, such respect is earned and never demanded, because a genuine devotee or religious person is always humble and detached. If you see a religious person who gets angry and revengeful because he believes he has not been adequately honored, he is very likely a fake.

Anyone who wants to make any progress in *bhakti*, *yoga* or spiritual life should be extremely cautious and strictly avoid

committing any offense towards a genuine *sadhu*, because the reactions to such crime destroy all the progress and good karmic credits. So religious people can be put to the test, but that should be done within reasonable limits and without personal arrogance from our part, because it is a very risky business.

The opposite of *ninda* is *stuti*, that means "praise", or glorification. Usually *stutis* are offered to the Personalities of Godhead, to recite their glories and offer prayers, and often to ask for blessings: all this is done with great veneration, an attitude that is several notches higher than simple respect and consideration. In the Vedic system, ritual worship is offered to all venerable persons and objects, and it acknowledges and expresses their participation to the beneficial and divine qualities and activities of God.

This is a natural tendency we can also find in many other cultures and even among atheists, who out of affection and respect offer flowers and lamps to their deceased relatives' picture, and bow to the portraits of their leaders.

Nobody is happy when subjected to insult, but we should at least be balanced enough to be detached from criticism or even offense that will inevitably come in life, especially when we are actively engaged in spreading and defending *dharma* and knowledge. Not many people are intelligent or sincere enough to participate to a debate or other interactions in a proper way, so chances are that we will have to face many attacks, sometimes vicious and unnecessarily personal.

One of the most popular tricks used by low class people who run out of solid arguments is to attack the opponent with *ad hominem* insinuations or accusations, usually totally invented, and often very vulgar and offensive, and to try to apply the various devices of emotional manipulation.

That is different from the constructive criticism that we face in a civilized confrontation or debate, when an opponent points out a defect in our reasoning or evidence.

The word *muni* refers to one who is sober and serious (*manana sila*), one who is quiet (*mauni*), an ascetic (*tapasvi*), one who is following *sadhana* (*vrati*), one in the renounced order of *sannyasa* (*yati*) and a realized soul who has the direct vision of Reality (*rishi*).

We have already elaborated on the meaning of the definition, that appears in several verses and especially in the following verses:

dukheshv anudvigna-manah sukheshu vigata-sprihah, vita-raga-bhaya-krodhah sthita-dhir munir ucyate, "A person whose mind is not distracted by sufferings or joys and remains detached, free from attraction, fear and anger, is called a Muni who is able to maintain a steadfast meditation," (2.56)

sannyasas tu maha-baho dukham aptum ayogatah, yoga-yukto munir brahma na cirenadhigacchati, "O mighty-armed (Arjuna), *sannyasa* (renunciation) without *yoga* (proper engagement) only produces misery/ is attained with difficulty; one who is engaged in Yoga is a *muni* (a wise person) and quickly attains Brahman," (5.6)

yatendriya-mano-buddhir munir moksha-parayanah, vigateccha-bhaya-krodho yah sada mukta eva sah, "Controlling the senses, the mind and intelligence, the Muni (the silent sage) who is fully dedicated to *moksha* (liberation), free from all desires, fear and anger, is certainly always liberated," (5.28).

The word *aniketana* ("without residence"), too, should be applied in the sense of detachment from *ahankara* and *mamatva*. The idea of home is the greatest attachment and comfort for all beings, including the birds and other animals, therefore overcoming the need for a fixed residence is a great demonstration of renunciation

and austerity. One's home is an extension of our identifications, and so are the concepts of race, nationality, etc.

A real *yogi* is detached from all this: *mata ca parvati devi, pita devo mahesvarah, bandhavah siva bhaktans ca, svadeso bhuvana trayam* ("my mother is Devi Parvati, my father is Shiva Mahesvara, the devotees of Shiva are my family, and the three worlds are my homeland", *Annapurna stotra*, 12).

Of course a *yogi* has a special attachment to the holy places of Bharata varsha and considers them his/ her motherland, just as s/he worships Shiva and Parvati as his/ her own parents and family. However, s/he is always ready to move and to settle wherever his/ her service requires, preferably alone (*rahasi sthitah ekaki*, 6.10 *vivikta sevi*, 18.52), without attachment for a place over the other, and adjusting to any situation. This is confirmed by the expression *yena kenacit*, "whatever comes".

In *Mahabharata* (*santi parva* 245.12) we find confirmation: *na kutyani nodake sange na caile na tri puskare nagare na asane namne ca mokshavantu sah - kuti, indaka, sanga, caila, nagare, asana, anna*, "One who knows liberation does not become attached to a particular house or village, sitting place, type of clothes, type of food, water reservoir, or even to auspiciousness".

The expression *tri puskara* literally means "the 3 lotus flowers" and refers to the higher planets (or "heaven"), the traditional places of pilgrimage on earth, and the very auspicious astronomical/ astrological configurations (*yoga*) that fall on month days 2, 7, 12, on Sunday, Tuesday and Saturday, and under the constellations named Krittika, Punarvasu, Uttara phalguni, Visaka, Uttarasadha, and Uttara bhadra pada.

VERSE 20

ये तु धर्म्यामृतमिदं यथोक्तं पर्युपासते ।

ye tu dharmyāmṛtamidaṁ yathoktaṁ paryupāsate ।

श्रद्धधाना मत्परमा भक्तास्तेऽतीव मे प्रियाः ॥ १२-२० ॥

śraddadhānā matparamā bhaktāste'tīva me priyāḥ ॥ 12-20 ॥

ye: they; *tu*: but; *dharmā amṛtam*: the nectar of *dharmā*/ eternal *dharmā*; *idam*: this; *yatha*: as; *uktam*: said; *paryupasate*: worship correctly; *śraddadhanah*: with faith; *mat paramah*: totally dedicated to me; *bhaktah*: devotees; *te*: they; *atīva*: very much; *me priyah*: dear to me.

"Those who worship correctly this eternal *dharmā* as explained by me, totally dedicated to me with faith and devotion, are extremely dear to me."

In this last verse of the chapter, Krishna summarizes *bhakti yoga* as the *dharmā amṛta*; this definition is extremely interesting as the word *amṛta* means "immortal", and also "nectar".

According to grammar, the most important part of the expression is the word *dharmā*, of which *amṛta* is an attribute; we therefore understand that the basis for the process described by Krishna in this chapter is *dharmā*. There is no *bhakti yoga* without *dharmā*: this is the fundamental truth that we really need to understand, because without a strong foundation in *dharmā* there cannot be any progress in *bhakti*. It is true that *bhakti* is completely independent from any other method or qualification, but when we speak of *bhakti*, we speak of *dharmā* - in this particular case, *sanātana dharmā*, the eternal and universal principles of *dharmā*.

We have already elaborated (2.8, 2.31) on the meaning of *dharma*, that is often mistranslated as "religion", while in fact it refers to the foundation of reality itself, that supports the existence, the consciousness and the happiness of the entire universe, as well as its progress and proper functioning. In nature, it is also called *ritu*, which means "rule", "natural law", "cycle", "season", and "orbit" as in the regular movements of the planets. This same *ritu* is called *dharma* in human society, and applies to the proper duty that each individual is meant to perform according to *guna* and *karma* (qualities, tendencies and abilities).

At a material level, based on the particular body that one is wearing and the relative qualities, tendencies and abilities, each human being is expected to engage in one of the *varnas* or professional occupations as a limb of the universal body of the Virata Purusha (4.13); this is called *sva dharma*, or "specific duty". However, on the transcendental level, *dharma* is *sanatana dharma*, the eternal and universal duty of all living entities: service to the Supreme and to the totality of Consciousness. This is also called *bhagavata dharma*, "service to God", that can be translated as "devotional service" or "Krishna Consciousness".

Vedic scriptures and especially *Bhagavad gita* clearly explain that such devotional service must be based on truthfulness, compassion, cleanliness, goodness, freedom from material identification and attachments, enlightenment, selflessness, fearlessness, impartiality, and cooperation among all to support society and universe.

Genuine *bhakti* will never motivate actions contrary to *dharma*, because *bhakti* is *dharma* itself: *svalpam apy asya dharmasya trayate mahato bhayat* (2.40), *asraddadhanah purusa dharmasyasya parantapa, aprapya mam nivartante mrityu-samsara-vartmani* (9.3), *kshipram bhavati dharmatma sasvacchantim nigacchati* (9.31), *tva avyayah sasvata-dharma-gopta sanatanas tvam purusho* (11.18).

Also 14.27 and 18.31 will confirm.

The expression *mat parama* means "having me as the supreme reality", and equals to *nirvana paramam* (6.15), *aksharam brahma paramam* (8.3), *paramam purusam* (8.8), *paramam gatim* (8.13, 8.21), *samsiddhim paramam* (8.15), *dhama paramam* (8.21), *paramam bhavan* (10.12), *paramam guhyam* (11.1, 18.67) and *paramam vacah* (10.1, 18.64), *aksharam paramam* (11.18), *dhama paramam* (15.6). A similar meaning is expressed by the word *parayana*, "totally dedicated to" (5.17, 9.34), and by the word *dharmatma*, "totally immersed in *dharma*" (9.31).