

BHAGAVAD GITA

The Global Dharma for the Third Millennium

Chapter 18

Translations and commentaries
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Chapter 18

Moksha yoga

The *yoga* of liberation

The wonderful journey of knowledge in the company of Krishna and Arjuna has led us from the awareness of disappointment and confusion of *Visada yoga* to the first step in transcendental realization - the concept of *atman*, the spiritual Self that incarnates in this world by wearing material bodies in order to evolve towards perfection or realization, culminating in the fully fledged spiritual form or *siddha deha*.

While the second chapter (*Sankhya yoga*) showed us how to distinguish between spirit and matter (the subject and the object of the action), the third chapter has taught us what to do with them both: this is the *Karma yoga* (the action or verb or predicate that sustains the statement according to syntax). In the 4th chapter we have come to the discussion about the purpose of life, that is the acquisition of knowledge (*jnana*), the direction in which we should channel our actions and efforts to elevate ourselves from the level in which we merely do our work because we are supposed to do it.

Through the instrumental factors of knowledge and detachment (*vairagya*, *tyaga* or *sannyasa*, chapter 5) we have become able to focus our mind into the proper state of consciousness or spiritual

realization (*dhyana*, chapter 6) and to apply this vision to our practical daily life (*vijnana*, chapter 7), relationships and choices.

In chapter 8 (*Taraka yoga*) we have seen that spiritual realization is at the same time the instrument, the purpose and the essence of liberation, by which we become able to constantly contemplate the Supreme Brahman in ourselves: this is the sum and substance of all the teachings and practices of Yoga. This is the great secret (*raja guhya*, chapter 9): how to see God in oneself and in all beings, and yet as the unchanged source and foundation of all existence. By constant meditation on God, one attains the highest perfection. We have thus seen that the concepts of renunciation (*sannyasa*) and liberation (*taraka*) are connected by the concentration and application of proper consciousness in all our actions (*dhyana*, *vijnana*). But what should we meditate (*dhyana*) on?

In chapters 10 (*Vibhuti yoga*) and 11 (*Visva rupa darshana yoga*) Krishna clearly explained how one should meditate on the universal powers and form of God (the Virata rupa or Visva rupa) and in chapter 12 we learned that such meditation is not just theoretical, but it must develop into a sincere service in love and devotion (*bhakti*), that consists in performing all dutiful actions in transcendental consciousness. In the course of this loving service, the most important thing is to clearly understand our duty - in which position we are and how we should relate with everything. For this, we must realize how the personal principle (the self, or the *purusha*) relates to nature (spiritual and material, the *prakriti*) and how they are actually one and the same although they appear to be distinct. Chapter 13 has been a real eye opener in this regard.

Similarly, chapter 18 will declare that all duties (*sarva dharman*, 18.66) are actually one and the same - and that is the intimate union with the Supreme (18.65). This is the supreme secret (*paramam guhyam*, 18.67) and the conclusion of *Bhagavad gita*.

The discussion about the *gunas* or modes of material nature was therefore interrupted by chapter 15 to remind us about the ultimate purpose of all the other instructions of *Bhagavad gita*: the realization of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Purushottama.

After discussing the characteristics and the effects of the material qualities or *gunas* (that we need to navigate in this world to perform our duties) we are now going to study the last chapter of *Bhagavad gita*, that summarizes its general contents and purpose - much like the second chapter had done - and offers a conclusion that is the next stepping stone for further progress into the science of Transcendence. *Moksha*, liberation from material conditioning, is not the final destination in our journey, but rather it marks the beginning of real life, of truly meaningful action, and of the full realization of the spiritual dimension introduced in the beginning of the dialog by Krishna's teachings on the *atman*. This is confirmed in verse 18.54.

For those who want to continue their evolution in Transcendence, we recommend that after *Bhagavad gita* they should study the 108 *Upanishads* and the 18 *Puranas*. As *Bhagavad gita* is part of the text of the *Mahabharata*, a sincere student will make an effort to read this voluminous work, too, and its counterpart the *Ramayana* written by Valmiki Rishi. At that point one will be ready to study the famous *Vedanta sutra*, that is considered the purpose, sum and substance of all the Vedic hymns of the *Samhitas*.

In this work we are offering an Appendix including a short summary of the *Mahabharata* and the famous *Gita mahatmya* ("the glories of *Bhagavad gita*") written by Adi Shankara Acharya.

VERSE 1

अर्जुन उवाच ।

arjuna uvāca ।

संन्यासस्य महाबाहो तत्त्वमिच्छामि वेदितुम् ।

sannyāsasya mahābāho tattvamicchāmi veditum ।

त्यागस्य च हृषीकेश पृथक्केशिनिषूदन ॥ १८-१ ॥

tyāgasya ca hṛṣīkeśa pṛthakkeśiniṣūdana ॥ 18-1 ॥

arjunah uvaca: Arjuna said; *sannyasasya:* of *sannyasa*; *maha baho:* o powerfully armed one; *tattvam:* the truth; *icchami:* I desire; *veditum:* to know; *tyagasya:* of *tyaga*; *ca:* and; *hrisikesa:* o Hrishikesh; *prithak:* difference; *kesi nisudana:* o slayer of Kesi.

Arjuna said:

"O powerful Krishna, o Lord of the senses, o slayer of Kesi, I wish to know the truth of the difference between *tyaga* and *sannyasa*.

The chapter on the *yoga* of liberation begins with the crucial subject of renunciation: *moksha* is simply freedom from material conditionings, and it can be attained only by renouncing to the material identifications and attachments (*ahankara* and *mamatva*) of which Krishna has been talking all along the *Bhagavad gita*. These are symbolically personified by the *asura* Kesi, who was killed by Krishna in his Vrindavana lila.

We have seen that chapter 5 was dedicated to the science of renunciation (*sannyasa yoga*) and specifically in verses 5.1 to 5.6

and 5.13, and therefore in the introduction to that chapter we have given a brief summary of the history of the order of *sannyasa* in Hindu tradition or *varna ashrama dharma*. Since that subject is also connected to the contents of chapter 18, we invite our readers to refresh the topic by consulting chapter 5. The subject of *sannyasa* was discussed also in 3.4, 3.30, 4.41, 6.1, 6.2, 6.4, 8.11, 9.28, 12.6, while *tyaga* was discussed in verses 12.11, 12.12, and 16.2. The concept of renunciation is thus presented on two levels, respectively external and internal, or we could say regulated and spontaneous.

Krishna has clearly stated that mere external *sannyasa* is not sufficient (3.4, 5.2), but one should attain a deeper consciousness of renunciation even without the need for the external requirements of the *sannyasa ashrama* (5.3, 5.4, 6.1, 6.2). It has been made abundantly clear that mere regulations are not only insufficient in themselves but also extremely difficult and painful to follow especially in Kali yuga (5.6), just like it is difficult and painful (and insufficient as well) to simply meditate on the impersonal and non-manifested (12.5). Therefore active service to the Supreme and to all beings (*sarva bhuta hite*) is indispensable (12.13-14, 12.6).

As we will see in the next verse, *sannyasa* refers to physically abandoning those actions that are not considered directly useful to the transcendental service, while *tyaga* refers to a state of consciousness by which one performs any activity in a completely selfless spirit. This level is also known as *avadhuta*, and it is higher and more difficult to attain than the conventional position of *sannyasis*, because an *avadhuta* is not bound by any rule or regulation, while *sannyasis* are expected to strictly follow the scriptural injunctions for their specific order of life. For example, a *sannyasi* cannot have a residence, a bank account, a regular source of income, or more possessions than the traditional things he can

carry by hand - more specifically, a walking stick (*danda*) and a small container for water (*kamandalu*). The *digambari* ("clothed by the directions of space") *sannyasis* do not wear any clothes, but if a *sannyasi* wants to wear something, it should be a simple loincloth made from old and worn out cloth discarded by others, and he should eat simple food by begging from door to door, without depending on anyone and without keeping anything aside for the next day. He cannot stay in one place for more than 3 days, and he should travel alone and on foot, without using palanquins or other vehicles, riding animals etc. Even if insulted or attacked, he cannot defend himself but he should always behave as a friend of all beings, and remain firmly situated in the transcendental consciousness without any material identification, affiliation or attachment, simply preparing himself to die at any moment. He cannot become a professional teacher, engage in debates, or take shelter of any cause, faction or sect. Special exceptions to these rules can be made in case of emergency or extraordinary circumstances, but still the principle of renunciation must be understood properly and applied honestly.

To better explore the topic, one should also read the *Upanishads* specifically dedicated to *sannyasa* or renunciation, listed hereafter: *Nirvana Upanishad*, *Maitreya Upanishad* (or *Maitrayaniya Upanishad*), *Sannyasa Upanishad*, *Kundika Upanishad* and *Aruneya Upanishad* in *Sama Veda*; *Yajnavalkya Upanishad*, *Satyayani Upanishad*, *Jabala Upanishad*, *Paramahansa Upanishad*, *Bhikshaka* (or *Bhikshuka*) *Upanishad* and *Turiyatita Upanishad* in *Sukla Yajur Veda*; *Teji bindu Upanishad*, *Avadhuta Upanishad*, *Katha rudra Upanishad*, *Varaha Upanishad* and *Brahma Upanishad* in *Krishna Yajur Veda*; *Parivraka* (*Narada parivrajaka*) *Upanishad*, *Paramahansa parivrajaka Upanishad* and *Para brahman Upanishad* in *Atharva Veda*. Also verses 2 and 3 of *Kaivalya Upanishad*, and verses 3.2.5 to 3.2.9 of *Mundaka Upanishad* speak about *sannyasa*.

Since it is impossible to quote all the relevant passages from these very important texts, we invite our readers to peruse our complete translation of the 108 major *Upanishads*, published by our Jagannatha Vallabha Vedic Research Center.

VERSE 2

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।

śrībhagavānuvāca ।

काम्यानां कर्मणां न्यासं संन्यासं कवयो विदुः ।

kāmyānāṃ karmaṇāṃ nyāsaṃ saṅnyāsaṃ kavayo viduḥ ।

सर्वकर्मफलत्यागं प्राहुस्त्यागं विचक्षणाः ॥ १८-२ ॥

sarvakarmaphalatyaḡaṃ prāhustyaḡaṃ vicakṣaṇāḥ ॥ 18-2 ॥

sri bhagavan uvaca: the wonderful Lord said; *kamyanam karmanam*: the activities performed to fulfill some desire; *nyasam*: renunciation; *sannyasam*: *sannyasa*; *kavayah*: learned scholars; *viduh*: know; *sarva karma phala tyagam*: renunciation to the fruits of all actions; *prahuh*: they call; *tyagam*: *tyaga*; *vicaksanah*: expert people.

The wonderful Lord said,

"Learned scholars know that *sannyasa* is non-engagement in activities aimed at fulfilling some personal desire, while expert people say that *tyaga* consists in being detached from the results created by all sorts of actions.

In other words, one should renounce the selfish attachment to the benefits that derive from one's actions, not renounce the actions themselves: *karmany evadhikaras te ma phalesu kadacana, ma karma phala hetur bhur ma te sango 'stv akarmani*, "You certainly

have the right to perform actions but not to enjoy the fruits of your actions. Do not try to become the cause of the fruits of the action, but do not become attached to inaction" (2.47).

Krishna establishes here a distinction of consciousness by utilizing two different definitions: *kavayah* and *vicaksanah*, respectively "scholars" and "realized persons" (or "expert persons" as in someone who has directly experienced). The singular form of these nouns are *kavi* and *vicaksi*; the word *kavi* also means "poet" or "literate", while the word *vicaksi* is a compound of *vica* ("comprehensively") and *aksi* ("who sees").

We therefore understand that the definition of *sannyasa* is used more theoretically or technically as a scientific instrument for social and religious categorization, while the definition of *tyaga* applies specifically to one's personal spiritual development, as practiced daily in all activities. *Sannyasa* is therefore merely an external support for *tyaga*, and it cannot be considered either sufficient or indispensable to attain success. We find confirmation of this concept in the description of the *varna-ashrama dharma* system in *Bhagavata Purana* (11.18.28): *jnana nistho virakto va, mad bhakto vanapeksakah, sa lingan asramams tyaktva cared avidhi gocarah*, "One who is firmly established in knowledge and perfect detachment, who is completely devoted to the Supreme and has no other desire or aspiration can rise above the rules and regulations and distinctive apparel of the *ashramas*".

The word *caret* in this verse actually contains a clear encouragement to follow this path, and could also be translated as "should rise". Why? Because the strict observance of the rules and regulations of social classes is very useful in the early stages of one's spiritual development, but as one progresses into liberation, it becomes cumbersome and even obstructs one's real work. Rules are just like crutches, that are essential for invalids but become an unnecessary burden for healthy people who are traveling and

working. Therefore Krishna will clearly say in 18.65 that one should leave behind all the different *sva dharmas* or rules and regulations of the social and religious system and simply focus on *yoga*, the transcendental union with the Supreme.

Actual renunciation or *sannyasa* consists in giving up the desire for selfish activities, or *kamyas* and *naimittika karma*. Later on (18.5-6) Krishna will clearly say that the *nitya karmani* (*yajna, dana, tapas*) should never be abandoned; in fact, one should simply renounce the fruits of all activities, as this is defined as renunciation (*tyaga*, 18.6). This is also confirmed in Valmiki Rishi's *Yoga Vasistha: na karmani tyajeta yogi karmabhist yajate hy asav iti*, "a *yogi* should not give up prescribed duty, as the duty itself will renounce the *yogi* (drop away from him) when he has reached the proper level".

In this regard we may quote a famous verse that is attributed to Krishna Chaitanya: *naham vipro na ca nara-patir napi vaisyo na sudro, naham varni na ca griha-patir no vanastho yatir va, kintu prodyam paramananda purnamrtabdher, gopi bhartuh pada kamalayor dasa dasa anudasa*, "I am not a *brahmana*, a *kshatriya*, a *vaisya* or a *sudra*, I am not a *brahmachari*, a *grihastha*, a *vanaprastha* or a *sannyasi*. I am simply the servant of the servant of the lotus feet of the husband of the *gopis*, the ocean of supreme ecstatic happiness".

On the material platform, the natural pursuit of happiness and pleasure takes different forms. The greatest pleasure in the material world is sex, but when this energy is not properly channeled, it can turn into the lust for name, fame, power, adoration, prestige, profit and position, that are not more meritorious or spiritual, but simply subtler and more hidden (and therefore more dangerous). Since this is due to the action of the laws of nature, like gravity, no one can escape from this danger. Even religious institutions and spiritualists in high positions are subject to this great danger.

Politics has often been compared to sex and has the same devices and purposes; indeed, politics is especially dangerous for those who have accepted the renounced order of life. How many times we have seen godbrothers turn into godfathers? The problem is that, since we are eternally loving servants of God, when we do not love we inevitably fall into lust. And thus we are trapped in the last snare of illusion: false liberation in the form of artificial *sannyasa*.

In such position, the tendency to act in search of pleasure can easily bring a conditioned soul to various hidden or secret perversions, and then cover everything up with a tight lid in the name of public image, decency, social order and respect for religion and tradition. Often this leads to pursue enjoyment and pleasure in a very negative way, through degraded sadistic and masochistic practices that are disgusting for any normal people. These forms of sense gratification are not meritorious or sinless as some people believe, and in fact they are much more dangerous than ordinary healthy sense gratification: such a course of action will not lead to evolution, it will bring total disaster.

We find the word *vicaksanah* also at the conclusion of Krishna's instructions to Uddhava (*Bhagavata Purana* 11.25.33): *tasmad deham imam labdhva, jnana vijnana sambhavam, guna sangam vinirdhuya, mam bhajantu vicaksanah*, "Therefore as they have obtained a suitable material body that enables knowledge and wisdom, experienced and intelligent people wash themselves clean of all the material *gunas* and should engage in my service".

The original purpose of *sannyasa* is expressed by its literal meaning as a compound of *sat nyasa*, "consecrating one's body to *Sat* (Transcendence)". In Vedic tradition and especially in the teachings of the *Tantras* we find that the worshiper of the Deity performs the *kriya* ("duty") called *nyasa*, that consists in placing *mantras* (*bija mantras* and *nama mantras*) on the various parts of his/ her body to purify and spiritualize it, thus making it suitable to

come in contact with the Deity. *Kara nyasa* is the application to the hands (fingers tips and finger joints), while *anga nyasa* is the application to the main limbs and even the organs of the body. *Utpatti* and *samhara nyasa* consist in the complete cycle of sanctification or dedication of one's body. An example offered in *Bhagavata Purana* is in reference to the Narayana kavaca (6.8.4-11).

All these rituals and practices are superseded when the power of the transcendental consciousness has destroyed all material identifications and attachments, and thus it has completely spiritualized the body. However, one should be extremely careful not to fall in the trap of false ego disguised as the "great *avadhuta*" or "great devotee" who believes he can do anything he pleases - including grossly adharmic actions - because he is "transcendentally above the rules", sometimes even while exhibiting the garb of *sannyasi*. Any adharmic action (*papa*) is in itself the evidence that the person is not at all on the transcendental level (7.28).

VERSE 3

त्याज्यं दोषवदित्येके कर्म प्राहुर्मनीषिणः ।

tyājyaṁ doṣavadityeke karma prāhurmanīṣiṇaḥ ।

यज्ञदानतपःकर्म न त्याज्यमिति चापरे ॥ १८-३ ॥

yajñādānatapaḥkarma na tyājyamiti cāpare ॥ 18-3 ॥

tyajyam: *tyaga*; *dosa vat*: defective; *iti*: thus; *eke*: some people; *karma*: activity; *prahuh*: they say; *manisinah*: great thinkers; *yajna dana tapah karma*: the (dutiful) activities of sacrifice,

charity and austerity; *na*: not/ never; *tyajyam*: to be given up; *iti*: thus; *ca*: and; *apare*: others.

"Some philosophers say that all activities are fraught with defects and must therefore be abandoned. Others say that *yajna*, *dana*, *tapas* should never be abandoned.

In our introduction to chapter 3 (*Karma yoga*) we have discussed about the old controversy between the supporters of the *Purva mimamsa* and those of the *Uttara mimamsa*, also known as respectively *karma kanda* and *jnana kanda* or *advaita*. Krishna has referred to the *karma kanda* category as *veda vada ratas* (2.42, 2.43, 2.44, 2.45) or those who are attached to the letter of the *Vedas* and are unable to see beyond the cycle of *samsara* and thus attain liberation.

Colonial academics believed that the *Purva mimamsa* refers to more ancient times when the entire Vedic society was focused entirely on the ritualistic path, worshiping the Devas for the purpose of elevation to the higher planets, and that only in relatively recent times Vedic philosophy developed the subtler metaphysical understanding expressed in the *Upanishads*, and finally the personalistic (almost "monotheistic") worship of Purushottama as we find in the *Puranas* and *Bhagavad gita* (contained in *Mahabharata*), that usually they relate to the abrahamic concept of God.

Mainstream academicians even assigned a temporal frame to each of these "periods" calculated on the conventionally taught "linear progress" of mankind, in which civilization proper started only about 5000 years ago in the Middle East with the first Sumerian cities. This old paradigm is based on the infamous Aryan invasion theory, according to which Sanskrit, together with Vedic knowledge and Vedic civilization, was introduced in India only around 2000 BCE by the marauding Caucasian nomads that

invaded the Indian subcontinent and enslaved the primitive but pacific Dravidians. This is generally labeled as the "Rig Vedic period", in which *brahmanas* were a sort of black wizards performing weird animal sacrifices to please blood-thirsty and primitive gods of war such as Indra and Rudra.

A sincere student of Vedic knowledge will not be confused by this colonial garbage, declaredly engineered for the purpose of demolishing the authority of the original Vedic tradition. The fact is that the entire Vedic knowledge is a consistent and articulated system, that exists simultaneously and eternally in its entirety but offers different degrees of approach to each individual in accord to their specific and particular level of evolution.

Thus, the word *purva* ("before", "initial") does not apply to some earlier historical period of the Indian subcontinent, but to the earliest stages of development of each individual, that must be supported and nurtured by society through the proper *varna-ashrama* system, with the promise of material benefits (in this life and in the next) that can best attract unevolved souls. In this connection, the word *uttara* ("higher") that juxtaposes *Uttara mimamsa* to *Purva mimamsa* must be understood as the "higher course of studies" that develops into *yoga* or *advaita* as clearly explained by Krishna in *Bhagavad gita*. This is also confirmed by the very name of the category of *Puranas* ("ancient"), that colonial indologists risibly consider "the most recent Vedic literature". If they are called "ancient", how can they be the most recent? It does not make any sense.

Krishna offers the perfect synthesis between the two perspectives in the form of Karma yoga or *tyaga*, that is the dutiful performance of prescribed duties as required by time, place and circumstance, for the higher purpose of serving the Supreme, without any selfish attachment or identification. This position has been explained under all possible perspectives all along the *Bhagavad gita* and

will be again summarized in this last chapter. When a *mimamsaka* becomes purified after so many lifetimes of sattvic activities, he starts to see that even pious actions involve some measure of defects, or greed and violence (3.38). This will be clearly stated in verse 18.48 with the example of fire and smoke; obviously this is even more applicable to the situation of the unfortunate people living in Kali yuga.

VERSE 4

निश्चयं शृणु मे तत्र त्यागे भरतसत्तम ।

niścayaṁ śṛṇu me tatra tyāge bharatasattama ।

त्यागो हि पुरुषव्याघ्र त्रिविधः सम्प्रकीर्तितः ॥ १८-४ ॥

tyāgo hi puruṣavyāghra trividhaḥ samprakirtitaḥ ॥ 18-4 ॥

niscayam: certainly; *srnu*: listen; *me*: to me; *tatra*: there; *tyage*: in the matter of renunciation; *bharata sat tama*: o best among the descendants of Bharata; *tyagah*: *tyaga*; *hi*: indeed; *purusa vyaghra*: o tiger among men; *tri vidhah*: three types of; *samprakirtitah*: it is declared officially.

"Listen to me, o best among the descendants of Bharata, o tiger among men. Indeed it is declared that there are three types of renunciation.

The three types of renunciation that Krishna will describe in the next verses are determined by the influences of the *gunas* explained in previous chapters (14, 16, 17); renunciation in *sattva* or goodness (or even in *suddha sattva*) is always beneficial, while

renunciation in *rajas* or greed has temporary and limited results, and renunciation in *tamas* or ignorance actually brings bad results.

Ideally, *sadhus* in the renounced order of life should be real saints (situated in *suddha sattva*), persons who have attained the platform of *brahma bhuta*, and whose association is the most valuable, blessed and pure treasure any human being can find in this world. Such persons do not see other people sexually, as males or females, but simply as spirit souls, parts and parcels of the Supreme, spiritual servants of Purushottama. These great souls are perfectly satisfied in themselves and do not need, expect or ask anything for themselves: they are not interested in sense gratification. They practice self discipline naturally and easily and are engaged 24 hours a day in selfless service to the Supreme and all beings.

A second group of celibate religionists is slightly less advanced but nonetheless very respectable: it is composed by sincere spiritual practitioners situated in *sattva* or material goodness, who are diligently trying to engage in self discipline for restraining their senses and do their best to serve the Supreme. This is a good position for a *brahmachari*, but not so safe for a *sannyasi*, because while a *brahmachari* can eventually take to family life if needed, a *sannyasi* is not supposed to renounce renunciation and become a *vantasi* ("one who eats his own vomit").

The third group is typically composed by men who have been frustrated in material life - they tried but did not succeed - or think that, in order to be spiritualists (and obtain the spiritual benefits or success) they must give up all pleasures and happiness. They consciously or unconsciously follow the philosophy of the sour grapes. But will they be able to engage positively in some good spiritual work, or will they simply become a nuisance for themselves and for others?

If they rise to *sattva* and *suddha sattva*, they will be able to make progress, but if they become established in *rajas* (selfishness and greed) and *tamas* (ignorance), they will become dry, cruel, insensitive, rough, proud and vainglorious, thus spoiling their own chances for spiritual progress and giving a very bad and misleading example to others.

If they think they have reached some elevated platform simply because of the external trappings (color or shape of dress, etc) they will not realize their foolishness until Mother Maya arranges for their noisy downfall. Usually these people are attracted by the idea of getting power over others (i.e. telling them what to do with their private lives), as well as attaining a worshipable position in society, special opportunities for name, fame and profit and other similar material benefits.

The fourth (utterly tamasic) group is not actually worth of the name of renunciates at all, as it is composed by frauds and hypocrites, who deliberately and cynically take advantage of their artificial dress to shamelessly exploit innocent and ignorant people for their own personal sense gratification and profit.

These people think of themselves as very clever and choose the life of a religionist simply because it ensures easy food, quiet sleep, very little or no work, sufficient respect from the society and sometimes very good opportunities for sense gratification. When these people do not obtain money, facilities or adoration (which they think is due to them simply because of their dress), they get angry and revengeful.

VERSE 5

यज्ञदानतपःकर्म न त्याज्यं कार्यमेव तत् ।

yajñadānatapaḥkarma na tyājyaṁ kāryameva tat ।

यज्ञो दानं तपश्चैव पावनानि मनीषिणाम् ॥ १८-५ ॥

yajño dānaṁ tapaścaiva pāvanāni manīṣiṇām ॥ 18-5 ॥

yajna dana tapah karma: the activities of sacrifice, charity and austerity; *na*: never; *tyajyam*: to be given up; *karyam*: duty; *eva*: certainly; *tat*: that; *yajnah*: sacrifice; *danam*: charity; *tapah*: austerity; *ca*: and; *eva*: certainly; *pavanani*: purifying; *manisinam*: even for great sages.

"The dutiful activities of sacrifice, charity and austerity should never be given up, because sacrifice, charity and austerity certainly purify even great philosophers.

The sacred actions that are prescribed in the scriptures and performed for the real benefit of the people (*yajna*, or sacrifice), the distribution of necessities for life to deserving people (*dana*), and the hard work in the service of the Supreme (*tapas*) should never be given up.

Some deluded men take up the position of *sannyasa* in order to live as a parasite of the society without actually working, with the idea that they will automatically get respect, service and special material facilities from the general mass of people, obtain a free ticket out of family responsibilities or acquire power in a religious institution: such renunciation never brings the real fruits of *sannyasa*. On the contrary, it only brings sufferings to everyone and will certainly end in a disastrous downfall in the future.

According to the original genuine *varna* and *ashrama* system, the duties of *yajna*, *dana* and *tapas* may take different shapes that best serve the purpose of one's activities. *Brahmanas* are expected to perform all the required duties in each subsequent *ashrama* (as *brahmachari*, *grihastha*, *vanaprastha* and *sannyasi*), while *kshatriyas* are only expected to perform the duties of the *ashramas* up to the *vanaprastha* stage. *Vaisyas* are expected to remain in the *grihastha ashrama* to advise and support their descendants, while there are no expectations of renunciation for *sudras*.

This does not mean that these lower *varnas* are forbidden to enter further *ashramas*, because they certainly can make such choice if they so desire, if they are qualified and strong enough, and if they have properly understood the rules and regulations they will have to follow.

In the *brahmachari ashrama*, the performance of *yajna* is a learning practice and is done in turn and together with other students under the careful watch of the *guru*. Its *dana* only consists in offering one's service and daily begging collections to the *guru*, and *tapas* only consists in following the *guru's* instructions. In the *grihastha ashrama*, *yajna* must be performed regularly every day in accordance to one's possibilities, and must include the selfless performance of one's social and professional duties in the service of society. More specifically, it is meant to repay one's debts (*rina*) with the *pancha maha yajnas* to serve God, the Devas, the Rishis, one's ancestors, guests (including meritorious human beings) and useful animals. *Dana* consists in feeding and clothing and in general taking care of the other 3 *ashramas*, while *tapas* consists in disciplining one's sense gratification to remain in *sattva* and within the limits of *dharma* (*satya*, *daya*, *sauca*). In regard to ritual ceremonies, one is only required to perform sattvic procedures, as there is never any compulsory prescription for animal sacrifices or other procedures influenced by *rajas* or *tamas*.

In the *vanaprastha* and *sannyasa ashramas*, the practice of *yajna* becomes increasingly focused on inner meditation, as elaborated in the *Aranyakas* and *Upanishads*; in this regard we may comment that *aranya* and *vana* are exact synonyms for "forest", indicating that after exhausting the need for the ritualistic worship of *naimittika* and *kamyā karmani*, a sober person moves from the swamp of material entanglement (2.52) to the transcendental forest of freedom. This was indicated by the passage from verse 3.9 to verse 3.17 and from verse 3.18 to 13.20. The stage of *sannyasa* totally focuses on inner spiritual activities as *yajna*, *dana* and *tapas*, totally abandoning all material concerns. However, *sannyasis* too are supposed to work hard in the service of society, engaging in the assistance of those who are in need with all the resources they can utilize.

There is no contradiction between the *Purva mimamsa* and the *Uttara mimamsa*, as both are stages of the journey of transcendental realization, and both will be overcome and integrated when we move to Yoga. Krishna has already declared: *tapasvibhyo 'dhiko yogi jnanibhyo 'pi mato 'dhikah, karmibhyas cadhiko yogi tasmad yogi bhavarjuna*, "The *yogi* is superior to the ascetic and is considered also greater than the scholar, and greater than those who perform ritualistic activities. Therefore, o Arjuna, you should be a *yogi*" (6.46). The ascetic is the *sannyasi*, the scholar is the *vanaprastha* and he who performs the ritualistic activities is the *grihastha*; similarly the perfection for a *brahmanas* is asceticism, detachment from material wealth and position, and abstaining from sense gratification, while perfection for the *kshatriya* is the material and spiritual knowledge he needs to rule well, and perfection for a *vaisya* is the performance of the ritualistic ceremonies by which he regularly purifies and distributes the wealth he has amassed. A *brahmachari* is not qualified yet as *adhikari* and the *sudra* is only required to sincerely serve others.

VERSE 6

एतान्यपि तु कर्माणि सङ्गं त्यक्त्वा फलानि च ।

etānyapi tu karmāṇi saṅgam̐ tyaktvā phalāni ca ।

कर्तव्यानीति मे पार्थ निश्चितं मतमुत्तमम् ॥ १८-६ ॥

kartavyānīti me pārtha niścitaṁ matamuttamam ॥ 18-6 ॥

etani: all these; *api*: certainly; *tu*: but; *karmani*: activities; *sangam*: association; *tyaktva*: abandoning; *phalani ca*: and the results; *kartavyani*: should be performed as duty; *iti*: thus; *me*: my; *partha*: o son of Pritha; *niscitam*: without a doubt; *matam*: opinion; *uttamam*: the best.

"O son of Pritha, I tell you without any doubt that the best course is to perform all sacred activities as duties, abandoning the identification and the fruits of such actions.

To properly understand this verse, we need to focus on three words: *sangam*, *phalani*, *kartavyani*.

All along *Bhagavad gita*, Krishna has said numerous times that *sanga* ("association", "contact", "belonging", "affiliation") must be free from the material delusions of identification and attachment. In this regard, we should consult verses 2.46, 2.47, 2.48, 3.9, 4.20, 4.23, 5.10, 5.11, 11.55, 12.18, 15.3, 15.5, and also (in the negative perspective) 2.62, 3.26, 13.22, 14.6-8, 15.4. So the concept of contact or association boils down to the identification as the *karta* ("the doer"), as expressed in verse 3.27. In that context we can see that the idea of remaining free from the contact or identification with the action automatically applies to the results or benefits of one's dutiful activities, and this means that one should perform dutiful actions selflessly, without being attached to the gross and subtle benefits that derive from it.

This is a totally revolutionary concept for those who come from a pragmatist (i.e. selfish) society, where profit and personal advantage (individual or collective) is the norm, and the idea of someone working without any expectation of personal benefit or credit is considered stupid or risible, and even natural creatures and eternal knowledge are subject to legal appropriation, patent registration and payment of royalties.

Yet, this selfless performance of one's duties is the only method by which human society can thrive and prosper and guarantee the progress and evolution of all its members. Any honest and intelligent sociologist can create study projections based on such scenario, and invariably it will be found perfect and successful. In Vedic society nobody gets paid - salary or fees or commission or compensation - for any specific work; everybody works for free and only gets the proper necessities of life because that is fair and natural, and obtains wealth (*artha*) as general recognition for their personal value.

Vaisyas directly produce food (*annam bahu kurvita, tad vratam, Taittiriya Upanishad, Brighu valli, 3.9.1*) and consume the amount they require for themselves and for their subordinates (*sudras*, etc), not only in its direct form but also in the form of other necessities that can be obtained by bartering from other producers and entrepreneurs and craftsmen, such as clothes, pots and vessels, tools and instruments, etc. Then they give a proper amount of the surplus wealth (food products and other goods) to the *brahmanas* as donation (*dakshina, bhiksha*) and to the *kshatriyas* as tribute. Some amount is stored for emergencies and further agricultural development, and if there is still a surplus, it is used to barter for other goods and valuables to be stored for the future benefit of the society at large. There are no loafers because the *brahmanas*, the *gurus* and the *kshatriyas* make sure that everyone is properly and happily engaged according to their actual *guna* and *karma* and

training. At the same time, everyone is taken care of, and taking pride and joy in their work for the benefit of the entire social body. As in the healthy and natural functioning of the body and its limbs, the various organs work without any selfish attachment but automatically obtain everything they need; the mouth enjoys the food but immediately sends it down to the stomach so that it can be properly digested (and the stomach also enjoys full satisfaction) and distributed to each and every organ and cell of the body. In this way there is no place for fear, hatred, envy, laziness, stress, or dissatisfaction, because communication and cooperation are perfect.

The definition of *phala* as "the fruit of the action" in reference to *karma yoga* and *sannyasa yoga* brings to mind the beautiful example of a person who plants a fruit tree in a public place, so that everyone will get its blessings and benefits. The situation in human society is now so degraded that people not only jealously guard their own orchards and trees, but avoid planting fruit trees even on their own land property because they are tired of getting their fruits stolen and destroyed by looters, thieves and envious monkeys. As a result, everybody suffers and is deprived, including the stupid monkeys. *Phala* as fruit of the action is explained in verses 2.43, 2.47, 2.49 (*kripanas* are those attached to such fruits), 2.51 (*manisinah* are those who are not attached to such fruits), 4.20, 5.4, 5.12, 5.14, 6.1 (*anasritah*, "not taking shelter" in such fruits), 7.23, 9.28 (detachment from such fruits as being called *sannyasa yoga*), 12.11, 12.12, 17.11, 17.12, 17.17, 17.20, and 17.25.

The word *kartavya*, "what is to be done", describes the dutiful action on the basis of *dharma*, ethical considerations, or conscience. Contrarily to despotic and ignorant ideologies where one is ordered and forced to carry out actions even against one's better judgment and ethical conscience, in *sanatana dharma* or

Vedic culture the concept of duty is always based on the intelligent choice of a conscious act of personal free will. Without freedom, there cannot be any evolution or progress, and certainly no satisfaction or happiness.

VERSE 7

नियतस्य तु संन्यासः कर्मणो नोपपद्यते ।

niyatasya tu sannyāsaḥ karmaṇo nopapadyate ।

मोहात्तस्य परित्यागस्तामसः परिकीर्तितः ॥ १८-७ ॥

mohāttasya parityāgastāmasaḥ parikīrtitaḥ ॥ 18-7 ॥

niyatasya: of the prescribed duty; *tu*: but; *sannyasah*: renunciation; *karmanah*: the activities; *na*: never; *upapadyate*: should be done; *mohat*: due to illusion; *tasya*: of them; *parityagah*: abandoning; *tamasah*: because of *tamas guna*; *parikirtitah*: has been explained.

"One should never renounce the activities of his/ her proper engagement. It has been explained that one who abandons them out of illusion is under the influence of ignorance.

We have seen that *tamas* (ignorance) produces laziness, stupidity, confusion and inertia, and that sometimes foolish people confuse such symptoms for noble sattvic characteristics. Later (18.32) Krishna will very clearly say that *tamas* deludes people into mistaking (and presenting) *dharma* as *adharmā*, and *adharmā* as *dharma*. It is very easy to observe this fact in the present degraded asuric society, that is ruled largely by *tamas* with some measure of *rajas*.

Speaking of *sannyasa*, we have seen many men dressed in saffron, red and pink robes presenting themselves as staunch renunciates, who live perpetually immersed in apathy, irresponsibility and laziness, sleepily rambling now and then about the sexual life of married people, and are roused only when they see some opportunity to collect donations from the public by exploiting the good name and merits of the founder of their organization, to get followers who will worship and serve them, or to engage in political power games and institutional fighting, or to actively persecute dissenters especially those who bring good logical arguments or present the original genuine Vedic version. And also all of the above, if time and energy suffice. Some of the most malicious ones may object that such activities of persecution of heretics and infidels constitute their specific service to society, but there is no such provision in the Vedic system. Unlike abrahamic ideologies and other totalitarian and imperialistic systems, Vedic civilization clearly teaches that renunciates and spiritualists must never try to enforce religious or ideological beliefs and behaviors on people, or encroach on people's personal lives and choices (or instruct others to do that). *Sannyasis*, *sadhus* and *brahmanas* can only offer teachings and advice, in speech and writing and by personal example.

On the other hand, *kshatriyas* and other government people, who enforce law and order, can only take material physical action to stop violent aggressions against the *prajas* - human and animal members of society. There should be no moral policing or persecution of dissenters or forced conversions. If false religionists become a nuisance for society by openly preaching in favor of violent aggression against innocent people, they should be challenged to debate by *brahmanas*; their followers should be prevented from putting such teachings into practice, and their targeted victims should be helped to defend themselves even to the extreme consequences (by killing the aggressor).

Only in extreme emergencies the assembly of the *brahmanas* can use their spiritual power (*brahma tejas*) to curse and remove an evil adharmic ruler who has not been defeated in duel by dharmic *kshatriyas*, but after the bad king has been deposed, the *brahmanas* will never step in and take control of the government, individually or collectively, even if they were capable of doing a good job as rulers. If a *grihastha brahmana* takes this step, he will lose his position as *brahmana* and become a *kshatriya* to all effects, with the attending rights and duties and limitations, but his position will still be respectable.

A *sannyasi* however (whatever *varna* he used to belong to) is strictly forbidden from having anything to do with government or politics, because by so doing he automatically becomes the object of ridicule for the entire society. Therefore one should think very carefully before entering the renounced order, especially considering that in Kali yuga nobody is required or even expected to take *sannyasa*. In case of extreme emergency and very serious danger for innocent and good people, a *sadhu* or *sannyasi* can temporarily take a *kshatriya* role to fight back violent invaders or criminals if there are no qualified *kshatriyas* left. However in that case the *sadhus* will only perform that duty without getting entangled in any measure of political power mongering, luxury, and attempts to control the personal lives and beliefs of the subjects.

An arrogant person who demands worship, service, sense gratification, profit and special material position and facilities because of his wearing the garb of a *sannyasi* or *sadhu* and refuses to engage in useful activities for the benefit of all beings (claiming to be "renounced") actually has no transcendental realization and is controlled by *tamas*. Therefore those who accept him as *guru* or superior and offer him wealth and service will share his negative karmic consequences and develop the same mentality and attitude,

perpetuating the social disaster. As Krishna has already said very clearly, everyone should work seriously and honestly for the benefit of society: *niyatam kuru karma tvam karma jyayo hy akarmanah, sarira yatrapa ca te na prasiddhyed akarmanah*, "Engage in your dutiful work, because action is better than non-action. Without action, it is even impossible to maintain the body" (3.8). The only creatures who do not perform useful work in the universe but subsists at the expenses of others without giving anything valuable in return are called parasites.

In this verse we notice the word *niyatam* as a derivative from *niyama*, or "regulated activities in which one should engage", as the counterpart of *yama* or "regulated abstentions". We have found the same word in verse 7.20 to indicate the prescribed method to worship the Devas, in verse 4.29 to indicate the proper scientific practice of *pranayama yoga* and in verse 6.15 to indicate the proper practice of meditation (*dhyana yoga*) on the *atman*.

As we have seen in the scientific system of the *varnas* and *ashramas*, these *niyata* (or *nitya*, "eternal") *karmani* or *kartavyani* can vary according to one's *guna*, *karma*, training and circumstances, but still one needs to always remain fully engaged and without selfishness, otherwise the mind and the soul will not be satisfied. This is confirmed in *Bhagavata Purana*: *sa vai pumsam paro dharmo yato bhaktir adhoksaje, ahaituki apratihata yayatma suprasidati*, "The highest perfection of one's *sva dharma* is to perform one's duties in a spirit of loving dedication and service, without interruption and without selfishness" (1.2.6).

The word *upapadyate* ("it is not justified", "it is not befitting", "it is unworthy", "it is below one's position") was found in verse 2.3 when Krishna told Arjuna that withdrawing from the battlefield would be disgraceful for him, and in verse 6.39 when Arjuna tells Krishna that others are less qualified than him to dispel his doubts. Many people born in families of great ancestry have neglected or

dropped their duties because of ignorance and greed, and their descendants have become so degraded that their behavior and conclusions can be easily recognized as asuric, yet in their delusion and confusion they continue to believe they are situated in a high position in society as *brahmanas*, *acharyas*, *gosvamis* etc, even without making any effort in performing their duties or purifying their existence. They eagerly spend plenty of time in watching stupid TV shows and immoral films, but they have no time to read the scriptures or practice even the shortest meditation in *sandhya vandana* and they do not follow any rule or restriction in their diet. What to speak of consecrating their food, they develop a habit of eating non-vegetarian stuff and even become aggressively offensive towards those who dare expound the benefits of vegetarianism.

Thus they have lost all intelligence and good sense, and slide into a hellish way of life.

VERSE 8

दुःखमित्येव यत्कर्म कायक्लेशभयात्त्यजेत् ।

duḥkhamityeva yatkarma kāyakleśabhayāṭtyajet ।

स कृत्वा राजसं त्यागं नैव त्यागफलं लभेत् ॥ १८-८ ॥

sa kṛtvā rājasam tyāgam naiva tyāgaphalam labhet ॥ 18-8 ॥

duḥkham: distress; *iti*: thus; *eva*: certainly; *yat*: which; *karma*: work; *kaya klesa*: physical trouble; *bhayat*: because of fear; *tyajet*: gives up; *sah*: s/he; *kṛtvā*: doing; *rajasam*: under the influence of *rajas*; *tyagam*: renunciation; *na*: not; *eva*: certainly; *tyaga phalam*: the results of renunciation; *labhet*: obtains.

"Certainly one who gives up his duties because of fear of physical trouble or distress is acting under the influence of *rajas*, and cannot obtain the results of renunciation.

We have mentioned this category of renunciates in the commentary to verse 4 as those who have embraced the "sour grapes" ideology. Many celibates - *sannyasis* or life long *brahmacharis* - choose their position because they know that getting married and working at a regular job require a lot of effort and commitment, and entail many difficulties and hardships. In the best scenario they remain as children and innocent about what many people call "the ways of the world", but this usually makes them immature and irresponsible, unless of course they have developed spiritually beyond material identifications and limitations, and consistently demonstrate the symptoms described in the *shastra* in this regard. Not everyone can claim of being on the same platform as Narada Muni and his brothers the four Kumaras, who remained celibates but were certainly not immature in their realizations. The measuring rod is offered here by Krishna: the difference between a responsible mature person and an irresponsible child is that the adult will engage in the dutiful actions even if he is not attracted to them for some reason - when he is tired, or when the action entails some degree of suffering and unpleasantness, *kaya klesa* (bodily suffering or fatigue) or *dukha* (mental suffering), and so on.

Childish wannabe spiritualists will generally behave foolishly like children, whimsically moving from one engagement to the other or trying to avoid work in general, and exchange positions whimsically by claiming only rights and no duties. They like to gossip about each other and about outside people, try to get better toys than their mates, use Deities as dolls and the *divya lila* as nice fairy tales for their entertainment. They may play roles such as the big devotee, the *guru*, the king, the general secretary, the president,

the scholar and so on, but without truly understanding what these roles entail in the real world as they are always abandoning their responsibilities and never cleaning up their own mess.

Children scare easily and need to be protected and reassured by elders, and get bored especially about reading and studying and other tedious but productive work, which they generally try to avoid as much as possible. They do not really care to produce actual good results with their work but rely on fantasy and daydreaming or outright lies. Superficial materialistic people, who are usually rather immature themselves, tend to confuse a childish mentality with a transcendental one - in this way the entire society easily falls prey to ruthless and manipulative tyrants and conquerors who have no qualms in misleading, mistreating, cheating and exploiting children of all ages.

Those who renounce the proper duties because of fear of difficulties and strain are not really renunciates and therefore they will not attain the result of renunciation (*tyaga phalam*) described in the *shastra*. At most they will get some cheap adoration from ignorant people and an easy life at the expenses of the public, but at the time of death they will have to take a new birth, to pay their debts and make up for the wasted time by working twice as hard and facing twice as many hurdles as normally human beings have to deal with.

We have personally experienced this fact, and we are very concerned about those who are not aware of what is waiting for them in the future; it is not our intention to criticize anyone but rather we want to offer precious information and warnings to help people avoid unnecessary future sufferings caused by uninformed choices in this lifetime.

This verse shows that fear is a result of *rajas*, because it originates from the desire to obtain what is pleasurable and the desire to

avoid what is not pleasurable. Fear has been associated with anger in verses 2.56, 4.10 and 5.28, where Krishna has clearly stated that is must be overcome and abandoned. A person in *tamas* will remain lazy and callous and avoid to perform any real beneficial work; as s/he is only interested in immediate sense gratification and violence, s/he will usually be unaware of dangers and therefore may seem to be fearless.

A person situated in *sattva* is emotionally and mentally an adult, who deliberately and serenely sacrifices him/her self to perform the prescribed duty, without fear for the consequences, because s/he is detached from joys and sorrows as the fruits of action (*phalan*) as Krishna has repeatedly stated in *Bhagavad gita*.

VERSE 9

कार्यमित्येव यत्कर्म नियतं क्रियतेऽर्जुन ।

kāryamityeva yatkarma niyataṁ kriyate'arjuna ।

सङ्गं त्यक्त्वा फलं चैव स त्यागः सात्त्विको मतः ॥ १८-९ ॥

saṅgaṁ tyaktvā phalaṁ caiva sa tyāgaḥ sāttviko mataḥ ॥ 18-9 ॥

karyam: the duty to be performed; *iti*: thus; *eva*: certainly; *yat*: which; *karma*: work/ action; *niyatam*: prescribed; *kriyate*: is performed; *arjuna*: o Arjuna; *sangam*: association; *tyaktva*: giving up; *phalam*: the result; *ca*: and; *eva*: certainly; *sah*: that; *tyagah*: renunciation; *sattvikah*: in *sattva guna*; *matah*: considered.

"O Arjuna, one should certainly perform the activities of one's prescribed duties, but renouncing the result (of such actions). This is truly considered renunciation in *sattva*.

For most people in our present society the idea of renunciation is based on celibacy or freedom from marriage and family responsibilities, so in general one is considered a *sannyasi* if he is not officially married and has no progeny. However, we should notice that here Krishna is using the word *tyaga* and not *sannyasa*, as a person who has already officially entered the order of *sannyasa* cannot possibly engage in any activity that could create fruits or duties in regard to marriage, children, or professional pursuits. One can enter *sannyasa* only after completing and resolving all such duties and past pending matters, and the very strict rules of *sannyasa* ensure that no new karmic debts will be initiated. In other words, Krishna gives much more importance to *tyaga* than to *sannyasa*.

According to the traditional Vedic culture, every man has a natural debt (*rina*) to pay to his parents and ancestors for the benefits he obtained by taking birth - a good caring home, emotional and financial support, fundamental training in self-preservation and ethics, etc. This debt is paid by keeping up the good name of the family (with one's good behavior) and by producing at least one child to continue the lineage and perform the rituals for the departed ancestors. Therefore marriage is a specific duty for all the members of the higher *varnas* - *brahmanas*, *kshatriyas* and *vaisyas*. *Sudras* do not have such duty because they are not able to fulfill it, or in other words, they individually lack the *guna* and *karma* required for the job; they usually perform the very simple ritual of *gandharva* marriage and have children out of affection and not out of duty, but still they loyally take care of their family.

This brings us to an extremely important point: generating an offspring is not something that one should do lightly, as a natural biological instinct (like ordinary animals do) or as a mere social or cultural custom or expectation. The *Bhagavata Purana* (5.5.18) clearly states: *gurur na sa syat, sva jano na sa syat, pita na sa syaj*

janani na sa syat, daivam na tat syan, na patis ca sa syan, na mocayed yah samupeta mrtyum, "One should not (dare to) become a *guru*, a kinsman, a father or mother, a worshiped superior or a husband/ protector if s/he is not able to deliver his/ her subordinates from death".

What does this mean? Everyone who has taken a material body will have to die (2.18, 2.27), so how can one deliver him/ her from death? Here "death" indicates the identification with the material body, because it is only the material body that will die (2.13, 2.17, 2.18, 2.20, 2.30). So we can only be saved from death if our superiors see us and treat us as eternal spirit souls (*atman/ brahman*), not as bodies: this means that before venturing to take up the responsible position as guardian of another creature, one should be fully established on the transcendental level, or at least able to treat people on that level (*brahma achara*).

We see here that father and mother are mentioned on the same level of *guru*, and in fact the role of parent is even more decisive and crucial than the role of any teacher. One is not a genuine religious teacher if he encourages people to beget many children just to increase the numbers of a materially identified community, without the proper ethical and spiritual preparation, and sometimes without the minimum of education and affectionate care that even animals provide to their young.

"Delivering" a baby is not a mere physical action like "delivering" a pizza, human beings are no "breeding" animals, and no pregnancy should be considered a "mistake" or a "nuisance" or "disturbance" so that one wants to "dump the load and hit the road". If a person feels a strong desire for romantic love and sex, s/he should marry, get healthy intercourse and happily have a baby if a pregnancy ensues. Renunciation in *sattva* consists in dutifully taking care of wife and children for as long as necessary, without expecting their service and worship in return.

Under no circumstance the idea of religious or spiritual renunciation can be used to justify running away from wife and especially young children and refusing to take responsibility for their maintenance and protection.

This also brings us to the sensitive issue of birth control and abortion; if a person simply suffers from a hormonal lust problem and is not ready to take the responsibility for a family, contraceptive means should be used to avoid pregnancy. Before the advent of abrahamic ideologies, many natural methods (especially herbal medicines) were used to prevent unwanted pregnancies, and nobody ever thought they were immoral in any way. They were not considered something "against the laws of nature assigning the punishment of pregnancy for the sin of sense gratification". They were just a medicine like any other. Claiming that birth control is against God's laws because it allows sinners to escape the consequences of their actions is like saying that digestive aids are sinful and should be criminalized and their use punished, because they help gluttons to escape the rightful sufferings and damages of occasional consumption of excessive or inappropriate food, or that it is against God's laws to mend a broken bone that was the consequence of a bad judgment in jumping over an obstacle or running downhill.

In ancient times it was extremely rare (if not unheard of) for women to actually chose to abort their baby, but not because abortion was banned or punished by law or social persecution. First of all because there was no concept of "illegitimate child": the very fact of having been conceived made a child perfectly valid, true and legitimate, and nobody would even dare to think of mistreating or disrespecting such a child or his/ her mother on the so-called "immoral" basis of that birth. In all non-abrahamic cultures, motherhood is revered as sacred in itself, and not considered a "contamination" or "loss of honor" in any case. Also,

abortion is a very serious matter, because it always entails acute physical and mental sufferings for the mother as well as considerable risks even when it is legally allowed and performed in a medically safe way, and if a woman makes this extreme choice, it is to be understood that she has no better alternatives and she is really desperate.

In Vedic civilization, any woman who for some reason does not have the active support of a husband to raise a child can take shelter in an *ashrama* (like for example the mother of Lava and Kusha, and the mother of Prahlada) without having to officially become a lifelong and exclusively dedicated disciple of the *guru* of the *ashrama* or take vows of strict discipline or penance for the rest of her life. Also, there was no such thing as "pre-marital sex" or "extra marital sex", simply because sex itself was considered a legal and legitimate form of marriage *per se* (see the Gandharva marriage, for example).

Husbands and wives who married in this way were free to live together or apart as they consensually saw fit, without being censored by "society" or even worse, by "religious authorities". Multiple marriages (that did not violate the basic principles of ethics such as truthfulness and compassion) were also accepted as normal and legitimate, and not condemned.

We know that Veda Vyasa was born of the casual sexual encounter of his mother Satyavati with the Rishi Parasara, and that his parents never lived together and apparently never had any further contact; certainly when king Santanu asked Satyavati to marry him, there is no record of anyone asking Parasara's opinion or permission, and Satyavati became the official queen mother for the future heirs to the throne. Nobody thought even for one moment that she should have hidden the existence of a previous son, and rather Vyasa was respectfully called to the court to help his step-brothers to get children who could continue the dynasty.

Even prostitution was considered normal and acceptable in Vedic times ; it was a perfectly legal and respectable occupation, not persecuted or subject to any constraint or sanction, and did not have any parasitic "protectors" that exploited the girls, because nobody would even dream about trying to hurt a prostitute. And of course there was no human trafficking or sexual slavery.

All prostitutes could easily and freely move to different occupations and social positions, so their children had all opportunities to get a good education and engage in different professional occupations than their mother's. In such a civilized society, there was NO need for a woman to kill her unexpected baby , and if ever she did do that (like Gandhari and Ganga), nobody criticized her.

In this verse, *karya* ("duty") is the proper ethical action that should be taken in any given circumstance, and it refers to the constructive or productive work as well to the acceptance of the difficulties and sufferings connected to that particular situation.

The expression *sanga tyaktva*, "giving up the association", means that one should not identify or be attached to the actions or its consequences; in the example of marriage and family, a truly renounced man sees his wife and children as parts of God's body, God's creatures and servants, and not as parts of his own body, his own creatures or servants. Only in this way he will be able to protect them from death.

Of course this also applies to mothers, not to fathers only, but we have hardly ever seen any woman abandoning her child under the pretext of religious or spiritual renunciation - except when forced to do so by others.

VERSE 10

न द्वेष्ट्यकुशलं कर्म कुशले नानुषज्जते ।

na dveṣṭyakuśalam karmā kuśale nānuṣajjate ।

त्यागी सत्त्वसमाविष्टो मेधावी छिन्नसंशयः ॥ १८-१० ॥

tyāgī sattvasamāviṣṭo medhāvī chinnaśaṁśayaḥ ॥ 18-10 ॥

na dveṣṭi: does not hate; *akusalam:* unpleasant; *karma:* work; *kuśale:* pleasurable; *na anusajjate:* does not become attached; *tyāgi:* the renounced person; *sattva samavistah:* focused on *sattva*; *medhavi:* who is intelligent; *chinna śamsayah:* having cut off all doubts.

"A renounced person who is situated in *sattva* does not hate what is unpleasant and does not become attached to what is pleasant. Through intelligence, s/he overcomes all doubts (regarding duty).

The point of dutiful and detached action is repeated here for further clarity and associated with the expressions *dveṣṭi* and *anusajjate*. The words *dveṣṭi* and *dvesa* ("s/he hates" and "hatred" as in the opposite of *raga* or "attraction") were mentioned in verses 2.57, 2.64, 3.34, 5.3, 7.27, 9.28, 12.13, 12.17, 13.7, 14.22, and we certainly recommend our readers to refresh their memory by reading those verses and observing the usage of opposite terms of comparison, in a range from *abhinandati* ("praises"), *raga* ("attachment", "taste"), *kanksati* ("aspires", "desires"), *iccha* ("wishes", "dreams"), *priya* ("pleasing", "beloved"), and *hrisyati* ("enjoys pleasure/ happiness"). We find the word *sajjamaṇah* for example in *Bhagavata Purana* as "mentally attached" to the material objects created by the *gunas* (11.25.12), or attached to the activities of the material world (8.5.44).

The addition of the prefix *anu* reinforces the concept, indicating consistency or a prolonged situation.

The word *kusala* indicates "joy, pleasure, happiness", but also "expertise, good fortune, auspiciousness, a favorable situation, a religious situation, good discrimination". Of course *akusala* is the exact opposite, and it can come to cover a vast range of unpleasant and bad things, including what we could call "a bad job" with reference to situations and people. This verse clearly states that one should perform one's duty in a selfless way even when it entails unpleasantness or even the possibility of failure. In this regard, we can apply the same considerations we made about whimsical childish behavior versus the responsible behavior of brave and strong-minded adults.

Krishna had already mentioned the need to overcome the attachment to auspiciousness in verses 2.57, 9.28 and 12.17; this does not mean that we should not make any difference between *subha* and *asubha* (auspiciousness and inauspiciousness) but rather that we should not be attached to either in the fulfillment of our duties (*karma, karmani*). A corollary of this instruction implies that astrology and astrological remedies are not to be trusted excessively or depended on, but merely utilized as general indications or supports.

While the first part of the verse focuses on the determination in performing one's dutiful activities selflessly, without repulsion or attachment, the second part of the verse connects this attitude with true renunciation (*tyaga*), a firm position in goodness (*sattva samavistha*), intelligence or wisdom (*medha*), and the clarity of thought that dispels doubts (*chinna samsaya*) with the light of knowledge and realization. It is important to understand that doubts (*samsaya*) should be addressed and solved in the appropriate way and not merely dismissed or ignored, because that is the difference between *sattva* and *tamas*.

One who never doubts anything is not using sufficient intelligence (*medha*), but one who is never able to overcome doubts through the appropriate research and verification is foolish and lazy (2.7, 2.37, 3.2, 4.40, 4.41, 4.42, 5.1, 5.25, 6.23, 6.39, 7.1, 8.5, 10.7, 12.8, 18.6).

The word *medha* ("intelligence", "wisdom", "understanding") is particularly interesting, also with reference with the famous *yajnas* called *asvamedha* and *gomedha* that colonial indologists deviously and mistakenly described as ordinary animal sacrifices, respectively of a horse and a cow. The fact is that such *yajnas* were meant to worship and serve the principles called *asva* and *go* and not to slaughter the animals associated with those names, as we see for example in the expression *pitri medha* used to indicate the offerings to the *pitris* or ancestors (*Bhagavata Purana* 9.10.29, referring to Ramachandra). We find in *Atharva Veda* (*suktas* 52, 53 and 54) a long elaboration on the fact that the word *asva* indicates *kala*, time, "a horse which flows continuously with seven rays and thousands of axes (as plural form of "axis")" as the different planets, solar systems and galaxies (*sahasra aksha*). As the horse Kala is the father, the cow Bhumi (planet Earth, and by extension all planets) is the mother; the "coming home" of the cows therefore indicates the point in which the revolving planetary systems return in a particular position or "home". The word *bhumi* is closely connected to *bhuta*, meaning "being", "existent", or "element", indicating specifically an existence that has come to be by the aggregation of the various material elements of the universe.

A clear confirmation of the deep symbolic meaning of such rituals is given by the very famous *Purusha sukta* (*Rig Veda*, 10.90), that still today must be chanted in all ritual performances: "The Purusha has a thousand heads, a thousand eyes and a thousand feet. He fills the universe everywhere, although he is ten fingers

tall. This Purusha is everything that has been and everything that will be, even greater than the powerful Lord of immortality, that grows with nourishment. All the creatures are one fourth of his existence, while the three fourths are the eternal life in the world that is not subject to destruction... From him, Viraja has come to existence, and again from Viraja has the Purusha appeared... The Gods prepared the sacrifice and the sacrificial offering was the Purusha himself: they nourished him with grass, anointed him with balms. From the flesh of the sacrificial victim, clarified butter was created, the creatures of the air, the wild and domestic animals, the hymns of the *Rig* and the *Sama*, and the *mantras* and the rituals, from which the *Yajur* was born. From the body of the Purusha came forth the horses and the cattle with two rows of teeth... when they divided the flesh of the Purusha, how many portions did they prepare? The *brahmanas* were his mouth, his arms were the *kshatriyas*, the legs the *vaisyas*, and the feet the *sudras*. The moon was born from his mind, the sun from his eye, Indra and Agni from his mouth, Vayu from his breath. From his navel came the interplanetary space, the heavenly planets from his head, earth from his feet, and the planetary systems from his body... I know this great Purusha, who shines like the sun and transcends the darkness, and one who knows him in this way attains liberation in this very lifetime - indeed, there is no other road to liberation. The Lord of the universe lives in the universe, and he appears in many forms without ever taking birth... I offer my homage to the eternally resplendent Brahman, who gave the divine power to the Gods, who is the *guru* of the Gods and their Elder."

To reinforce the connection between this concept and the topic of *sannyasa* and *tyaga*, we would like to mention here a verse quoted from *Brahma vaivarta Purana*: *asvamedham gavalambham sannyasam pala paitrkam devarena sutotpattim kalau panca vivarjayet*, "In this age of Kali, five acts should be abandoned: the *asvamedha yajna*, the *gomedha yajna*, the acceptance of the order

of *sannyasa*, the offering of oblations to the forefathers, and a man's begetting children in his brother's wife."

Of course, this is because human society has lost its best qualifications and are unable to perform them correctly, not because such practices were too primitive or immoral for the "evolved civilized human beings" of our times, as some foolish ignorant people would believe.

VERSE 11

न हि देहभृता शक्यं त्यक्तुं कर्माण्यशेषतः ।

na hi dehabhṛtā śakyaṁ tyaktuṁ karmāṇyaśeṣataḥ ।

यस्तु कर्मफलत्यागी स त्यागीत्यभिधीयते ॥ १८-११ ॥

yastu karmaphalatyāgī sa tyāgītyabhidhīyate ॥ 18-11 ॥

na: not; *hi*: indeed; *deha bhrita*: by those who carry a body; *sakyam*: it is possible; *tyaktum*: to abandon; *karmani*: all activities; *asesatah*: endless; *yah*: one who; *tu*: but; *karma phala tyagi*: one who renounces the results of actions; *sah*: s/he; *tyagi*: (real) renouncer; *iti*: thus; *abhidhiyate*: it is said.

"Indeed for those who are embodied it is not possible to give up the vast numbers of the dutiful activities, therefore one who remains detached from the results of the activities is considered the real renouncer.

The key word in this verse is *deha bhrita*, "those who carry a body", indicating the complex network of needs, influences, qualities, activities and consequences that we need to negotiate while still embodied in this universe. This will be again confirmed

in 18.40: *na tad asti prithivyam va divi devesu va punah, sattvam prakriti jair muktam yad ebhih syat tribhir gunaih*, "There is not even one single person, either in this world or in the world of the Devas, that is free from the influence of the three *gunas* created by the *prakriti*". In verse 3.8 Krishna had also stated: *niyatam kuru karma tvam karma jyayo hy akarmanah, sarira yatrapa ca te na prasiddhyed akarmanah*, "You should perform the dutiful actions, because action is better than non-action. Without action, it is even impossible to maintain the body, that is the vehicle (of the Self)." This idea is reinforced by the use of the word *bhrit*, that is closely related to the verb *bibharti*, "to maintain/ is maintaining".

Even those who claim they have ceased all activities still have to find some sort of food (air, light etc) and shelter, and their minds will continue to create presentations and distractions or focus on something, even if it is only complete ignorance. And why should they keep a body if they are not using it to do something good in this world? If they don't need a body, it is better for them to leave it and stop being a waste of space on this crowded planet, because their so-called abstention from karmic entanglement is simply a vegetative life immersed in the laziness of *tamas*. The body is given to us as a valuable instrument and vehicle, and we are supposed to use it properly for the service of all beings, in payment of our debt (*rina*) to the Devas, the Rishis, the Pitris and all the other benefactors of the world.

The expression *karmani asesatah* indicates that dutiful activities are innumerable and never ending. Of course this does not mean that each and every individual must perform all those activities at the same time, because the immense number refers to the possibilities or opportunities of engagement in the administration of the universe in accordance to one's individual *guna* and *karma*. *Karma* as duty is determined by *guna* or qualification, as we will see later in this chapter especially applied to human society, but

even the Devas and the creatures that are below the human levels have duties to perform, as we can easily see every day. The sun dutifully shines, the wind dependably blows, and even a small ant works indefatigably to carry its loads for the benefit of the community - not only to secure food and provisions to its community in the anthill, but also to clean up dead bodies and debris from other places. Even a dung beetle or an earthworm have a very important and respectable job in the world's administration, because they break down waste and make it available again in the form of usable fertilizer for the growth of plant food.

In human society as among all beings, the Soul of the soul (*antaryami paramatma*) guides the *jivatman* to seek the circumstances and experiences that are appropriate for his/ her development, so we can see that naturally and spontaneously our conscience tells us that we are attracted to a particular occupation rather than another.

Of course this attraction could simply be temporary and instrumental to one's education, as for example a short experiment in some occupation that appeals to our fantasy in an excessively idealized way, filled with misconceptions that need to be cleared out by direct verification. This is ideally done at an early age in the home of the *guru* (*guru kula*) where the students live as his adopted children, all on the same level, and are engaged in all sorts of tasks and can access all types of training at least tentatively. But it can also occur later in life.

Ultimately it is the *guru*, the assembly of *brahmanas* and the *king* who have the responsibility to assess or verify the *sva dharma* of each individual according to his/ her *guna* and *karma*, or natural inclinations and capabilities, and to help and support each individual to develop his/ her full potential and remain properly engaged.

We can therefore understand that having unqualified persons in such crucially responsible positions constitutes an extreme threat to the entire society and could devastate the lives of everyone. Intelligent people should always be attentive and carefully scrutinize the conclusions and behaviors of *gurus*, *brahmanas* and government representatives to make sure that they are doing their job properly, otherwise they must be removed from their positions.

In the Vedic system this is usually done passively by ostracism, as the unqualified individuals are exposed and the public simply avoids them. We can see the demonstration for example when the subjects of Hastinapura were eager to leave Duryodhana and the capital city, and move to the new city of the Pandavas, Indraprastha. The citizens of Ayodhya were going to do the same thing when Rama was exiled, and were dissuaded only by the order of Rama himself, who explained that he was going to live like an ascetic in the forest for a few years and then he would come back.

In our times, the situation has become so degraded that we need to start almost from scratch to rebuild the foundations of a healthy society, and this must begin with the head. We need a new body of *sresthas* (3.21), qualified *brahmanas* who have the proper knowledge and realizations and visibly apply them in practice in their own lives; these will act as the *gurus* of the entire society and train and engage anyone freely and without prejudice, simply on the verification of their actual *guna* and *karma*.

The blind birth prejudice of the caste system has nothing to do with the *varna* system of genuine Vedic civilization and should be discarded from any government legislative or administrative process.

VERSE 12

अनिष्टमिष्टं मिश्रं च त्रिविधं कर्मणः फलम् ।

aniṣṭamiṣṭaṁ miśraṁ ca trividhaṁ karmaṇaḥ phalam ।

भवत्यत्यागिनां प्रेत्य न तु संन्यासिनां क्वचित् ॥ १८-१२ ॥

bhavatyatyāgināṁ pretya na tu saṅnyāsinaṁ kvacit ॥ 18-12 ॥

anistam: non desirable; *istam*: desirable; *misram*: mixed; *ca*: and; *tri vidham*: three types; *karmanah*: of activities; *phalam*: result; *bhavati*: becomes; *atyaginam*: for those who are not renounced; *pretya*: after death; *na*: not; *tu*: but; *sannyasinam*: for the *sannyasis*; *kvacit*: at any time.

"After death, those who were not renounced are faced with the consequences of their activities - non-desirable, desirable and mixed. However, *sannyasis* are not bound by them.

A genuine *sannyasi* has already experienced and overcome death when he has given up all material identifications, attachments, relationships and affiliations, desires, enterprises, and so on. Whatever residual karmic reactions resulted from his previous activities have been consumed by the austerities he accepted while still in the body, so at the time of death there are no more ties with his material body. This is the real reason why *sannyasis* are not bound by *karma*.

We see in this verse that Krishna uses the two terms *tyaginam* and *sannyasinam* simultaneously, to signify that both factors should be there - the spiritual renunciation to the fruits of the actions and the physical renunciation to the position of *karta* ("doer") and to the activities that are not strictly necessary. In the traditional Vedic

system, an evolved person must leave home after attaining the age of 50 (*pancasa urdhvam vanam vrajet*).

This is also confirmed by the personal example of innumerable great personalities - generally *brahmanas* and *kshatriyas* and especially kings - offered in the stories of *Puranas*, *Upanishads* and other Vedic texts.

After spending a sufficient period as a resident of the forest (*vana prastha*) living a quiet, simple and solitary life, one should formally prepare for death by entering the order of *sannyasa*, that is already considered social death. Usually this ceremony is performed at the age of 75, when the expectation of further survival is rather short, and family life has lost much of its meaning. The *sannyasi* changes his name and makes himself totally unrecognizable by his former relatives and friends, and gives up all connection to his professional and ritual engagements. He stops cooking and taking care of his body and personal possessions, and survives from moment to moment and from day to day, always ready to leave his body at any time. This is the real meaning of *sannyasa*.

A person like that is not bound by anything. It is easy to understand how the concept of *sannyasa* came to be associated with the concept of the world as mere illusion (*brahma satya, jagan mithya*). A *sannyasi* perceives the remaining period of his life in the body as a mere dream, a temporary illusion that will soon crumble away and from which he will awaken to the eternal reality of pure spiritual existence. Some commentators in the impersonalistic line explain the word *phala* (as in *karma phala*, or "result of the actions") as a compound of *pha* from *phalgu* ("unsubstantial") and *la* from *layam* ("disappearance", also related to *pralaya*, "destruction"). Thus, because the *sannyasi* has already realized that the *karma phala* are merely illusory, he will not be bound by them at the time of leaving his body.

From one dream he will move to another dream with a new birth, or hopefully he will awaken to *nirvana*.

This however is a very simplistic position, that resembles the conclusion of the sour grapes or the fantasies of immature children; a consciousness based on dreams and illusions does not belong to *sattva* or *visuddha sattva* but to *tamas*, and if it spreads among people in general it can seriously damage society at large because it confuses *grihasthas* into believing that absenteeism and irresponsibility are legitimate or even nobler spiritually than proper engagement in dutiful action. This is the reason Krishna explained in chapter 3, when he said that he also engages in action, simply to give a good example to society (3.22-26), because personally he has no selfish interest in obtaining any result from actions. This is also why *sannyasis* should never be in contact with *kshatriyas*, government representatives, active leading members of the society and married people; at most they can approach their homes once a day and remain outside the door for the time required to receive the leftovers of the family meal. Therefore there is no need to see the *karma phala* as mere phantasmagoric illusion, and a much better course of action (*yoga*) has been repeatedly stated by Krishna all along *Bhagavad gita*, as we can easily see in verses 2.47, 2.51, 4.20, 5.12, 5.14, 6.1, 9.28, 12.11, 12.12, 17.11, as well as in verses 2.39, 2.48, 2.50, 3.9, 3.19, 3.28, 3.31, 4.14, 4.15, 4.21, 4.23, 4.24, 4.32, 4.37, 4.41, 5.2, 5.3, 5.10, 6.1, 9.27, 11.55, 12.6, 13.30, 16.24, and 17.23.

The word *pretya* ("after death") is closely connected to the word *preta* ("dead people" as ghosts), as at the time of death one leaves the gross body but normally retains the subtle body that we could call "ghost". In a sense, everybody becomes a ghost for some time, because reincarnation is usually not immediate; the deceased spirit can remain around his/ her dead body and the places and people of his previous lifetime if s/he is too attached to them, and in this way

s/he misses a crucial opportunity for progress and evolution. If at the time of death we are able to leave all these identifications and attachments behind and move on, we will be obtain a new opportunity for reincarnation according to the result of our past activities and desires (*karma phala*), otherwise we might remain stuck between two lifetimes as a ghost proper, even for a very long time, and this is certainly unpleasant.

The circumstances created by our past *karma* can be pleasurable (*ista*), non pleasurable (*anista*) or more likely, a mixture (*misra*) of the two. The word *istam* is very interesting because it means "pleasurable" but also "desired", "preferred", "chosen". So Krishna is saying here that after death we will be faced with expected and unexpected circumstances, both the manifestation of our desires and fears, because attraction (*raga*) and repulsion (*dvesa*) are equally magnetic poles for the materialization of events.

For this reason we must become established on a level of neutrality, and not simply reject material life and objects as negative and undesirable - because what we deny and repress can easily become stronger in our mind and attract exactly what we do not want to get. Hatred, resentment and fear bind the conditioned soul with even stronger ties than love and attachment, and it is frequent for arch-enemies to be reborn as twins, or to become husband and wife or parent and child in a next lifetime. A racist or a person who actively hates a particular nationality, community or caste will very likely take a new birth there, and a man who hates women (or a woman who hates men) is preparing a next birth as a member of the opposite sex. Of course this applies to the birth circumstances only, and it does not change the individual's attitude and beliefs automatically. This certainly creates a very good learning opportunity.

When we apply this concept to the practice of celibacy or renunciation to sexual life, it is easy to understand that a true

sannyasi must be neutral and undisturbed, and not obsessed by negative sexual thoughts entertained or expressed to condemn or hate sexuality. When *tyaga*, renunciation, is considered in a dualistic way as the opposite of *bhoga* ("enjoyment of pleasure"), it is still on the conditioned platform and the unfortunate victim of this delusion will swing back and forth from one to the other and back. This happens because one still considers himself the enjoyer (*purusha*) and believes that he is renouncing to something that is actually his legitimate right or property; this ego is based on the false identification with the material body and position, for example as "man", while "women" are seen as bodies and objects of enjoyment. The fact that a celibate is not physically engaging in sexual activities is totally secondary and certainly not sufficient (3.6) to solve the problem. When we are neutral, we do not think of ourselves as the *karta*, *isvara* or *bhogi* (16.14), not even to believe that we have the credit of renouncing action, domination or enjoyment. We do not even think of ourselves as men or women, but as *atman* only.

A true *sannyasi* does not speak about women or think about women, because he sees all embodied beings as *jivatmans*, spirit souls, parts of God's body, therefore he sees no "women". He does not condemn or fear women or forbid them to move or sit around when he is walking or sitting in some place. He does not speak disparagingly about women, he does not treat women disrespectfully, he does not hate women. For him, there are no "women" or "men", but only spirit souls wearing various types of bodies.

Some commentators have tried to relate *istam* with heaven or *svarga*, *anistam* with hell or *naraka*, and *misram* with earth and human society, but this is an attempt to justify and validate Vedic concepts by associating them with abrahamic concepts. It is not necessary, and in fact it can be very misleading.

VERSE 13

पञ्चैतानि महाबाहो कारणानि निबोध मे ।

pañcāitāni mahābāho kāraṇāni nibodha me ।

साङ्ख्ये कृतान्ते प्रोक्तानि सिद्धये सर्वकर्मणाम् ॥ १८-१३ ॥

sāṅkhye kṛtānte proktāni siddhaye sarvakarmaṇām ॥ 18-13 ॥

panca: five; *etani:* these; *maha baho:* o mighty armed one; *karanani:* the causes; *nibodha:* understand; *me:* from me; *sankhye:* in the science of *Sankhya*; *krita ante:* at the conclusion; *proktani:* described; *siddhaye:* for the perfection; *sarva karmanam:* of all activities.

"O mighty (Arjuna), you should understand that according to Sankhya there are five factors required for the perfection of all activities.

In verse 1, Arjuna had called Krishna *maha baho*, "mighty armed one", and now Krishna is returning the compliment, after calling him *bharata sattama* and *purusa vyaghra*, respectively "best among the Bharatas" and "tiger among men". In this chapter Krishna is explaining how *moksha* (liberation) can be attained by working sincerely and selflessly for the universal good, and the references to physical strength are an indication that such work must be done by investing sufficient energy and effort in practice, and not just in theory and vague meditation.

The word *nibodha* ("you should understand") is related to the word *buddhi*, and therefore indicates the proper use of intelligence. Physical force by itself is not very effective, if it is not coordinated and directed by the proper use of intelligence and strategy - exactly the subject that Krishna is going to explain in these verses.

What is strategy? It is the art and science of planning resources for their effective use in achieving a goal; as the expression is *nibodha me* ("you should understand from me") we can conclude that it is best to learn the science of strategy directly from the best authorities or expert people. We have seen that Sankhya ("counting, enumeration") is the science of combined physics and metaphysics that categorizes the elements of the universe and their connections. It is said that the word *sankhya* is a compound of two roots - *san* from *samyak* ("completely") and *khya* from *khyayante* ("described"). The expression *krta ante* ("at the end of the work") can be applied at different levels; one meaning can indicate the end or purpose of the actions or activities themselves, and another meaning can indicate the conclusion of the work of compilation of the Sankhya literature. In both cases it involves a sense of finality that is directly connected to the idea of strategical planning. One should take proper advantage of the opportunity of a human body (18.11) because ghosts (18.12) are unable to work for their own progress or for the benefit of the universe and the service of the Supreme.

The science of action is certainly not an easy subject, as Krishna had already remarked: *kim karma kim akarmeti kavayo 'py atra mohitah, tat te karma pravaksyami yaj jnatva moksyase 'subhat*, "Even scholars can become confused about what is *karma* and what is *akarma*. I will tell you this science of *karma*, by knowing which you will become free from all inauspiciousness" (4.16). This chapter is dedicated to liberation (*moksha*), and it started by discussing about renunciation (*sannyasa* and *tyaga*), but we should not be surprised to see that Krishna continues the discussion by elaborating about action and work: *sannyasah karma yogas ca nirsreyasa karav ubhau, tayos tu karma sannyasat karma yogo visisyate*, "Both these paths - *sannyasa* and *karma yoga* - will bring the best benefit, but *karma yoga* is better than *sannyasa*" (5.2).

VERSE 14

अधिष्ठानं तथा कर्ता करणं च पृथग्विधम् ।

adhiṣṭhānaṁ tathā kartā karaṇaṁ ca pṛthagvidham ।

विविधाश्च पृथक्केष्टा दैवं चैवात्र पञ्चमम् ॥ १८-१४ ॥

vividhāśca pṛthakceṣṭā daivaṁ caivātra pañcamam ॥ 18-14 ॥

adhistanam: the place; *tatha*: similarly; *karta*: the doer; *karanam*: the instruments; *ca*: and; *prithak vidham*: of different types; *vividhah*: various; *ca*: and; *prithak*: different; *cestah*: efforts; *daivam*: destiny; *ca*: and; *eva*: certainly; *atra*: here; *pancamam*: the fifth.

"The position, the doer, the instruments and the effort can be of different types. The fifth factor is destiny.

The word *adhi sthana* means "place", and it includes the body, its natural *guna* and previous *karma*, the position in time and space, the specific circumstances of community or society and culture, place and time, the facilities offered by a good or bad birth (both can be very useful), and so on. It is the starting point from which we can begin our journey and work, and therefore it is extremely important to understand and verify where we are actually standing.

The word *karta* means "doer", "one who does", and indicates the motivation or deliberation of the action, so we see this definition normally used in the *sankalpa* or official declaration of purpose at the beginning of religious rituals. Several people can be engaged in the performance of a ritual, especially a complex and important one, but the merit of the sacrifice and the good results go to the *karta*, the person who has taken the initiative to make it happen and is supplying all the materials and remunerating the priests.

We know that the concept of *karta* is relative: *prakriteh kriyamanani gunaih karmani sarvasah, ahankara vimudhatma kartaham iti manyate*, "All activities are actually performed by the qualities of nature, but a foolish person who is confused by egotism thinks 'I am doing'" (3.27). In this verse, however, the definition is used to indicate the subjective agent, that is the origin of the choice to engage in action, not the force that determines the particular type of action - which is conducted by *prakriti*. The *jivatman* still has a measure of free will, by which s/he can choose whether to engage in action or not, while the modality of the action is controlled by the *gunas* or nature.

The word *karana* ("instruments") refers to the sense organs - those of perception and those of action - that constitute the inner or personal instruments of our work. One can be born in a good family of skilled surgeons and have sufficient intelligence and inclination for the job, but if he is blind or deaf he will not be able to get the same results he would obtain with properly functional visual and auditive senses. So this is an important factor.

We need to remember here that *karana* (with a long first *a*) means "cause". In this regard, we may remember verse 13.21: *karya karana kartritve hetuh prakritir ucyate, purusah sukha duhkhanam bhoktritve hetur ucyate*, "*Prakriti* is said to be the cause and the origin of the action, while *purusha* is the cause of the perception of happiness and distress" (13.21); this can help us put the *karta* and the *karana* into perspective.

The word *cesta* means "endeavor, effort, attempt, movement," and indicates the amount of energy that the *karta* invests in the action. Some commentators say that the word is a compound of *ca* ("and", "again") and *ista* ("desired", "chosen"), indicating that one needs to try again and again to obtain the purpose or aim that he is seeking. As the quote goes, success is obtained with some percentage of inspiration and a much greater amount of perspiration.

The word *daivam* is very interesting. It is usually translated as "destiny", and as such, *daivam* includes the sum total of the karmic reactions of our previous activities and desires, but it is not limited to a mechanical result of events. In the Vedic perspective, nothing is truly impersonal, not even the laws of material nature, because the blueprint of every existence is knowledge. Therefore destiny is non-different from the consciousness or plan of God (*deva*), although certainly not in the same sense presented in abrahamic ideologies; God does not reward or punish anyone, does not absolve sins or judge people, and does not sentence or condemn anyone to any particular situation. A reaction to our previous action is simply meant to instruct us, demonstrating the reciprocity of all existence and perception. With each choice and decision, either in positive or negative, we put consequences in motion and obtain results - *ista*, *anista* and *misra* - that will either fulfill our desires or teach us that such desires were not a very good idea in the first place.

Some commentators translate *daivam* here as *paramatman*, the Soul of the soul, that always accompanies the *jivatman* in all his subsequent incarnations and guides him towards the actions and reactions that are required for his evolution. In this regard, they have quoted the aphorism *esa hi drasta srasta*, "he who is the witness is the creator" (*Prasna Upanishad* 4.9), indicating that *antaryami paramatman*, the creator and origin of the *jivatman*, can see and understand all the desires of the heart of the soul, and arranges for the suitable circumstances and experiences to materialize, and then guides the *jivatman* towards them and through them. However, in the Vedic perspective a human being still has some amount of freedom to choose in which actions s/he wants to engage.

We can compare destiny to a mighty river on which we are traveling. The current is strong and it carries us in a specific

direction and therefore it is an important factor to be reckoned with, but we still have the freedom to row our boat and steer it at will, for example towards the bank where the current slows down. Along the course of the river there will be waterfalls, where we can only focus on surviving the jump and keeping our head above the water as much as possible, but there will also be shallow waters and fords (*tirthas*) where we will be able to get out of the river altogether and rest on the shore, and maybe build a new and better boat.

With sufficient investment of effort and time, we can even build dams or dig a new stream for the river in which other people after us will be able to travel, but the water will always flow to the ocean, no matter how we try to divert its course. So the purpose of life and the basic process of reincarnation and liberation will always remain the same for everyone.

VERSE 15

शरीरवाङ्मनोभिर्यत्कर्म प्रारभते नरः ।

śarīravāṅmanobhiryatkarma prārabhate naraḥ ।

न्याय्यं वा विपरीतं वा पञ्चैते तस्य हेतवः ॥ १८-१५ ॥

nyāyyaṁ vā viparītaṁ vā pañcaite tasya hetavaḥ ॥ 18-15 ॥

sarira: by the body; *vak:* by the speech; *manobhih:* by the mental actions; *yat:* which; *karma:* action; *pra arabhate:* begins (with a purpose); *narah:* a human being; *nyayyam:* appropriate; *va:* or; *viparitam:* otherwise/ contrary; *va:* or; *panca:* five; *ete:* these; *tasya:* of this; *hetavah:* the causes.

"Whatever good or bad action is performed by a human being with body, speech or mind, is caused by these five factors.

The word *nara* means "man", but we can safely believe that it includes here both men and women, considering that human beings as a species are allowed a certain degree of free will and instruments for actions performed by body (*sarira*, *tanu*, or *kaya*), speech (*vak*) or mind (*manasa*). Here *manas* is expressed in the plural form (*manobhih*) as in 2.56, 7.1, 9.34, 11.49 and 18.65, to indicate the different levels and modalities of mind functions - for example conscious and subconscious,

The technical Sanskrit terms for actions performed by body, speech and mind are *saririka* or *kayika*, *vacika* and *manasika* respectively and apply to all activities including the practice of the spiritual or *yoga sadhana* and the calculation of karmic reactions according to the different circumstances. For example in Kali yuga or in particularly difficult circumstances, mental activities performed with a good motivation and of good nature have the same or better effect than speech or bodily activities with the same purpose, while mental offenses (i.e. bad activities performed in the mind only) are considered much less serious than bodily offenses. This is because the physical environment including the body and senses is creating negative influences, and it is far easier for a person to actually commit bad actions than good ones. Of course, when one chooses to keep thinking of some action, s/he is also creating a certain amount of karmic reaction and associating with the object of the action (2.62), and the accumulation of such reactions and association will have an increasingly greater influence on the subsequent manifestation of actions through speech and then on the bodily level.

The individual's responsibility and the results for each action depend on the exact amount of free will that one enjoys at the time when the action is performed. For example, a slave who is forced to steal or kill, or a child or a jail convict who is forced to eat non vegetarian food are not held responsible for the karmic

consequences of their actions. Those who put them in such situations are responsible and will have to face the karmic consequences. Even a woman who is forced to kill her own child through abortion by the pressure of family or society will not have to suffer the same karmic reactions of the killing of a child in ordinary circumstances. Conversely, if a person who is in a position of power - health, wealth, energy, time, position, instruments, etc - neglects to honor even a small duty or good action, or chooses to commit even a small bad action, the karmic reaction will be much more severe.

The expression *pra arabhate* means "starts to perform, enterprise, undertake", and indicates that the important thing in any action is not so much the successful completion, but the deliberate choice to initiate it and invest time and energy into it. This is already creating the good or bad karmic reaction, and accruing the merit or demerit of it, because the successful completion does not depend solely on the *karta* (subjective actor) and the *cesta* (effort). This is confirmed in 3.7, 4.19, 14.12, 14.25, 18.25, 18.48.

The two types of action described in this verse are *nyayyam* and *viparitam*. *Nyaya* means "reason, logic", and indicates the intelligent and reasonable actions that are called dharmic, or righteous in a positive way. The word *viparitam* means "opposite, reverse", and refers to the contrary of reasonable activities, that according to the Vedic perspective is called *vikarma*, bad actions or adharmic actions.

These definitions are very interesting, because contrarily to other ideologies, Vedic tradition considers the merit and demerit of actions on the basis of ethical values, conscience, and especially intelligence and reason. Krishna has already presented *buddhi yoga* (the *yoga* of intelligence) as the highest criteria for action (2.39, 2.49, 2.50, 2.51, 2.53, 3.1, 4.18, 6.43, 8.7, 10.10, 12.8, 12.14, 15.20) and *buddhi* (intelligence) as a fundamental

requirement (2.41, 2.44, 2.52, 2.63, 2.65, 2.66, 3.2, 3.26, 3.40, 3.42, 5.20, 5.28, 6.9, 6.21, 10.4). The Vedic religion of *Bhagavad gita* has nothing to do with the blind beliefs and obedience of abrahamic ideologies, that most atheists consider the actual and genuine (if not the only possible) model of religion.

VERSE 16

तत्रैवं सति कर्तारमात्मानं केवलं तु यः ।

tatraivaṁ sati kartāramātmānaṁ kevalaṁ tu yaḥ ।

पश्यत्यकृतबुद्धित्वान्न स पश्यति दुर्मतिः ॥ १८-१६ ॥

paśyatyakṛtabuddhitvāna sa paśyati durmatih ॥ 18-16 ॥

tatra: there; *evam*: thus; *sati*: being; *kartaram*: of the doer; *atmanam*: oneself; *kevalam*: only; *tu*: but; *yaḥ*: s/he; *pasyati*: sees; *akrita buddhitvat*: due to a shortage of intelligence; *na*: does not; *sah*: s/he; *pasyati*: sees; *durmatih*: stupid.

"Therefore one who sees oneself as the only cause of actions is deluded due to lack of intelligence.

The expression *tatra evam sati* literally means "that being the case" and connects the previous verse to this one. The expression *atmanam kevalam* may apply to two levels of meaning; the ordinary level refers to "oneself only" as in the main translation of the verse, while at the higher level means "the *atman* alone". In the second case the translation is, "one who sees the *atman* as the cause of action is deluded by a lack of understanding". We have already seen that the *purusha* is never really engaged in any action, but simply feels and perceives.

We had already seen that verse 3.27 straightforwardly called "stupid" (*vimudha*) one who considers himself as the only cause and master of his actions: *prakriteh kriyamanani gunaih karmani sarvasah, ahankara vimudhatma kartaham iti manyate*, "All activities are actually performed by the qualities of nature, but a foolish person who is confused by egotism thinks 'I am doing'". So the concept of *karta* ("doer") needs to be understood properly. There is in fact a subjective principle of action called *karta* (18.14), but it is not the exclusive controller and beneficiary of the action (2.47). This is why Krishna in this verse uses the word *durmatih* ("unable to understand easily") and *akrita* ("imperfect").

We should not foolishly claim full credit for our success, because we can only be the instrument (*nimitta matra*, 11.33) of the higher and vaster Consciousness; this of course does not mean that we should not get recognition for our work, or that someone else can take credit or recognition for the work we have done, substituting our name with their name, for example as authors of a book we have written. The factual truth should be recognized, and each person should be appreciated for their contribution: *tasmāt tvam uttistha yaso labhasva jītvā satruṇ bhunṅsva rājyaṃ samriddhaṃ, mayāivaite nihataḥ purvā eva nimitta matraṃ bhava śavya śacin*, "So, get up, o great archer, and achieve fame by your victory against the enemies, and then enjoy the prosperity of the kingdom. I have already killed all these warriors: you should become just the instrument of the victory" (11.33).

Acknowledging one's subordinate position to the supreme Consciousness as an instrument in the great plan of life is quite different from the false modesty or lack of self esteem of one who is unable to take a compliment or an encouragement or to understand the value of his own work. An instrument cannot claim the full credit for a good job, but it can and it should certainly receive the credit due to a good instrument. This is why Krishna

says in 11.33, *yaso labha*, "obtain fame" and *bhunksva rajyam*, "enjoy the kingdom".

Vedic knowledge is not subject to copyright. We cannot say that Vyasa plagiarized the work of the many Rishis who wrote the original hymns of the *Samhitas*, and although he is known as the compiler of the *Vedas* he never claimed "intellectual property" or tried to stop others from writing further commentaries or treatises over Vedic knowledge. Yet, Vyasa is honored as the original teacher of the *Vedas* in this age. The Vedic system regularly reports, "this person said", "that person said", and quite often the individual who is speaking clearly says he is quoting someone who previously said the same things or similar things. Knowledge is eternal, and so nobody can claim to have "created" it, but it is a fact that individuals are credited with particular compositions or presentations.

Vyasa's father Parasara wrote some hymns of the *Rig Veda* (dedicated to Agni and Soma) and the *Parasara dharma samhita*. Atri Rishi (*manasa putra* of Brahma and the first of the Seven Rishis) is the author of the 5th *mandala* of the *Rig Veda*, that is also called *Atri samhita*. Agastya Rishi, another of the Seven Rishis, is the author of an original text on the *Ayur Veda* (now lost, but mentioned in later literature), the *Nadi jyotisha* (a treatise on astrology), the famous *Lalita sahasranama stuti* ("the 1000 names of Lalita", the Mother Goddess), and the famous *Aditya hridayam sukta*. Agastya's wife, princess Lopamudra of the Vidarbha kingdom, cooperated to the *Lalita sahasranama* and personally composed one hymn of the *Rig Veda*. Gautama Maharishi, another of the Seven Rishis, is the author of many *suktas* of the *Rig Veda*, the *Bhadra sukta* of *Sama Veda*, and the *Gautama Dharma sutra*, the first text among the *Dharma shastras*. Vasistha, another of the Seven Rishis, family Guru of the *avatara* Rama, is the author of the 7th *mandala* of the *Rig Veda*, and of the *Vasistha samhita*.

The teachings of Vasistha are also related by Valmiki Rishi (the author of the *Ramayana*) in his famous *Yoga Vasistha*. Pulastya, one of the Seven Rishis, direct son of Brahma, received from Brahma the *Vishnu purana* and transmitted him to Parasara Rishi. Bharadvaja, another of the Seven Rishis, is famous for having written the *Vimanika shastra* (a treatise on aeronautics-astronautics, now lost).

Angira, author of most of the *Atharva Veda*, is said to be a dignitary at the court of Yama on Pitri-loka, the inter-dimensional planet where the virtuous ancestors live. Atharva is author of many hymns of the *Atharva Veda*; the fact that the *Atharva Veda* was composed by these two Rishis and as such it is known by the name of *Atharvangirasa samhita*. Kausika, Vasistha, Kasyapa, Saunaka, Vamadeva, Meghatithi, Priyamegha, Nodha, Savya, Nrimmegha, Kusta, Pracheta, are the authors of other hymns of the *Atharva Veda*.

Kanva is the author of various hymns of the *Rig Veda* dedicated to Agni, Yupa, Marut, Brahmanaspati, Varuna, Mitra, Aryaman, Pusha, Rudra and Soma. Medhatithi wrote various hymns of the *Rig Veda* dedicated to Agni, Nirmathya Havaniya Agni, Idhmah Samiddha Agni, Astanunapat, Narasamsah, Ilah, Barhih, Devirdvarah, Ushasanaktha, Daivya, Hotara, Pracetasa, Sarasvati, Ila, Bharati, Tvashta, Vanaspati, Svaha Akrutayoh Agni, Visve Deva, Indra, Maruta, Tvashta, Mitra Varuna, Dravinoda Agnih, Asvini (*ritu devatah*), Indra Varuna, Gayatri, Padani, Brahmanaspati, Soma, Dakshina, Sadaspati, Narasama, Maruta, Ribhu, Asvini, Savita, Devyah, Varuna, Anyagnayah, Dyava-prithivya, Prithivi, Vishnu, Ayu, Vayu, Marutvan, Pusha, Apah and Pura-ushnik. Praskanva Rishi wrote various hymns of the *Rig Veda* dedicated to Agni, Usha, Ashvini and Surya.

There were also several Rishikas (female Rishis) among the original authors of the *Vedas*: Ghosha (2 *suktas* in the 10th

mandala of *Rig Veda*), Vagambhrina (*Vac sukta* of *Rig Veda*), Maitreyi, wife of Yajnavalkya (10 hymns of *Rig Veda*). Gargi, the composer of the *Gargi samhita*, is mentioned in *Yajnavalkya samhita* and *Brihad aranyaka Upanishad* on the occasion of a famous philosophical debate. Visvavara, Sikata, Nivavari, Apala and Visvavara from Atri's family, Angirasi Sarasvati from Angirasa's family, Yami Vaivasvati, Sraddha, Surya, Indrani, Urvasi, Sarama, Juhu and Paulomi Saci all wrote a number of the original Vedic *suktas*, of which all the subsequent Vedic literature constitutes commentaries.

Later in this chapter Krishna will elaborate more about intelligence according to the three *gunas*, and the effects of actions performed under the various types of understanding. Some people believe that all types of understanding or opinions should be equally respected and valued, but this is not Krishna's instruction - in fact it is just the opposite (18.32).

VERSE 17

यस्य नाहंकृतो भावो बुद्धिर्यस्य न लिप्यते ।

yasya nāhaṅkṛto bhāvo buddhiryasya na lipyate ।

हत्वाऽपि स इमाँल्लोकान्न हन्ति न निबध्यते ॥ १८-१७ ॥

hatvā'pi sa imāṁllokāna hanti na nibadhyate ॥ 18-17 ॥

yasya: of whom; *na*: not; *aham kritah*: sense of doership; *bhavah*: nature/ feeling; *buddhih*: intelligence; *yasya*: of whom; *na*: not; *lipyate*: (is) affected; *hatva api*: even while killing; *sa*: s/he; *iman*: this; *lokan*: world; *na hanti*: does not kill; *na nibadhyate*: (and) is not bound (by the reactions).

"One who is not affected by the egotism of identification with the action remains with a clear intelligence. Even if he kills, he does not kill, and is not bound (by the reaction)."

The word *ahankrita* ("I have done") is a synonym of *ahankara* ("I am the doer") mentioned several times as the delusion of material identification (2.71, 3.27, 7.4, 12.13, 13.6, 13.9, 16.18, 17.5, 18.53, 18.58, 18.59). This *ahankara* is a material element like the mind, space, air, fire, and so on; as long as we are in the material world we cannot become free from it but we need to learn how to deal with it. This is why Krishna in this verse says *na lipyate*, "is not affected". It is the same with the *gunas* - as long as we are embodied in the material world we will have to deal with the lower *gunas* of *rajas* and *tamas*, because we will come in contact with them regularly, again and again. So the best thing is to learn how to use them without being affected and controlled by them. We can use *tamas* to sleep deeply and rest our body and mind, we can use *rajas* to goad ourselves into action when we risk getting too comfortable and uninterested in investing much effort in our duties. *Sattva* is a quality of balance and tends to detachment, so in contact with *ahankara* or separate identification it could develop a rigidity that is likely turn to *tamas* because of the material obscuration of consciousness.

The solution, as we have already seen, consists in overcoming the identification with material *sattva* as well and elevating oneself to *suddha sattva*, that is the quality of goodness not tainted with material identification. But that means that one should overcome *ahankara*. How to overcome *ahankara*? It would be like trying to overcome water or fire or earth. We cannot become free from these elements, because they are present even in our own bodies. We must recognize that the action is conducted by *prakriti* through the consciousness of the *purusha*, under the direction of the *paramatma*, Purushottama.

We need to use *ahankara* just like we use water or fire or earth - carefully, with intelligence, knowledge and detachment, without being affected by it. We can direct the power of identification towards the transcendental level, in the direction of *atman* or self realization and *bhakti* or devotion to the Supreme. The key to the process is *bhava* (with a second long *a*) that means "feeling, nature", and on a higher level, "consciousness". When directly applied to action, this means we should not have any personal selfish motive, either individual or collective. Collective selfishness means acting for the exclusive benefit of one's family, ethnic group, circle of friends or gang, community, gender, race, nation or even species, without considering the benefit of all others. The concept of selfishness is based on duality, i.e. the mistaken idea that we are separated from other beings and existences, and therefore we can actually get benefit from an action that damages others.

To remain free from this delusion we must always consider the benefit for all beings before engaging in any action; the activities strictly connected to our survival, as the killing of aggressors of all kinds and the reasonable and appropriate consumption of food and other resources, are not considered a selfish action because by stopping an aggressor we are actually preventing him from committing a crime, and because our personal existence has a greater value than food and other resources when we are following the instructions of the *shastra* and living for the service of the universal community (*Virata rupa*) and the well being of all creatures (*para upakara*). This is also directly confirmed in verse 5.25: *labhante brahma nirvanam risayah ksina kalmasah, chinna dvaidha yatatmanah sarva bhuta hite ratah*, "Those who see Reality attain the *brahma nirvana* because they have been purified from all faults and have cut off all dualistic illusions, engaging themselves in work for the benefit of all living beings." Verse 12.4 also uses the same words: *te prapnuvanti mam eva sarva bhuta*

hite ratah, "they can attain me if they are sincerely interested in the benefit of all beings".

Verse 13.31 is particularly clear: *yada bhuta prithag bhavam eka stham anupasyati, tata eva ca vistaram brahma sampadyate tada*, "When one becomes trained to see all beings as situated in one, even when they are separated, and (how all this) is developed, s/he attains the position of Brahman." Other verses also bring up this concept, further explaining that God is present in all beings as life and consciousness: 5.29, 7.5, 7.6, 7.9, 7.10, 8.4, 8.22, 9.5, 9.8, 9.13, 9.29, 10.20, 10.22, 10.39, 11.15, 11.43, 12.13, 13.16, 13.17, 13.28, 14.3, 14.4, 15.13 and 15.14. Therefore those who act in envy and hatred against other beings are clearly defined as *asuras*: *ahankaram balam darpam kamam krodham ca samsritah, mam atma para dehesu pradisanto 'bhyasuyakah* "Taking shelter in *ahankara*, physical strength, arrogance, lust and anger, they show envy and hatred against me, as I reside in their own bodies and in the bodies of others" (16.18), and *karsayantah sarira stham bhuta gramam acetasah, mam caivantah sarira stham tan viddhy asura niscayan*, "You should know that they are certainly *asuras*, because they foolishly cause suffering and damage to all beings, and to me as well, since I reside within the body" (17.6).

The expression *hatvapi sa imal lokan na hanti na nibadhyate* echoes one of the first instructions given by Krishna: *ya enam vetti hantaram yas cainam manyate hatam, ubhau tau na vijanito nayam hanti na hanyate*, "One who knows this (*atman/ brahman*) does not consider himself to be killing or being killed; in both (positions) he knows that one does neither truly kill nor is truly killed" (2.19). A person who has overcome the illusion of duality and is attached to the benefit to all beings as the cells of one single body will take action to remove only those body parts that are damaging the body as a whole, like gangrenous tissues or cancerous growths.

In this way, he is actually working for the benefit of all other beings, therefore he is not going to suffer an adverse reaction for the "killing" of such cells. Of course forceful removal must always be the last resort: Krishna and the Pandavas amply demonstrated this point in the events of the *Mahabharata* leading to the battlefield of Kurukshetra, where Krishna and Arjuna are now talking for our benefit.

Furthermore, this does not mean that we can hide behind hierarchy and bad orders from our superiors in command, or take the pretext that one type of being is better than another so the existence of the better beings will be improved if we eliminate the "not so good" ones (that are not aggressors). There is no place for cheating or dishonesty in the work for *dharma*.

VERSE 18

ज्ञानं ज्ञेयं परिज्ञाता त्रिविधा कर्मचोदना ।

jñānaṁ jñeyaṁ parijñātā trividhā karmacodanā ।

करणं कर्म कर्तेति त्रिविधः कर्मसंग्रहः ॥ १८-१८ ॥

karaṇaṁ karma karteti trividhaḥ karmasaṅgrahaḥ ॥ 18-18 ॥

jnanam: knowledge; *jneyam*: the object of knowledge; *pari jnata*: one who understands; *tri vidha*: of three kinds; *karma*: of action; *codana*: the impetus/ the motivation; *karanam*: the instruments (the senses); *karma*: the action; *karta*: the doer; *iti*: thus; *tri vidhah*: three types; *karma sangrahaḥ*: the factors/ components of the action.

"There are three triggers for action: knowledge, the object of knowledge and the subject of knowledge. There are three

requirements for action: the instruments for action, the action itself and the subject of action.

The expression *tri vidha* ("of three types") can also apply to the characteristics determined by the particular influence of each of the three *gunas* or modes of material nature, as Krishna has explained in previous chapters. In the next verse Krishna will clearly mention the specific symptoms of knowledge, action itself and subject of the action according to *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*, but we have seen from the previous chapters that also the objects of knowledge (the sense objects) and the instruments of knowledge (the senses of perception and action) are characterized by the specific *gunas*. The best example is the description of the three types of foods and corresponding preferences in tastes in verse 17.7.

In verse 13.3 Krishna had defined knowledge as the knowledge of the *kshetra* (object) and the *kshetra jna* (subject) as well, so in fact we could aggregate the factors of sense objects and senses under the category of the subject of action (*karta*) that Krishna will describe in the next verses. The word *codana* is very interesting. In other contexts, it has been used to indicate "encouragement" or "scriptural instruction" (*codana laksano artho dharma*, "the meaning of dharmic duty is what is indicated by the scriptures", *Purva mimamsa sutra* 1.1.2), but also "motivation", "inducement" and "impetus", "inspiration" or even "subtle manifestation" (as in the blueprint design of a technical device). We translated it as "trigger" but we could also call it "catalyst".

Some people believe that the knowledge of action and the self is not a precise or concrete science and therefore all opinions are good, but this is a very serious mistake. In Vedic civilization and in all pre-abrahamic cultures, people were able to see the strong connection between physics and metaphysics, between the *kshetra* and the *kshetra jna*.

In more recent times, western physicists have become increasingly free from the abrahamic academic prejudice and have proved that at subatomic level, reality does not actually exist until we measure it.

John Wheeler's delayed-choice thought experiment was first proposed back in 1978 using light beams bounced by mirrors, but only 40 years later the procedure was conducted with full success by using a Mach-Zehnder interferometer and ultracold metastable helium atoms, scattered by laser light in a suspended state known as Bose-Einstein condensate. The atoms were ejected until there was a single one left; this chosen atom was then dropped through a pair of laser beams, which made a pattern acting as crossroads that would scatter the path of the atom. Then they randomly added a second pattern that recombined the paths, but only after the atom had already passed the first stage. This second phase led to constructive or destructive interference, which is what would be expected if the atom had traveled both paths, like a wave would do. But when the second pattern was added no interference was observed, as if the atom had chosen only one path: this was taken to mean that the atom had not determined yet its nature before being measured for a second time. Only when the atom was measured at the end of the journey, its wave-like or particle-like behavior was brought to existence.

This confirms Bohr's view that one cannot ascribe the wave or particle behavior to a massive particle before the measurement takes place. Scientists were already surprised about the quantum physics predictions about interference (of the *kshetra jna* on the *kshetra*) when applied to light (which seems more like a wave), but the recent experiment applied the same principle to atoms, that are complicated objects that have a mass and interact with electric fields. A Vedic *rishi* would not have been surprised at all. To keep up with the progress of knowledge in the mainstream scientific

research field, we need to become detached from the imperfect and often mistaken information that was peddled to us as absolute unquestionable truths during our early years in school. The same applies to archeology, paleontology and especially history, where records and theories have been manufactured with incredibly biased motivations to hide the actual truth from people.

With reference to *Bhagavad gita* and this verse, we need to understand that reality and action are much deeper than what they appear to be superficially, so we must keep an open mind to consider all the factors. Vedic knowledge is not based on blind faith, but a certain measure of confidence in the teacher is indispensable in order to become able to conduct our own verification experiments in the precise conditions that will guarantee its success. Whimsically neglecting the basic parameters (*sangraha*) that are the basis for the experiment will compromise the procedure and yield different results. Another interesting point to note is that the word *sangraha* is also related to the concept of "understanding", "enlightenment", as "to receive" (the same logical derivation of the Latin word "*data*"), and "collection" (of information or factors).

In the *bhakti* perspective, this verse has been explained as the process of engagement in devotional service, where *jnana* is *sambandha* (the relationship between *bhakta* and *Isvara*), *jneya* is *abhidheya* (the engagement in active service to *Isvara*), and *jnata* is *prayojana* (the attainment of perfect union with *Isvara*). In this regard, these are considered the basic factors that inspire action, while the ingredients of action are the *bhakta* (*karta*), the *bhajana* or active meditation on *Isvara* (as *karma* or duty according to *vaidhi* or *raganuga bhakti*), and the *rasa* or *bhava* (sentiment) that constitutes the *siddha deha* or spiritual bodily form of the devotee (including the senses of course). This is confirmed by *Narada pancaratra: hrisikena hrisikesa sevanam, bhaktir ucyate, "Bhakti*

is defined as using one's senses in the service of the Lord of the senses".

VERSE 19

ज्ञानं कर्म च कर्ताच त्रिधैव गुणभेदतः ।

jñānam karma ca kartāca tridhaiva guṇabhedataḥ ।

प्रोच्यते गुणसङ्ख्याने यथावच्छृणु तान्यपि ॥ १८-१९ ॥

procyate guṇasaṅkhyāne yathāvacchṛṇu tānyapi ॥ 18-19 ॥

jnanam: knowledge; *karma*: action; *ca*: and; *karta*: the doer; *ca*: and; *tri dha*: of three types; *eva*: certainly; *guna bhedatah*: categorized according to the *gunas*; *procyate*: it is said; *guna sankhyane*: by analyzing the *gunas*; *yatha vat*: as they are; *sru*: listen; *tani*: to them; *api*: also.

"Knowledge, action and the subjective factor are certainly categorized according to the three *gunas*. Listen to their enumeration according to their specific qualities.

In this verse the word *guna* is used in its fundamental meaning of "quality", "mode", "characteristic", applied specifically to the three categories of *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. Similarly, Krishna uses here the word *sankhya* in the most elegant way as a symmetrical indication that remind us about the Sankhya philosophical system of recognizing the nature and qualities of the various components of Reality, introduced in chapter 2 as either spiritual or material (*sat* or *asat*, 2.16).

Now, we should spend a moment to wonder how chapter 2 was entitled to Sankhya, when in fact it only speaks about the *atman*/

brahman as distinct from the material manifestation, and even recommends to become detached from all the various categories of the material universe, that are merely manifestations of the three *gunas* (2.45). The seed of this understanding is contained in a deeper meaning of the subsequent verse: *yavan artha udapane sarvatah samplutodake, tavan sarvesu vedesu brahmanasya vijanatah*, "Whatever value is found in a pond is also found, for all purposes, also in a large lake, and similarly whatever is contained in all the *Vedas* can be found in a person who has realized the knowledge of Brahman" (2.46). This indicates that the analytical knowledge of the various categories of the material universe is not opposite to the science of Brahman, but rather Brahman realization contains all other categories of knowledge and existence.

By overcoming the illusion of duality (2.45, 4.22, 5.3, 5.25, 7.27, 7.28, 15.5), one penetrates the mystery of the non-difference between *purusha* and *prakriti*, as amply elaborated in chapter 13, that also started by Arjuna's questions about *kshetra* and *kshetra jna, jnana* and *jneya* (13.1). This is indeed how Krishna started his teachings in chapter 2, and the same point will continue to be central to the understanding of *Bhagavad gita*, the *Vedanta sutra* and the Vedic hymns as well (13.5). In 13.6 and subsequent verses, Krishna enumerates the categories of reality that are generally considered as the subject of Sankhya, therefore we can see the strong connection between the the two topics - *sankhya* or analytical enumeration of categories of reality, and understanding of the concept of *purusha* and *prakriti*, or *shaktiman* and *shakti*.

The connection between Sankhya and the science of the three *gunas* is illustrated in the descriptions of the creation of the universe, about which Krishna has given a reference in verses 7.6, 9.8, 10.32, 14.3, 15.4. However, to explore the subject further we will have to examine the teachings of the *Puranas*, and especially the *Bhagavata Purana*. In verse 4.11.16 we see for example this

statement: *evam pravartate sargah sthiti samyama eva ca, guna vyatikarad rajan mayaya paramatmanah*, "O king, the creation, preservation and destruction (of the universe) occurs by the interaction of the *gunas* of the Paramatma's energy". The subject of primary creation is explained in *Bhagavata Purana* (3rd canto, chapters 25 to 32) by the *avatara* Kapila, the original expounder of the Sankhya system, who also elaborates there about the science of action, especially about prescribed duty and *bhakti*. We give here below a brief summary of that description.

The static combination of the three *gunas*, the three influences of nature, is the aggregate of the elements that compose nature, and is called *pradhana*. These elements are the five gross elements, the five subtle elements, the four internal senses, the five senses of perception and the five organs of action. The five gross elements are earth (energy in the solid form), water (energy in liquid form), fire (energy in the form of heat and light), air (energy in the form of gas) and space. The five corresponding subtle elements are smell, taste, color, touch and sound. The senses of perception are the nose, tongue, eyes, skin and ears, while the senses of action are those that enable us to speak, move, work, generate and evacuate. The internal subtle senses are the mind, intelligence, ego and material awareness. The 25th element is time - the external manifestation of the Godhead that starts and ends creation - while the 26th element is the presence of the soul.

In the beginning the soul is pure, clear and peaceful awareness, free from all distraction, but when it identifies with matter, the principles of creation manifest the various material elements. The false perception of the self focused in goodness manifests the mind. Material identification focused in passion manifests intelligence, with its functions such as doubt, correct understanding, incorrect understanding, memory and sleep, as well as the senses of perception and action, that depend respectively on

intelligence and life energy. Material identification focused in ignorance produces the material elements, beginning with the subtle element of sound, that in turn produces space and the sense of hearing. From the existence of space the sense of touch develops, and then air. The interaction of air and the sense of touch produces the concept of the forms of the bodies, determined by the destiny of each individual. The evolution of the forms generates fire (light and heat) and the eyes acquire the ability to perceive forms and colors. The interaction of fire with the visual perception evolves the element of taste, that produces water and the sense that perceives taste (the tongue). Although taste is originally one, it develops in various categories such as astringent, sweet, bitter, pungent, acid and salty, because of its contact with different substances. The interaction of water with the perception of taste develops the subtle element of odor, that manifests earth and the sense of smell.

When all these elements become differentiated, the Supreme Lord personally enters the creation together with time, action and the *gunas*, giving birth to the Cosmic Egg. Within the Cosmic Egg, Vishnu, Hari, divides it in 14 planetary systems that compose its body. The parts of the body of the Virat Purusha, the universal Lord, manifest as the various components of nature - the mouth is the power to speak and the Deva of fire, the nostrils are the sense of smell and the *prana*, and so on. At this point the *jivatmans* are introduced in the universe and take birth in accordance to their specific *gunas* and *karma*.

In this way we contemplate the Godhead as present in our own body and in the universe and simultaneously distinct from them. When the living being is in this position, he is not subject to the influence of the *gunas*, of the temporary identifications and of the sense of possession, just like the sun remains detached from its own reflection in the water.

VERSE 20

सर्वभूतेषु येनैकं भावमव्ययमीक्षते ।

sarvabhūteṣu yenaikam bhāvamavyayamīkṣate ।

अविभक्तं विभक्तेषु तज्ज्ञानं विद्धि सात्त्विकम् ॥ १८-२० ॥

avibhaktam vibhakteṣu tajjñānam viddhi sāttvikam ।। 18-20।।

sarva bhutesu: in all beings; *yena*: by which; *ekam*: one; *bhavam*: sentiment/ nature; *avyayam*: imperishable; *iksate*: s/he sees; *a vibhaktam*: not divided; *vibhaktesu*: in (all) the separated (manifestations); *tat*: that; *jnanam*: knowledge; *viddhi*: you should know; *sattvikam*: in *sattva guna*.

"You should know that knowledge in *sattva guna* sees the one imperishable existence in all beings, undivided although manifesting in many different forms.

The first and truest form of knowledge is based on *sattva*, the quality of existence that is nearest to *sat* and *satyam* - the transcendental existence that is the supreme truth. To better understand this verse, we should remember that the word *bhuta* ("being") indicates a living entity or *jivatman*, and also a form of existence ("being") in which the living entity finds itself in this world as a result of his *guna* and *karma*. Therefore the sattvik intelligence sees all *jivatmans* as cells in the same universal body of the *paramatman* - as one and the same, and at the same time distinct and categorized according to their different functions and positions. Furthermore, such sattvik intelligence sees all conditions of life - *subha* and *asubha*, *sukha* and *duhkha*, etc - as parts of the same great plan for the evolution of the *jivatman*, just like many

different classes present various subjects in a single school course for the all-round preparation of the students. Both these perspectives and meanings have been confirmed many times along the text of *Bhagavad gita*.

The word *bhava* (with a long first *a*) is used here to indicate the supreme Being, and with very good reason. We have seen in previous commentaries that this word includes the meanings of "being, state of being, situation, existence, nature", and also "feeling, sentiment, taste," and even "heart" (as in 10.11). Brahman, the Purushottama, is consciousness and existence: *raso vai sah, rasam hy evayam labdhvanandi bhavati*, "He is taste, and by attaining him, one becomes happy", (*Tattirya Upanishad*, 2.7.1).

This definition of *bhava* includes both *atman* and *brahman*, as both are *avyaya* ("imperishable", "eternal"), but this sentiment or knowledge shines brighter when it is not clouded (*na lipyate*) by the cover of separate material identification (no *ahankara - na aham krto*) as we have seen in verse 18.17. *Atman* and *brahman* are one, yet they are distinct as the two birds sitting on the same tree; this was confirmed from the very beginning of Krishna's instructions, in verse 2.12. This simultaneous difference and non-difference between *Isvara* and *jiva* is explained not only in terms of quantity, but also in terms of relationship, as we have seen in chapter 13. The *jivatman* is simultaneously *purusha* and *prakriti*, just like Brahman is simultaneously *purusha* and *prakriti*: this differentiation is only functional but it allows the required space for relationships or "dance", epitomized by Krishna's *rasa lila* with the *gopis* in Vrindavana. In that *lila*, the *parama purusha* is Krishna and the *parama prakriti* is Radha, while on the subordinate/ responsive level, the *prakriti* is the *gopi's bhakti*, while the *purusha* is the *gopi's bhava*, that is non-different from Krishna himself.

And in fact we found in chapter 13 a statement that is very similar to the verse we are now studying: *avibhaktam ca bhutesu vibhaktam iva ca sthitam, bhuta bhartri ca taj jneyam grasisnu prabhavisnu ca*, "Although undivided, he appears as if he is divided into the many beings where he resides. He is the sustainer of all beings, and is to be known as the powerful Vishnu, who devours everything" (13.17). In turn, that verse connected to the meditation on the Virata Rupa or Kala Rupa, radiant as fire and sun and devouring the universe, that we have seen in chapter 11, especially from verses 11.10 to 11.32, that finally reveal in full splendor what had only been hinted in the previous verses 5.16, 8.10, 10.11, 10.21, and 10.36,

Here is just one example: *divi surya sahasrasya bhaved yugapad utthita, yadi bhah sadrisi sa syad bhasas tasya mahatmanah*, "If thousands of suns were rising simultaneously in the sky, that radiance would be similar to the radiance of the great Atman" (11.12).

Again this will be confirmed in verse 13.8, that explains the Sankhya and the unity/ difference of *purusha* and *prakriti*: *jyotisam api taj jyotis tamasah param ucyate, jneyam jnana gamyam hridi sarvasya vishthitam*, "He is described as the light in all radiant things, transcendental to darkness. He is established in the heart of everything, and he is to be known through the cultivation of knowledge" (13.18).

And what is this great radiance of Brahman, the *brahmajyoti*, if not the emanation of all the *shakti*, *svamsa* and *vibhinnamsa* manifestations of the one great Reality? Therefore those who have true knowledge can see Paramatman existing in all beings: *vidya vinaya sampanne brahmane gavi hastini, suni caiva sva pake ca panditah sama darsinah*, "The wise and learned see equally the *brahmana* who is learned and gentle, the cow and the elephant, as well as the dog and to the savage" (5.18).

The next two verses will illustrate the symptoms of a mind functioning under *rajas* and *tamas*; while we can call the sattvic mode of understanding with the name of "knowledge" (*jnana*) or "intelligence" (*buddhi*), the tamasic mentality does not meet the requirements, therefore this definition will not appear in verse 23. While we study the three types of knowledge (18.20-22), action (18.23-25) and doer or subjective factor (18.26-28) we should remember that these include the position, the instruments and the effort mentioned in verse 18.18. The conclusion of this elaboration (18.30) is that only sattvic persons are able to understand the subject of *sannyasa/ tyaga* and *moksha* that is the focus of this chapter. Then again Krishna will explain about the different types of intelligence (18.31-32), determination or effort (18.33-35), and happiness (18.36-39). After establishing again the importance of the *gunas*, Krishna will describe the duties of the different types or categories of human beings in society according to their *gunas* (18.41-49). Only after that, Krishna will directly discuss about transcending material positions and identifications (*sarva dharman parityajya*, 18.66), while continuing to fulfill one's proper duties (18.56-57) as genuine, pure transcendental devotional service to the Supreme (18.55, 18.58, 18.61-62, 18.64-66). And this is the last conclusion of *Bhagavad gita*.

VERSE 21

prithaktvena: because of the distinction; *tu*: but; *yat*: which;

पृथक्त्वेन तु यज्ज्ञानं नानाभावान्पृथग्विधान् ।

pr̥thaktvena tu yajjñānaṁ nānābhāvānpṛthagvidhān ।

वेत्ति सर्वेषु भूतेषु तज्ज्ञानं विद्धि राजसम् ॥ १८-२१ ॥

vetti sarveṣu bhūteṣu tajjñānaṁ viddhi rājasam ॥ 18-21 ॥

jnanam: knowledge; *nana bhavan*: many natures; *prithak vidhan*: different types; *vetti*: s/he knows; *sarvesu bhutesu*: in all beings; *tat*: that; *jnanam*: knowledge; *viddhi*: you should understand; *rajasam*: in the *rajas guna*.

"Know that the knowledge influenced by *rajas* is the understanding that sees different natures in all beings as separated from each other.

We have already seen in many verses that the influence of *rajas* creates greed and attachment for the selfish exploitation and enjoyment of material nature. The very concept of selfishness and greed implies duality and separation of interests, as claiming one thing for oneself means that we are preventing someone else from having or accessing it. It is important to understand here that overcoming duality is a fundamental teaching that must be applied to the *bhutas* - the living beings and the conditions of being; one should never fall in the trap of believing that there is no difference between *sat* and *asat*, *dharma* and *adharma*, *vidya* and *avidya*, or that all opinions and "ways of life" are equally valid. It is a question of good sense: anyone can see that a particular action will bring some consequences, and the opposite action will bring the resulting consequences.

A rajasic mentality will shift the discriminating intelligence from choosing the ethically valid action and will bring it to choosing the individual or group that will obtain a separate benefit from the action. Therefore the *karma* ("action, duty") will be seen in terms of antithetical advantage rather than general advantage, based on the particular separate identity of the beneficiary of the advantages contemplated, as if different categories of beings had different natures.

In a sattvic society like the original Vedic civilization (in Satya yuga), people do not have a rigid concept of private property, and

certainly they do not apply it to common basic resources such as land, water, animals, plants, or even food. When society is seen as a single harmonious unit of members who cooperate together and share together, each receiving automatically what is required for proper living, there is no crime among human beings - no thefts, no frauds, no violent aggressions. The idea of charity is aimed at circulating and distributing wealth rather than getting some personal merit (17.20). When *rajas* increases in society, greed, selfishness and attachment develop, and the exploitation mentality creates a scarcity paradigm, the impulse to hoarding up grains and other food supplies, and the clear delimitation and segregation of one's land or territory, family and domestic animals. As a consequence, people feel empty, needy and fearful about the future, and they become worried about their self-defense, because they perceive in others the same seed of fear, the desire for exclusive appropriation, and the anticipation of loss and death.

In the cultivation of knowledge, the difference of opinions moves from complementary to competing and rival; while in Satya yuga there was only the desire to better understand and enlighten each other, in Treta yuga with the increase of *rajas* we see debates starting to develop in order to establish a winner, who thus demonstrates his superiority among other scholars. The study of philosophy and theology becomes separate from elemental sciences, and the concept of linear history appears to disrupt the constant awareness and knowledge of the entire cosmic manifestation, spiritual and material. The divisive feeling creates the different classes of occupation in human society, and a difference of roles and inclinations between men and women. Brought to excess, this rajasic influence becomes unreasonable and detrimental, based on the logic of cutting a piece of cloth from one side of a blanket to add it to the opposite side of the same blanket with the idea of making the blanket bigger, or as the famous saying goes, "robbing Peter to pay Paul".

Bodily identification becomes stronger and birth prejudice develops, creating many sufferings and damages to individuals and to society at large. People become easily confused about the nature of the *atman*, and *upadharmas* and *nastika darshanas* develop as popular religions to cater to less intelligent and lazier people, who like to believe that the *atman* is temporary or limited to the body (to rationalize and justify their greed), or prefer to simply have a set of rules and celebrations for social interactions and affiliation (to rationalize and justify their superficiality). When *rajas* is further contaminated by *tamas* (ignorance), human society becomes asuric and hellish, as the concept of exploitation and enjoyment of resources becomes disconnected from actual work and resorts to violent aggression and destruction (vandalism, sadism).

We have seen this development described in the chapter about the difference between the *daivi* and *asuri* characteristics: *idam adya maya labdham imam prapsye manoratham, idam astidam api me bhavisyati punar dhanam, asau maya hatah satrur hanisyecaparan api, isvaro 'ham aham bhogi siddho 'ham balavan sukhi*, "Today I have acquired all this, and I will get even more, as much as my mind desires. This wealth is mine, and it will increase more and more. I have killed that enemy of mine, and I will kill others, too. I am the Lord and master. I am the enjoyer. I am perfect, powerful and happy." (16.13-14). This mentality starts from *rajas* because of the sense of duality and separation, in which one feels that one can obtain pleasure by hurting others, and the sattvic idea of healthy enjoyment of one's legitimate share in a cooperative society is replaced by the selfish accumulation of possessions and power. This selfishness reinforces the *ahankara* (material identification with body and position) and *mamatva* (material attachment to possessions and affiliations), until *abhimana* (arrogance, pride) fills the entire horizon of the conditioned soul, and he cannot see anything else.

It is the intrinsic ignorance consisting in material identification that attunes the consciousness with the lowest mode of *tamas*, in which intelligence is completely covered by darkness. This is certainly not the road to liberation.

VERSE 22

यत्तु कृत्स्नवदेकस्मिन्कार्ये सक्तमहैतुकम् ।

yattu kṛtsnavadekasminkārye saktamahaitukam ।

अतत्त्वार्थवदल्पं च तत्तामसमुदाहृतम् ॥ १८-२२ ॥

atattvārthavadalpaṁ ca tattāmasamudāhṛtam ॥ 18-22 ॥

yat: which; *tu*: but; *kṛtsna vat*: as the completion; *ekasmin*: in one; *kārye*: in the action; *saktam*: attached; *ahaitukam*: without reason; *a tattva artha vat*: one who does not give the proper value to reality; *alpam*: very little; *ca*: and; *tat*: that; *tamasam*: in *tamas guna*; *udahritam*: it is described.

"The narrow-mindedness that sees dutiful action in one method only, to which one is irrationally attached, and that does not give the proper meaning/ importance to reality, is described as controlled by *tamas*.

Abrahamic ideologies and their derivatives (such as communism, capitalism, globalism, as well as some sects of originally non-abrahamic faiths that have been contaminated later by abrahamic beliefs and concepts), are the perfect example of tamasic mentality, because each one of them (and each of their sub-sects) presents itself as the only true, genuine, possible or permissible method or way of life, and is openly determined to demonize and destroy all other beliefs or opinions, irrespective of their actual merit and the benefits they would bring to individuals and society.

Sectarianism can also be present in other groups and cause friction, lack of mutual respect and even occasional clashes, but apart from abrahamic sects (and derivatives) there is no historical evidence of any particular ideology forcing people into conversion and systematically engaging in trying to physically eliminate all other ideologies.

We need to understand this point very clearly, because in Kali yuga people are immersed in *tamas* and therefore rather stupid (*manda sumanda matayo manda bhagyah hy upadrutah*, "lazy, foolish, ill-favored by fortune and above all, misguided", *Bhagavata Purana* 1.1.10) and tend to equivocate and confuse things. Sometimes this foolishness and ignorance comes to the point of mistaking beliefs or ideological affiliations for ethnic culture or even racial character, so if we do not accept or respect the dangerously adharmic abrahamic ideologies we are accused of being racist and intolerant of cultural diversity.

Such foolish accusers are not even aware of the meaning of the words "race" and "culture", and they do not understand that a person who converts to any abrahamic sect fails to have his/ her DNA changed. His/ her skin color and face traits remain exactly the same - unless of course we introduce artificial methods such as use of bleach, dyes, cosmetic surgery etc, that can alter the external appearance but certainly not the DNA and genetic configuration and have effect on anyone with no regard to one's particular beliefs and religious practices.

Also, ignorant and foolish people do not bother to verify the fact that cultural diversity and ethnic traditions rarely disappear with conversion to a particular religion, and people tend to continue in their particular traditional clothing style, food taste, language, music style, entertainment preferences, and so on - unless of course the religious or government authorities make separate efforts to ban previous ethnic customs and enforce new life styles,

and in any case total uniformity (*eka asmin karya*) is extremely difficult to obtain and maintain unless *tamas* is strong and deep enough. So this really boils down to *tamas* again - on how strong it becomes in people.

There are two opposite foolish positions - one says that all opinions and beliefs are equally valid (or equally non-valid), and the other says that only one's own opinion is valid *a priori* simply because one believes in it. Both positions are influenced by *tamas* and remain unable to help the progress and happiness of the individual or society.

The actual fact is that there will always be many opinions, some of which have more merit and some have less merit; all these should be individually evaluated based on their degree of intelligence, ethical sense, feasibility and beneficial effects on individuals and society in general.

The merit or demerit of a particular opinion has nothing to do with the social or historical position of the person or persons who proposed it, or even with the sheer number of the people supporting it. Vote by majority is not a guarantee of the value of what is being approved, because a majority of adharmic people, criminals or fools will support what they like best from their own perspectives; sometimes it is said that democracy is like two goats and five wolves voting together about what is for dinner, or even about what is the most righteous diet.

Claiming that a particular opinion has absolute value because "God said so" (to whom? and who will prove it?) or more realistically, because "God's priests said so", is a tamasic proposition and will only be accepted by people who are already influenced by ignorance. Rajasic people will accept an opinion because it suits them (and their personal objectives) and sattvic people will accept an opinion because it makes sense in the light of intelligence and

ethical sense, while tamasic people will accept an opinion because of apathy, fear and confusion created by clever manipulative propaganda.

A tamasic mentality is naturally attracted to some particular material object or projection, and sees it at the eternal and perfect Being, the appropriate center of his/her attention, service and worship, but the real problem is that s/he becomes overly attached (*sakta*) and aggressive against all those who do not share the same belief. Such mentality is irrational, illusory, confused and irrelevant to the actual purpose of life or benefit of society. It could be some ideological belief, a religious sect, a social class, a race, or a group of any other kind - even a religious organization, a *sampradaya*, and so on. It could be a powerful person such a politician, a superstar of some kind (cinema, sports, culture, religion, etc) or a fictional character or even a *rakshasa* or evil spirit as we have seen in previous chapters (9.25, 17.4). The influence of *tamas* will compel a foolish person to worship and become very attached (*saktam*) to his/ her center of focus, to the point of supporting it against all logic and good reasons, and with all possible violence, deceit and devious means.

In this verse the words *ahaitukam* ("without reason") and *a-tattva-artha* ("no meaning") indicate the tamasic characteristics of no reasoning, blind faith, lack of interest in understanding or discovering reality or facts. The word *alpam* ("minimal") indicates a very narrow minded approach, obsessed with trifles and irrelevant details such as gossip about celebrities, and it can be connected to the expression *duratma* as opposed to *mahatma*. This small vision will - for example - present *yoga* as a health and fitness practice, aimed at stimulating the lower *chakras*, and present *tantra* as a pretext to get cheap sex from foolish followers, eat non vegetarian stuff and drink booze for selfish sense gratification and recreational purposes.

Similarly, the word *karye*, meaning "in what is to be done", can refer to a manufactured form or image, indicating the religious fervor of those who give more importance to the materials and the specific shape of the Deity as an idol of stone, metal or wood, rather than to the divine principle that is manifested in such *vigraha* because of the *bhakti* of the worshiper. Tamasic people who have very little intelligence (*alpa medhasa*, 7.23) will superficially worship the form without understanding it deeply, and therefore the results of such worship will be short-lived and very limited, even if the *vigraha* is one of the various Vishnu tattva forms.

VERSE 23

नियतं सङ्गरहितमरागद्वेषतः कृतम् ।

niyatam saṅgarahitamarāgadveṣataḥ kṛtam ।

अफलप्रेप्सुना कर्म यत्तत्सात्त्विकमुच्यते ॥ १८-२३ ॥

aphalaprepsunā karma yattatsāttvikamucyate ।। 18-23 ।।

niyatam: regulated; *sanga rahitam*: without association; *araga dvesatah*: without attachment or repulsion; *krtam*: done; *aphala prepsuna*: without selfish desire to enjoy the results; *karma*: work; *yat*: which; *tat*: that; *sattvikam*: in *sattva guna*; *ucyate*: it is said.

"That action that is performed in a regulated way, without identification or affiliation, without attachment or repulsion, without a selfish desire to enjoy the results, is described as belonging to *sattva*.

The word *niyatam* refers to regulated actions performed steadily and sincerely, as a matter of duty, as proper beneficial engagement

or *sadhana* (*yata*, 2.60, 3.8, 4.21, 4.28, 4.30, 5.25, 5.26, 6.10, 6.12, 6.15, 6.19, 6.36, 6.43, 6.45, 7.3, 7.20, 7.29, 8.11, 9.14, 12.11, 12.14, 15.11, 18.7, 18.9, 18.46, 18.47). Such actions could be sometimes difficult and challenging, but we need to make some effort to remain regularly engaged; even if we are not successful, the amount of effort we invested in the attempt will bring good results - just like in school we must go through our exercises, tests and homework in order to learn and practice and become perfect. In Hindu-Vedic tradition, these actions are called *nitya karma*, or *nitya karmani* (plural), and constitute the activities that according to Krishna should never be abandoned (18.3).

However, we should not think that such duties are exactly the same for everyone at all times, because the fundamental concept is to engage one's resources and abilities (*guna* and *karma*), and these can be quite different from one person to the other, or even for the same person in different circumstances or stages of individual progress. Therefore we need the wise and knowledgeable guidance of *guru*, *shastra* and *sadhu* to become able to understand what exactly is our duty (*sva dharma*) in each particular circumstance.

We have elaborated several times on the word *sanga*; here we will only repeat that it means not only "contact, association", but also "affiliation, belonging, identification" (*sa-anga*, "member with") as to a particular group rather than to the entire universal body of the Virata Rupa of which we are all parts. So our *sanga* ("association") should be liberated (from all material identifications and attachments) otherwise we should cut ourselves free from it, in order to achieve the level of *mukta sanga* - an essential step towards *moksha* or liberation.

Some commentators translate *raga* as "love" or "absorption", but that is not correct. Love is always a good sentiment and has the power to bring freedom; unfortunately the definition of "love" has been rather inflated and hijacked by using it incorrectly to refer

to lust, attachment, sense of possession, attraction, infatuation, enjoyment, and so on. Also, the concept of "absorption" conveys the sense of concentration and meditation that certainly does not need to be abandoned in order to attain *moksha*.

The word *raga* actually means "attachment" and is closely connected to the type of identification (*ahankara*), based on the egotic dualistic separatist perception indicated by its counterpart *dvesha* ("repulsion, hatred"). One who identifies with the material body will be very attached to it and invest a lot of time and effort and resources in trying to keep it in the best possible shape. One who identifies with the mind will be very attached to mental activities - general readings, riddles, crossword puzzles, scholarly pursuits etc - and invest time, effort and resources accordingly.

One who identifies with a particular group will be attached to that group or its ideology, and similarly invest and work for it. In all such cases, as material body, mind and group affiliation are temporary, the conditioned soul will experience fear, suffering, despair and confusion at the time of loss, due to death or other factors. The same applies for *dvesha* ("hatred, repulsion") and this is why we should do without them, as indicated by the privative prefix *a* applied to the compound word.

So the only *raga* that should be accepted is the one that has no *dvesha* because it is focused on the Supreme on the transcendental liberated stage. This means that we should become attached to our original and true spiritual identity as *atman*, part of *brahman*, and engage all our potential - time, effort and resources - in pursuing that consciousness and engagement. Since the *atman/ brahman* is eternal and unchanging, there will never be any loss, therefore automatically fear and confusion will disappear.

On that level, we are liberated from the consequences of material action because we do not identify with the action itself or its

results and we are not attached to them (*aphala prepsuna*), but we simply accept whatever comes by the grace of the Supreme as *prasadam* or blessing, and use it in the best possible way as a further opportunity for universal service. That is called *visuddha sattva*.

The level of material *sattva* is a sort of preparatory training or internship towards the level of *visuddha sattva* or transcendence; in the language of *bhakti* literature we can define material *sattva* as *vaidhi bhakti* (regulated devotional service) and *visuddha sattva* as *raganuga bhakti* (spontaneous devotional service). While the first is mostly a mechanical exercise and still requires some effort, the second level is free from any friction caused by material contamination, so there is no opposing resistance to the pursuance of our activities.

Again, the platform of material *sattva* must be carefully watched and protected from any contamination, otherwise there is a serious danger of sliding into *tamas* instead of attaining the higher level of *visuddha sattva*.

This can happen due to the influence of ignorance, where *sanga rahitam* is interpreted as "without connections to others or the rest of the world" (as in self-centered egotistic callousness), *a-raga-dvesa* is interpreted as "everything is the same because I don't care" (as in neglect of the basic dharmic values), and *apahala prepsuna* is interpreted as "I don't care what the results of my actions will be" (as in selfish sense gratification, aggression and undue exploitation and misappropriation). These considerations apply both to the individuals and to the groups, including religious communities, traditions or organizations.

VERSE 24

यत्तु कामेप्सुना कर्म साहंकारेण वा पुनः ।

yattu kāmepsunā karma sāhānkāreṇa vā punaḥ ।

क्रियते बहुलायासं तद्राजसमुदाहृतम् ॥ १८-२४ ॥

kriyate bahulāyāsaṁ tadrājasamudāhṛtam ॥ 18-24 ॥

yat: which; *tu:* but; *kama ipsuna:* by one who desires to enjoy; *karma:* work; *sa ahankarena:* with egotism; *va:* or; *punah:* again; *kriyate:* it is done; *bahula ayasam:* with huge efforts; *tat:* that; *rajasam:* in *rajas guna*; *udahritam:* it is said.

"However, that action that is performed in egotism, or with great efforts, by one who wants to enjoy (the results), is described as influenced by *rajas*.

We have seen that *rajas* is characterized by greed or lust rather than "passion" as generally believed. The dictionary definition of "passion" is "emotion as distinguished from reason", and "intense, driving or overmastering feeling", "ardent affection", "a strong liking or desire for, or devotion to some activity, object or concept". Therefore "passion" is a neutral factor that can be directed also towards *sattva* or even towards the transcendental spiritual level, which contradicts the usage of the definition for the materially attached, greedy and lusty influence of *rajas*. The misunderstanding is probably due to the application of "passion" to the concept of strong desire, mistakenly interpreted as always based on lust and not on love, as a corollary of the faulty interpretation and application of the definition of "love" that we have already discussed. There is a clear and important difference between love and lust, and if we are not able to understand it, we can never progress in the science of spiritual life and Transcendental Reality.

People tend to confuse the two because of ignorance and degradation, enforced through asuric cultural parameters by social convention and ideological propaganda often taking the garb of religious or moralistic teachings. Nonetheless, each human being has the innate capacity of seeing the difference between the two concepts - lust and love - because of his/ her natural ethical sense or conscience, and also in the light of intelligence and good sense. While lust is focused on selfish enjoyment, attachment and desire to possess and exploit, love is characterized by a spirit of service and self sacrifice, and by the desire to give happiness and pleasure to the object of one's affection.

Both sentiments or feelings (*bhava*) are based on emotion rather than on reason, and both can be rationalized and channeled through intelligence and logic. Both can be overwhelming and both are based on desire, but the effects are diametrically opposite, especially for our personal evolution and for the karmic consequences that will be generated. While love is liberating, lust is cause for bondage; while love brings unconditional happiness, lust brings constant suffering and fear.

Some religionists, influenced by the abrahamic ideology that demonizes nature, the body and sense pleasure, claim that there is no such thing as love in the material world, and that what we call "love" is nothing but lust. This is not a fact. Material love exists and is influenced by *sattva*, while spiritual love is influenced by *visuddha sattva*, and lust is influenced by various degrees of *rajas* and *tamas*. By denying the existence and value of sattvic material love, these ignorant religionists are repressing the natural healthy tendency for sattvic happiness and pleasure, but such tendency cannot disappear and will rather become distorted as the confused followers are led to believe that they can have some immediate joys and relationships in this world only through *rajas* and *tamas*, in a perverted selfish and even violent and degrading way. We

have seen this automatic mechanism manifest again and again and destroy the lives of innumerable people: we really need to clarify this misconception to save them from serious trouble.

Actual - sattvic - love (including the material love directed to creatures and not just to the Creator) is naturally supported by *dharma* (*satya, daya, sauca, tapas*) and therefore it sublimates desire and even raises it to the level of divinity (7.11), culminating on the platform of *visuddha sattva* into the transcendental passion or ecstasy of *bhakti rasa* and *bhakti bhava* directed to the Supreme Existence, who is also made of feelings: *raso vai sah, rasam hy evayam labdhvanandi bhavati*, "He is sentiment, and by attaining him, one becomes happy", (*Tattirya Upanishad*, 2.7.1). Desire in itself is not a source of degradation, and it can actually be a powerful force for evolution if it is directed and channeled in the correct way.

However, the *kama* ("desire") mentioned in this verse (*kama ipsuna*, 18.24) is not the divine type because it is closely associated with *ahankara* (*sa-ahankarena*), that is precisely the egotistic and selfish identification and attachment that characterizes lust. It is desire and emotion channeled towards exploitation and separation, and will inevitably bring sufferings and damage.

The expression *bahula ayasa*, "with great effort", is directly connected to the concept of *sa ahankara*, "with selfish egotism". It is important to understand that spiritual engagement (*yata, nitya karma*) is supposed to be proportionate and suitable to the individual's capabilities, as confirmed in verse 9.1 *su sukham kartum* ("to be performed happily/ easily"). The concept of *sukham* ("joy") is not condemned in *Bhagavad gita*, rather it is encouraged as a natural aspiration of the living being, that we can legitimately enjoy although we should not get too attached to it (2.15, 2.66, 4.40, 5.3, 5.13, 5.21, 6.21, 6.27, 6.28, 6.32, 9.1, 10.4,

16.23). We will see more about the subject of joy or pleasure in verses 18.36 to 18.39.

It is true that in the course of our sattvic and spiritual duties in this life we must invest some effort and tolerate some difficulties and even sufferings, but we are never required to make efforts that are superior to our strengths or to go looking for suffering deliberately, because there is no intrinsic value in suffering. This idea of suffering as an inherent religious merit, called "penance" and characteristic of the abrahamic ideologies, is actually of asuric origin, as we can see clearly stated in verses 16.9, 16.10, 16.18, and especially 17.19. Therefore the proper path is in the middle - far from the callous laziness and neglect created by *tamas*, and also far from the excessive unnecessary strain and stress caused by the egotic and arrogant attempt to establish one's superiority under the impulse of *rajas*.

We do not need to show off as a big devotee, a staunch renunciate, a strict religionist, or a great personality of some other type, because all this is based on *ahankara* and *bahula ayasa*, and will not impress God or persons who have actually realized Transcendence. At most, such megalomaniac display could win the favor of ignorant and gullible fools and procure temporary followers and wealth, but it is certainly not worth it, because we will not be able to keep up with it, and soon our stamina will dwindle or snap and we will either become a cynical fraud (just keeping up a fake front for "public relations") or we will simply give up the facade and return to ordinary materialistic life as many examples have demonstrated already.

It is not difficult to understand: we can make the example of physical exercise. If we want to attain and maintain a certain level of physical fitness, we need to establish a progressive routine that is within our real possibilities, and practice regularly without straining too much. When jogging, we start with a short distance at

a comfortable pace, then we increase very gradually day after day, with a careful observation of the effects on our body and mind, and if necessary we skip one or more days to recover our energies. We do not attempt a 40 km running marathon immediately, without proper preparation, just to impress our friends and neighbors, because if we do that we might end up in hospital with permanent damage, that will seriously restrict our activities in the future, and bring the typical sufferings and confusion that are the result of rajasic actions.

Our duties such as the spiritual *sadhana* and the engagement in professional activities (that can also be considered spiritual service) should be personalized under the direct guidance of an expert teacher, and adjusted according to time, place, circumstances and individual abilities. The impersonalist approach that treats everyone "transcendentally" in an artificial way, without caring to ascertain the actual *guna* and *karma* and level of personal evolution of each individual, is certainly not in *visuddha sattva* but in *tamas*, as we will see in the next verse.

VERSE 25

अनुबन्धं क्षयं हिंसामनपेक्ष्य च पौरुषम् ।

anubandham kṣayam hiṁsāmanapekṣya ca pauruṣam ।

मोहादारभ्यते कर्म यत्तत्तामसमुच्यते ॥ १८-२५ ॥

mohādārabhyate karma yattattāmasamucyate ।। 18-25।।

anubandham: of future bondage/ consequences; *ksayam*: destructive; *himsam*: hateful/ cruel; *anapekṣya*: careless; *ca*: and;

paurusam: not sanctioned by the divine authority; *mohat*: out of illusion; *arabhyate*: is started; *karma*: work/ activity; *yat*: which; *tat*: that; *tamasam*: in *tamas guna*; *ucyate*: it is said.

"Those activities that are cause for bondage, that are destructive, hateful, careless, and fabricated without real knowledge, performed out of illusion, are said to be in *tamas*."

The expression *anu bandham* here is very interesting. The word *anu* means "following, regularly, closely, after someone, connected, related, subsequent", and *bandham* means "bondage". Accordingly, we can apply all these meanings to define the characteristic symptoms of tamasic duty or action. One is "slavery", as the action that is performed because one is forced to do so, by violence, blackmail or because there is simply no alternative. Another obvious meaning is that tamasic activities (or "duties") create negative consequences for oneself and others, as for example the professional occupation of thieves and robbers and cheaters.

Another meaning indicates an activity (or "duty") performed simply out of imitation and conformism, because "this is the tradition" or "it has always been done like this", without really understanding its purpose or significance, and therefore with a very high risk of misconceptions, mistakes and failures. Akin to this interpretation, we can add the scenario of those engaging in professional, social or religious activities because of the gregarious "gang" spirit - something that sheeple normally do when they feel they have found some trendy fashionable group or club that gives them a sense of exclusive belonging and camaraderie.

Another meaning refers to addictive (especially masochistic) or compulsive activities, such as unnecessary and excessive lifelong vows made out of egotism, that may cause unexpected complications and even serious damage in the future, and in the

very least will cause guilt, fear, confusion and depression in case one becomes unable to continue the practice because of some unavoidable circumstance. Such pledges are taken without a real evaluation of one's personal strength or purpose of life, and often in a reckless and irresponsible way, but they create bondage and liabilities.

The word *ksaya* means "destruction, loss"; in the same etymological derivation, a *ksha-tra* is "one who protects from destruction". Any activity (or "duty") influenced by ignorance usually causes damages to oneself and others (16.19, 17.6); within the category of destruction we should also include the loss of faith and trust, the loss of innocence and good sentiments, the loss of karmic credit and merit, and the loss of intelligence, good sense and good will. A tamasic conditioning (also called "brainwashing" or "programming") enforced as "training" by family, school, community or organization will weaken the mind of the individual and destroy his/ her potential and chances for future success, and sometimes even the possibility of a healthy normal life with sane relationships and engagement.

A word of caution also to psychologists and psychiatrists who follow the behavioral approach in pursuance of Pavlov's experiments with dogs: a truly scientific mind will first ascertain the reality of the factors before initiating any experiment or procedure. Their methods might be useful with people who are already deeply in *tamas* and need to be treated at the bottom level of consciousness like animals, and mechanically conditioned just to behave properly because they are unable to learn in the normal way, but there are also more evolved human beings with a greater potential (even not fully developed yet, as it is the case with children) who could be harmed by the procedures.

The word *himsa* has been analyzed already in other verses. It means "violence" in the sense of hatred and aggressiveness, cruelty

and malice, and desire to hurt and cause suffering. Abrahamic ideologies value corporal punishment and penance, inflicted on oneself and on others, especially after the "ideal example" of Jesus Christ who is shown in an anguished, broken and tortured state of extreme suffering called "passion". This concept develops from the intrinsic hatred towards the body and its natural origin through maternal birth, called "the original sin", from which the believer must be purified through his/ her own suffering or the suffering of a replacement scapegoat. This is crazy *tamas* in a very destructive form, and cannot possibly lead to liberation or spiritual realization. Ignorance normally brings cruelty and callousness, and when carried to the extreme, even delusional madness with all its attending perversions.

The word *anapeksa* means "indifferent, with no consideration"; it was used in a positive sense in verse 12.16, applied to indifference towards the circumstances that could distract us from our proper duty. In this verse the definition is used in a negative sense, applied to indifference towards the action itself - when it is performed sloppily, lazily, absentmindedly, by cutting corners and without sincerity, attention or devotion. It also applies to the indifference towards the sufferings and problems that one is causing to others, as well as to indifference towards the principles of ethics or *dharma*, or decency or goodness. Another application of the term refers to carelessness in regard to the consequences of the action, its disadvantages and demerits, and its chances of success; this approach may seem similar to the sattvik attitude, but as it is not inspired by selflessness and bravery in the performance of one's duties, it remains on the level of irresponsibility and uselessness.

The word *paurusam* is also very interesting. It refers to the human level, where the material mind can manufacture so many different methods based on assumptions or fantasy, on one's own power and

prowess; it is the opposite of *a-paurusa*, a definition used to indicate Vedic knowledge (*apauruseya*, "super-human"), that is realized - directly "seen" - by the *rishis* in its completeness and perfection. In this verse, *paurusam* refers to some activity or duty that has been invented or manufactured artificially, whimsically, without superior reference or scriptural evidence, but to serve some material purposes. This meaning is reinforced by the next term, *mohat*, "out of illusion", that can indicate a delusional perception of our own prowess and powers, by which we cannot really understand whether we are able to perform the action or not.

The combined meanings give an impression of the blind leading the blind, groping around in the dark and still claiming they know perfectly well where they are going - a situation that can easily be recognized in many aspects of the present society, especially in most of the academic fields of psychology, sociology, politics, and so on. The so-called ascending empirical method for acquiring knowledge is not condemned by Vedic civilization, but it is not given excessive value in itself, also because of the vast amount of information and knowledge already available for study. We can see for example in mathematics and physics that the process of learning makes good use of the knowledge offered by previous scientists, and we happily take advantages of formulas and theorems and "laws" and other universally recognized and accepted milestones of knowledge in such fields, in spite of the fact that they may not be 100% accurate or they may even be disproved by subsequent discoveries. Still, it would be foolish to think that one had to totally rediscover (rather than verifying) personally each and every single piece of knowledge that is presently available thanks to the work of previous scientists.

The word *arabhyate* is also interesting; it literally means "it is started" and refers to the fact that the result of the activity is less important than the act of beginning it. While the conclusion of the

activity results from a number of factors and is an accumulated effect of previous attempts, actually initiating an action is a big step that already creates a ripple in the world and in our own karmic territory.

VERSE 26

मुक्तसङ्गोऽनहंवादी धृत्युत्साहसमन्वितः ।

muktasaṅgo'naḥamvādī dhṛtyutsāhasamanvitaḥ ।

सिद्धयसिद्धयोर्निर्विकारः कर्ता सात्त्विक उच्यते ॥ १८-२६ ॥

siddhyasiddhyornirvikāraḥ kartā sāttvika ucyate ॥ 18-26 ॥

mukta sangah: free from all association; *an aham vadi*: without egotism; *dhriti*: with determination; *utsaha*: enthusiastically; *samanvitaḥ*: endowed with; *siddhi asiddhyoh*: in success or failure; *nir vikarah*: without changing; *karta*: the doer; *sattvika*: in *sattva guna*; *ucyate*: it is said.

"A person who engages in duty without attachment to association, without egotism, but filled with equal determination and enthusiasm in front of success or failure, is said (to be situated) in *sattva guna*.

The expression *mukta sanga* was already mentioned in the chapter on *Karma yoga*: *yajnarthat karmano 'nyatra loko 'yam karma bandhanah, tad artham karma kaunteya mukta sangah samacara*, "Actions must be performed as sacrifice, otherwise in this world they cause bondage and further actions. Therefore, o son of Kunti, you should perform your activities for the purpose of sacrifice, remaining free from material association" (3.9).

The concept was mentioned again in 2.47 (*sangam tyaktva*), 4.23 (*gata sangasya muktasya*), 5.10 (*sangam tyaktva*), 5.11 (*sangam tyaktvatma*), 11.55 (*sanga varjita*), 12.18 (*sanga vivarjita*), 15.5 (*jita sanga dosa*), 18.6 (*sangam tyaktva*), 18.9 (*sangam tyaktva*), 18.23 (*sanga rahitam*).

The word *sanga* is a compound of *sa+anga*, meaning respectively "with" (*sa*) and "limb" or "member" or "part" (*anga*). It carries the meanings of "union, contact, confluence, togetherness, concluded, complete, with all its parts, sticking, addiction, attachment, sexual intercourse", but also "war, conflict". A closely related word, *sangha*, carries the meanings of "association, society, organization, group, crowd, religious order, church, company, assembly, concrete cement".

It is clear that Krishna is warning us against the problem of identification and belonging with some sort of "*sanga/ sangha*" especially in the matter of actions and duty, and not only because of attachment to the results of our actions. The two things actually go together, because when we choose to maintain a sense of identification and affiliation with a particular group (falling into the illusion of duality of interests) we become attached to the results of our actions as we want to offer such result to the aggrandizement of our particular group, and not to the entirety of society and Consciousness where they should go.

Such a mentality is influenced by *rajas* (*prithak*, "separation", 18.21) and *tamas* (*anu*, "following", 18.25), not by *sattva* or *suddha sattva*, so if someone is trying to peddle such attitude to us as if it was transcendental, we know what to reply.

This is particularly serious when someone is trying to enroll or exploit us for the interest of a group (organization, *matha* etc) by using the good name of God ("become a devotee of God") and then they demand that we uniform our beliefs and practices to the

policies of the organization because we are "members" and our allegiance and loyalty goes to the organization first, irrespective of God's actual instructions.

Of course we can notice that *sanga/ sangha* can be under the influence of *sattva*, *rajas* or *tamas*; a *sattvik sanga/ sangha* will put the emphasis on the "togetherness" as in "team work and cooperation", rather than on the separatedness of sectarianism, so the results will be dramatically different. A strong influence of *tamas* will not only encourage sectarianism and competition with other groups, but will even cause intolerance, offensive behaviors and physical persecution of other *sanghas*. The more we rise in *sattva*, the better everything becomes; the highest level is the transcendental platform, on which we are united (*sanga*) with the entire Reality (*brahman, paramatma, bhagavan*), and therefore *sanga* becomes *yoga*.

For those who are still struggling with the *gunas*, there are other considerations too. It is said, *krite mantra prayoge va, tretayam tantra sadhane, dvapare vyuha racane, saktih sanghe hi sa kalau*, "In Satya yuga power is found in *mantras* and *yoga*, in Treta yuga power is found in *tantra* and *sadhana*, in Dvapara yuga power is found in strategy and planning, and in Kali yuga it is found in team work".

Even at the lowest level, the strength of *sanga* can be used beneficially on people who are deeply immersed in *tamas* like most of those who live in Kali yuga; by carefully and expertly using the power of *tamas* (*anu*, or conformism) and *rajas* (*prithak*, or sectarianism) under the enlightened guidance of a truly qualified *guru*, otherwise hopeless individuals can be brought to a basic level of human life and acceptable behavior, engaging them in activities that will ultimately create *punya* and increase *sattva* (3.6).

But the *guru* must be truly qualified, because what is medicine for someone will be poison for another, and the impersonalist delusion that everyone (or all the individuals whimsically labeled under the same category, without proper verification) should be treated in the same way will certainly cause many casualties and great damage to the entire society.

For neophytes and weak practitioners in the journey of spiritual progress, even the power of *ahankara* and *mamatva* can be channeled in a good direction - *sattva* and *suddha sattva* - by identifying oneself as a devotee of God (especially one's *ista deva*), a *sadhaka*, a *karyakarta*, etc, and by feeling a sense of belonging and possession (association) in regard to God, *guru*, *shastra*, *sadhus*, and so on.

If such association (*sanga*) is truly qualified and spiritually oriented (in *sattva* or preferably in *suddha sattva*), it will help us rather than obstructing us in our progress, through good example, inspiration, encouragement, instruction, and support. If we truly follow these parameters of *sattva* and *suddha sattva*, even association with individuals that are less evolved than us (such as our own students or subordinates/ dependents) will be beneficial for us, because it will keep good energy (emotion, or *bhava*) circulating in our own consciousness, and this will make us more open to the inspiration and direct instruction from Paramatman. Even popular wisdom says that one can still learn a lot by teaching others.

Sattva or goodness influences us to become free from *ahankara* and *mamatva*, or at least to apply them to the highest and purest level possible, using our position and our resources for selfless service to the Supreme and all beings. When we work in this selfless spirit of service, we find perseverance (*dhriti*) and enthusiasm (*utsaha*) in the action itself, because of the satisfaction coming from a work well done and from having found our

proper place in the world, filling an adequate job description with our true *guna* and *karma*. This dutiful work is done for itself, without the need to show off or to get support from others or to be pushed. The word *dhriti* means "determination, perseverance, patience", and must be supported by *utsaha*, "enthusiasm", because good results do not come by themselves and we need to keep pushing and trying and applying effort and intelligent work, and we need also to keep doing it with a smile and a proactive approach. We should see difficulties as opportunities rather than obstacles, so that we learn to utilize anything that life and destiny (*daivam*) put on our path. Remaining free from *ahankara* and *mamatva* (*an aham vadi*) is still possible even if we work with determination, enthusiasm and pride, and we get satisfaction and a good livelihood from our activities. We just have to always remember "I am just doing my job", and "I am happy to be of service".

When we are equally disposed towards success and failure (*siddhi asiddhi*), it is not because of indifference or stupidity, but because of a proactive and optimistic approach: we are able to see that each step is valuable in itself and even failure can be used for learning and building future success. This applies both to the success or failure we have already experienced, and also to those future outcomes that appear to be likely or inevitable in the course of the proper performance of our duty. *Asiddhi* means "imperfection" and is a splendid way to consider anything less than perfection, in descending order from 99% to 0%. We assess our position and then work our way upwards, with determination and enthusiasm, catching all good opportunities and shaking off negative feelings, without allowing ourselves to be distracted and misled. Cultivating determination and perseverance means that we must be regular, trying to work out a functional schedule and doing something every day, even if only a little bit, and resuming our efforts with renewed energy if for some reason we were forced to stop.

This is reinforced by the word *nirvikara*, "without change", indicating that once we have taken a decision with intelligence and wisdom, we should stick to our path without second thoughts and without being discouraged by difficulties or losses, because nothing valuable can be achieved without some measure of self sacrifice. Enthusiasm means that we find pleasure in our work (*su sukham*, 9.1) and we invest everything we have into it, without reservations, without hesitation, without holding back and without fear. *Sattva* is the key to long lasting and progressive success.

VERSE 27

रागी कर्मफलप्रेप्सुर्लुब्धो हिंसात्मकोऽशुचिः ।

rāgī karmaphalaprepsurlubdho himsātmako'suciḥ ।

हर्षशोकान्वितः कर्ता राजसः परिकीर्तितः ॥ १८-२७ ॥

harṣaśokānvitaḥ kartā rājasah parikīrtitaḥ ।। 18-27।।

ragi: very attached; *karma phala*: the results of the work; *prepsuh*: intensely desiring; *lubdhah*: greedy; *himsa atmakah*: of a cruel nature; *asucih*: impure; *harsa soka anvitah*: characterized by joys and sorrows; *karta*: the doer; *rajasah*: in *rajas guna*; *parikirtitah*: is declared.

"A person who acts out of attachment for the results of his/ her work, pushed by intense desire and greed, distracted by elation and despondence, without cleanliness or compassion, is described as acting in *rajas*.

We have seen that a *sattvik* person remains balanced and steady in front of the various situations, and can keep a cool mind and nerves of steel - s/he is the fearless leader and advisor who can

steer ordinary people out of any type of trouble. Because s/he is not greedy, s/he will live happily with whatever joys, wealth and success are available without too much stress, and consequently s/he will enjoy relatively good health and peace of mind. A rajasic person, on the contrary, will always be in a mental turmoil, tossed here and there by powerful emotions and desires (*prepsuh*), torn between elation and depression (*harsa soka*), victimized by envy and half blinded by the narrow and short vision typical of selfishness. So s/he will be unable to understand that the artificial means that s/he is using today to support his/ her stressful life and achieve immediate goals will ultimately take their toll on physical and mental health, relationships, and even on the opportunities to enjoy the accumulated wealth, properties, positions etc. A rajasic person (man or woman) is selfish and this does not make him very popular in spite of all efforts to win a good social position, and certainly he will never be able to have a real satisfactory relationship based on love or affection. When he is asking, "what's in for me?" before even bothering to hear other people speak, he is ruthlessly nipping any good sentiment in the bud, and cutting himself out of any real evolutionary progress because his interest remains nailed to grossly material profit in the form of sense gratification, possession and domination.

The word *ragi* ("attached") indicates lust, that is very different from love, even when it is applied to personal relationships. What to speak of material objects and wealth, a rajasic person remains miserable and suffering because no relationships can really satisfy his hunger. He is eating more and more and more, and then vomiting so that he will be able to eat some more - this applies to relationships as well, as we can see in the cases of people who become addicted to superficial sex, flirting and meaningless social life. A miser (*kripana*) is greedy and avid (*lubdhah*) and envious of the property and success of others, but he is never really enjoying his own property and success, because he is always

focused on the next goal and above all, he is afraid of losing what he already possesses. So in the end he suffers more than a true pauper, because at least a person who does not own anything has no fear of losing what he does not have. This is connected also to the expression *himsa atmaka*, that can be interpreted on different levels.

On one level, *himsa atmaka* means "one whose nature is violent and cruel", but we see that usually violent people are also addicted to harming themselves, in some way or another. In a very direct interpretation, we can see that rajasic people tend to commit suicide more easily, due to the terribly desperate depression they feel when they lose the object of their attachment - wealth, good name, career, family, a romantic or sexual relationship, the success they aspired to or dreamed of. However, this self-inflicted damage could also be brought about through the abuse of drugs, or by mere stress and excessive mental pressure, the thrill of fear, or by some weird death wish as in the case of those nuts who think it is fun to go swimming with the sharks, climb dangerous cliffs, go bungee jumping or paragliding, drive at full speed at night without headlights or on the wrong side of the road, and so on. Such activities are performed without any benefit whatsoever to society or individuals, but simply to get one's adrenaline pumping and feel "high".

Of course the problem is that "getting high" has a descending curve, called "being down"; all forms of intoxication produce side effects called hangover, withdrawal, rejection, de-sensitization or over-sensitization (reverse tolerance), compulsive reactions and dependency. After the pleasurable effect has passed, the addict feels worse than before and in the long run he will need to consume a dangerous quantity of the substance just to feel "normal", and to get the "high" feeling he will usually risk overdosing.

The addict will also have very unpleasant hallucinations, desperate depression, anger and violent fits, anxiety, paranoia, schizophrenic tendencies and many other mental disorders; he will feel pains all over the body, nausea, and a lot of other physical problems mostly due to brain damage and liver damage. This can be observed in different degrees in those who consume addictive substances such as psychotropic or stimulant herbs (from the mild and sometimes beneficial theobromine, caffeine, cannabis, light alcoholic drinks and nicotine, to the stronger and more dangerous datura, psilocibine etc), and even more in an increasingly serious scale with liquors, heroin, morphine and other opium derivatives, cocaine and other traditional drugs normally used for centuries in various cultures, and to more recent synthetic chemical cocktails such as LSD, amphetamines, meth and similar stuff, as well as legal prescription medications, commercial solvents (sniffed by some destitute street children) etc. Interestingly, the same stimulation and similar damage can be caused by some natural substances produced by one's own body - especially the pituitary and other glands - under particular stress or excitement conditions such as danger, fatigue, physical strain etc. These are the neuropeptide endorphins, the hormone adrenaline (also known as epinephrine), and the various dopamine neurotransmitters produced by a particularly rajasic approach to sex, gambling, video gaming, physical exercise, risk/ danger taking, social rewarding, personal attention, psychotropic substance abuse, and even some kind of music.

It is interesting to note that in order to get the dopamine production effect, one does not really need to assume the substance or perform the action - it is sufficient for the mind to anticipate or even remember the consumption or the activity through the internal senses (*antah karana*). Addictions and drug abuse are typical of people who are strongly influenced by *rajas* and *tamas*; the rajasic type uses these substances for stimulation, while the tamasic type

uses the same substances to dull down or block unpleasant feelings and emotions or thoughts. In the end, however, both elation and despondency, as well as the obnubilation of all feelings, are cause for suffering and degradation, sooner or later. Of course, there is an even darker category of asuric people who do worse than that, specifically becoming addicted to causing pain and suffering and death to others "just for fun"; the numbers of these unfortunate souls are increasing under the pressure of what goes under the name of "culture" and "entertainment", and the accumulated karmic results will be disastrous.

A person who gives so much importance to sense gratification, acquisition of possession and position, as if they were permanent and could define one's purpose in life through identification and attachment, will certainly be looking at people in an impure way (*asuci*), always thinking about how to get some profit or benefit from them, and will eagerly associate with bad or dirty company if that seems to offer some opportunity for material benefits - which is often the case. This also applies to the contact with material objects and acquisitions, as a rajasic person will not care if his earning is pure or impure - as the famous Roman emperor said, "*pecunia non olet*" ("money does not stink").

VERSE 28

अयुक्तः प्राकृतः स्तब्धः शठो नैष्कृतिकोऽलसः ।

ayuktaḥ prākṛtaḥ stabdhaḥ śaṭho naiṣkṛtiko'lasaḥ ।

विषादी दीर्घसूत्री च कर्ता तामस उच्यते ॥ १८-२८ ॥

viṣādi dirghasūtrī ca kartā tāmasa ucyate ॥ 18-28 ॥

ayuktah: not engaged/ without connection (to *yoga* or the scriptures); *prakritah*: materialistic; *stabdhah*: stubborn; *sathah*: deceitful; *naiskritikah*: destructive/ harmful; *alasa*: lazy; *visadi*: morose; *dirgha sutri*: procrastinating; *ca*: and; *karta*: the doer; *tamasa*: in *tamas guna*; *ucyate*: it is said.

"A person acting in *tamas guna* is not engaged (in useful activities), he is materialistic, stubborn, deceitful, destructive, lazy, morose, and procrastinating.

The word *a-yukta* is the exactly opposite of *yukta* (2.39, 2.50, 2.51, 2.61, 3.26, 4.18, 5.6, 5.7, 5.8, 5.12, 5.21, 5.23, 6.8, 6.14, 6.17, 6.18, 6.29, 6.47, 7.17, 7.18, 7.22, 7.30, 8.8, 8.10, 8.14, 8.27, 9.14, 9.22, 9.28, 9.34, 10.10, 12.1, 12.2, 17.17), a word that Krishna uses as a synonym of *yogi* (3.3, 4.25, 5.11, 5.12, 5.24, 6.1, 6.2, 6.8, 6.10, 6.15, 6.19, 6.27, 6.28, 6.31, 6.32, 6.42, 6.45, 6.46, 6.47, 8.14, 8.23, 8.25, 8.27, 8.28, 10.17, 12.14, 15.11). By re-reading these verses we will be able to understand the meaning of this definition more deeply.

Yukti, or *yoga*, includes the meanings of "engagement, connection, service, conscious action, purposeful action, relation" and could be considered the opposite of the separatist mentality that comes from the illusion of duality. Among the various meanings of *ayukta* we find "unemployed, unsteady, erratic, disconnected, devoid of basis or foundations, without reference to *shastra* or method, irresponsible, lazy, incomplete".

This is confirmed by the verses that directly speak about those who are *ayukta*: *nasti buddhir ayuktasya na cayuktasya bhavana, na cabhavayatah santir asantasya kutah sukham*, "A person who is not connected/ engaged (in *yoga*) cannot have the proper understanding. A person who is not engaged (in *yoga*) cannot get any good results, or be able to attain peace. And how can there be happiness without peace?" (2.66), and *yuktah karma phalam*

tyaktva santim apnoti naisthikim, ayuktah kama karena phale sakti nibadhyate, "A *yogi* gives up the attachment to the results of activity and therefore attains permanent peace. One who is not a *yogi* becomes tied by the results of the action that s/he desired to obtain through work" (5.12).

The word *prakrita* is directly derived from the word *prakriti* ("nature") as applied to material nature, therefore it indicates a person who sees life as a mere manifestation of material nature, not unlike the animals see it. By itself, this definition is not insulting or negative, but it restricts the intelligence and the activities of the individual to the material level. The word thus contains the meanings of "materialistic, spontaneous, naive, simplistic, sentimentalist, passive, uneducated, illiterate, unrefined". On a deeper level, it can indicate a person who is slave to the nature of the body, i.e. the mind and senses, and focuses his consciousness on their demands only, without caring for the consequences; these two interpretations reflect the qualities of *rajas* and *tamas*. On the other hand, the word *stabdha* is certainly negative. It means "stubborn, rigid, obstinate, arrogant, impudent", and it was used in verse 16.17 to describe the asuric nature. The word *sathat* is even worse, as it means "cunning, deceitful, clever, hiding, cheating, secret, hypocritical".

The word *naiskritika* literally means "undoing", and it indicates a destructive behavior, insulting and torturing others, trying to destroy their livelihood and create problems. It also conveys the meanings of "miserly, mean, passive aggressive, blackmailing". The word *alasa* means "indolent, languid, lazy", while *visadi* means "depressed, morose, negative" - as in Arjuna's feelings in the first chapter of *Bhagavad gita*. The expression *dirgha sutri* means "procrastinating, postponing, goofing out, spacing out", as when one takes a month to do one day's work, or "kills time" with some foolish games. We find further elaboration in *Bhagavata*

Purana (1.16.9): mandasya manda prajnasya, vayo mandayusas ca vai, nidraya hriyate naktam, diva ca vyartha karmabhih, "Lazy and ignorant/ foolish people, who live only a short life, spend their nights by sleeping and their days by wasting the hours in useless activities".

VERSE 29

बुद्धेर्भेदं धृतेश्चैव गुणतस्त्रिविधं शृणु ।

buddherbhedam dhṛteścaiva guṇatastrividham śṛṇu ।

प्रोच्यमानमशेषेण पृथक्त्वेन धनञ्जय ॥ १८-२९ ॥

procyamānamaśeṣeṇa pṛthaktvena dhanañjaya ।। 18-29।।

buddheh: of intelligence; *bhedam:* the difference; *dhriteh:* of determination; *ca:* and; *eva:* certainly; *gunatah:* according to the *gunas*; *tri vidham:* three types; *srnu:* listen; *pra ucyanamam:* as they are described; *asesena:* in many ways; *prithaktvena:* differently; *dhananjaya:* o Dhananjaya.

"O Dhananjaya, there are also three types of intelligence and determination, according to the *gunas*. Listen, I will describe them.

The word *buddhi* ("intelligence, understanding") has been used prominently in *Bhagavad gita* as a major factor in self realization and progress in knowledge and wisdom towards liberation. Krishna already introduced this concept in verse 2.39: *esa te 'bhihita sankhye buddhir yoge tv imam srinu, buddhya yukto yaya partha karma bandham prahasyasi*, "I have explained *Sankhya Yoga* - now listen to *Buddhi Yoga*. O Arjuna, through this application of intelligence and correct understanding you will be released from the bondage of *karma*".

Next he continued to elaborate on *Buddhi Yoga* from verse 2.49 to 2.53, and speaking about the importance of intelligence and understanding, culminating in 2.63: *krodhad bhavati sammohah sammohat smriti vibhramah, smriti bhramsad buddhi naso buddhi nasat pranasyati*, "Anger becomes confusion, and confusion becomes failing memory. Because of the loss of memory, intelligence is lost, and when intelligence is lost, one falls to destruction."

Again Krishna will highlight the importance of using one's intelligence, especially in verses 5.20, 6.9, 6.21, 6.43, 8.7, 10.10, 12.8, 12.14, 15.20. It is interesting that *buddhi* and *dhriti* ("determination") are mentioned together in this verse, because intelligence without determination will not be sufficient to carry out the actions to their proper completion, and determination without intelligence is mere stubbornness that will cause us to stick to wrong and detrimental choices.

The word *bheda* means "classification", but also "division, differentiation, separation", and in this sense it can be connected with *viveka*, the discriminating function of intelligence that makes us understand the difference between *sat* and *asat*, between *dharma* and *adharma*, between *vidya* and *avidya*. So on a primary level, *bheda* in this verse refers to the distinction between the three different categories of intelligence and determination according to the three *gunas*, but on a deeper level we see that *bheda* as *viveka* also becomes a factor together with *buddhi* and *dhriti*, for the preliminary stage of action when one makes the choice of performing it (*arambha*, 3.4, 4.19, 12.16, 14.12, 14.25, 18.48).

The expression *pra ucyamanam* means "as it is being stated", and refers to the elaboration that Krishna will offer in the next verses and that is presented as particularly accurate by the words *asesena* ("completely") and *prithaktvena* ("distinctly"). It is also interesting to note that the primary meaning of *asesena* is "endlessly", which

in this context refers to the innumerable sub-divisions (*prithak*) of the characteristics of the three *gunas* when they couple up and weave into each other.

So besides the basic three modes known as *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* (that are rarely found in their pure state as they keep interacting with each other), we can have *sattva-sattva*, *sattva-rajas*, *sattva-tamas*, *rajas-rajas*, *rajas-sattva* and *rajas-tamas*, *tamas-tamas*, *tamas-rajas* and *tamas-sattva*. Furthermore, in individual persons (and in material objects and situations) we can also find *sattva-rajas-tamas*, *sattva-tamas-rajas*, *rajas-sattva-tamas*, *rajas-tamas-sattva*, and so so with many (endless, actually, because they also change with time and action) different combinations, where the definition shows the preeminence of one *guna* on the others by the relative position in the compound word.

Thus, for example, *sattva-rajas* is a combination in which a person likes to work hard for the good of society, and although he enjoys the dynamism of his engagement and a variety of stimulations for his intelligence, and has a taste for the benefits and pleasures that his work and social position bring, when he has to choose between honesty and success, he will immediately choose honesty and will use his wealth and position selflessly. Conversely, a *rajas-sattva* person will tend to be more self-righteous and take advantage of his position to get some special attention and honors, although he will externally and superficially remain a very refined gentleman and even a philanthropist.

A *sattva-rajas-tamas* person will be honestly working for the benefit of society, moderately enjoying the benefits and pleasures connected to such work, but he will be jealous of his privacy and attached to family, clan, ethnic group etc; furthermore, if the occasion arises, he may choose to use his position to give special benefits to those he considers "his own people" even if they are not qualified or deserving.

A *sattva-tamas-rajās* person will be a well mannered individual, a good honest worker, but if he has to choose, he will put his own interest before the interest of society, and defend his position fiercely.

Krishna elegantly hints at this mixture of influences inherent in the roles of human society by calling Arjuna with the name of Dhananjaya ("who wins wealth"), referred to the service Arjuna rendered to his brother Yudhisthira especially on the occasion of the Rajasuya yajna, when Arjuna played the role of supreme army commander and followed the roaming horse to the various kingdoms to collect tributes and donations from their rulers as a mark of respect and cooperation to Yudhisthira. This does not mean that Arjuna himself is confused by the influence of the *gunas*; it means that his role in society is inevitably based on a mixture of characteristics that originate from the *gunas*, and therefore he has to deal with them: *na tad asti prithivyam va divi devesu va punah, sattvam prakriti jair muktam yad ebhih syat tribhir gunaih*, "There is not even one single person, either in this world or in the world of the Devas, who is free from the influence of the three *gunas* created by the *prakriti*" (18.40).

VERSE 30

प्रवृत्तिं च निवृत्तिं च कार्याकार्ये भयाभये ।

pravṛttiṁ ca nivṛttiṁ ca kāryākārye bhayābhaye ।

बन्धं मोक्षं च या वेत्ति बुद्धिः सा पार्थ सात्त्विकी ॥ १८-३० ॥

bandhaṁ mokṣaṁ ca yā veti buddhiḥ sā pārtha sāttvikī ।। 18-30 ।।

pravrittim: engagement; *ca*: and; *nivriittim*: renunciation; *ca*: and; *karya akarye*: what should be done and what should not be done; *bhaya abhaye*: what should be feared and what should not be

feared; *bandham*: bondage; *moksam*: liberation; *ca*: and; *yah*: that; *vetti*: who knows; *buddhih*: intelligence; *sah*: that; *partha*: o son of Pritha; *sattviki*: in *sattva guna*.

"O son of Pritha, sattvik intelligence is when one knows what should be accepted and what should be rejected, what actions should be performed and what actions should not be performed, what is to be feared and what is not to be feared, what brings liberation and what brings bondage.

This verse reminds us, for contrast, of verse 16.7: *pravrittim ca nivrittim ca jana na vidur asurah, na saucam napi cacaro na satyam tesu vidyate*, "Asuras do not have correct knowledge about engagement and renunciation. They have no purity, or proper behavior, or truthfulness."

Thus we understand that *asuras* are actually stupid (*alpa buddhayah*, 16.9) and they tend to keep making the wrong choices that will bind them more and more and bring them down to the lowest levels of existence (16.19-20). In this process, *paramatman* is merely allowing them to act through the volition of consciousness (*tan aham kshipami, mam aprapya*): it would be wrong to say that God is responsible for such degradation, or that such hellish existence (*naraka*, 1.42, 1.44, 16.16, 16.21) experienced by the *asuras* is a sort of punishment ordered by God as claimed by abrahamic ideologies. It is all a question of what we do with our free will; as a loving parent, God will simply assist and support us in our educational experiences while we try to get happiness even in the wrong way and against the good advice of *shastra* and *sadhu*.

Also, neither paradise (*svarga*) nor hell (*naraka*) are eternal - no material condition of pleasure or pain is ever eternal, as all joys and sufferings have a beginning and an end, and are caused by the contact of the senses with the sense objects (however subtle and

refined): *matra sparsas tu kaunteya sitosna sukha duhkha dah, agamapayino 'nityas tams titiksasva bharata*, "O Arjuna, 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, and you should just try to tolerate them." (2.14).

Here we can also connect this concept with the statement about what is to be feared and what is not to be feared (*bhaya abhaye*): we should only fear to make the wrong choice, that is *adharma* over *dharma*, because all our bad actions will bring a proportionate consequence in the future, sooner or later, causing further bondage in the cycle of births and deaths. On the other hand, we should not fear death or loss in themselves, because with the proper consciousness we can utilize them for our progress towards liberation. We should never be afraid of God, either, as God is not our enemy.

God does not care for the merits or demerits of individuals or groups: *nadatte kasyacit papam na caiva sukritam vibhuh, ajnanenavritam jnanam tena muhyanti jantavah*, "The all powerful Lord does not consider the good or bad merits of anyone. Whatever happens is only done by the living entities themselves, that are confused because their knowledge is covered by ignorance" (5.15). This means that at any time we can choose to change the course of our life and gradually establish ourselves on a better path. God does not care if someone does not give him allegiance or loyalty or obedience: *samo 'ham sarva bhutesu na me dvesyo 'sti na priyah, ye bhajanti tu mam bhaktya mayi te tesu capy aham*, "I am equally disposed towards all living beings. I do not hate anyone, and I do not favor anyone. Yet, when someone offers me a sincere service in devotion, I also serve them with love and devotion" (9.29). In this perspective, it makes sense to say that God is good and loving.

The words *pravritti* ("doing, following, engaging") and *nivritti* ("renouncing, abandoning") are quite important because they constitute the focus of the balance between the two opposite poles of *sat-asat*, *dharma-adharma*, *vidya-avidya*, and so on.

The choice is not between two perspectives or *darshanas* of Reality, or between one belief or another, but between two courses of action that will automatically and naturally bring opposite consequences as fear or fearlessness (*bhaya abhaya*), freedom and bondage (*moksam bandham*), and therefore they should be performed or rejected (*karya akarya*).

The laws of the universe do not care about what we believe or do not believe: if we throw a rock against the sky, the rock will come back down with a "vengeance" that is totally neutral and hit a believer just like a non-believer.

Other commentators have defined the two as *vihita* ("proper, established, arranged, ordained, dutiful, determined, destined, ordered, prescribed by *shastra*") and *pratisiddhe* ("improper, omitted, denied, rejected, forbidden by *shastra*").

However, we should not interpret this scriptural endorsement as some kind of sectarian commandments, because that is not the Vedic mentality. The emphasis on the scriptural support is expressed to counteract the tendency of people to rely on social conformism or *laukika sraddha*, that is an opinion held by some or many people but not substantiated by any fact or reliable source - in other words, a popular superstition.

VERSE 31

यया धर्ममधर्मं च कार्यं चाकार्यमेव च ।

yayā dharmamadharmaṁ ca kāryaṁ cākāryameva ca ।

अयथावत्प्रजानाति बुद्धिः सा पार्थ राजसी ॥ १८-३१ ॥

ayathāvatprajānāti buddhiḥ sā pārtha rājasī ॥ 18-31 ॥

yaya: by which; *dharmam adharmam ca:* *dharma* and *adharmam*; *karyam ca akaryam:* what should be done and what should not be done; *eva:* certainly; *ca:* and; *ayatha vat:* not clearly; *prajanati:* who understands; *buddhih:* intelligence; *sah:* that; *partha:* o son of Pritha; *rajasi:* in *rajas guna*.

"O son of Pritha, the type of intelligence that does not understand clearly what is the difference between *dharma* and *adharmam*, or what should be done and what should not be done, is controlled by *rajas*.

The primary meaning of this verse is that rajasic people do not care about *dharma*, but only about their own material advantage, so they choose to label conclusions and behaviors as dharmic or adharmic according to their personal interests and beliefs. Similarly, they legitimize their actions, engagements or rejections, on the degree of material benefit they can obtain through them (*kama ipsuna*, 18.24) or the attractiveness of the activity itself (*akusalam kusale*, 10, *istam anistam*, 12) and personal likes and dislikes (*raga, dvesa, lobha, bhaya*).

In our previous commentary we have mentioned the difference between the *shastra buddhi* ("understanding through the scriptures") and the *laukika sraddha* ("popular belief"); the proper understanding of the eternal principles of knowledge as directly seen by the *rishis* ("realized souls") is illuminated by *sattva*, while

the influence of *rajas* leads people (*loka*) to develop particular beliefs (*sraddha*) according to their selfish interest. Greed does not apply only to sexual lust or acquisition of money and other material possessions - it also includes subtler forms of sense gratification such as fame, name, adoration, social position, recognitions, honors, etc. It also expands in collective selfishness, greed and aggrandizement as we can see in intolerant sectarian movements or ideologies.

This can easily be applied to the distinction between *pravritti* and *nivritti* on several levels of meanings, but in any case the central concept here is *ayathavat*, that means "wrong, not true, not thoroughly understood, incorrect, imperfectly understood". Krishna is giving us the measuring instrument to verify the value of all possible conclusions and behaviors.

One of the important *darshanas* in Vedic tradition is Nyaya, that literally means "logic". So all conclusions and behaviors should be carefully sieved through the mesh of logical arguments, direct verification and examples from genuine scriptures compiled by genuinely realized persons.

We have seen many times Krishna emphatically and explicitly saying that we should overcome the illusion of duality (*dvandva*, 2.45, 4.22, 5.3, 5.25, 7.27, 7.28, 15.5) and he has also repeated the same concept of equal attitude to opposite situations in 2.14, 2.15, 2.38, 2.48, 2.50, 2.56, 2.57, 2.64, 3.30, 3.34, 5.19, 5.20, 6.7, 6.8, 6.9, 6.29, 6.31, 6.32, 12.13, 12.15, 12.16, 12.17, 12.18, 12.19, 13.10, 13.28, 13.29, 14.24, 14.25, 18.50, 18.51.

Unfortunately, people who are influenced by *rajas* and *tamas* remain unable to understand this point correctly, and imagine that the only way to overcome duality is to deny the value of *viveka*, discriminating intelligence.

This problem is also created by the fundamental dualistic attitude, by which the individual is expected to become officially affiliated to a particular ideology and pay exclusive allegiance to it, in a form of expanded selfishness also influenced by *rajas*, and therefore gives up the proper use of discriminating intelligence, delegating it to "the leaders" or "the authorities" that are seen as "the guardians of the tradition".

We see this problem for example in the dichotomy between the "followers of *dvaita* schools" and "the followers of *advaita*", as if *dvaita* was a totally different reality in opposition of *advaita* and not just a different perspective of the same Reality. These two groups are often mistakenly presented as *pravritti marga* and *nivritti marga*.

In the typically abrahamic approach, the opposite camp is considered not simply mistaken (or "incompletely understood"), but dangerously vicious (i.e. satanic), because allegiance to a particular ideological affiliation is based on the fear of committing the sin of "infidelity" manifested in appreciating the good value of some statement given by the opposite camp.

This idea is totally alien to the original Vedic system, where all the various *darshanas* are respected as different perspectives, as long as they agree on the basic - universal and eternal - principles of *dharma* (*sanatana dharma*), that have nothing to do with beliefs or perspectives or the choice of one's *ista devata*.

This is the reason why Hinduism is so broad minded: it is not afraid of "heretics" or "infidels" and listens with an open mind to all good ideas: *a no bhadra kritavo yantu visvatah*, "may good things come to us from everywhere" (*Rig Veda*, 1.89.1)

VERSE 32

धृत्या यया धारयते मनःप्राणेन्द्रियक्रियाः ।

dhṛtyā yayā dhārayate manaḥprāṇendriyakriyāḥ ।

योगेनाव्यभिचारिण्या धृतिः सा पार्थ सात्त्विकी ॥ १८-३३ ॥

yogenāvyaabhicāriṇyā dhṛtiḥ sā pārtha sāttvikī ।। 18-33 ।।

adharmam dharmam: adharma (as) dharma; iti: thus; yah: which; manyate: one considers; tamasa avrita: covered by ignorance; sarva arthan: in all pursuits/ values; viparitan: in the wrong direction; ca: and; buddhih: intelligence; sah: that; partha: o son of Pritha; tamasi: in tamas guna.

"O son of Pritha, the type of intelligence influenced by *tamas* believes *adharma* to be *dharma*, and because it is covered by darkness it always chooses the wrong direction in all pursuits.

While rajasic people opportunistically decide what is *dharma* according to their particular selfish material interest, tamasic people consistently mistake *adharma* for *dharma*, and *dharma* for *adharma*. They do not say, "I do not know what *dharma* is", or "there is no *dharma*", but they are actually very strongly opinionated and usually very vocal about what they believe *dharma* is - and therefore they cause the greatest damage to individuals and society, because they keep trying to enforce *adharma* as *dharma* on all others. Just as a passing note, we should remember that the fundamental principles of *dharma* are truthfulness, compassion, honesty, self-control, etc; any "religious teaching" that violates such principles is clearly dictated by *tamas*.

The word *avrita* means "covered", and refers to the darkness of ignorance and stupidity that is almost palpable, like a thick fog on which the tamasic individual or group will project their own blind

beliefs. Another application of the word *avrita* refers to a stratification of various layers of dirt, wrong concepts, unfounded or misplaced beliefs, incorrect cultural superimpositions, and contrasting random ideas accumulated during one's various experiences. The point is that such concepts remain separated and opposite, without any attempt at reconciling them in a meaningful harmonious picture; they are simply superimposed without proper discrimination even if they show a veritable monster - like a stack of photo slides or transparencies of an object seen from different positions and perspectives.

The expression *yah manyate* ("he thinks") summarizes the entire problem of ordinary unfounded and unverified opinions, either one's own or someone else's, presented as actual facts or truth. Usually such opinions are created from a superficial observation devoid of actual knowledge, as when a simple-minded person sees a machine functioning or a vehicle moving, and thinks that the object is acting independently, without an operator.

The expression *sarva arthan* literally means "all meanings, all purposes, all values" and applies both to theory and practice. The word *viparitam* ("wrong direction") is also very interesting; it expresses the idea of "totally opposite, upside down", where perception is exactly the opposite of reality. Now, making some mistakes on the path is not a very serious problem, because we can learn and correct ourselves and become even stronger and wiser than before, but going in the wrong direction is a big problem that should be addressed as quickly as possible, to avoid wasting a lot of time and energies. We should not be afraid of abandoning a wrong path, if after sufficient correct experimentation along a reasonable length of time, we actually see it is leading us in the opposite direction.

The sectarian blind ideological allegiance by which which one only accepts good ideas from a particular line is certainly different

from the determination of honestly and seriously following a method by applying all the genuine requirements. Once a student has chosen a *guru*, s/he should stick to the method faithfully and apply it without cutting corners, but questioning should always be encouraged (*pariprasnena*, 4.34).

An intelligent student does not close his/ her eyes "out of loyalty" in front of apparent contradictions or mistakes or inconsistencies in the teachings or behaviors of the *guru*; a student has not only the right but also the duty to ask relevant questions (respectfully but clearly) to verify whether s/he has misunderstood something. A genuine *guru* should happily welcome such questioning as a good opportunity to help the student to understand how theory and practice should be applied to the various circumstances of time, place and recipient, and if any mistake had really been made out of distraction or other reasons, the genuine *guru* will be eager to correct the mistake. Otherwise, the student should understand that the *guru* is not genuine, and that there is no fault or offense in abandoning a false *guru*.

The preposterous misconception of blind ideological allegiance, that is nothing else but intolerant sectarianism and blind faith, has been compounded by mainstream academia that was founded and directed for many centuries as a propaganda tool for abrahamic expansion and society control; in the first schools and universities of the present era, all students had to take clerical vows in the Christian church (hence the words "clerk" and "clerical work" applied to scribes) as all others were forbidden to learn to read and write.

The church would then pick the most clever and faithful by indoctrinating them and verifying their beliefs through exams before giving them further knowledge with which to control society for the benefit of the church - mostly as priests and other echelons of the church itself, but also as school/ university

teachers, intellectuals, writers and translators, medical doctors, lawyers and notaries, magistrates and judges, diplomats and advisors to kings.

It is high time to liberate Hinduism from such disastrous influence and restore it to its pristine and genuine glory; this must be done by separating (*viveka*) what is actually Vedic knowledge and instructions from what is merely a stratification of dirt - not unlike the process of washing a baby and throwing out the dirty bath water. In this light, the repeated instructions by Krishna about removing oneself from *sanga* (as a corollary of *ahankara* and *mamatva*) are particularly valuable (2.47, 4.23, 5.10, 5.11, 11.55, 12.18, 15.5, 18.6, 18.9, 18.23, 18.26). We must liberate ourselves from the fear of not being "loyal enough" to one party or another, one group or another, one school or another, one lineage or another, one organization or another, one tradition or another, because this fear is an obstacle to real progress and evolution. It stops us from recognizing good things as good and bad things as bad, irrespective of who said or did them, and certainly this approach does not lead to liberation.

VERSE 33

धृत्या यया धारयते मनःप्राणेन्द्रियक्रियाः ।

dhṛtyā yayā dhārayate manaḥprāṇendriyakriyāḥ ।

योगेनाव्यभिचारिण्या धृतिः सा पार्थ सात्त्विकी ॥ १८-३३ ॥

yogenāvyaabhicāriṇyā dhṛtiḥ sā pārtha sāttvikī || 18-33 ||

dhṛitya: determination; *yaya*: by which; *dharayate*: that sustains; *manah prana indriya kriyah*: the activities of the mind, the *prana*, and the senses; *yogena*: through the practice of *yoga*;

avyabharinaya: without interruption; *dhritih*: determination; *sah*: that; *partha*: o son of Pritha; *sattviki*: in *sattva guna*.

"O son of Pritha, the sattvik determination is that which sustains the dutiful activities of the mind, the *prana* and the senses through the practice of *yoga* without interruption.

We can see from this verse that Krishna applies the definition of *yoga* to all the dutiful activities that a human being performs with mind, *prana* and senses. The practice of *astanga yoga* ("eight-limbed engagement") consists of eight parts: *yama*, *niyama*, *asana*, *pranayama*, *pratyahara*, *dharana*, *dhyana* and *samadhi*, and all these can be applied equally to all methods such as *hatha*, *kriya*, *raja*, *karma*, *jnana* and *bhakti*. Actually these are all perspectives of the same approach of "union" with the Supreme, as all definitions of *yoga* are merely attendant practices to the central and fundamental meaning of *yoga*. *Buddhi* or *vidya* includes *jnana*, *vijnana*, *sankhya*, *sannyasa* and *moksha*, explains the truth about *prakriti* and *purusha*, shows the *visva rupa* and warns us about the effects of the *gunas* and the symptoms of *daivi* and *asuri* natures. It also possesses the attributes of *taraka* and *vibhuti*, and leads us to the realization of Purushottama through *bhakti* in proper dutiful action or *karma*.

It is therefore very important to apply *sattvik viveka* to our understanding of *yoga*, otherwise *sattvik* determination will be applied to *rajasic* or *tamasic* understanding, and the results will not be so good.

For example, many unqualified teachers of *yoga* merrily skip over the fundamental requirements of *yama* and *niyama*, and carefully avoid to tell their students what *dhyana* and *samadhi* are supposed to be, while Patanjali himself starts his *Yoga sutras* by dedicating the entire first chapter to discussion about *samadhi* and *atman/ brahman* realization as the sole purpose of *yoga*.

There is not one single verse in Patanjali's *Yoga sutras* that states that the purpose of *yoga* is to lose weight or relieve stress or treat the various physical diseases through *asanas* and *pranayama*, or to see pretty lights and colors in one's mind. Various technical exercises in meditation and purification of *nadis* and *chakras* have been added to the tradition of *yoga* by a number of teachers on the basis of their own experience, but under no circumstances such literature or teachings can be considered on a par with the original *shastra* of *yoga*, and certainly they should not be presented under the label of "the best/ true *yoga*" as methods to achieve mere physical fitness or relieve stress so that one can carry on with a materialistic life where no *yama* or *niyama* are applied.

Reference to sufferings is there (*Yoga sutras*, 2.11-2.16) but simply to state that it must be addressed in the mind only, by detaching oneself from it. *Bhagavad gita* is more specific about practically addressing physical problems, but it only recommends attention and moderation in working, eating and sleeping: *yuktahara viharasya yukta cestasva karmasu, yukta svapnavabodhasya yogo bhavati duhkha ha*, "For one who consciously controls his food intake, who is controlled in moving around, makes controlled efforts in performing one's duties, and is regulated in sleeping and keeping vigil, *yoga* becomes the destroyer of sufferings" (6.17).

Rather, the fundamental definition of *yoga* is to control and eliminate the modifications of consciousness (*yogas citta vritti nirodhah*, *Yoga sutras*, 1.2) in order to focus it on the pure *atman/ brahman* (*tada drastuh sva rupe avasthanam*, *Yoga sutras*, 1.3) by dropping all other identifications (*vritti sarupyam iti ratra*, *Yoga sutras*, 1.4) and overcoming mistaken perceptions (*vrittayah pancatayah klista aklistah - pramana, viparyaya, vikalpa, nidra, smritayah*, *Yoga sutras*, 1.5, 1.6) including all the fantasies and projections of the mind based on false knowledge (*viparyayo*

mithya jnana a tad rupa pratistham, Yoga sutras, 1.8). All imaginative visualizations are therefore excluded very explicitly by Patanjali: *sabda jnana anupati vastu sunyo vikalpah*, "Descriptions or knowledge of things that are devoid of actual reality are called fantasies (and as such, they should be abandoned)" (*Yoga sutras, 1.9*).

The only two genuine methods to achieve the purpose of *yoga* are emotional detachment and constant practice of meditation on the *atman* (*abhyasa vairagyabhyam tan nirodhah, Yoga sutras, 1.12*) together with the direct meditation on Isvara (*tat param purusa khyater guna vaitrisnyam, Yoga sutras, 1.16*) or simply devotion to Isvara (*isvara pranidhanad va, Yoga sutras, 1.23*). One should be very wary of any *yoga* teacher who is trying to make things more complicated than this, especially in Kali yuga when human beings need to simplify processes and make them more practical and useful for the limited possibilities of the people of this era.

The word *dharayate* in this verse obviously refers to *dharana* ("to hold"), that is the constant practice of focusing the consciousness on the desired object of meditation. Some preliminary exercises for neophytes include contemplation of a lamp light or a *mandala* or *yantra*, but in any case one should avoid using imagined forms such as random geometrical shapes, ordinary material objects or similar distracting forms, either gross or subtle. This *dharana* can be performed successfully only if the previous limbs of *astanga yoga* have been fully mastered, from *yama* and *niyama* (abstentions and practices) to *pratyahara* (withdrawing the senses from sense objects).

We will briefly summarize them here: *yama* consists of *ahimsa* (non violence, including strict vegetarianism), *satya* (truthfulness and honesty), *asteya* (abstention from misappropriation and excessive consumption of resources), *brahma acharya* (behaving like *brahman*), *aparigraha* (not accepting gifts or payments),

while *niyama* consists of *saucha* (cleanliness and purity, including ritual purification and *samskaras*), *santosha* (renouncing the search for sense gratification and possessions), *tapas* (tolerating difficulties in the performance of one's duties) and *svadhyaya* (study of the scriptures about *atma vidya* and *brahma vidya*). Without being firmly established in these practices, the "mastery of *asanas* and *pranayama*" has no meaning, because it will only apply to the body and will have no effect on the mind, and in some cases it can even have adverse effects, such increase of blood pressure, physical pain etc, apart from the lamentable increase in egotism (*ahankara*) and arrogance (*abhimana*).

Many people misinterpret the purpose of *asana* and *pranayama* (and the various *kriyas*) as some sort of entertainment exercise or party trick, in which we show people our stomach dancing in its cavity or we produce thin cotton cloth streaming into our mouth and out from our nose, or we exhibit our body twisted up into a pretzel, or precariously balanced in awkward and exotically strange positions. But the meaning of the word *asana* is "sitting place", and the purpose of the *asana* is to sit in meditation; the variety of the positions and movements has the only purpose to train the body to remain still and quiet, so that it will not disturb or distract one from meditation - the focusing of consciousness on the *atman/ brahman*. This is confirmed by other commentators to this verse with the expression *nirbheda brahma anusandhana*, "becoming united with *brahman* without any difference/ disruption". The sensationalist physical demonstrations offered by some *yogis* are merely meant to impress and attract the simple minded and foolish people, and to inspire a measure of awe and reverence for the ability to do extraordinary things; a serious student of *yoga* is not distracted by these gimmicks.

Similarly, the word *pranayama* means "control of the *prana*", and it is done *through* the control of breathing - it is not the mere

control of breathing itself. Just like the balanced stillness of the body is conducive to the steadiness in focusing the mind, *prana* circulation and breathing must be reduced and ultimately stopped in order to facilitate the cessation of all the modifications of the mind (*yogas citta vritti nirodhah*, *Yoga sutras*, 1.2). Exactly the same must be done with the senses through *pratyahara* (literally "directing the consumption by removing"), which includes not only the practice of restricting the amount of food consumed by the mouth and stomach, but also all the other "food for senses" that is hearing, seeing, touching, smelling and remembering and desiring (through one's *antah karana* or internal senses).

This does not mean total abstention but rather control and detachment (5.8, 5.9) and is confirmed by verses 6.16 and 6.17 and especially by this verse with the expression *manah prana indriya kriyah*, "the activity of mind, *prana* and senses". This control should be constant, unbroken, stable, free from deviations as expressed by the word *avyabhicari*, meaning "firmness, no change, no adulteration". In the approach called *isvara pranidhana* by Patanjali, this *avyabhicarini bhakti* means *samadhi* as *suddha bhakti*, or devotion that is not touched by any other consideration except love and service for the Supreme.

VERSE 34

यया तु धर्मकामार्थान्धृत्या धारयतेऽर्जुन ।

yayā tu dharmakāmārthāndhṛtyā dhārayate'rjuna ।

प्रसङ्गेन फलाकाङ्क्षी धृतिः सा पार्थ राजसी ॥ १८-३४ ॥

prasaṅgena phalākāṅkṣī dhṛtiḥ sā pārtha rājasī ॥ 18-34 ॥

yaya: by which; *tu*: but; *dharmā kama arthan*: *dharmā*, *kama* and *artha*; *dhṛitya*: the determination; *dharaṇyate*: that sustains; *arjuna*: o Arjuna; *pra sangena*: because of attachment; *phala akankṣi*: one who desires the results (of the actions); *dhṛitih*: determination; *sah*: that; *partha*: o son of Pritha; *rajasi*: in *rajas guṇa*.

"O son of Pritha, that determination that sustains *dharmā*, *kama* and *artha* because of the desire for their benefits is (produced) by *rajas guṇa*.

It surely takes a lot of determination to engage sincerely and regularly in the hard work required to achieve success in *dharmā*, *artha* and *kama*. Vedic civilization does not condemn such pursuits but rather describes them as *puruṣa arthas*, "purposes of life", as the *puruṣa* is the living consciousness that inhabits the body. For such work to be really successful in this life and in the next, one has to start with *dharmā*, otherwise the results will be ultimately disastrous, even though superficially it may seem that benefits are reaped more quickly and easily without concerns for *dharmā* (18.31).

In transcendental *suddha sattva*, every action is a sacred offering in the union with the Supreme: *yat karosi yad asnasi yaj juhosi dadasi yat, yat tapasyasi kaunteya tat kurusva mad arpanam*, "O Arjuna, whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you sacrifice, whatever you give, whatever you endure in the performance of your duties - do it for me" (9.27).

On the material platform, the difference between *sattva* (14.6, 14.16, 17.11, 17.17, 17.20, 18.9-10, 18.20, 18.23, 18.26, 18.30) and *rajas* (14.7, 14.17, 17.12, 17.18, 17.21, 18.21, 18.24, 18.27, 18.31) is that in *sattva* one works selflessly for the benefit of all beings, in full knowledge and consciousness, without being distracted by joys or sorrows, while in *rajas* one works to acquire wealth, sense gratification, position, power, for oneself or one's

own group, and remains attached and identified with the results of actions. Religious activities performed under the influence of *rajas* also remain material and create bondage.

The expression *pra sangena* again highlights the *sanga* ("contact, association, affiliation, belonging") as the main factor of the action prompted by *rajas*. It is the selfish separation of interests (*prithaktvena*, 18.21) by which one separates himself and his group from the rest of the universe, and therefore from the body of the Virata rupa and the supreme absolute consciousness of the Brahman.

It is interesting to note that in this verse Krishna lists first *dharma* and then immediately *kama* before *artha*; this indicates that under the influence of *rajas* the acquisition of valuable pursuits is merely directed to personal sense gratification and desires. In *sattva*, the acquisition of valuable things is directed to the benefit of the entire society and community of beings, and therefore *kama* is created and obtained automatically for all, without any separate effort, as it actually should be. This is the key to genuine success: *karmanah sukritasyahuh sattvikam nirmalam phalam, rajadas tu phalam dukkham ajnanam tamasah phalam*, "They say that *sattva* gives immaculate results as properly performed duties, while *rajas* produces distress, and *tamas* produces ignorance" (14.16).

VERSE 35

यया स्वप्नं भयं शोकं विषादं मदमेव च ।

yayā svapnaṁ bhayaṁ śokaṁ viṣādaṁ madameva ca ।

न विमुञ्चति दुर्मेधा धृतिः सा पार्थ तामसी ॥ १८-३५ ॥

na vimuñcati durmedhā dhṛtiḥ sā pārtha tāmasī ॥ 18-35 ॥

yaya: by which; *svapnam*: dreaming; *bhayam*: fear; *sokam*: complaining; *visadam*: negativity; *madam*: delusion/ madness; *eva*: certainly; *ca*: and; *na*: not; *vimuncati*: one gives up; *durmedha*: stupid; *dhritih*: determination; *sa*: that; *partha*: o son of Pritha; *tamasi*: in *tamas guna*.

"O son of Pritha, the determination that is in *tamas guna* is characterized by stupidity and cannot go beyond dreaming, fearfulness, lamentation, moroseness and illusion.

This is certainly the type of determination that we can observe most commonly among the people of our times. Even people who consider themselves as staunch dharmic activists will rarely go beyond mere lip service or idle theorizing and protesting. When some actual practical proposal is offered, they shy away and disappear. In Kali yuga people are immersed in *tamas* and therefore rather stupid (*manda sumanda matayo manda bhagyah hy upadrutah*, "lazy, foolish, ill-favored by fortune and above all, misguided" (*Bhagavata Purana* 1.1.10), and *mandasya manda prajnasya vayo mandayusas ca vai, nidraya hriyate naktam diva ca vyartha karmabhih*, "These lazy, foolish and ignorant people are weakened by bad health; they spend their nights sleeping and their day engaging in pointless activities" (*Bhagavata Purana* 1.16.9).

Rakshasas and human *asuras* are very eager to take advantage of the situation, because stupid people can be controlled more easily, like sheep that passively remain in queue at the slaughterhouse munching on some fodder although they can see their companions dragged away and killed. This is because they are offered *svapna* or dreams and fables (such as the description of the pleasures of paradise, surrogate happiness through consumers' goods and services, fictional heroes and adventures in movies, etc) and *bhaya* or fear (the imaginary torture of hell and the very real torture and persecution in this very lifetime), *soka* by creating one crisis after

another to distract people and make their lives more miserable (so that they do not have time or energy for anything more than mere survival) and by offering scapegoats to blame and hate (so that they do not try to find out the real cause for their unhappiness) by and *mada*, encouraging intoxication and addictions through a subtly manipulative balance of prohibition, shame and guilt. As Orwell put it: convincing people that ignorance is strength, freedom is slavery, war is peace, oppression is love, victims are the offenders, and truth is whatever you are told to believe from time to time.

Tamasic ideologies have always treated the mass of people like sheep (hence the neologism "sheeple"), even shamelessly calling their own leaders as "shepherds", and time and again they have sacrificed many innocent creatures (human and non-human) in their blood holocausts for the sadistic pleasure of the evil beings they worship. The main instrument they have used in these last 3000 years to keep the people in *tamas* is the imposition of collective stupidity and ignorance, especially through the physical destruction of books, libraries, teachers, schools, universities, and the prohibition to cultivate any knowledge that is not strictly under their control; this principle has been applied more or less thoroughly in different periods and regions proportionately to the social, financial and military power acquired by such ideologies. In their scriptures we find many openly anti-intellectual statements condemning not only wisdom, intelligence and knowledge but even the direct experience of "one's ears and eyes" that dare to oppose the complete and blind obedience to the official ideology.

In Europe, even the teaching of basic reading and writing was prohibited for many centuries, from the 300s to the 1600s, reserving this privilege to priests and monks, who were the only people allowed to keep libraries. Ordinary people (*laymen*, or "non-clerics") were forbidden to read even the Bible

independently; translations in vulgar (popular) languages were strictly prohibited and translators were burnt at the stake for their disobedience to the law. Intellectuals and even kings tried to oppose this tyranny, but only in the 1400s with the Italian and French Renaissance the situation started to improve thanks to the patronage of wealthy aristocrats, who through corruption were able to put some of their own people on the papal throne.

However, the recovery has been very gradual, long and difficult and still today it is incomplete, as the abrahamic ideology has been inculcated so deeply in the collective subconscious, that even those who try to remove its influence from culture and society continue to subconsciously carry its fundamental concepts as if they were objective truths, or the only possible truths. For example, we see many atheists (by definition "people who do not believe in the existence of God") that merrily engage in insulting God (a God they externally claim does not exist) and surmise *a priori* that all religions are contrary to the natural ethics and conscience, and have the purpose of dumbing, brainwashing, oppressing, enslaving and exploiting people in this life with a false promise of future happiness in paradise. At present, it is very clear that only a solid, deep, vast, consistent, practical, scientific and ethical ideological system such as the original Vedic civilization and knowledge has the intrinsic power to solve the problem and save human society from complete disaster.

All tamasic ideologies stupidly try to solve problems by applying the same faulty mechanics that created the problems in the first place (18.32). For example: to cope with the problem of unwanted teen pregnancies and sexual abuse of children, schools introduce compulsory sexual education - but but instead of trying to prevent the exploitation of children by warning them about the dangers, the program rather actively engages pre-teens in learning how to have sex in all possible ways.

This, coupled with the obsession about sexual prowess and attractiveness ("sexiness") as general status symbols advertised by media and society, creates a pressure on children to demonstrate that they are "cool" by having more sex even if their hormonal development has not created any sexual desire yet.

Similarly, to address the problem of widespread criminality, the government privatizes the prison system with contracts with commercial companies that demand a guarantee of 90 to 100% "occupancies" in their establishments, so that police and magistrates are pressurized into convicting larger numbers of people, including children, even for very mild misconduct cases. In these jails, convicts are exposed to a very harsh life and association in which they learn to become actual criminals, and subsequently after their release they are rejected by the job market because of their criminal records - and have no other option but applying their newly mastered skills to make a living.

The "war against drugs" is conducted by deliberately pumping people from early childhood with all sorts of toxic substances - from fluoride in the water and toothpaste to chemical additives in fast food, to heavy metals in vaccines and strong medications (such as Ritalin) for the so-called attention deficit disorder - and giving a high position as valuable commercial and cultural goods/services to addictive substances and behaviors such as alcoholic beverages, caffeine, nicotine, engagement in gambling, obsessive sex, video gaming, and so on.

This is reinforced by the application of emotional manipulation techniques and by proposing unrealistic standards of social acceptability and life objectives. Wasting resources, "killing time" and avoiding any real useful work are considered symptoms of high-class position in society, and nothing seems too stupid when it comes to spending money and "having fun".

The dumbing down trend of TV programs, music lyrics and styles, literature, media news, comedy, popular jokes, feature films and general entertainment is considered normal. From early childhood, people are made to believe that it is "cool" to dedicate time and attention to watching professional sports games and soap operas and serials, following the gossip and private lives of celebrities, or getting obsessed with cars and motorcycles, physical fitness, fancy diets, fashion and trends, commercialization of relationships (especially through "celebration of special days" by purchasing and gifting consumer's goods), commercialization of personal value (through status symbols such as career position, academic titles, attractiveness of one's wife, personal physical fitness and attractiveness, down to the model of one's car and the cost of one's shoes and clothing), so-called reality shows, game shows, street magicians shows, systematic media disinformation, and a superficial use of social media and electronic gadgetry.

However, the disastrous performance of students in schools and adult illiteracy are blamed on the introduction of the teaching of Darwin's theory of evolution, that is contrary to the tenets of abrahamic ideologies and therefore "immoral".

To cater for the basest taste of the public and the adrenaline junks, cinema producers favor the glorification of actual criminality, especially by creating terrifying cult characters and multiple sequels about psychologically diseased individuals who horribly torture and slaughter innocent people, more graphically disturbing with every new movie, so that they consider a symptom of success if the spectators end up feeling sick to their stomachs. But if anyone is putting up some kind of protest, they are not objecting to Jason or Freddy - they are objecting to Harry Potter.

Other typical tamasic approaches are the "one way only" method (18.22) with an hypertrophy of legislation and law enforcement and bureaucracy, by which everything that is not compulsory

becomes forbidden and illegal, also creating an overgrowth of unproductive and pointless professional positions dedicated to complicating simple things and harassing good people. To give themselves some importance and confuse the gullible, these useless administrators often come up with preposterous and whimsically invented methods (18.25) in the hope they will somehow work, and applying more of the same if it becomes clear that they are not working.

And over and above all, there is the general blame game in which everyone is whining, cursing and complaining about others without really knowing who or what is actually responsible for a particular problem - and without ever engaging in practical proactive work.

The dreaming (*svapna*) mentioned in this verse is not simply the excessive importance given to ordinary sleeping dreams and daydreaming (that in moderate amounts are generally good for one's health), but it can also be applied to fake "meditation" practices invented by people who are not qualified by proper knowledge and realization.

The overpowering presence of *svapna* in tamasic societies is also observed in the hypertrophy and excessive importance given to commercial advertisement, fictional stories with no practically useful contents, all forms of virtual reality, cosplay, internet gaming, internet *avatars*, computer generated special effects, and so on, while *mada* indicates not only the intoxication of wine and liquor, but also all kinds of addictions and delusions, including plain madness.

VERSE 36

सुखं त्विदानीं त्रिविधं शृणु मे भरतर्षभ ।

sukham tvidānīm trividham śṛṇu me bharatarṣabha ।

अभ्यासाद्रमते यत्र दुःखान्तं च निगच्छति ॥ १८-३६ ॥

abhyāsādramate yatra duḥkhāntam ca nigacchati ॥ 18-36 ॥

sukham: happiness; *tu*: but; *idanim*: now; *tri vidham*: three types of; *srnu me*: listen to me; *bharata rshabha*: o best among the descendants of Bharata; *abhyasat*: by practice; *ramate*: one enjoys; *yatra*: where; *duhkha antam*: the end of sufferings; *ca*: and; *nigacchati*: one attains.

"O best among the descendants of Bharata, there are three different types of happiness. Now hear from me how by practice one can obtain pleasure and put an end to sufferings.

Everyone seeks happiness: this is the nature of the soul, that is also called *anandamaya*, "made of happiness". Although the *atman* is pure *sat*, *cit*, *ananda*, the conditioned *jivatman* keeps running around in the attempt of finding pleasure in the external world. However, in this verse Krishna does not use the word *ananda*, but the word *sukha*, that is usually accompanied by its polar opposite *duhkha*, "suffering". Therefore we are dealing here with that type of happiness that one obtains through action in the world of the *gunas*. The expression *abhyasat* means "constantly, acquired by practice", and indicates that the pursuit of all types of happiness is not an instant fix but requires a certain amount of effort and work.

What is this material happiness? The acquisition of pleasure and the cessation of suffering. At the most basic level, happiness is just the absence of suffering, especially physical pain, that can be really overpowering and erase everything else from one's

consciousness. However, even physical suffering can be experienced in a different way according to our individual level of evolution and training; the human body has the power to deliberately cut off the painful feelings in order to continue to work for a higher purpose, and conversely one's mental attitude towards pain can also make it much more unbearable through emotional reinforcement and identification.

In this last section of *Bhagavad gita*, Krishna is still talking about the all-encompassing power of the *gunas* in this world, because as long as we have a body and a mind, we need to deal with them and use them properly. This is a very important field of knowledge: *ya evam vetti purusam prakrtim ca gunaih saha, sarvatha vartamano 'pi na sa bhuyo 'bhijayate*, "One who knows the *purusha* and the *prakriti*, as well as the various ways of the *gunas*, will not take another birth, irrespective of his/ her situation" (13.24). After explaining the three types of happiness, Krishna will comment: *na tad asti prithivyam va divi deve su va punah, sattvam prakriti jair muktam yad ebhish syat tribhir gunaih*, "There is not even one single person, either in this world or in the world of the Devas, who is free from the influence of the three *gunas* created by the *prakriti*" (18.40).

We can also remember a very similar statement in chapter 7: *daivi hy esa guna mayi mama maya duratyaya, mam eva ye prapadyante mayam etam taranti te*, "This divine energy of mine manifesting as the three *gunas* is very difficult to overcome, but those who take shelter in me can cross over this illusion" (7.14). Here is the redeeming path: while we continue to negotiate the *gunas* in this world, in our bodies and minds, we must keep our consciousness, desires, identifications and attachments on the transcendental level, that is the supreme Reality of *atman/ brahman*: *ye caiva sattvika bhava rajasas tamasas ca ye, matta eveti tan viddhi na tv aham tesu te mayi*, "You should know that

certainly all those forms of existence created by *sattva*, *rajas* and even *tamas* come from me alone, but I am not in them: rather, they are in me" (7.12). Verse 7.12 was accompanied by another wonderful statement, that shows us the proper way to tread: *balam balavatam caham kama raga vivarjitam, dharmaviruddho bhutesu kamo 'smi bharatarsabha*, "O Arjuna, I am the strength of the strong who is free from selfishness and attachment. In all beings, I am the desire that is not contrary to *dharma*" (7.11).

This divine dharmic desire is the pursuit of happiness in the true and correct direction, and is based on love rather than selfish lust; the highest object of love is certainly the Supreme Personality of Godhead, and we can start developing this love first of all by hearing or reading about his activities for the support of *dharma*.

This was already clearly stated in chapter 4: *yada yada hi dharmasya glanir bhavati bhārata, abhyutthanam adharmasya tad atmanam srijamy aham, paritrānaya sādhanam vinasaya ca dukṛitam, dharma samsthāpanārthaya sambhavāmi yuge yuge, janma karma ca me divyam evam yo vetti tattvatah, tyaktva deham punar janma naiti mam eti so 'rjuna*, "O Arjuna, whenever *dharma* declines and *adharmā* rises, at that time I manifest myself. I personally descend *yuga* after *yuga* to protect the good people, destroy the evil doers and re-establish *dharma*. One who truly knows the divine nature of my births and activities does not have to take another birth after leaving this body, but comes to me." (4.7, 4.8, 4.9).

This is the truest method to attain happiness and the cessation of sufferings: *mam upetya punar janma dukkhalayam āsavatam, napnuvanti mahatmanah samsiddhim paramam gatah*, "Having attained me, they do not have to take another birth in this world, that is the cause of sufferings and impermanence. Such great souls have already reached the highest level of perfection" (8.15).

VERSE 37

यत्तदग्रे विषमिव परिणामेऽमृतोपमम् ।

yattadagre viṣamiva pariṇāme'mṛtopamam ।

तत्सुखं सात्त्विकं प्रोक्तमात्मबुद्धिप्रसादजम् ॥ १८-३७ ॥

tatsukham sāttvikam proktamātmabuddhiprasādajam ॥ 18-37 ॥

yat: which; *tat:* that; *agre:* in the beginning; *viṣam iva:* like poison; *pariname:* at the end; *amrita:* nectar; *upamam:* similar to; *tat:* that; *sukham:* happiness; *sattvikam:* in *sattva guna*; *proktam:* it is described; *atma buddhi:* the understanding of the self; *prasada jam:* derived from the satisfaction.

"That happiness that seems like poison in the beginning but is nectar at the end is described as sattvik in nature and is born from the understanding of the self and the satisfaction of the mind.

The most direct meaning of this verse refers to *sadhana*, the deliberate engagement of body, mind and senses in the practice of spiritual consciousness and action, dropping all other concerns at least for the time regularly scheduled for meditation: *sankalpa prabhavan kamams tyaktva sarvan asesatah, manasa ivendriya gramam viniyamyā samantatah, yato yato niscalati manas cancelam asthiram, tatas tato niyamyā itad atmany eva vasam nayet*, "Completely abandoning all the desires and plans arisen from the mental processes, one should control the mind and all the senses by regulating them from every side. The mind is unsteady and impatient to wander around. Every time and wherever it runs off, one should bring it back under control and regulate it so that it remains controlled in the *atman*." (6.24, 6.26).

This is also exactly how Patanjali defines *yoga*: *yogas citta vritti nirodhah*, (*Yoga sutras*, 1.2) *tada drastuh sva rupe avasthanam*, in order to focus it on the pure *atman/ brahman* (*Yoga sutras*, 1.3) *vritti sarupyam iti ratra*, by dropping all other identifications (*Yoga sutras*, 1.4) and overcoming mistaken perceptions i.e. *vrittayah pancatayah klista aklistah - pramana, viparyaya, vikalpa, nidra, smritayah* (*Yoga sutras*, 1.5, 1.6).

It is important to understand that one does not need to abandon the dutiful activities, which include some amount of planning and desiring in order to become successful - just like Arjuna needed to focus on strategy while engaging in the battle at Kurukshetra. Many times Krishna has explained that one should renounce not the action itself, but the selfish attachment to the results of the actions (2.47, 2.64, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, 3.7, 3.8, 3.9, 3.25, 3.26, 3.28, 3.30, 3.31, 3.33, 4.14, 4.15, 4.20, 4.21, 4.23, 4.24, 4.37, 4.41, 5.2, 5.10, 5.12, 5.13, 5.14, 6.1, 7.29, 7.30, 9.28, 12.11, 12.12, 12.14, 13.21, 18.2, 18.6, 18.7, 18.8, 18.9, 18.17, 18.23, 18.30).

Thus we understand that the practice of *sadhana* consists in learning how to control the mind and focus it (*dharana, dhyana, samadhi*) on the precise subject we want to examine, without allowing it to run off in other directions: *vyavasayatmika buddhir ekeha kuru nandana, bahu sakha hy anantas ca buddhayo 'vyavasayinam*, "O Arjuna, the intelligence that is constantly focused is the only true one in this world. Those who do not concentrate disperse their intelligence in innumerable minor ramifications" (2.41).

When we have a strong and sincere consciousness of dutiful activities performed as a service to the Supreme, every small action becomes transcendental and worthy of our full concentration: *yat karosi yad asnasi yaj juhosi dadasi yat, yat tapasyasi kaunteya tat kurusva mad arpanam*, "O Arjuna, whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you sacrifice,

whatever you give, whatever you endure in the performance of your duties - do it for me" (9.27). And again: *gata sangasya muktasya jnanavasthita cetasah, yajnayacaratah karma samagram praviliyate*, "One who has finished with all associations and whose consciousness is firmly established in knowledge, worships Yajna (Vishnu) as all his actions become devotional service. The entirety of his *karma* is thus destroyed." (4.23)

To practice *yoga* one does not need to remove himself from family and society and abandon his duties. In the beginning, one must make some extra effort to find a place and time alone (6.10, 13.11) to learn to concentrate without distractions, but the purpose is to attain the direct realization: *naiva kincit karomiti yukto manyeta tattva vit, pasyan srinvan sprisan jighrann asnan gacchan svapan svasan, pralapan visrijan grihnann unmisan nimisann api, indriyanindriyarthesu vartanta iti dharayan*, "One who is a *yogi* thinks, 'I am not the doer of anything'. One who knows the truth engages in the activities of seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, eating, going, dreaming, breathing, talking, leaving, accepting, opening and closing one's eyes, but s/he sees that the senses should naturally be engaged in the sense objects and s/he does not identify with them." (5.8, 5.9). This is the way to engage the *gunas* in the *gunas*: *tattva vit tu maha baho guna karma vibhagayoh, guna gunesu vartanta iti matva na sajjate*, "O Arjuna, one who knows things as they really are is able to understand the various qualities and activities, and therefore he engages the *gunas* in the interaction with the appropriate *gunas*: this awareness keeps him free from attachment" (3.28).

The word *prasada* found at the end of this verse (*prasada ja*) was already explained at the beginning of Krishna's instructions: *raga dvesa vimuktas tu visayan indriyais caran, atma vasyair vidheyatma prasadam, prasade sarva dukkhanam hanir asyopajayate, prasanna cetaso hy asu buddhih paryavatisthate*

adhigacchati, "A person who has become free from the attraction and repulsion for the objects of the senses, maintains the control of himself in his actions and regulates himself (in body, mind and senses) obtains satisfaction. This *prasadam* (blessing) brings about the destruction of all sufferings, gives peacefulness to the mind, and quickly establishes the proper understanding." (2.64, 2.65).

VERSE 38

विषयेन्द्रियसंयोगाद्यत्तदग्रेऽमृतोपमम् ।

viṣayendriyasamyogādyattadagre'mṛtopamam ।

परिणामे विषमिव तत्सुखं राजसं स्मृतम् ॥ १८-३८ ॥

pariṇāme viṣamiva tatsukhaṁ rājasam smṛtam ॥ 18-38 ॥

visaya: the objects of the senses; *indriya*: (and) the senses; *samyogat*: from the union; *yat*: which; *tat*: that; *agre*: in the beginning; *amrita upamam*: comparable to nectar; *pariname*: at the end; *visam iva*: like poison; *tat*: that; *sukham*: happiness; *rajasam*: in *rajas guna*; *smrtam*: it is remembered.

"That happiness that comes from the contact of the senses with the sense objects is like nectar in the beginning and like poison in the end, and is described as due to *rajas guna*.

Learning how to be satisfied with what comes naturally and to peacefully enjoy the healthy dharmic pleasures can be difficult in the beginning because it takes some training. A small child tends to be selfish because his survival requires constant cares and attention from adults; he feels pleasure and laughs when his needs are met, and feels pain and cries when his needs are not attended to.

In such a helpless situation there is not sufficient space for other considerations in his consciousness, except for the constant feeling of insecurity and fear. According to the Vedic system of civilization, a child is pampered until 2 or 3 years of age, when s/he becomes able to understand the connection between actions and their consequences.

At that point his/ her family members generally start to educate the child by precept and not only by example as they had already been doing from before his/ her birth. Still, the child is usually not punished for his/ her mistakes and his/ her security or self image is never threatened. After the completion of 5 years from birth, children were sent to live in the home of the *guru* for their education; the *guru* and his wife became their foster parents and the other students became their siblings for a variable number of years according to their individual possibilities.

Because of the new environment and the many interesting opportunities for engagement, children could easily forget any previous bad habits and the excessive familiarity they had developed with their lenient family members. Still, in the house of the *guru* the student was treated with much affection and care, and never mistreated or punished severely; discipline never used any corporal punishments or other methods that could harm the healthy self-respect of the child. Particular emphasis was given to developing the actual potential of the child with positive reinforcements and recognitions, and especially with peer pressure and healthy competition among students, who were encouraged to associate closely in small groups based on age and talents or inclinations.

Apart from the academic learning, students were gradually trained in engaging in tedious menial services such as house chores, and to observe strict discipline in regards to meals and leisure occupations. For example, they were taught they could take food

only by sitting together and after taking permission from the *guru*, and consume only the foods permitted by the *guru*. All the students proudly wore the same austere clothes and attire of the *brahmachari*, and roamed around in groups to collect forest products (wood, fruits, herbs etc) and alms from the village people (grains, etc) to present to the *guru* for communal use in the *ashrama*; in this way through peer pressure they learned how to behave responsibly, properly, politely and selflessly in all circumstances.

For those who did not have the good fortune of being educated in a genuine *gurukula* (which today means practically the entirety of the global population, except a very small number of people), this training in sense control will have to be self-taught at a later age. Still the principle is the same, and we can find the proper instructions in *Bhagavad gita*. This verse warns us about attachment to sense gratification, that is pleasurable in the beginning but ends in frustration. The word *samyoga* means "engagement, service, meditation, contemplation" and indicates the deliberate choice of focusing one's attention on sense gratification rather than on one's duty and on the consciousness of one's true identity (which is the meaning of *brahma achara*). This is quite different from the healthy and appreciative enjoyment of the good things that naturally come to us in the correct performance of our duties.

We can make a very good example with couple relationships: marriage should be based on love and duty, and not on sense gratification and lust, otherwise after a short infatuation period there will be nothing left when physical attraction dwindles. Then the troubles start, because pregnancy is the natural consequence of sexual union, and if a relationship was simply based on sense gratification, the husband will feel he has been somewhat replaced by the child in his wife's attentions, and the physical and mental

changes of motherhood may make the wife less sexually attractive. The daily life routine and duties will become tiresome and boring and the couple will start blaming each other to the point of resentment and spite, and often the man will make himself scarce, sometimes seeking sexual gratification from other women.

We can see the root problem through the word *visa* ("poison") used in this verse together with its derivate *visaya* ("sense objects"). A poison may not be instantly recognizable when we drink it and actually it could taste sweet, but soon it will affect our health, destroying our strength and intelligence, making us lose consciousness and finally killing us. This applies to all types of sense gratification, that can be healthy only if consumed sparingly and carefully and in the correct way; a poison often can also act like a medicine, but it must be taken in the proper dosage and in the specific circumstances, otherwise it will have the opposite effect. A great example is salty, sour or spicy food, that was mentioned in verse 17.9 as characteristically loved by rajasic people; in small quantities and in the appropriate bodily conditions and environment (season etc), these ingredients can be extremely beneficial to our health, but if we consume them in excess they become addictive and gradually destroy our health.

The same applies with the sensations of heat and cold that were also brought as an example of sense gratification early in chapter 2: *matra sparsas tu kaunteya sitosna sukha duhkha dah, agamapayino 'nityas tams titikhasva bharata*, "O Arjuna, 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, and you should just try to tolerate them without being confused and distracted from your duty" (2.14). We certainly enjoy cold things in summer such as ice cream, chilled drinks and dips in cool water, and warm things in winter, such as warm fire, warm bed, contact with warm bodies,

hot soup and food etc. But we do not like cold things in winter and hot things in summer; in fact the same items that gave us so much pleasure in one season will make us suffer in the opposite season. Therefore an intelligent person will simply journey through these ups and downs without being attached to either, but accepting them in moderation when they are favorable to his/ her service in the performance of his/ her proper duties.

VERSE 39

यदग्रे चानुबन्धे च सुखं मोहनमात्मनः ।

yadagre cānubandhe ca sukham mohanamātmanah ।

निद्रालस्यप्रमादोत्थं तत्तामसमुदाहृतम् ॥ १८-३९ ॥

nidrālasypmamādottham tattāmasamudāhṛtam ।। 18-39 ।।

yat: which; *agre:* in the beginning; *ca:* and; *anubandhe:* and in future consequences; *ca:* and; *sukham:* the happiness; *mohanam:* delusional; *atmanah:* about the self; *nidra:* sleep; *alasya:* laziness; *pramada:* madness; *uttham:* arisen from; *tat:* that; *tamasam:* in *tamas guna*; *udahritam:* it is said.

"That happiness that is based on illusory identifications from the beginning to the end, and is born from sleep, laziness and madness, is said to originate from *tamas guna*.

This verse clearly states that the happiness offered by *tamas* is merely oblivion and loss of consciousness about oneself - not only about the real self or spiritual *atman*, but even one's material identification. Some people say, "ignorance is bliss", and in fact we can see that on the level of *tamas*, total illusion and madness

can give a sort of happiness to the confused soul, that is unable to perceive his actual position and degradation. For a drug addict or a drunk in the gutter their stupor gives a temporary cessation of suffering and a delusional feeling of happiness, and only someone else can usually see their real plight. Even when the anesthetic effect of their intoxication vanishes and they suffer horribly both in mind and body, their consciousness remains covered by delusional identifications and attachments, and they are unable to improve their condition. As *gunas* and *prakriti* are always in movement, there will be some brief flash of self-awareness even in the most degraded human being, but that moment will be exactly the opposite of happiness, and the only way out from that terrible predicament will be a new birth in an animal body, where the conditioned soul will be able to stop harming himself and to start "detoxifying".

For a pig, happiness is all about rolling around in smelly mud and finding some tasty excrements to eat; this perfectly agrees with the set of senses and the type of mind and body he has naturally acquired, and his activities will not be self-destructive and self-inflicted as in the case of the junkie. If an animal suffers, it is trouble coming from outside, that will consume his past *karma* and not create more bad *karma* for the future; the duration of this experience depends on the specific individual's karmic baggage and if we try to engage a pig on a more sattvik level of life, he will feel alienated and possibly even get angry at us.

There is no point in trying to change his nature; although we should not mistreat him, we should not waste time and energy to educate him either. This is why Krishna tells us not to confuse the minds of people who are immersed in *tamas*: *na buddhi bhedam janayed ajnanam karma sanginam, josayet sarva karmani vidvan yuktah samacaran*, "A person who has knowledge should not confuse the understanding of the ignorant who are attached to their

actions, but should rather help them to engage in all activities in a spirit of cooperation, giving a good example personally" (3.26).

Of course there is a huge difference between a pig and a human being, as *manusya jati* (human birth) already contains the potential for education and evolutionary progress to a level that lower animals can never attain; however such evolution must be a personal choice and cannot be imposed from the outside. All external help should come in the form of assistance in positive and proactive engagement, that will counteract the tamasic tendency to laziness and favor an increasing influence of *rajas* or greed. In very rare and exceptional cases, the power of transcendental contact can raise a conditioned soul out of tamasic stupor, but even in that case the purification and progress must be performed through active engagement in practical useful service so that s/he will sweat off all traces of *tamas*. Otherwise, a relapse is inevitable.

In this verse, the word *anubandha* refers to future binding consequences, and can be translated "in the end" like in the two previous verses we have seen the word *parinama*, that literally means "transformation" (as in *parinama vada*, "the doctrine of transformation"). This indicates that both *sattva* and *rajas* imply a change or transformation - one for the better, the other for the worse - while *tamas* is an immobilizing factor, like the ropes or shackles that bind a prisoner (*anubandha*).

As we have seen, intoxication or *pra mada* ("what makes one crazy") is a major cause/ effect for *tamas* to obliterate self-awareness; this can be applied to all types of addictions and behaviors that remove our consciousness from the perception of reality, including the adrenaline highs that drown other feelings and numb the brain. However, the same effect is easily obtained by obsessive identification and attachments as in *moha* ("illusion"), inertial inaction, callousness and irresponsibility to the point of

catatonic condition as in *alasya* ("laziness"), and simply a self-reinforcing habit of excessive sleep as in *nidra* ("sleep"). In all these conditions, the deluded soul seeks permanent happiness and not merely a temporary relief from fatigue, and therefore he "hates Mondays" and dreams of a lifelong vacation in which he will not do anything but all his needs and pleasures will be provided by someone else's work.

We find very similar statements in Krishna's instructions to Uddhava: *sattvikam sukham atmottham, visayottham tu rajasam, tamasam moha dainyottham, nirgunam mad apasrayam*, "Happiness in *sattva* is found in the self, happiness in *rajas* is found in sense objects, and happiness in *tamas* is found in illusion and degradation. However, transcendental happiness is found in me" (*Bhagavata Purana* 11.25.29). We should remember here that by "me" Krishna means the supreme Consciousness and Reality known by the names of Brahman, Paramatma, Bhagavan.

In this regard, we can observe the distinction between the *atman* mentioned for *sattva* and the *paramatman* mentioned for *visuddha sattva*: the perception of *atman* ("self") can vary according to the degree of *sattva* or goodness, and is indicated by the legitimate etymological use of the definition *atman* to refer to the spiritual consciousness and *purusha*, the *jiva*, the mind and even the body. So we are to understand that all types of happiness that we can find in ourselves without looking for external sources are sattvik and good for us.

However, as the *gunas* constantly revolve in the wheel of *samsara*, even sattvik happiness is not permanent and if we want a permanent solution and position we need to rise above all *gunas*: *traigunya visaya veda nistraigunyo bhavarjuna, nirdvandvo nitya sattva stho niryoga ksema atmavan*, "The knowledge of the three *gunas* is based on the sense objects only. O Arjuna, you should become detached from all these three *gunas*, and situate yourself in

that pure goodness that is not subject to change. One who knows the *atman* becomes free from all dualities and finds protection in detachment." (2.45).

VERSE 40

न तदस्ति पृथिव्यां वा दिवि देवेषु वा पुनः ।

na tadasti pṛthivyāṃ vā divi deveṣu vā punaḥ ।

सत्त्वं प्रकृतिजैर्मुक्तं यदेभिः स्यात्त्रिभिर्गुणैः ॥ १८-४० ॥

sattvaṃ prakṛtijairmuktaṃ yadebhiḥ syātttribhirguṇaiḥ ॥ 18-40 ॥

na: not; *tat:* that; *asti:* there is; *pṛthivyam:* on the earth; *va:* or; *divi:* in the sky; *devesu:* among the *devas*; *va:* or; *punaḥ:* again; *sattvam:* existence; *prakṛiti jaiḥ:* born from nature; *muktaḥ:* free; *yat:* which; *ebhiḥ:* from these; *syat:* there will be; *tribhir guṇaiḥ:* three *gunas*.

"Neither on this earth nor in the heavens among the Devas, one's existence can be free from the influence of these three *gunas*, that are generated by nature.

In this verse, the expression *divi deveṣu* is quite interesting. The word *diva* literally means "sky", "luminous", "glittering", and is used to refer to the higher planetary systems, where everything is radiant - bodies, land, buildings etc - as the material elements are illuminated by *sattva*, with a small influence of *rajas* and almost complete absence of *tamas*. The expression *tat sattvam*, divided at the beginning of each of the two lines, means "that existence" or "that mind", indicating that Svargaloka is a higher dimension of life but it is still within the material realm under the rule of the mind.

Materialistic people often confuse heaven with the spiritual dimension, but these are not exactly the same. The concept of paradise, especially in abrahamic ideologies that consider it the highest possible attainment and an eternal position, is still loaded with materialistic ideas of sense gratification, and a subconscious cultural superimposition often confuses Hindus into believing that the spiritual world or Vaikuntha is a sort of paradise where the devotees of Vishnu or Krishna go after death to enjoy an eternal life of celestial pleasures. *Bhagavata Purana* (3.15.13-23, 4.12.35) gives a short description of the Vaikuntha planet within this universe, called Svetadvipa or Dhruvaloka, where Brahma and the other Devas travel when they want to approach Karanodakasayi Vishnu and where a certain semblance of time and space is created in order to facilitate the understanding and the communication with embodied souls.

However, even in this watered-down projection of the transcendental Consciousness we clearly see that everything there is meant for the service and pleasure of Bhagavan, and not as a display of sense gratification opportunities to reward the faithful deceased. Without the limitations imposed by material dualistic perception, such as time and space, the spiritual world or *param dhama* (8.21, 10.11, 11.38, 15.6) is a non-manifested/ non-changing (*avyakta*) eternal complete present everywhere in perfect union with the Supreme, therefore it cannot be described (*adhoksaja*). It is the Supreme itself/ himself, beyond duality and non-duality.

There is no contradiction between this verse and the verses in which Krishna has instructed us to become free from the *gunas* (2.45, 7.14, 14.20, 14.23, 14.25, 14.26), as this verse and the others referring to the great power of the *gunas* (3.5, 3.27, 3.29, 4.13, 7.13, 7.14, 13.15, 13.20, 13.22, 13.24, 14.5, 14.18, 14.19, 15.10, 18.19, 18.29) speak of the influence of *gunas* on one's existence -

mind, senses, body, surrounding objects, circumstances of life - and never on the real self or *atman*. Because of its inherent transcendental nature, the *atman* can never be touched or changed by the *gunas*, just like a diamond is never really touched or changed by the layers of dirt that accumulate around it. The consciousness of the self can only be temporarily covered or obscured, but genuine detachment based on realized knowledge is sufficient to liberate it from such identifications: this is called *moksha*. The subject of the *gunas* and the process to transcend the *gunas* is also explained extensively by Krishna to Uddhava in the famous *Uddhava gita*, contained in *Bhagavata Purana* (canto 11, chapters 7 to 29); we are planning to produce a separate publication on this subject.

It is important to understand that liberation comes from the genuine and permanent detachment born from realized knowledge, and not from the mere absence of a physical connection with a material body. Liberation from material conditionings does not come automatically at the time of death; although it is a fact that death liberates us from the sufferings of a seriously damaged body, if we still have material identifications and attachments we will have to take a new birth in another material body: *jatasya hi dhruvo mrityur dhruvam janma mritasya ca, tasmad apariharye 'rthe na tvam socitum arhasi*, "Because one who has taken birth must necessarily die, and one who has died will again be reborn. There is no point in worrying over something that is inevitable." (2.27). Our purpose then is not merely to "be liberated from the body", but to become liberated from all the delusional desires, attachments and identifications that will cause the development of one body after another.

This applies not only to the earthly level (*prithivi*) but also at the celestial level (*divi devesu*) within the material universe: *a brahma bhuvanal lokah punar avartino 'rjuna, mam upetya tu kaunteya*

*punar janma na vidyate, mam upetya punar janma dukkhalayam
asasvatam, napnuvanti mahatmanah samsiddhim paramam gatah,*
"O Arjuna, all these worlds, from the planet of Brahma
downwards, are places from which one returns, but for one who
has attained me there is no more rebirth. Having attained me, they
do not have to take another birth in this world, that is the cause of
sufferings and impermanence. Such great souls have already
reached the highest level of perfection." (8.16, 8.15). This means
that we need to attain the *atman/ brahman* realization well before
leaving this body: *saknotihaiva yah sodhum prak sarira
vimoksanat, kama krodhodbhavam vegam sa yuktah sa sukhi
narah,* "One who in this life, before leaving the body, is capable of
withstanding the onslaughts of lust and anger, is a *yogi* and a
happy human being." (5.23)

Liberation can and must be attained already in this lifetime: *gata
sangasya muktasya jnanavasthita cetasah, yajnyacaratah karma
samagram praviliyate,* "One who has finished with all associations
and whose consciousness is firmly established in knowledge,
worships Yajna (Vishnu) through his actions. The entirety of his
karma is thus destroyed." (4.23) This is required because living in
a body necessitates constant actions and therefore puts us in
contact with the *gunas*: *na hi kascit ksanam api jatu tisthaty
akarma krit, karyate hy avasah karma sarvah prakriti jair gunaih,*
"Never, at any time, can a person remain without acting even for
one moment, because he is forced to into action by all the *gunas*
born from *prakriti*." (3.5).

To attain liberation, one simply needs to firmly maintain one's
consciousness (*samadhi*) on the transcendental identity of *atman/
brahman*, that is neutral and detached in regard to the *gunas*, even
while continuing to work with them: *prakriteh kriyamanani
gunaih karmani sarvasah, ahankara vimudhatma kartaham iti
manyate, tattva vit tu maha baho guna karma vibhagayoh, guna*

gunesu vartanta iti matva na sajjate, “All activities are actually performed by the *gunas*, but a foolish person who is confused by egotism thinks ‘I am doing’. One who knows things as they really are is able to understand the various *guna* and *karma*, and therefore he engages the *gunas* in the interaction with the appropriate *gunas*: this awareness keeps him free from attachment" (3.27, 3.28).

In the next group of verses, Krishna will expand this concept into a brief description of the *guna* and *karma* of the four *varnas* or occupational categories of human society. that constitute the guidelines for a *sattvik* and progressive life, gradually leading to liberation (*dharmā, artha, kama, moksha*). After that, Krishna will clearly explain that even while performing one's occupational duties, it is possible to become established on the level of liberation by keeping one's consciousness focused on the transcendental Reality, in the subsequent realizations of Brahman, Paramatma, Bhagavan. This is the *nirguna* level, where all the differences in material duties become meaningless, and one is ready to selflessly perform any service to the Supreme (18.66). This will be the conclusion of *Bhagavad gita*.

VERSE 41

ब्राह्मणक्षत्रियविशां शूद्राणां च परन्तप ।

brāhmaṇakṣatriyaviśāṃ śūdrāṇāṃ ca parantapa ।

कर्माणि प्रविभक्तानि स्वभावप्रभवैर्गुणैः ॥ १८-४१ ॥

karmāṇi pravibhaktāni svabhāvprabhavairguṇaiḥ ॥ 18-41 ॥

brahmana: of the *brahmanas*; *ksatriya*: of the *kshatriyas*; *visam*: and the *vaisyas*; *sudranam*: of the *sudras*; *ca*: and; *parantapa*: o Parantapa; *karmani*: the activities; *pra vibhaktani*: are categorized;

sva bhava: out of their individual nature; *pra bhavaih*: produced by; *gunaih*: the *gunas*.

"The duties of the *brahmanas*, *kshatriyas*, *vaisyas* and *sudras* are categorized according to their specific natures, produced by the *gunas*.

The expression *karmani pravibhaktani* indicates that the duties of the four *varnas* are different, and this difference is determined by the particular nature (*sva bhava*) of each category, produced by the influence of the *gunas*. Some commentators have translated the word *pra bhava* as "by birth", and interpreting this as a confirmation of the casteist prejudice by which one can belong to a particular *varna* only if he was born into it. This interpretation is profoundly incorrect and it has caused immense damage to Hindu society and to the human society in general, because it somehow created the idea that people who were born as in a high *varna* - especially *brahmanas* - did not need to qualify themselves, while people who were not born in that position could never become qualified and should never be allowed to try. The casteist prejudice is heavily influenced by *tamas* and Kali yuga, and is the reason for the gradual social, political, economical weakening and collapse of India society, especially as clever invaders and colonizers took full advantage of this weakness and reinforced it for their own purposes.

Unfortunately there is still a number of people, especially among unqualified birth brahmins, that continue to defend the birth prejudice, claiming that the different castes have a totally different DNA, like a cow is different from an elephant or a dog. However, this half-baked genetic argument does not explain why the DNA of a member of a high caste does not show any change in case the individual "loses his caste" due to the ostracization from the community or conversion to a non-Hindu faith.

The fact is that there is not one single verse, in *Bhagavad gita* or in the entire expanse of the *shastra* (*sruti* and *smriti*) that states that the categorization and duties of the four *varnas* are determined by birth, but on the contrary there is ample documentation on the *suddhi*, *prayascitta* and remedial *diksha* procedure that has been used regularly and for large numbers of people who were welcomed in the *varna* system as *vratyas*, up to the highest position of *brahmanas*. The system was discontinued only in the last 200 years as the British introduced the caste based census, rigidly codifying the hereditary positions as different race groups.

Verse 4.13 had already stated: *catur varnyam maya sristam guna karma vibhagasah, tasya kartaram api mam viddhy akartaram avyayam*, "The four *varnas* have been created by me on the basis of different *gunas* and *karmas*, but although I am their maker, know that I am unchangeable and detached from action." The position of each individual within the civilized system of human society described in Vedic tradition is solely determined by the particular tendencies or *gunas* and activities or *karma*; in the original Vedic system one's duty or *sva dharma* is determined automatically by one's *karma*, so much that the two words are normally interchangeable, except in the case of *vikarma* or "bad actions" that are not prescribed for anybody. The concept of *karma* as duty is therefore strictly connected to the concepts of *sva dharma* and *sva bhava*; the difference between *dharma* and *bhava* is similar to the difference between *dharma* and *karma*, as there can be an *asuri bhava* (7.15, 9.12, 16.4, 16.5, 16.19, 16.20) that is opposed to *dharma*.

In other words, there can never be a "criminal *dharma*" as some casteist fools would have us believe, because that is an oxymoron or a contradiction in terms. If one was born in a family or community of criminals, it is certainly not his duty to remain in such situation and carry on the "cultural legacy and family

beliefs"; on the contrary, it is the express duty of all civilized people and especially of the *brahmanas* to help those who want to reform and purify themselves and find an appropriate place within the civilized human society called the *varnashrama dharma*: *krinvanto visva aryam*, "Let us make everybody an *arya*" (*Rig Veda* 9.63.5).

In this verse the first three occupational classes are united in a single compound word (*brahmana-kshatriya-visam*) while the *sudras* are mentioned separately, because *brahmanas*, *kshatriyas* and *vaisyas* are *dvi-ja* ("twice born") and therefore they have the duty to perform the activities of their specific professional responsibilities as well as the traditional Vedic rituals called *nitya karmani* ("regular duties"). By definition, *sudras* do not have the suitable *gunas* for such duties, and therefore they are not required to perform them; if they wish, they can engage in various types of religious activities or get training for a higher *varna*, under the expert guidance of a qualified *brahmana*, and if they develop the appropriate *gunas*, they can be awarded the recognition and engagement that is most suitable to them.

Contrarily to the abrahamic ideology, where one's particular type of birth is mysteriously and unquestionably decreed and sanctioned by God and therefore it cannot be changed for one's life (and then it's over as there is no reincarnation), Vedic civilization teaches that one obtains a particular body in particular circumstances due to his previous activities and desires, and therefore his situation can be changed at any time by a suitable modification of his activities and desires. Not only this concept is explained theoretically, but it is also demonstrated through the practical examples of many famous personalities whose stories are narrated in traditional Vedic literature.

Jabali (Satyakama Jabala), Valmiki, Gautama, Janasruti, Citraratha are often quoted as individuals who were born totally outside the

varna system (one could say "outcaste") and yet became acknowledged as great *brahmanas* and Rishis. The story of Satyakama Jabala, son of a prostitute who did not even know who his father was, is particularly well known because it is narrated in *Chandogya Upanishad* (4.4.1-5). The great Vasistha was the son of the *apsara* Urvasi, born from a casual encounter. Veda Vyasa was born from the casual sexual encounter of a woman belonging to the fishermen community; he had a highly qualified *brahmana* son (Sukadeva), two *kshatriya* sons (Pandu and Dhritarastra) and a son who was situated on a level of consciousness completely transcendental to the *varna* system (Vidura).

Parasara himself was born from Adrisyati Chandaluni. Aitareya Rishi, author of the *Aitareya Upanishad*, was born of a *sudra* mother. In *Aitareya Brahmana* (2.19) we find the story of Ailusha Rishi, who was the son of a prostitute and himself a gambler of low character; however he became sincerely interested in Vedic knowledge and in time he was recognized as a Rishi and an Acharya. On the other hand, the famous *rakshasa* Ravana (and his brothers) were the grandchildren of Pulastya Rishi.

Visvamitra the son of Maharaja Gadi was a *kshatriya* not only by birth but by *guna* and *karma* as well, but he was determined to become a *brahmana* and he achieved his goal after a long and hard training. He is mentioned together with Maharaja Vitahavya in *Mahabharata* respectively in Adi Parva chapter 174 and Anusasana Parva, chapter 30, because they both moved up from a *kshatriya* birth to the position of famous *brahmanas*. The *Hari vamsa* (29.7-8) also says that among the descendants of Gritsamada the son of Vitahavya there were many *brahmanas*, as well as *kshatriyas*, *vaisyas* and *sudras*.

The position of *brahmana* was attained by Suceta, Prakasa, Pramiti (famous experts in *Vedas* and *Vedangas*), and also by Sunaka, who was born as a *sudra* and became the father of the famous Saunaka

Rishi (who narrated the *Bhagavata purana* to the Rishis assembled in Naimisharanya). Conversely among the descendants of the great *brahmana* Rishi Bharadvaja we find king Vitaka, a great *kshatriya*, who had two sons (Nara and Garga); Nara continued the dynasty with a *kshatriya* offspring, while Garga became a *brahmana*.

Another *kshatriya* who became a *brahmana* and generated an offspring of *brahmanas* was Maharaja Dhrista, mentioned in *Bhagavata purana* (9.2.16-17). Again the *Bhagavata Purana* (9.2.22) mentions for the same reason Maharaja Agnivesya (later known as Jatukarma Rishi), son of Devadatta, whose *brahmana* descendants became famous as the Agnivesyayanas. Jahnuni Muni was born as the son of king Hotra, descendant of the saintly king Aila of the Chandra vamsa (*Bhagavata Purana* 9.15.1-4), Kanva Rishi was born in the dynasty of Maharaja Puru and his son Medhatithi was the ancestor of the *brahmana* Praskanna (*Bhagavata Purana* 9.20.1-7).

Similarly the position of *brahmana* was attained by Gargya the son of King Sini, by the three sons of king Duritakshaya called Trayyaruni, Kavi and Puskararuni (*Bhagavata Purana* 9.21.19), by the *vaisyas* Nabhaga and Dista (*Bhagavata Purana* 8.18.3), by Ajamidha and his son Priyamedha (that belonged to the dynasty of king Bharyasva) and his descendants such as the great Rishi Mudgala, Satananda and Kripacharya (*Bhagavata Purana* 9.21.21, 9.21.31).

The *Hari vamsa* (31.33-35) states that Maharaja Bali had 5 *kshatriya* sons but also other sons who became *brahmanas* and generated *brahmana* lineages. The *Bhagavata Purana* also informs us that among the 100 sons of king Rishabhadeva, 81 became *brahmanas* (*Bhagavata Purana* 5.4.13).

VERSE 42

शमो दमस्तपः शौचं क्षान्तिरार्जवमेव च ।

śamo damastapaḥ śaucam kṣāntirārjavameva ca ।

ज्ञानं विज्ञानमास्तिक्यं ब्रह्मकर्म स्वभावजम् ॥ १८-४२ ॥

jñānam vijñānamāstikyam brahmakarma svabhāvajam ॥ 18-42 ॥

samah: control of the mind; *damah*: control of the senses; *tapah*: control of the body; *saucam*: cleanliness; *ksantih*: tolerance; *arjavam*: simplicity; *eva*: certainly; *ca*: and; *jnanam*: theoretical knowledge; *vijnanam*: applied knowledge; *astikyam*: faith in Vedic authority; *brahma karma*: the activities/ duties of the *brahmana*; *svabhava jam*: born from his specific nature.

"The activities/ duties of the *brahmana*, determined by his particular nature, are control of his own mind, senses and body, cleanliness, tolerance, simplicity, theoretical and practical knowledge, and living in accordance to Vedic teachings.

The word *astikyam* ("faith in *Vedas*") is closely connected with the word *astika* ("one who believes in the authority of Vedic knowledge") used in the traditional categorization of *darshanas*; we may remember that among the dharmic *darshanas* there are three that are described as *na-astika* ("not recognizing the authority of Vedic knowledge"): Buddhism, Jainism and Charvaka's agnostic materialism. These ideologies are still considered compatible with *sanatana dharma* because they recognize the validity of the eternal and universal principles of ethics (*dharma*), but they are not up to the mark of the civilized (*arya*) system of *varnas* and *ashramas*, and they are therefore called *upa-dharmas*.

In this verse Krishna clearly establishes that there can be no such thing as an agnostic *brahmana*, because that would be an oxymoron, like saying "dry water" or "cold heat". *Astikya* is a defining characteristic by which one can recognize a *brahmana*, so if this quality is not present, the individual can at most be a *brahma bandhu*, or "relative of a *brahmana*". It is important to understand that such faith is in the genuine and original Vedic knowledge. It does not refer to a particular belief in a personal God, because Vedic knowledge accommodates the perspective of impersonalism (*akshara*, 12.3, non-manifested, 7.24), although Krishna says that it is an unnecessarily difficult form of meditation (12.5). Therefore the word *nastika* cannot be translated as "atheist" in the abrahamic sense.

The preceding couple of attributes, *jnana-vijnana*, refers to *astika*, therefore it indicates a solid verifiable source, and not some second hand opinion or popular belief (*laukika sraddha*) as sometimes Hinduism is considered. This also means that one can certainly study and respect the teachings of Vedic commentators or *gurus*, but such writings must never be considered on the same level of the original *sruti*, because their presentation was necessarily adapted to their particular *desa, kala, patra* and therefore do not require an implicit faith from a *brahmana*.

Blind allegiance to a *sampradaya* against the teachings of the original *Vedas* thus disqualifies a person from the category of *brahmanas*. This also means that paid teachers depending on academic institutions cannot be considered *brahmanas*, because *brahmanas* only teach under their own responsibility and value truth and knowledge above all else. On the other side, academia forces people to conform to what is taught, even against truth and ethics, and against the benefit of the students.

The next *karma* (characteristic activity, duty, qualification, occupation) of the *brahmana* is *arjavam*, a definition that conveys

the meanings of "simplicity, honesty, truthfulness, straightforwardness". Unfortunately some people confuse simplicity with foolishness or ignorance. The same applies to *kshanti*, that means "tolerance, forgiveness", often mistaken for callousness or indifference, neglect or absenteeism, or even irresponsibility. The other qualities are *sama* and *dama* (control of one's internal and external senses, especially *manasa*, *jihva*, *udara* and *upasta* - mind, tongue, belly and genitals), *tapah* (austerity consisting in bravely facing difficulties) and *sauca* (cleanliness and purity). These have been discussed in many previous verses, especially from 13.8 to 13.12 where Krishna described the real meaning of *jnana*; that list should also be considered contained in the expression *jnana vijnana* of this verse. One who does not show the qualities/ activities listed in this verse cannot really be considered a *brahmana*.

In the *Bhagavata Purana* (7.11.21) Narada Muni states: *samo damas tapah saucam santosah ksantir arjavam, jnanam, ayacyutatmatvam satyam ca brahma-laksanam*, "The qualities that characterize a *brahmana* are the control of one's mind and senses, austerity and tolerance in the face of difficulties, cleanliness, contentment, tendency to forgive, simplicity, knowledge, compassion, truthfulness, and complete surrender to the Supreme Personality of Godhead."

In the *Mahabharata* (Vana Parva chapter 180), Maharaja Yudhisthira states: *dharmas ca satyam ca damas tapas ca amatsaryam hris titiksanasya, yajnas ca danam ca dhrtih srutam ca vratani vai dvadasa brahmanasya*, "A *brahmana* must always behave in accordance to *dharma* (ethical principles). First of all he must be truthful and able to control his own senses. He must be austere, detached, humble and tolerant. He must not envy anyone. He must be expert in the performance of sacrifices and distribute his possessions in charity. He must be determined in the study of

Vedic scriptures and in religious activities: these are the 12 fundamental qualities of a *brahmana*." And again, *sudre tu yad bhavel laksana dvije tac ca na vidyate, na vai sudro bhavec chudro brahmano na ca brahmanah*, "If these qualities (listed as the characteristics of the *brahmanas*) are found in a *sudra* (i.e. a person born in a *sudra* family), such person must never be called a *sudra*, just like a *brahmana* (i.e. a person born in a *brahmana* family) is not a *brahmana* if he lacks these qualities."

We find descriptions of the character of the genuine *brahmanas* also in the original *samhitas* such as *Rig* (2.22.2, 5.34.6, 6.63.5, 7.103.1), *Atharva* (5.17.9), *Yajur* (26.2); here is one example: *brahmana saha saumino vacamkrat brahma krinvantah parivatsarinam adhvaryayo gharminah sisvidhana avirbhavanti guhya na kecit*, "A *brahmana* is always gentle and soft spoken, always engaged in spiritual activities on the highest level of consciousness, offers revelations on knowledge, recognizes merit in others and does not hide anything" (*Rig Veda* 7.103.8).

Again the *Mahabharata* gives further clarifications in this regard (Anusasana Parva 163.8, 26, 46), where Shiva tells Parvati: *sthito brahmana-dharmena brahmanyam upajivati, ksatriyo vatha vaisyo va brahma-bhuyah sa gacchati, ebhis tu karmabhir devi subhair acaritais tatha, sudro brahmanatam yati vaisyah ksatriyatam vrajet, etaih karma-phalair devi suddhatma vijitendriyah, sudro'pi dvija-vat sevya iti brahmabravat svayam, sarvo'yam brahmano loke vrttena tu vidhiyate, vrtte sthitas tu sudro'pi brahmanatvam niyacchati*.

Here is the translation: "If *kshatriyas* or *vaisyas* behave like *brahmanas* and engage in the occupations of *brahmanas*, such persons attain the position of *brahmana*. In the same way, a *sudra* can become a *brahmana* and a *vaisya* can become a *kshatriya*. O Devi, thanks to the performance of these activities and by following the instructions of the *Agamas* (Vedic scriptures that

contain the instructions for the rituals) a person born in a family of *sudras* devoid of qualifications can become a *brahmana*. In this world, a person is born in a *brahmana* family as a result of his tendencies, therefore a *sudra* that manifests the tendencies of a *brahmana* and acts as a *brahmana* automatically becomes a *brahmana*." The *Bhagavata Purana* (7.11.35) confirms: *yasya yal laksanam proktam pumso varnabhivyanyakam, yad anyatrapi drsyeta tat tenaiva vinirdiset*, "One who shows the characteristics of a *brahmana*, *kshatriya*, *vaisya* or *sudra* as described above, should be classified in the corresponding social category."

Abandoning the study and practice of Vedic scriptures (*svadhyaya tyaga*) still remains the most serious cause for degradation for a son of *brahmana* parents. *Manu samhita* (2.157, 2.172) states, *yatha kashtra-mayo hasti yatha carma-mayo mrgah yas ca vipro'nadhiyanas trayas te nama bibhrati*, "A *brahmana* who does not study the *Vedas* is comparable to an elephant or deer made of leather, that are called elephant or deer but cannot function as such. We must know that as long as a *brahmana* is not qualified in the Vedic knowledge, he remains on the same level of a *sudra*." The *Manu samhita* (4.245) states, *uttamanuttaman gacchan hinam hinams ca varjayan, brahmanah sresthatam eti pratyavayena sudratam*, "According to the good or bad company he keeps, a *brahmana* can either become extraordinarily elevated or fall to the position of a *sudra*."

The *Mahabharata* (Santi parva, 189.7) declares, *himsanrta-priya lubdhah sarva-karmopijivinah krsna saucaparibhrasthas te dvijah sudratam gatah sarva-bhaksyariatirn ityam sarva-karmakaro 'sucih tyakta-vedastvanaca rah sa vai sudra iti smrtah*, "A *brahmana* who commits violent acts (as for example in the consumption of non-vegetarian foods), who lies and cheats, who is greedy, impure, or engages in any activity in order to earn a livelihood, is degraded to the position of *sudra*. Precisely because

he eats and drinks anything without discrimination and is attached to the material things and to the idea of making money, he has abandoned Vedic *dharma* and ethical behavior, and is called a *sudra*."

Traditionally, a *brahmana* is considered fallen from his social position if he commits violations to cleanliness/ purity (*saucam*), for example because of the consumption of non-vegetarian foods, alcoholic drinks, or even of vegetarian foods that have been cooked by *sudras* (*sudranna pustam*), as confirmed by the *Kurma purana*: *nadyac chudrasya vipro'nnam mohad va yadi kamatah sa sudra-yonim vrajati yas tu bhunkte hy-anapadi*. This is the reason why a *brahmana* never goes to a restaurant for eating, and is extremely careful about what he purchases on the market.

VERSE 43

शौर्यं तेजो धृतिर्दाक्ष्यं युद्धे चाप्यपलायनम् ।

śauryam tejo dhṛtirdākṣyam yuddhe cāpyapalāyanam ।

दानमीश्वरभावश्च क्षात्रं कर्म स्वभावजम् ॥ १८-४३ ॥

dānamīśvarabhāvaśca kṣātram karma svabhāvajam ॥ 18-43 ॥

sauryam: heroism; *tejah*: charisma; *dhritih*: determination; *daksyam*: resourcefulness; *yuddhe*: in battle; *ca*: and; *api*: also; *apalayanam*: steadiness; *danam*: charity; *isvara bhavah*: sense of leadership; *ca*: and; *ksatram*: of the *kshatriya*; *karma*: activities/ duties; *svabhava jam*: born from his specific nature.

"The activities/ duties of the *kshatriya*, determined by his particular nature, are heroism, charisma, determination, resourcefulness, steadiness in battle, charity, sense of leadership.

The *Bhagavata Purana* confirms: *sauryam viryam dhritis tejas, tyagas catmajayah ksama, brahmanyata prasadas ca, satyam ca ksatra laksanam*, "The characteristics of the *kshatriya* are heroism and chivalry, determination, charisma, detachment from possessions, self-control, obedience to *brahmanas*, satisfaction, and truthfulness" (*Bhagavata Purana* 7.11.22) and *tejo balam dhritih sauryam, titiksaudaryam udyamah, sthairyam brahmanyam aisvaryam, ksatra prakritayas tv imah*, "Charisma, bodily strength, determination, heroism, tolerance, generosity, great endurance, steadiness, devotion to the *brahmanas* and sense of leadership are the natural qualities of the *kshatriyas*" (*Bhagavata Purana*, 11.17.17). A person who does not show these qualities in practice is not a *kshatriya* but an impostor and usurper, or the impotent descendant of illustrious forefathers.

Just like *arjavam* (simplicity) and *kshanti* (tolerance) should not be confused with foolishness and apathy, the characteristics of a *kshatriya* need to be understood correctly. The expression *isvara bhava* ("controlling nature") could also be translated as "lordly attitude" because *isvara* means "Lord"; a tendency to be bossy is not a bad thing, as it does not mean bullying people around to impose one's will over others whimsically. If the bossy individual is qualified and properly trained, and capable to lead, direct and manage others, society should appreciate this quality and use it to its benefit instead of resenting it on the basis of a delusional belief in the complete equality of all human beings. The only equality that should exist in society is equal access to opportunities to qualify oneself; according to the particular nature (talents and tendencies, or *guna* and *karma*) of each individual, some people will become more qualified for some particular duties, and some will be more suitable for other duties, and some others will always need to be told what to do and depend on others for their protection and maintenance.

Of course respect and obedience are to be commanded, not demanded. A true leader shines for his own value and charisma (*tejas, saurya*) and naturally inspires faith and loyalty in good people.

A true *kshatriya* is always on the front line, before anybody else, in the thick of the battle, and is the best example to follow. He works harder and longer hours than anyone else, and is ever ready (24 hours a day, 7 days a week) to sacrifice his own sense gratification, comforts, possessions, position and personal life (by living and by dying) for the sake of the kingdom and the *prajas* - whether the kingdom is a large country or a village, a neighborhood or any group of people who look up to him for guidance.

A true *kshatriya* takes responsibility not only for his own failures but also for collective defeats, inspires and encourages others and helps them to rise and progress to become qualified leaders in turn. He demonstrates concern, care and affection for the *prajas* just like a good father behaves with his children, engages them happily and appropriately, and always watches over their well-being, over and above his own immediate family and relatives. If a *kshatriya* expects to be obeyed in his orders to people about what they should do, it is because he knows what he is doing; he is *daksha*, "expert", as his training has taught him the sciences of war strategy, social management and resource administration.

The word *dakshyam* also indicates resourcefulness, that is the ability to face new unforeseen situations and to adapt one's approach smoothly. Generosity and charitable disposition (*dana*) are his natural qualities, therefore people are not afraid they will be exploited or mistreated in any way; rather, because he is never afraid to stand for justice and protection of the subjects (*yuddhe apalayanam*), people feel safe in his presence and seek his help and protection.

The qualities called *sauryam* and *tejas* are similar to each other. The word *sauryam* is closely related to *sura* (divine beings such as the Devas) and *surya*, referring to the Sun, and indicates the radiance of majesty, the chivalry and personal power, and invincibility that we associate with the Sun itself. *Tejas* also means "radiance, power", and even "heat", and its meanings overlap with *tapah*; in fact *tejas* is created by *tapah*. These two attributes warn us that it is dangerous to step too near to the royal *kshatriya*, because in spite of his benevolence and spirit of self-sacrifice, his energy is very powerful and could scorch a weak personality, causing negative effects such as envy or fear (which in turn will give rise to hatred). Normally and ideally, *sauryam* and *tejas* should be engaged with determination and careful skills in the protection of the *prajas*, and therefore the two qualities are mentioned in the first part of the verse together with *dhriti* (determination, patience, endurance, perseverance), *dakshyam* (skillfulness, resourcefulness, expertise, ability, dexterity) and *yuddhe apalayanam* (steadfastness and courage in battle).

The word *dhriti*, especially in this context, could also be translated as "grit, resolve". It indicates the strong determination of the warrior, who firmly faces any difficult situation or loss and even death, and when he is wounded and unable to stand, he continues to fight even on his knees. However, this determination should not be confused with the stupid stubbornness of tamasic people that are attached to some particular action or belief or underestimate dangers; the *kshatriya* has a clear vision of the situation but he chooses to sacrifice himself for the protection of the *prajas* if this is required, because that is his duty.

He is never depressed or dogged down, as this is considered a contamination (*kasmalam*, 2.2), a sign of impotence (*klaibyam*, 2.3) and a "weakness of the heart" (*hridaya daurbalyam*, 2.3) that is unworthy of a civilized person (*anarya justam*, 2.1), a cause of

infamy (*akirti karam*, 2.1) and an obstacle to one's elevation (*asvargyam*, 2.1). Of course these qualities cannot be expected from everyone, and even in a person who has the genuine talents and inclinations for the role of *kshatriya*, these must be developed through appropriate training and experience, so aspiring *kshatriyas* should not feel discouraged at their shortcomings.

Similar to *dhriti* is *apalayanam*, "not fleeing", referring to the steadiness in battle and heroism in spite of adversities; this quality or characteristic is not demonstrated only on the battlefield but in all aspects of daily life, in the small and the big things. Also, there are many weapons with which one can fight; swords, bows and arrows (of many types) are more chivalrous than guns and modern weapons (that are more suited to cowards), and there are subtler weapons too, consisting in words and ideas. *Kshatriyas* are educated and trained in strategy and diplomacy in dealing with the enemy - the first attempt is *sama*, treating the opponent like a friend and allowing sufficient space for his livelihood and prosperity, the second is *dana*, trying to win them with peace offerings and gifts, the third attempt is *bheda*, trying to break up hostile alliances and facing one enemy at the time, and only as a last chance one should resort to *danda*, punishment as in taking physical action against the offender.

This brings us to another very important clarification. The main job of a *kshatriya* is fighting to protect the *prajas*, because that is his natural inclination and the best use of his qualities, as Krishna has stated specifically: *sva dharmam api caveksya na vikampitum arhasi, dharmyad hi yuddhac chreyo 'nyat ksatriyasya na vidyate, yadricchaya copapannam svarga dvaram apavritam, sukhinah ksatriyah partha labhante yuddham idrisam*, "Considering your own dharmic duty you should not hesitate, because for a *kshatriya* there is nothing better than fighting a dharmic battle. O Arjuna, happy are the *kshatriyas* to whom such opportunity comes

unsought. For a warrior, engaging in such a battle is like having the doors of heaven open in front of him." (2.31, 2.32). This will also be confirmed again in verse 18.59.

However, the warrior spirit of a *kshatriya* is not the war mongering, blood lust, and cruelty of the *asuras*; he is not a brawling bully and he avoids confrontation and conflict if there is any other option still possible, as the Pandavas demonstrated in practice in their dealings with the aggressive Duryodhana and his brothers.

Besides, there is a specific code of conduct for *kshatriyas*; non-combatants should never be attacked or harmed, and property that is not directly connected to the fighting should not be destroyed; for example, the encampments where the warriors retire for the night are not to be touched. Even on the battlefield a warring enemy should not be attacked if he is unprepared, unarmed, distracted, distraught, or if he admits defeat..

Sometimes unqualified persons pose as *kshatriyas*, but they should be exposed and neutralized by genuine *kshatriyas* or *brahmanas*; they are described as *nripa linga dharam* ("merely showing the appearance/ insignia of kings"). Prominent examples can be found in *Bhagavata Purana* (1.3.25, 1.14.17, 4.14.28, 4.14.31, 4.14.34, 1.16.4, 1.17.1, 1.17.5, 1.17.10-11, 1.17.14, 1.17.32, 4.14.4, 4.16.6, 4.16.14-16, 12.1.39-41, 12.2.8, 12.2.20).

Here is a description of the unqualified kings of Kali yuga: *stri bala go dvija ghnas ca, para dara dhanadritah, uditasta mita praya, alpa sattvalpakayusah, asamskritah kriya hina, rajasa tamasavritah, prajas te bhaksayisyanti, mleccha rajanya rupinah*, "These *mlecchas* in the form of kings will be killing/ injuring women, children, cows/ the planet and the twice born, and going after the wives and wealth of others. They will be mentally and emotionally unstable, rather weak mentally and physically and

short lived. Covered by *rajas* and *tamas*, they will not perform any proper duty or auspicious ritual, but they will devour the *prajas*." (*Bhagavata Purana* 12.2.39-40).

A brief note about the meaning of *mleccha*: as in the case of the *varnas*, the categorization of *mleccha* depends on *guna* and *karma*, demonstrated by a criminal nature (*mleccha bhavata durjanah*, *Bhagavata Purana* 9.16.33), as in the case of the sons of Visvamitra who did not accept Sunahsepha as their eldest brother. Ancestry, ethnic group, language, nationality, family of birth and other similar considerations are irrelevant to the point - only adharmic behavior is the criterion.

VERSE 44

कृषिगौरक्ष्यवाणिज्यं वैश्यकर्म स्वभावजम् ।

kr̥ṣigaurakṣyavāṇijyaṁ vaiśyakarma svabhāvajam ।

परिचर्यात्मकं कर्म शूद्रस्यापि स्वभावजम् ॥ १८-४४ ॥

paricaryātmakaṁ karma śūdrasyāpi svabhāvajam ॥ 18-44 ॥

krisi: agriculture; *go raksya*: protection of the cows/ del pianeta; *vaniyam*: commerce; *vaisyakarma*: the activities/ duties of the *vasya*; *svabhava-jam*: born from his specific nature; *paricarya*: service/ assistance; *atmakam*: consisting of; *karma*: activities/ duties; *sudrasya*: of the *sudra*; *api*: also; *svabhava-jam*: born from his specific nature.

"The activities/ duties of the *vaisya*, determined by his particular nature, are agriculture, protection of the cows/ planet, and commerce. The activities/ duties of the *sudra*,

determined by his particular nature, are the service / assistance (to others).

Vaisyas and *sudras* are grouped up in one single verse because they are less evolved than *brahmanas* and *kshatriyas* and therefore they have less duties; the *sudras* considerably less than the *vaisyas*. These professional and social positions are easier to maintain even without making particular efforts to qualify oneself or make lots of personal sacrifices.

Therefore it is said that in the age of Kali everyone is born a *sudra*, because without a strenuous effort and a proper training it is almost impossible to become genuine *brahmanas* or *kshatriyas*. Yet, *sudras* and especially *vaisyas* should not be underestimated, because their work is essential for the proper functioning of the social body. Only stupid people would neglect their own stomach or feet, considering them less lovable than their arms and head, because all parts of the body are strictly connected and the sufferings of one part affects the entire body.

The word *krishi* is the most important item in the verse; in verse 17.7 we elaborated on the fundamental importance of food, both materially and spiritually, and how the production of abundant food is the core of the entire service to the social body. Even the *brahmanas* and the *kshatriyas* depend on the food produced by agriculture, just like the basic function of the head and the arms is to work to procure food and convey the resources to the stomach so that the nutrients can be re-distributed all over the body, so that all the other types of work can be performed properly - including the higher functions of intellect and consciousness.

Without sufficient and appropriate food there can be no material or spiritual progress (1.42, 17.13), as confirmed also by the *shruti* (*Chandogya Upanishad* 6.6, 7.1-3, *Taittiriya Upanishad* Brighu valli, 3.1.1, 3.7.2, 3.8.1, 3.9.1, 3.10.1, *Taittiriya Upanishad*

Brahmananda valli, 2.2.1, *Sama Veda samhita* 3.10.6, *Prasna Upanishad* 1.4, 1.14, *Brihad aranyaka Upanishad* 1.4.7).

After establishing the importance of agriculture, Krishna immediately gives the necessary ethical guidelines with the expression *go rakshya*; *rakshya* means "protection" and *go* can refer both to cows and to Mother Earth as the personification of the land. This means that a *vaisya* is responsible for the health and well being of the land; he must make sure that the soil is not depleted or contaminated or polluted in any way, because the food production would suffer. Within the definition of land (*go, bhumi*), one needs to include the water reservoirs (surface and underground), the forests, the wild animals etc.

Protection of the cows obviously does not mean ruthless exploitation and cruel treatment as we can observe in the "animal husbandry" methods developed following the abrahamic exploitative values and centralized industrialization. It may be difficult to believe for those who are used to the present asuric society (and may consider it the "norm"), but it is possible for human beings to live with cows and other animals in a mutually beneficial relationship, based on friendship, love and trust. When obtained ethically, the products of cows are extremely valuable for the health and progress of human society.

The word *vanijyam* means "commerce, trade", and refers to a further stage in the transformation and distribution of resources, by which wealth is created through commercial enterprises. This does not include unnecessary parasitic professional positions that simply make money without actually producing anything of real value, but it rather consists in all those activities that contribute to create useful goods and distribute them to a larger number of people. For example, mining and forging metals into weapons, pots and plates, containers, instruments for agriculture and specialized tools of many kinds, and of course the personal

ornaments that are suitable for the different types of individuals according to the recommendations of the *brahmanas*. *Vaisyas* also used precious metals (gold, silver, copper) in the form of minted coins and gems (pearls, diamonds etc) to support their trade in other regions where they traveled by river or sea or by utilizing the roads protected by the imperial garrisons, transporting commodities characteristically produced in different places, such as salt, spices, medicinal herbs and extracts, textile materials, oils, rare foods and seeds, cosmetics and so on.

Indian tradition gives equal primary importance to army personnel and farmers (*jawan-kissan*) that are the foundations for the survival and prosperity of the people and the kingdom (*rastra*), even in the absence of properly qualified *brahmanas* and *kshatriyas*, like we see in non-aryan tribal civilizations. In fact, the present plight of farmers and society in general could be easily solved by removing the asuric tendencies and obstructions (internal and external) and allowing people sufficient freedom to provide for themselves in the matter of food and other agricultural/forestry products, energy, housing, and protection. Any society can prosper with an agriculture based first of all on local subsistence and self sufficiency, with diversified production based on organic cultivation and permaculture, added value processing in local cottage industry preservation and transformation of produce, and small scale local market selling directly to consumers on an open venue. This was the prevalent system everywhere in ancient times, and it worked very well.

The Vedic system, however, rises human society to a higher level. It is more scientific and focuses on education and training, so that the full potential of each individual can be developed, stage after stage, after attaining perfection in one's individual occupation. A *sudra* is encouraged to become responsible for himself through the development of self-sufficient handicrafts and/or kitchen

gardening; once he has become able to manage his own production independently and provide sustenance for himself and his family, he is already in the process to become a *vaisya*. The decisive step consists in taking an apprentice and becoming responsible for his work and maintenance - at this point, he is already an entrepreneur, albeit a small one, and he can get advice and further training from qualified *vaisyas* and then from *brahmanas*.

A successful *vaisya* has become able to manage many workers and gradually develops a stronger tendency to protect his subordinates - both animals and people - and the lands he is taking care of. By a closer cooperation with qualified *kshatriyas* and the proper instructions from *brahmanas*, he can develop the qualities to become fully responsible for his own small "kingdom" and by delegating the easier tasks to apprentices, he can personally qualify as *kshatriya*.

Similarly, a *kshatriya* who has expanded his mind from the charge of a small kingdom to the greater society of all beings in the universe can become able to protect the *prajas* on a deeper and vaster level, that is beyond the temporary identification with the material body and social position. Since all the twice-born (*brahmanas*, *kshatriyas* and *vaisyas*) regularly study Vedic knowledge and engage in religious activities and pursuits, this evolution is only natural.

In his elaboration on the *varna* system, Narada Rishi explained to king Yudhisthira: *deva guru acyute bhaktis, tri varga pariposanam, astikyam udyamo nityam, naipunyam vaisya laksanam*, "The characteristics of the *vaisya* are devotion towards the Devas, the *guru* and God, feeding the three (the 3 *varnas*, as well as the 3 purposes of *dharma-artha-kama*), faith in Vedic system, skillfulness and determination in working" (7.11.23). Krishna also gave similar instructions to Uddhava: *astikyam dana nistha ca, adambho brahma sevanam, atustir arthopacayair,*

vaisyas prakritayas tv imah, "Faith in Vedic civilization, dedication to charity, freedom from hypocrisy, service to the *brahmanas* and constant work to create wealth are the natural qualities of the *vaisyas*." (*Bhagavata Purana*, 11.17.18).

The duty of the *sudra* is very simple and only requires sincerity and loyalty to one's employer. It is important to understand that a *sudra* is not a slave, an outcaste or an untouchable (*dalit* or *paria*); *sudras* normally lived in the home of their employers as family members, but they were free to leave if they were not satisfied with their treatment, and sometimes they could be sent away if they did not behave properly. Although the Vedic system encourages individual evolution, sometimes people choose to indulge in lower and degrading tendencies and picking up bad habits, for example neglecting cleanliness or becoming greedy to the point of stealing, or cruel and insensitive towards people or animals. At this point the *sudra* falls to the level of *anarya*, and is dismissed from service and expelled from Vedic social life; he becomes a *chandala* or *mleccha*, that is outside the *varna* system, and therefore has no duties whatsoever.

The word *paricarya* means "working for others" and refers to employment or dependent work, including State/ Government servants of all levels; anyone who receives a *salary* for his work is a *sudra*. A *kshatriya* is an independent protector and does not take orders or salary from anyone because this would compromise his freedom in supporting *dharma*; he can accept gifts or tributes (taxes) from the people he protects and cares for, but only in a reasonable amount.

A *kshatriya* can employ *sudra* soldiers in the army under his orders and take care for their maintenance, but their responsibilities and duties are different; they are not permanently on service but they simply respond the *kshatriya's* call in case of a major attack from the outside. They are *private* citizens who

understand that the king needs help in defending their homes and families, and participate to the manoeuvres as best as they can, according to their abilities; these voluntary temporary fighters can come from all sections of society because every limb of the body is eager to help when the entire body is in danger, therefore *sudras*, *vaisyas* and even *brahmanas* can bear weapons and fight on the battlefield in case of emergency. But that does not make them *kshatriyas*, and they are not permanently organized as military forces like in modern societies, where army personnel get bored and restless when there is no war, or become lazy on the salaries paid by the government.

VERSE 45

स्वे स्वे कर्मण्यभिरतः संसिद्धिं लभते नरः ।

sve sve karmaṇyabhirataḥ saṁsiddhiṁ labhate naraḥ ।

स्वकर्मानिरतः सिद्धिं यथा विन्दति तच्छृणु ॥ १८-४५ ॥

svakarmanirataḥ siddhiṁ yathā vindati tacchṛṇu ।। 18-45।।

sve sve: each according to his own nature; *karmani*: activities; *abhi ratah*: following; *sam siddhim*: complete perfection; *labhate*: obtains; *narah*: a human being; *sva karma*: in one's specific duty; *niratah*: engaged; *siddhim*: perfection; *yatha*: as; *vindati*: attains; *tat*: that; *sṛnu*: listen.

"By engaging in the duties pertaining to his specific nature, a human being gradually attains perfection. Now listen how one can attain perfection through engagement in his specific duties.

The expression *sve sve karmani* indicates that each limb of the social body has very specific functions and should stick to the

engagement in his particular duties according to the position that was assigned individually by the *guru*. The influence of *rajas* and *tamas* can push people to desire a different occupation because it seems to offer more advantages and less problems than the position they occupy, but that is simply illusion. An upgrade of *varna* is always possible, but it cannot be done whimsically; it requires a genuine gradual qualification and training in accordance to the established rules. A downgrade in the *varna* system is much easier, but it is not helping the personal evolution of the individual or the good functions of society; however it is preferable to step down to a less responsible position than to try to artificially occupy a professional place without fulfilling one's proper duties.

Especially in the genuine Vedic system, the higher position one occupies, the more duties and the more difficult and hard is the work, and the more sacrifices one is expected to make for the sake of society. *Sudras* may think that their *vaisya* employer is having an easy life just giving orders while the farm hands are doing all the work, but they do not know anything about planning, coordinating, marketing, and managing. Left to their own devices, *sudras* would work as little as possible and enjoy and consume as much as possible, and would soon slide into bankruptcy and destitution, if not starvation. Of course the definition of *sudra* applies to the *guna* and *karma* of the individual, not to the birth or belonging to a *sudra* community, because it is certainly possible that *sudra* parents can give birth to a more talented child, who will rise to a higher social position by his own effort, even against all hardships.

The socialist/ communist experiments in the last 300 years have demonstrated that inevitably more talented (and often more ruthless) individuals rise to fill the posts of command anyway, and in the absence of an ethical and scientific social system of evaluation of their qualifications, their personal power cannot be

controlled by the rules and duties supporting a progressive evolution. So they become tyrants in their own way, and the people working under them are oppressed and exploited, often worse than in capitalistic systems, and nobody really makes much progress, because nobody is encouraged to take personal responsibility and become more qualified.

The word *abhiratah* means "sticking to, following", and indicates a type of attachment to one's duty that is actually selfless, a loyalty towards society, and a love and pride in one's work for its own sake. This approach brings a deep satisfaction and a feeling of happiness for a work well done, for the clean conscience of having properly contributed one's part for the common good. Since the prescribed duties for the professional categories are strongly based on ethical and progressive considerations, they constitute a valuable fail-safe protection against degradation and should always be respected in the best possible way. Of course this does not mean that there are no provisions for flexibility in the system.

This brings us to the very important concept of *apat* (*apad*) *dharma*, or "duties/ ethics in case of emergency". It is similar to the word *anapadi*, that indicates a social emergency or upheaval in which there is no qualified person to occupy a particular position, and the next best person must step up and take the place. The Vedic system is based on the fundamental ethical principles called conscience, and therefore it easily admits that in some circumstances it is better to follow the spirit than the letter of the law; *dharma* is not a rigid set of commandments and taboos but a system of principles that support society, so it should be applied with intelligence according to the circumstances.

Chandogya Upanishad (1.10-12) offers the example of Ushasti son of Chakra, who was a *purohita*, a chief priest in sacrifices performed for kings and other twice born. Once traveling through a wild region during a serious shortage of food, he was able to find

no food except a few cooked beans from the house of a *chandala* (outcaste) and he shared them with his wife because they were extremely hungry, however he refused the water that the *chandala* wanted to give him, because he could find purer water elsewhere. After simply taking a bath, he proceeded to his destination where he normally resumed his place as instructor and supervisor of the *ritvika brahmanas* engaged in the religious rituals to which he had been invited. Nobody objected saying that he had "lost his caste" and therefore he was not qualified any more to direct the *yajna*.

The *brahmanas* still have the responsibility of ascertaining the level of emergency and directing or endorsing the necessary actions; it is said: *jaghanyo nottamam vrittim anapadi bhajen narah, rite rajanyam apatsu sarvesam api sarvasah*, "A person with lower qualifications should not usurp a higher position for the sake of his own livelihood, but when there is no genuine king in charge, in the emergency created anyone can perform any other tasks - except for the *kshatriya*" (*Bhagavata Purana*, 7.11.17). The exception of the *kshatriya* in this verse means that in times of emergency or social upheaval, the work of the *kshatriya* is the most important and urgent in order to preserve and protect the *prajas* and the resources of the kingdom, so a *kshatriya* who abandons his duties in such circumstances to take up some other professional activity is a traitor to the kingdom.

A *kshatriya* can also find himself in a situation of personal emergency - for example being exiled by some conspiracy, or being defeated in battle and left seriously injured on the battlefield while his opponent ascends the throne. In such cases he is allowed to take up the occupations of *brahmanas* (if he is qualified to teach something) or *vaisyas* (agriculture and cow protection) until such time when he can resume his normal duties again; only he cannot become a *sudra*, otherwise he will be lost (*Bhagavata Purana*, 11.17.48).

Similarly, a *brahmana* can temporarily work as a *kshatriya* or a *vaisya*, but never become a *sudra*, a position that is considered the livelihood of a dog (*sva vrittya*, 11.17.47) as a house dog totally depends on the owner and is fully loyal to him, no ethical questions asked. A *vaisya* may take up some handicraft venture or get temporary employment as a *sudra* (11.17.49), until he gets the opportunity to return to his normal duties.

The duties of each particular *varna* are engineered to challenge his abilities and progress in learning and realization, therefore it is possible that due to some difficulty or depression one can be tempted to take another position - a lower one for which he is overqualified and therefore does not require much effort, or a higher one for which he is even unable to understand what qualifications are required. This is why verse 18.47 will warn us that it is better to fail or die while engaging in our duties than to attain success in performing someone else's duties.

The word *samsiddhi* is a compound of *sam* + *siddhi*, indicating complete perfection, much like the word *sanskrita* (indicating Sanskrit language) is a compound of *sam* + *krita*, indicating a complete system of expression.

The complete perfection one can attain through the loyal and sincere performance of one's professional and social duties - i.e. proper work - increases one's learning (knowledge), character (*sila*, or behavior), intelligence, strength, wealth, position and religious merits (*punya*), so that one will get a better birth in the next life or even *moksha* (liberation). The word *vindati* ("increases") indicates the gradual attainment of perfection through a regular and continued effort.

VERSE 46

यतः प्रवृत्तिर्भूतानां येन सर्वमिदं ततम् ।

yataḥ pravṛttirbhūtānāṃ yena sarvamidaṃ tatam ।

स्वकर्मणा तमभ्यर्च्य सिद्धिं विन्दति मानवः ॥ १८-४६ ॥

svakarmanā tamabhyarcya siddhiṃ vindati mānavaḥ ॥ 18-46 ॥

yataḥ: from which; *pravrittih*: the creation/ engagement; *bhutanam*: of the beings; *yena*: by which; *sarvam idam*: all this (universe); *tatam*: is pervaded; *sva karmana*: by his own activities; *tam*: that/ him; *abhyarcya*: by worshiping; *siddhim*: perfection; *vindati*: attains; *manavaḥ*: a human being.

"By properly performing one's duties one is worshiping the Supreme from which all beings/ situations are created and engaged, and that pervades all this universe. This is how a human being can attain perfection.

The glory of the Vedic system is that it raises the human being to the level of bodily part of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, to become directly engaged as co-creator and co-controller, co-preserver and co-protector of the universe. This concept is unique to the Vedic tradition, as other dharmic and natural systems consider the human being simply as a part of creation, with the same rights of all other creatures but not more duties, while the adharmic systems consider the human being as the lord and owner of creation, with more rights (and no duties) compared to other creatures.

This is the reason why in Vedic tradition, and especially in the *varna* and *ashrama* system, the word *dharma* is normally translated as "duty". This is also the reason why the *dvi-ja* (twice

born) who are more responsible than the generic ordinary population of *sudras* are required to engage daily in religious rituals to associate with the Devas who have even higher responsibilities towards all creatures. So when a *brahmana*, *kshatriya* or *vaisya* is engaged in performing a *homa* (fire sacrifice) calling the Devas to partake of the *ahutis* (oblations of clarified butter), he is actually engaged in a breakfast business meeting with his superiors - bonding with them and absorbing their qualities, and at the end of this human life he may move to their level and work directly with them.

The Devas, too, are limbs of the universal body (Virata Rupa), and occupy their positions precisely because of their absolute loyalty to their own duties; the fire never fails to burn, the wind never fails to blow, the sun never fails to rise, and death never fails to take his toll on a mortal body. All levels of consciousness, however, are coordinated by the supreme Consciousness, that includes all other individual consciousnesses and yet is greater than them all - just like the owner of the body includes the functions and consciousness of all the body cells and organs, yet he is more than the body. This was explicitly confirmed in verse 15.7: *mamaivamso jiva loke jiva bhutah sanatanah*, "The living being in this world is certainly a limb of my (body), and as such he is eternal."

At the universal level, this supreme Consciousness or Reality is called *tattva*, or more specifically, *vishnu tattva*, because it is the foundation and source of all power (*vishnu* means "powerful"). Here we must not be distracted by sectarian prejudice, because we would lose a golden opportunity to really understand life; Vishnu is not a separate Deity that can be opposed to Shiva, Durga, Brahma, or other Personalities of Godhead, although we see that in their *avatara lila*, the various Personalities interact in amazing ways.

Actually, all such Personalities are one Reality, one supreme Consciousness, that is called Brahman, Paramatma, Bhagavan: *vadanti tat tattva vidad, tattvam yaj jnanam advayam, brahmeti paramatmeti, bhagavan iti sabdyate*, "Those who know the *tattva* declare that *tattva* is undivided Knowledge, variously called Brahman, Paramatma, and Bhagavan" (*Bhagavata Purana* 1.2.11).

The Godhead is described as knowledge (*jnana*) and reality (*tattva*), as well as undivided (*advayam*); God is therefore the sum total of all being and knowledge/ consciousness, and although it remains undivided, it manifests innumerable forms and names to express all the immense variety of qualities and functions.

It is already impossible to comprehend all these aspects of God that are manifested in this single universe (*Virata Rupa*), so we can understand how foolish must be the arrogance of someone who claims they fully know the Supreme Reality in the spiritual world, that is non-manifested and therefore impossible to even imagine for minds that function within time-space parameters.

After clarifying this point, we can safely state that all the members of the *varna* system should actually perform their professional duties sincerely and devotedly, considering them as the most fundamental act of worship to Vishnu, the sum total of all Consciousness: *atah pumbhir dvija srestha varnasrama vibhagasah, svanusthitasya dharmasya samsiddhir hari tosanam*, "The categories of *varnas* and *ashramas* and their specific prescribed duties constitute perfection (of human life) because they please Vishnu" (*Bhagavata Purana*, 1.2.13), *varnasramacara vata purusena parah puman, visnur aradhyate pantha nanyat tat tosa karanam*, "A human being who performs the duties of the *varna-ashrama* system is worshiping the supreme Personality of Godhead, Vishnu. There is no other way for satisfaction" (*Vishnu Purana* 3.8.9).

The satisfaction mentioned in this verse of *Vishnu Purana* refers both to pleasing the Supreme and to pleasing the *atman*, as the two are closely connected.

The word *yatah* at the beginning of the verse is a declination of the pronoun *yah*, "that", indicating the Supreme. The word *pravritti* contains the meanings of "creation, emanation, engagement, work, development", and connected to the word *bhutanam* ("of all beings") obviously refers to the supreme continuum of reality that is the source of the manifestation and the activities of all beings. We can continue the microcosmic comparison with the body cells, by remembering that it is the *atman*, the original unchangeable being living in the body, that creates all the body cells by developing tissues and organs gradually, beginning from conception, and sustains all the cells for the entire duration of the body, and then destroys the body by leaving it in accordance to his evolutionary journey. Since the *atman* is consciousness, he is present everywhere in the body (*yena sarvam idam tatam*, 2.17), and service to him is the purpose of all the cells and organs.

Similarly in a larger macrocosmic scale, God as the sum total of Consciousness is all pervading, the origin of all creatures and the purpose of their engagement: *janmady asya yato 'nvayad itaratas carthesv abhijnah svarat, tene brahma hrda ya adi kavaye muhyanti yat surayah, tejo vari mrdam yatha vinimayo yatra tri sargo 'mrta, dhamna svena sada nirasta kuhakam satyam param dhimahi*, "I offer my respect to Bhagavan Vasudeva, from whom the creation/ birth etc of this (universe, body, manifestation) proceeds. He is fully independent, fully conscious of purpose, directly and indirectly. He inspired the supreme Consciousness of Brahman in the heart of the first poet (Brahma). His nature/ existence/ energy of illusion overpowers even the *suras* (*devas* and *rishis*), (just like) with the optical illusions created by heat, water and earth. In this way by action and reaction he always manifests

himself as the 'almost reality' of the three creations and all their objects/ places of existence. I meditate on (him), the supreme truth, always self-sufficient, of whom illusion is just the absence of perception." (*Bhagavata Purana* 1.1.1).

The word *pravritti* ("engagement") is also connected to *abhyarcya* ("worshiping"), as the worship itself consists in dutifully engaging in the activities that are suitable to one's nature. This is the origin of the famous saying, "work is worship", also characteristic of the Hindu tradition. The fact that God is all-pervading (*yena sarvam idam tatam*) means that everyone can remember and worship God at any time and in any place, and in any activity: *yat karosi yad asnasi yaj juhosi dadasi yat, yat tapasyasi kaunteya tat kurusva mad arpanam*, "O Arjuna, whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you sacrifice, whatever you give, whatever you endure in the performance of your duties - do it for me" (9.27).

This attitude will align our consciousness perfectly with the supreme Consciousness, so that there is no more difference in purpose: *yajnarthat karmano 'nyatra loko 'yam karma bandhanah, tad artham karma kaunteya mukta sangah samacara*, "Actions must be performed as sacrifice, otherwise in this world they cause bondage. Therefore you should perform your activities for that (purpose of sacrifice), remaining free from (material) association." (3.9).

Because there is no difference in purpose, there will be no negative effects: *brahmany adhaya karmani sangam tyaktva karoti yah, lipyate na sa papena padma patram ivambhasa*, "Dedicating all activities to the Brahman, giving up all material identification and association, one is never affected by the negative consequences of bad action, just like a lotus leaf is never affected by water." (5.10). This will be confirmed at the conclusion of this chapter (18.65). This is the traditional ancient system, by which the great personalities of the past attained perfection: *karmanaiva hi*

samsiddhim asthita janakadayah, "Janaka and others like him became situated in perfection through the performance of their duties." (3.20)

VERSE 47

श्रेयान्स्वधर्मो विगुणः परधर्मात्स्वनुष्ठितात् ।

śreyānsvadharmo viguṇaḥ paradharmātsvanuṣṭhitāt ।

स्वभावनियतं कर्म कुर्वन्नाप्नोति किल्बिषम् ॥ १८-४७ ॥

svabhāvaniyataṁ karma kurvannāpnoti kilbiṣam ।। 18-47।।

sreyan: better; *sva dharmah*: one's specific duty; *viguṇah*: not perfect; *para dharmat*: than the duty of someone else; *su anuṣṭhitat*: followed perfectly; *sva bhava niyatam*: prescribed according to one's specific nature; *karma*: activities; *kurvan*: performing; *na apnoti*: does not achieve; *kilbisam*: fault.

"It is better to engage in one's specific duty, even imperfectly, than following the duties of others in a perfect way. One's duties are prescribed according to one's specific nature, and engaging in them is the right thing to do.

We have seen an almost identical verse in the chapter on *Karma yoga*: *sreyan sva dharmo viguṇah para dharmat sv anuṣṭhitat, sva dharme nidhanam sreyah para dharmo bhayavahah*, "It is better to perform one's own duty even with some imperfections or mistakes, or even if this means meeting with death or destruction, rather than successfully engaging in the duties of others - which is a dangerous choice" (3.35). This idea can be (and has been) misinterpreted by foolish and ignorant people who remain unable

to understand the particular nature of each individual, and confuse it with the circumstances of his birth. So this verse has been desecrated by fake brahmins to mistreat and insult innumerable genuine Satyakamas and to prevent them from pursuing the proper education and engagement in dharmic duties that they desired so strongly, while the duty of the *brahmana* should have been to purify, elevate and train sincere souls who wanted to progress, even from the lowest level (*Rig Veda* 2.22.2). It is difficult to calculate the amount of negative reactions to such gross dereliction of duty, arrogance and cruelty, but we can see the results all around us.

Krishna has already explained very clearly that each particular position and its duties are assigned specifically according to the individual's *guna* and *karma*, and are not automatically hereditary. We have elaborated on this point several times already in previous commentaries, but one should see that Krishna's statement is clear enough on its own when he speaks of a specific individual nature. As the popular saying goes, if it walks like a duck and quacks like a duck, it cannot be something else, even if it was found in a place very different from a duck nest. This is called *vrschika tanduli nyaya*, "the logic of the scorpion and the rice"; it is said that sometimes scorpions lay their eggs inside a mound of rice to take advantage of the warmth of the grains that are drying up, so when the eggs hatch, it appears that the little animals were born from rice grains, while in fact the rice was simply the host.

Of course when degradation spreads and *brahmanas* become corrupted by *tamas* and *rajas*, those endorsed by them as *brahmanas* will be even less qualified generation after generation, until *adharma* becomes normally presented as *dharma* (18.31, 18.32). This is the true root cause of the degradation of Hindu civilization, where many misguided people present the gross identification with the material body (casteism, racism, sexism,

etc) as the highest form of *dharma* and religious duty, that overrides all considerations of ethics and intelligence and even the direct observation of the actual *guna* and *karma* and realizations of the individual.

A very clear example is the life of Salabega, a very famous pure devotee who loved Jagannatha very much and was very dear to the Lord, and whose songs are universally recognized as the highest standard of *bhakti* and sung by one and all in Puri and Orissa. Yet, simply because of his birth Salabega was always treated like an outcaste, insulted, beaten and barred from ever entering the temple for public *darshana*, his house was torched and he was denied access to the crematorium for the funeral of his mother - a disgraceful persecution that is still considered with pride by the brahmins in Puri as a demonstration of "purity" in the temple standards. We could make thousands of similar examples from the history of the last 500 years and also from contemporary news especially in Orissa, Bihar, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh in India, although casteism is becoming increasingly obsolete especially in big cities where the westernization of society and culture has moved the focus of social prejudice and injustice to financial considerations and political positions rather than religious privilege.

Some people resent what they call "brahmin bashing", claiming that the higher castes (which are actually artificial and irrelevant ethnic subdivisions of the general brahmin caste) have been and are still grievously mistreated and unjustly discriminated. However, they are not taking any proactive measure to improve the situation, thus demonstrating that they are deeply immersed in *tamas* (18.35, 18.32, 18.39, 18.28, 18.25, 18.22, 14.13, 14.8, 14.17) and therefore unqualified for the elevated position of *brahmana* they want to occupy and the attending rights they are demanding. Instead of blaming others, recriminating, complaining,

whining and dreaming, they should start really performing their duties and work actively and fearlessly to purify themselves and the entire society from *avidya* and *adharmā*. For example, many of these fake brahmins are very attached to non vegetarian foods (the ordinary type, purchased on the market) and to silence their own guilty subconscious, they regularly attack and insult those who propagate the knowledge of the benefits of vegetarianism. Also, fake brahmins are generally characterized by hatred and spite for women, and many of them are ferociously "anti-feminists", a persuasion that goes from justifying rape ("boys will be boys"), to beating and torturing their own wives and other female family members or congregation members, encouraging the mistreatment, suppression and elimination of girl children, and enjoying and circulating offensive jokes and vignettes that portray women in humiliating and degrading ways.

For a brahmin who wants to become a *brahmana*, a good first step consists in actually studying, understanding and applying the instructions of the *shastra* in one's own life, developing his qualities as described in scriptures and especially in *Bhagavad gita* (2.46, 17.23, 18.42, etc), verifying his own realizations and improving the general culture of society by engaging in public debates in support of *dharma* and *vidya*, and sincerely (without cutting corners for materialistic selfish purposes) performing the traditional *karmas* (dutiful activities, ritual ceremonies) starting from *suddhi*, *prayascitta* and *vrata* for themselves and for those who wish to engage in the Vedic way of life. Then he should continue by sincerely understanding and observing all the *samskaras* and elevating his own consciousness and the consciousness of others through example and precept, observing and teaching the practices of *yama* and *niyama* and properly training the other members of society (according to the individual *guna* and *karma*) for the positions of *kshatriyas* and *vaisyas*.

If he chooses not to do that, he does not deserve any respect, even if externally he may present himself as a great religionist.

The *Vishnu dharma shastra* (93.7) states, *na vary api prayacchet tu vaidala-vratike dvije na baka-vratike vipre naveda vidi dharmavit*, "Those who know *dharma* should never give even a drop of water to the hypocritical son of a *brahmana* who has not studied Vedic knowledge but follows the vow of the duck or the vow of the cat". The *baka vrata* ("the vow of the duck") is that of one who always looks down in order to make a show of humility and does *sadhana* for the purpose of earning money, but is cruel, arrogant and usually tells lies. The *vaidala vrata* ("vow of the cat") is shown by one who is externally proud of his religious position (*dharma dhvaji*) but is in fact a hypocrite, a greedy, envious, hateful, violent person, indulging in slandering innocent people.

When social and professional roles are assigned by a qualified *guru*, a person's leaving his prescribed duty for another position, without any real emergency, can be explained as a whimsical movement of the restless mind, that can only create problems to the individual and to society: *indriyasya indriyasya arthe raga dvesau vyavasthitau, tayor na vasam agacchet tau hy asya paripanthinau*, "Attraction and aversion are ordained to result from the interaction of the senses with the objects of the senses; one should not fall under the control of either of them, because they are both to be considered as obstacles on the path of the performance of duty" (3.34).

The word *vigunah* means "incomplete, with bad qualities, without much value, not interesting", and refers exactly to the negative emotions of a person who is facing depression and a fall in self esteem due to some temporary difficulty. When a person is not educated and trained properly, he will become more vulnerable to anxiety and insecurity, because he has no clear vision of the situation.

At the opposite side, we have the expression *su anusthita*, meaning "very well done, more attractive", which shifts the focus from the social importance of the activity to the narcissistic complacency for the action itself or the social position it seems to offer.

The *guru* is supposed to help the disciple developing this clear vision (*darshana*), starting from the real identity of the self (*atman*), the meaning of *dharma*, *artha*, *kama* and *moksha*, and the appropriate method to apply them in one's life through *yoga* as explained by Krishna in *Bhagavad gita*.

The word *kilbisam* means "stain, offense, contamination, bad reaction", as in verses 3.13, 4.21, 6.45; this indicates that in the sincere performance of one's duties there could still be some imperfections and failures, but one should not take them too seriously.

On a deeper spiritual level, the word *viguna* has been interpreted as *nirguna*, signifying that one should continue to perform the assigned duties even after having transcended the material qualities of nature (3.18, 3.22, 3.23, 3.24, 3.25, 4.14, 4.20, 4.21, 4.23, 4.24, 9.9, 17.26) because in this world everyone must continue to work until the end of the body (3.4, 3.8, 5.2, 18.9).

Similarly, the expressions *sva dharma* and *para dharma* are applied respectively to the *atman* and the *non-atman*, that is the material composing the mind, the senses and the body. In this respect, we would like to highlight the fact that there is a difference between *para* (no long *a*) and *para* (long final *a*); the first means "other" and the second means "superior" as in *para prakriti* (long *a*).

VERSE 48

सहजं कर्म कौन्तेय सदोषमपि न त्यजेत् ।

sahajam karma kaunteya sadoṣamapi na tyajet ।

सर्वारम्भा हि दोषेण धूमेनाग्निरिवावृताः ॥ १८-४८ ॥

sarvārambhā hi doṣeṇa dhūmenāgnirivāvṛtāḥ ॥ 18-48 ॥

saha jam: born at the same time; *karma*: activities; *kaunteya*: o son of Kunti; *sa dosam*: together with some fault; *api*: although; *na tyajet*: one should not abandon; *sarva arambha*: all enterprises; *hi*: indeed; *dosena*: with some fault; *dhumena*: by smoke; *agnih*: fire; *iva*: similarly; *avritah*: covered.

"O son of Kunti, one should not abandon the duties pertaining to one's own congenital nature, even if they seem to be imperfect, because all activities are bound to have some defect, just like fire is covered by smoke.

The expression *saha jam* ("born at the same time") refers to the *guna* and *karma* carried by the individual at the time of his birth, and that can be ascertained by a good astrologer by examining the exact time and place of birth; for this reason astrology (*Jyotisha Veda*) is considered a direct and important part of Vedic literature. In ancient times every newborn had his or her horoscope immediately cast by a trusted astrologer, so that the parents could adjust the early stages of education.

In genuinely qualified *brahmana* families, all the members always maintain a high standard of spiritual consciousness, mental purity, good behavior and clear knowledge of *dharma* and *vidya*, and thus they create a specially favorable environment; with the *garbhadana samskara* the womb of the mother is purified through

spiritual and religious impressions, so at the time of conception the high level of consciousness of the parents will likely attract an evolved soul. Any negative influence can bring disastrous results, as exemplified by the inauspicious circumstances of the pregnancy of Diti, the wife of Kasyapa Rishi and mother of the great *asuras* Hiranyaksha and Hiranyakasipu.

Again, here we must remember that birth is something that applies to the person who is born, not to his parents or family; the one who takes birth is the subject of the action. It is easy to verify this point by comparing specific qualities - intellectual capacity or the strength of one's ethical sense but especially professional talents or abilities - between siblings or even between child and parents, where irregularity or discordance are the actual norm and not the exception: how many mathematical geniuses, for example, come from families where everybody shares the same trait? Therefore the duties one acquires by birth are those activities that are related to one's own congenital characteristics, that may be quite different from those of one's parents or family members, especially if the parents have neglected to control their level of consciousness during intercourse - in which case any type of person can take birth, as the sexual act in itself is exactly the same for all *varnas* and indeed for all human beings.

In any case, during the pregnancy and at birth several more *samskaras* are performed to raise and purify the level of consciousness of the fetus, that is still very impressionable and submissive to learning. After the astrological evaluation of the *guna* and *karma* of the child, the family can remedy a bad situation with extra rituals and spiritual/ religious activities and so on, besides the customary *samskaras* that continue up to the age of 5, when the child is sent to the *gurukula*. One of the main rituals is the *annaprasana*, marking the start of the weaning process at the completion of 6 months of age and consisting in feeding the child

with his first cooked grains; during this ceremony the child is shown various articles symbolizing different tendencies (*guna* and *karma*) such as books, working tools, money, an image of a Deity, weapons, and so on. The child will normally be attracted by one article more than by the others, and this is taken as a broad indication for his education.

However, a child below 2 years of age (*sisu*) does not undergo any specific training or moral teaching and is free to do whatever s/he wants; there is never any punishment for "bad actions" because such a small child cannot really understand it. After the second or third birthday the child (*bala*) is gradually taught whatever possible by his/ her family members, and at the age of 5 he is usually sent to the residential school; there, too, he is considered just a child and allowed lots of freedom and leniency until the age of 12. A boy older than 12 years is called *kumara* and becomes subjected to an increasingly strict discipline by the *guru*, stage by stage: he is called *kisora* until his 15th birthday and *taruna* until his 19th birthday, after which he is known as *yauvana*. These definitions are used to establish their specific duties.

Not all the students in the *gurukula* will be able to endure the increasing pressure, so usually *sudras* are dismissed at the age of 12 after learning the fundamentals of *dharma* and *achara*, *vaisyas* graduate at the age of 15, *kshatriyas* at the age of 19 and *brahmanas* can be trained up to the age of 25, after which they need to marry and begin their work in society. During this training period, the individual can rise much higher than the original position at birth, but the purpose of the training is not to move the student to a higher *varna* than what was indicated by his birth chart, but rather to help him develop his potential in accordance to *dharma* and *vidya*, and learn how to perform all the duties prescribed for his particular nature, and which will be comfortable for him.

After attaining perfection in those duties one can start training in stricter duties for further evolution. It is important to understand that the higher *varnas* have proportionately more stringent duties and less opportunities for enjoyment - up to the *brahmanas*, whose sustenance should be obtained by collecting discarded grains in the fields after the harvest or from the bags of merchants in the market (*yayavara silonchanam vipra vrittih, Bhagavata Purana 7.11.16*) and should always live in simplicity and austerity, without indulging in sense gratification.

The expression *saha jam* ("born with") is elegantly balanced with the symmetrical expression *sa dosam* ("with defects"), indicating that in the beginning any enterprise or work appears difficult and imperfect, but one should not be discouraged by a poor performance or even by failure. This is why we need to practice our duties regularly (*sadhana*) to improve ourselves. No job is perfect or easy or completely pleasant, as there will be tedious and even unpleasant, dangerous and painful moments, yet one should never give up: this is the only way we can attain perfection (*samsiddhi*).

The example of the fire covered by smoke (*dhumena agnih avritah*) is amazingly beautiful. When we start a fire (especially by friction, as it was done in ancient times) the smoke is the first thing we see, then a small flame pops out, and when properly fed with the suitable fuel, a nice crackling fire appears; then we can put some bigger load of wood and finally everything is consumed to embers and ashes.

So in the beginning of one's training there will be mostly difficulties and discomfort (*yat tad agre visam iva pariname 'mritopamam*, "happiness that seems like poison in the beginning but becomes nectar in the end", 18.37) especially if we did not make any practice in previous lifetimes (6.41-6.45). Before making good progress, we need to burn away a good amount of

impurities that cloud our vision and encrust our good will, and that makes a lot of stinking smoke.

Then one fine day we suddenly get some amazing realization, like a small flame popping out apparently from nowhere, and we start to see the light; from that time, our desire to improve and progress gets warmer and brighter and the fire is burning. All the good things (study, austerity, charity, rituals, etc) we offer in the fire make it brighter, until our light can be seen from far and wide, and nothing can stop the fire of our realization and consciousness. Finally, when the process is completed, all the fuel has been digested and absorbed into a glowing and stable awareness that can remain hot for a very long time without any further feeding, and that can instantly kindle other consciousness fires just by contact. Applied to the evolution of the individual from one level of duties to another, the embers of stable consciousness are then fed with a different and purer quality of fuel - such as *ghi* or camphor, for example, exemplifying pure transcendental consciousness - that gives the fire different functions, shifting gradually from heat to light, until only light remains.

We have already clarified the difference between *dharma* and *adharna*, one described as *sat* or *daivi* and the other as *asat* or *asuri*; therefore when we speak of *sva dharma* that is following one's *sva bhava*, that never applies to *asurim bhava*, because there can be no such thing as criminal *dharma*. Therefore a person who was born in a disadvantaged situation, in a degraded family or community, should be helped in all possible ways if he wants to purify and elevate himself. True, he was born in that situation because of his past *karma*, but bad *karma* is not absolute and eternal and can be changed at any moment simply by engaging in positive *karma* or actions, or even simply by accepting transcendental knowledge (2.39, 2.50, 2.51, 3.9, 3.31, 4.14, 4.19, 4.20, 4.23, 4.37, 4.41, 9.28).

Similarly, we need to remain conscious about *dharma* and *vidya* in all social and professional positions; a *sudra* can refuse to carry out the orders of a bad adharmic master, and in fact he should abandon him to find better employment. Anyone can and should observe whether the *vaisyas* and especially the *kshatriyas* (and even the *brahmanas*) are engaged in adharmic actions; for the protection of the entire society the genuine *brahmanas* should admonish, reform or if necessary even remove such unqualified leaders. Returning to the example of the smoke covering the fire in the early stages: smoke does not make the fire impure but it can kill you if you are in a closed environment and you keep breathing it - that is, if you remain attached to your bad habits and qualities, or if you continue to perform toxic activities either by your own deliberation or by someone else's orders.

We have also explained that the importance of remaining loyal to one's prescribed duties is based on the fact that such duties are specifically and scientifically engineered for the evolution of the individual, and not for his material profit, comfort and success. People are very eager to discuss about their own rights (or what they perceive to be their rights, sometimes incorrectly) and not so eager to discuss about their duties; if you try to bring the issue to the table they get offended and do their worst to take revenge overtly or covertly, again demonstrating their utter lack of qualifications. Krishna has stated many times that one should perform one's duties sincerely and at the best of one's abilities, but without being attached to the success and failure in any specific action (2.38, 2.48, 3.35, 4.22, 16.15, 18.26), therefore it should be clear that the purpose of engagement is learning, not merely obtaining a material result. Learning and evolving have an eternal value as we carry them from one lifetime to the next, while the material attainments in this world are always very temporary and therefore have little meaning in themselves; they rarely make us better persons, and without a higher evolution of consciousness in

the members of society, all the technological achievements will fail to procure happiness because they are likely to be misused and cause more problems than solutions.

VERSE 49

असक्तबुद्धिः सर्वत्र जितात्मा विगतस्पृहः ।

asaktabuddhiḥ sarvatra jītātmā vigataspr̥hah ।

नैष्कर्म्यसिद्धिं परमां संन्यासेनाधिगच्छति ॥ १८-४९ ॥

naiṣkarmyasiddhiṁ paramāṁ sannyāsenādhigacchati ।। 18-49।।

asakta buddhih: with detached intelligence; *sarvatra:* in all circumstances; *jita atma:* with self control; *vigata sprihah:* having abandoned the attachment to contact; *naiskarmya siddhim:* the perfection of *naiskarma*; *paramam:* supreme; *sannyasena:* by renunciation; *adhigacchati:* one attains.

"One attains the supreme perfection of *naiskarma* through *sannyasa*, that is detached intelligence applied to all circumstances, (and also) establishing self control and giving up all association.

Krishna has already discussed the meaning of *sannyasa* in several verses (3.4, 3.30, 4.41, 5.3, 5.6, 5.13, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.4, 6.38, 8.11, 9.28, 12.6) and then again on the request of Arjuna in chapter 18 he elaborates on the difference between *sannyasa* and *tyaga* (18.1 to 18.12). Also, chapter 5 was completely dedicated to *Sannyasa yoga*. From all these instructions we can understand that the act of renunciation in itself, as in the *sannyasa ashrama*, has different value and results depending on the consciousness and motivations.

A superficial external renunciation devoid of real realization will not bring good results (3.4) but only sufferings (5.6) because nobody can ever stop acting (3.5) as long as the body continues to live. So the real *sannyasi* is one who performs his prescribed duties in society without being bound by *ahankara* and *mamatva* (5.3, 5.13, 12.6, 18.5, 18.6, 18.7, 18.9, 18.10, 18.11), not the one who does not kindle the fire and remains officially without a job and a family (6.1).

Therefore we must carefully distinguish when the word *sannyasa* is used in the superficial sense or in the true sense. The key to understand the true meaning of *sannyasa* as the path to *moksha* is found at the beginning of this verse in the expression *asakta buddhih sarvatra*, that can be translated as "using intelligence to remain detached in all circumstances" as we have seen in so many previous verses. In fact, the central focus of *Bhagavad gita* is *Buddhi yoga* (although there is no specific chapter entitled to it), the awakened consciousness that enables us to remain connected and united through detachment. It sounds like a contradiction, but we can consider the example of a father who has many children: he can remain connected to all of them only if he is detached from their differences, mistakes, characteristics or appearances but maintains an equal approach. The moment he becomes attached to one of them, he will lose focus on the others, and ultimately he will also lose the object of his attachment, because attachment is not love.

The expression *jita atma* is also very interesting; it means "having conquered oneself". Just like the word *sannyasa* can be used at different levels, the word *atma* can refer to the soul (*atman*, *jivatman*) or to one's mind, senses or even to the body. All the different meanings remain valid because people who are situated on different levels of personal evolution need to relate to the self and renunciation according to their particular capabilities.

So at the beginning of the path of *yoga*, one needs to start controlling his own body and senses (*yama*, *niyama*, *asana*, *pranayama*) and then he becomes able to control the mind (*dharana*, *dhyana*, *samadhi*). On the level of *samadhi*, the *atman* is conquered in the sense that the *yogi* has won the greatest prize: the direct perception and realization of his transcendental identity. And then he can engage in purely spiritual work (18.54).

Similarly, on the neophyte level one needs to take the external motions of accepting the order of *sannyasa* and following the strict rules and regulations, that are like crutches for the development of one's consciousness - a journey that usually takes many lifetimes (7.19). The regulated practice of renunciation will create a positive habit (18.37) and shape the mind into *sattva* and finally *visuddha sattva*; on that level one can engage in any *varna* or *ashrama* and perform the attending duties without being touched by any contamination, as Krishna will clearly state at the conclusion of the chapter (18.66).

This brings us to the next interesting expression of the verse - *vigata spriha*. Some commentators translate "without hankering/without aspirations", but the literal meaning is "contacting/touching completely gone". We have seen it in verses 2.56 (*vigata spriha*), 2.71 (*nihsprihah*), 4.14 (*na me spriha*), 6.18 (*nihsprihah*), and in a negative sense in 14.12. The word *spriha* is closely related to *sparsa* ("contact"), as we have seen in previous verses: *matra sparsas tu kaunteya sitosna sukha dukkha dah*, "the contact of the senses (with the sense objects) causes joy and distress just like cold and heat" (2.14); *ye hi samsparsa ja bhoga dukkha yonaya eva te*, "Those pleasures that derive from contact (with the sense objects) are the cause for future sorrow" (5.22); *sparsan kritva bahir*, "keeping the objects of contact outside" (5.27); *sukhena brahma samsparsam*, "s/he easily remains in contact with Brahman" (6.28).

Several previous verses mentioned *siddhi* or *samsiddhi* (18.45, 18.46, but also 3.20, 8.15, 12.10, 14.1); specifically, verse 3.4 stated: *na karmanam anarambhan naiskarmyam puruso 'snute, na ca sannyasanad eva siddhim samadhigacchati*, "A person cannot achieve freedom from *karma* by abstaining from action, just like perfection cannot be achieved simply through *sannyasa*."

How can we reconcile verse 3.4 with the present verse claiming that one attains the supreme perfection of *naiskarma* through *sannyasa* (*naiskarmya-siddhim paramam sannyasena adhigacchati*)? Simply by remembering that the word *sannyasa* can have a lower or neophyte level, and a higher or transcendental level, as we were discussing on the meaning of the expression *jita atma*.

Here Krishna clearly establishes that the meaning of the word in the particular verse is verified by the presence of detached intelligence in all circumstances (*asakta buddhi sarvatra*), genuine mastery of the self (*jita atma*) and true detachment from all identifications and associations (*vigata spraha*).

As long as a *sannyasi* does not have these symptoms, he will not attain the supreme perfection of *niskarma*. For a person who has attained that perfection, there is no more duty to perform: *yas tv atma ratir eva syad atma triptas ca manavah, atmany eva ca santustas tasya karyam na vidyate*, "A human being who loves the Self certainly becomes satisfied in the Self and peaceful within the Self: for such a person there is no need to perform any action" (3.17).

VERSE 50

सिद्धिं प्राप्तो यथा ब्रह्म तथाप्नोति निबोध मे ।

siddhiṁ prāpto yathā brahma tathāpnoti nibodha me ।

समासेनैव कौन्तेय निष्ठा ज्ञानस्य या परा ॥ १८-५० ॥

samāsenaiiva kaunteya niṣṭhā jñānasya yā parā ।। 18-50।।

siddhim: perfection; *praptah*: achieved; *yatha*: similarly; *brahma*: Brahman; *tatha*: also; *apnoti*: achieves; *nibodha*: you should understand; *me*: from me; *samasena*: in brief; *eva*: certainly; *kaunteya*: o son of Kunti; *nistha*: established position; *jnanasya*: of the knowledge; *ya*: which; *para*: supreme/ transcendental.

"O son of Kunti, you should understand from me that once (this) perfection is obtained, one attains Brahman. In brief, certainly this realization is the supreme knowledge.

The perfection to which this verse refers consists in performing the activities of one's duties with complete dedication in service to the Supreme, and without any selfish motivation, attachment or identification (see the previous verse, 18.49). When one is firmly situated in this consciousness (*nistha*), all positions in the universe are instantly transformed into pure devotional service, because Brahman is everywhere and in everything (*sarvatra*). At this level the separation between matter and spirit loses importance because everything is ultimately spirit (Brahman).

This is an advanced understanding of Reality - just like in elementary arithmetics we are taught that you cannot subtract a larger number from a smaller number, but in advanced algebra we learn that the opposite is true, too. This is the reason why we need the direct and personal guidance of a realized *guru*, who is established on a higher level (*nistha*) from which s/he can see how the two apparent opposites can easily be reconciled, and how the

teaching method should proceed gradually according to the understanding of the student.

The Vedic system offers a variety of approaches to the same fundamental path of Yoga, where the word Yoga defines the essence of spirituality and religion as explained abundantly in the many chapters of *Bhagavad gita*. In this sense, Yoga is not simply one of the *darshanas* of Vedic tradition, but it is Vedic tradition itself - its essence, meaning, root, source and foundation. The *karma kanda* (*Purva mimamsa*) is *Karma yoga*, the *jnana kanda* (*Uttara mimamsa*) is *Jnana yoga*, the Sankhya system is *Sankhya yoga*, Nyaya is *Buddhi yoga* and *Vijnana yoga*, Vaishesika philosophy is *Vibhuti yoga* and *Visvarupa darshana yoga*, and there are even more *darshanas* in *Bhagavad gita* - such as the *Taraka brahma yoga*, *Sannyasa yoga* and *Moksha yoga*, that go even beyond the scriptures and seek realization from the direct contemplation of the *atman/ brahman*.

This is the real, immense, liberating contribution of *Bhagavad gita*, offered from age to age (4.1) to the human kind as an essential integration to all methods of study. *Bhagavad gita* is not meant to affirm the sectarian superiority of the formal worship or sentimentalist devotion of one particular God - Krishna - over "the demigods", or to preach an exclusive path of formal renunciation and absenteeism from the "illusory things of the world".

Through *Bhagavad gita*, Krishna teaches us that we are all, directly and indirectly, limbs of the Supreme Purusha (Purushottama, chapter 15, who is the source of Brahman, 14.27) and as such we have duties in this universe by which we can contribute to the happiness and progress of the entire body. This devotional service is the key to our individual evolution and to the establishment of a perfect society where each individual is supported, protected, engaged and cared for, each and everyone comfortably enough for their particular *guna* and *karma* but with

just the sufficient pressure to make efforts to improve, and where the human potential can bloom in its full splendor and glory. This is true Yoga.

The first part of the verse is focused on the symmetry of *yatha-tatha*, that means "at the same time, in the same way", and connects perfection (*siddhi*) with Brahman, the supreme Consciousness that encompasses all Reality. This is the final stage (*nistha*) of renunciation (*sannyasa*) and liberation (*moksha*), the subject of this chapter. We have already elaborated on the fact that Brahman (Paramatma, Bhagavan) is the reality of consciousness or knowledge (*tattvam yaj jnanam advayam, Bhagavata Purana, 1.2.11*) and that the *jivatmans* are his parts or limbs (*amsa, 15.7*).

Everything wonderful and beautiful in this world is manifested by a part of the radiance of this Brahman (*tejo amsa sambhavam, 10.41*), as the *Bhagavata Purana* further explains: *etan nanavataranm nidhanam bijam avyayam, yasyamsena sriyante deva tiryak naradayah*, "From these many *avataras* (Karanodakasayi Vishnu, Garbhodakasayi Vishnu, Kshirodakasayi Vishnu) come the indestructible seed (the *anu atman, aham bija pradam, 14.4*) that manifests all existences such the *devas*, the animals, the human beings and all other creatures" (1.3.5).

These three subsequent forms of Vishnu are called *purusha avataras* ("manifestations of the personal principle of consciousness in this world"); the first is also called Narayana ("the shelter of human beings") that is sleeping (*sayi*) immersed in *yoga nidra* or *maha maya* in the Karana ("causes") *udaka* ("ocean") also called the *mahat tattva brahman*, and at each one of his breath cycles all the innumerable universes are created and destroyed.

Then a *svamsa* ("complete/ united part") enters each of these universes and rests (*sayi*) on the Garbha ("embryo") *udaka*

("ocean"), giving birth through his navel to Hiranyagarbha ("the golden embryo" or "the golden egg") that is Brahma, the first creature and creator of each universe.

Simultaneously, Narayana also manifests in a localized form in *prapanchika vaikuntha*, a duplicate Vaikuntha planet (or dimension) within this universe - a sort of embassy of Vaikuntha in the material world - and therefore he is called Kshira ("milk") *udaka* ("ocean") *sayi* ("reclining"). This Vishnu abode in the ocean of milk is the island Trikuta ("three mountains") also called Svetadvipa ("the white island") and Dhruvaloka or the polar star, around which all the other stars and planet circle; here Brahma and the Devas can approach Vishnu for help in the protection of the universe. Since the number of universes is unlimited, there are certainly many of these *svamsa avatars* in the material manifestation; from these emanate all the *jivatmans* or *anu atmans*, that are the seeds of life and consciousness, beginning as small atoms that incarnate in the world in order to evolve.

VERSE 51

बुद्ध्या विशुद्ध्या युक्तो धृत्यात्मानं नियम्य च ।

buddhyā viśuddhayā yukto dhṛtyātmānaṁ niyamy ca ।

शब्दादीन्विषयांस्त्यक्त्वा रागद्वेषौ व्युदस्य च ॥ १८-५१ ॥

śabdādīnviṣayāṁstyaktvā rāgadveṣau vyudasya ca ॥ 18-51 ॥

buddhya: with intelligence; *visuddhaya*: completely purified; *yuktah*: engaged; *dhritya*: with determination; *atmanam*: the self; *niyamy*: regulating; *ca*: and; *sabda adin*: beginning from sound;

visayan: the sense objects; *tyaktva*: giving up; *raga dvesau*: both attraction and repulsion; *vyudasya*: putting aside; *ca*: and.

"By engaging the self with determination and a completely purified intelligence, and by following the prescribed method, and also by letting go all the sense objects, beginning with the sounds, as well as attraction and repulsion,

Intelligence (*buddhi*) is the key and the instrument to attain true success both on the material level (in *dharma*, *artha*, *kama*, *moksha*, brought about by *sattva*, 14.16) and on the spiritual level as well; however, in order to remain on the spiritual level (*nistha*) one's intelligence must be completely purified, and therefore rise above material *sattva*. The word *visuddha* ("completely purified") is also used to refer to that level of *sattva* ("goodness") that is not contaminated by any material consideration, therefore the *visuddha buddhi* is beyond material intelligence and constitutes the highest possible position from which we can realize the absolute Truth - Brahman, Paramatma, Bhagavan Purushottama. Of course the expression can also mean "purified by intelligence", as when intelligence is pure, the consciousness is not covered by contamination. .

Other commentators have explained that *visuddha buddhi* means *anatmani atma buddhi nivrittan*, "the termination of thinking as self what is not the self", or in other words, abandoning the root delusion of material identification (*ahankara* and *mamatva*). The process of purification requires determination (*dhriti*) because one needs to sincerely follow the proper method and its rules (*niyama*) and abandon all the attachment, attraction and repulsion towards the sense objects. This is not a one-time choice, but a daily repeated process, because as long as we have a material body, our material senses and material mind will be subject to the power of the *gunas* (18.40) and to the waves and movements of their interactions.

The purpose of Yoga is to become detached from such waves and movements, raising our consciousness above the ocean of material existence, so that our mind is not disturbed any more by these *vrittis*. This is only possible when the mind is strongly focused on the transcendental contemplation of *atman/ brahman*.

Some people try to meditate "on the void", foolishly thinking that the purpose of Yoga is to become "liberated from the mind", but that is delusion; if they seem to succeed, it is because they have immersed their consciousness in *tamas*, so nothing moves there but only because of inertia and forgetfulness, just like in the minds of a lobotomized human being or a less evolved creature such as a plant or a rock. We need to follow the proper method (*niyamyā*) in meditation, because mere fantasy and speculation will not have the same effect as a sincere and dedicated application of the genuine scientific system. The word *yukta* is from the very same root of the word *yoga*, and indicates "union, connection, engagement, relationship, control, regulation"; we can better understand the meaning of Yoga by applying all these particular meanings to our *sadhana*.

The expression *sabda adin*, meaning "all those (things) beginning with sound" is very interesting. On the simpler level, it indicates the various sense objects or functions of the senses such as sound, form and color, touch, taste, smell. On a deeper level, it refers to the fact that all material creations begin from the sound - first subtle, then gross - and develop subsequently into form and then into physical contact. We can easily verify this scientific fact by experimentally concentrating our attention on a mental sound, preferably a word, and then we will be able to observe how the mind follows the senses by recalling a form that corresponds to that word or sound, and then how the senses of action will send the impulse of movement to go and touch the sense object. There is the famous exercise on the name "lemon"; by focusing on the

name/ sound/ idea "lemon", our internal senses will immediately present the image of a lemon and even the sour taste of the lemon, recovering it from our previous memories.

Therefore the purification of the mind starts with sounds, more specifically with the *pranava omkara* and the *maha mantras* composed by the names of God, the descriptions of the teachings, activities, qualities and forms of God, and with other auspicious sounds such as conch shells blowing, bells ringing, etc. By regularly surrounding ourselves with these spiritual sounds, the memory of the inauspicious sounds will be pushed out, and gradually the mind will abandon it completely because it has found a better taste (2.59).

The perfection of this meditation is called *sakalpa* or *samprajnata samadhi*, or constant absorption of the mind on auspicious transcendental sense objects or ideas, such as *mantras*, *stutis*, *vigrahas*, *lilas*, etc. Only after attaining this level one can aim at transcending it and attain the *nirvikalpa* or *asamprajnata samadhi*, the original state of the *atman/ brahman*, where there is no *sankalpa* ("desire, purpose") or *jnata* ("object of knowledge"), because there is no more duality, no more space and time, and the *atman* is completely united into *brahman*, yet it remains distinct in service and relationship. One who has not experienced transcendence will not be able to understand how this is possible, because it is not a concept that can be explained by words or perceived by the senses or by the mind. Yet, it is very much real, in fact more real than material objects and consciousness; in *asamprajnata samadhi* everything is contained in a *bindu* ("point/drop") much like Arjuna experienced the entire expanse of the universe in one single point when he contemplated the Virata Rupa. Such an experience has nothing to do with *sunyata* ("void").

The word *vyudasya* ("putting aside") is a very practical instruction for meditation, both for beginners and advanced students. The

mind is restless and always eager to find something new and interesting, so it keeps running everywhere and bringing back stuff to show us, like an enthusiastic little child who has found wonderful and strange objects in his exploration of the world - a pebble with a particular shape, a feather fallen from a bird, a piece of broken glass, a flower, and so on (sometimes even nasty things). Krishna has already recommended that we should make friends (6.5, 6.6) with our own mind and treat it affectionately but firmly like we would deal with a restless child to be engaged in some important learning task: *sanaih sanair upamed buddhya dhriti grihitaya, atma samstham manah kritva na kincid api cintayet, yato yato niscalati manas cancelam asthiram, tatas tato niyamyaitad atmany eva vasam nayet, cancelam hi manah krisna pramathi balavad dridham, tasyaham nigraham manye vayor iva su duskaram, asamsayam maha baho mano durnigraham calam, abhyasena tu kaunteya vairagyena ca grihyate*, "Gradually withdrawing from attachments and distractions by the use of intelligence, with a determined effort, one should fix the mind in the Self/ *atman* and stop worrying/ thinking about everything else. The mind is unsteady and impatient to wander around. Every time/ wherever it runs off, one should bring it back under control, and regulate it so that it remains controlled in/ by the Self/ *atman*. The mind is indeed restless, turbulent, powerful and stubborn; controlling it is more difficult than controlling the wind. However, although the mind is restless and very difficult to manage, it can be controlled by practice and detachment." (6.25, 6.26, 6.34, 6.35).

We should therefore sit in meditation, in a comfortable position (*asana*) so that our body will not distract us, then calm and purify the mind through proper breathing (*prayanama*) and learn how to stop listening to external messages (*pratyahara*) so that we can fix our mind (*dharana*) on a transcendental sound (*mantra*) and form (*vigraha, yantra*).

Every time our mind becomes distracted by external or internal objects, every time it comes up with some other idea or memory, we should say, "thank you, but now I am busy" and go back to the proper contemplation. Sometimes it helps to take a quick note (pen and paper) if we have the impression that the mind's idea is particularly useful in our daily life, so that the mind feels satisfied that we have given it some attention.

However, we need to remain neutral towards all the impressions, emotions, memories etc, because both attraction and repulsion will reinforce the interest of the mind and create an attachment, and repression is even worse because it gives the problem too much power. Just acknowledge and let go. Gradually the mind will learn to appreciate the transcendental objects and will become calmer and more focused, undisturbed by the waves of the *gunas* (2.70).

VERSE 52

विविक्तसेवी लघ्वाशी यतवाक्कायमानसः ।

viviktasevī laghvāśī yataavākkāyamānasah ।

ध्यानयोगपरो नित्यं वैराग्यं समुपाश्रितः ॥ १८-५२ ॥

dhyānayogaparo nityam vairāgyam samupāśritah ॥ 18-52 ॥

vivikta sevi: living alone and in a quiet place; *laghu asi*: eating moderately and light food; *yata*: having controlled; *vak*: speech; *kaya*: body; *manasah*: (and) mind; *dhyana yoga*: in *dhyana yoga*; *parah*: dedicated to; *nityam*: constantly; *vairagyam*: renunciation; *samupasritah*: having taken shelter of.

"living alone/ in an isolate place, eating moderately, controlling the speech, the body and the mind, taking shelter in renunciation, and constantly immersed in meditation,

Krishna is summarizing here the essentials for *yoga* and *sannyasa*, that lead to *moksha*. The previous verse (18.51) clearly stated that one should first of all be determined to purify one's intelligence from *ahankara* and *mamatva*, follow the rules of *yama* and *niyama*, and becoming completely detached from both attraction and repulsion, letting go all the sense objects, starting from sound - noise pollution, useless and meaningless socialization, the constant chattering of the mind, and so on. In this verse Krishna recognizes that it is extremely difficult to do this unless one lives alone, in a quiet and solitary place, so that one does not have to deal with the constant chattering of the mind of someone else (besides one's own mind's chattering), and with the silly and superficial socialization and the loud noises created by stupid people. And today the situation is even worse than the condition of society in Krishna's times.

Sometimes religiously inclined people who are influenced by *tamas* believe that if something is good, more of that same thing must be better, so they distort and abuse the idea of spreading auspicious sounds for the benefit of all. Vedic civilization did not use loudspeakers and certainly does not prescribe putting the mega boom boxes at maximum volume to get their *kirtanas* or *bhajanans* heard at 10 km distance, creating hearing problems, mental confusion and physical pain to all those who live at a closer range (within 1 km, for example) and damaging the eardrums, brain and nervous system of those who stand or sit even nearer (within 10 meters, for example). We have seen how *tamas* creates addiction to an excessively high volume of music, because the aggression of sound to the brain and nervous system is mistaken by the conditioned body and mind as a pleasurable stimulation.

However, normal people, especially small children, and even animals are simply disturbed and aggravated by this noise pollution, that can cause miscarriages in women and cows as described in the *shastra* with reference to very powerful sounds like the war conch shells of *asuras*. Actually, sattvic sounds as described in *shastra* with references to *ashramas* are very soft and sweet, on the same decibel level of scattered birds singing.

So, *vivikta sevi* ("living alone") is a precise instruction by Krishna. It was already recommended in previous instructions: *yogi yunjita satatam atmanam rahasi sthitah, ekaki yata cittatma nirasir aparigrahah*, "A yogi should constantly practice meditation on the *atman* by living alone in a secluded place, carefully keeping the mind and the consciousness under control, free from expectations and from attachments to material acquisitions/ from depending on others" (6.10).

Because our world is now overpopulated and society and government are not conducive to the actual practice of *yoga*, it may be difficult to find a proper place to live and practice meditation in a congested city or even in the vicinity of some loud temple or "*yoga ashrama*", so we need to adjust as best as we can. For example, it is always advisable to have a room of one's own (no other people using the same room) and let people know that we are practicing *mauna* (silence), so that we can avoid their gossiping and chattering and superficial socializing. The telephone is another major source of distraction and frustration, so it is better to switch it off or keep a voice mail recording instead, and let people know that they should send you messages and you will call them back when free.

The next extremely important factor in one's spiritual life and practice is the choice of food (*asi*, "eating, consuming, absorbing"). It was also mentioned in verse 6.17 (*yukta ahara*, "controlled eating"), and confirmed in many verses of *Bhagavata*

Purana (mita bhuk, 3.27.8, 7.12.6, 11.11.30, mita vanya bhuk, 4.8.56, mita adanam vivikta ksema sevanam, 3.28.3, nihsanga aparigraha ekah vivikta saranah mita asanah, 7.15.30). This of course applies both to the mind's food and to the body's food. By living alone in a quiet place, we can better choose the food we want to make available to the mind, without external disturbances and interruptions, and similarly a *yogi* who lives in the forest or keeps a small permaculture or forest garden and orchard in or near his *bhajana kutir* or *ashrama* can obtain nice light food that is suitable for *sadhana*.

It is a very well known fact that a *yogi's* diet is based on fresh fruits and vegetables, especially herbs and leaves (*patram puspam phalam toyam, 9.26*), edible roots (*Bhagavata Purana 4.23.5, 10.20.28, 11.18.2, vanya bhuk, 11.29.42, 12.2.9*), nuts, and milk produced by the *ashrama* or household cows, who return home in the evening after grazing in the forest or non-cultivated lands around the isolated place where the *yogi* lives. Occasionally the *yogi* (*brahmana, sadhu, brahmachari, vanaprastha* or *sannyasi*) can go to some village and collect alms in the form of grains (rice, wheat, barley, sesame, beans, etc) and keep a small store in the kitchen especially to cook small quantities of nice *bhoga* offerings for the Deity on festive occasions. With a sufficient supply of pure fresh water and occasional forest products such as honey and medicinal substances, the health and peace of mind of the *yogi* are guaranteed.

We understand that such a sattvik, idyllic, easy and comfortable way of life is not available to many people at present, therefore we will adjust by observing strict vegetarianism and choosing only sattvic ingredients, and especially preparing and consuming them in a "light" manner (*laghu*). So we should avoid the excessive use of spices and especially hot spices, the excessive use of sugar and especially refined white sugar, the excessive use of fats and

especially fried fats or heavy oils such as the irritant mustard oil or the saturated fats of palm oil, coconut oil, "*vanaspati*" vegetable oil mixes etc. Even excessive use of clarified butter (*ghi*) and milk products is detrimental to good health and the lightness of body and mind required by the practice of *yoga* and *sannyasa*, so when we use relatively heavy (albeit pure vegetarian) ingredients, it should be only in the form of *prasadam*, that consists in very small quantities of preparations offered to the Deity and shared with others.

Controlling one's speech and mind is something we need to work on even when we are living and practicing in perfect solitude, and it is best done by engaging our power of speech (*vak shakti*) in reciting the *shastra* and singing devotional songs, and especially by vibrating the completely transcendental sounds of *pranava omkara* and *maha mantras*, that are composed exclusively by Divine names. The mind can also be nourished by the constant study of the scriptures (*svadhyaya*) and by devotional activities and thoughts (*isvara pranidhana*), and especially on the dynamic meditation (*dhyana*) on the Divine reality and its service, including the close association with the *antaryami paramatma*, whose voice becomes easier for us to hear clearly when there is no other noise around, internally or externally.

The word *yata* means "controlled, engaged", and gives us a better understanding of the word *yati*, that is a synonym of *sannyasi* (4.28, 5.26) as also confirmed even more clearly in *Bhagavata Purana* 7.12.16, 11.8.16, 11.18.17, but also 2.2.15, 3.1.31, 4.23.12, 5.26.39, 11.8.17, 11.16.43). Here is one example: *mauna aniha anila-yama, danda vag deha cetasam, na hy ete yasya santy anga venubhir na bhaved yatih*, "One who is not controlling his power of speech, has not given up selfish activities, does not control his *prana*, and does not keep a strict discipline on his own voice, body and mind, can never be a true *sannyasi*, even if he carries many

bamboo rods (the insignia of an ordained *sannyasi*)" (*Bhagavata Purana*, 11.18.17).

The *tridandi sannyasis* of some later *dvaita* lineages carry a bamboo rod (*danda*) with three (*tri*) points, to distinguish themselves from the original *ekadandi* ("one rod") *sannyasis*; they claim that such three points symbolize their vow of controlling speech, body and mind (*vak, kaya, manasa*) as instructed in this verse. This is all very nice, but too often these three points of the *danda* are seen not just to represent such control, but to replace it altogether, as the *sannyasis* are found to be shamelessly engaged in such activities of sense gratification and material power that ordinary people end up trying to achieve a more enjoyable standard of living and better facilities by officially entering the order of *sannyasa* in such lineages.

Such fake *sannyasis* will claim that they are accepting these facilities only for the sake of devotional service, but that does not explain very expensive and unnecessarily prestigious status symbols such as the rolexes, the executive class seats on frequent air flights, the multi-star hotel rooms, the lavish birthday parties, the super-luxury vehicles, the dedicated personal servants including cooks preparing an elaborate feast with sophisticated items three times every day, the silver plates cups and *katoris*, the silken bedsheets and garments, the *pashmina* sweaters and shawls, the high quality marble and golden fauceted bathrooms at one's own private apartments, and the state of the art electronics and digital devices that are only used for very elementary purposes (sending/ receiving email messages and writing notes for a lecture). At these objections, the fake *sannyasi* will reply that he is humbly accepting these loving offerings from his disciples to avoid hurting their feelings, but if he is their *guru* he is supposed to teach them what is an appropriate living standard for a *sannyasi*, and encourage them to invest their wealth and efforts in the service

of God and the cause of *dharma* and *vidya* instead. And if the *sannyasi* receives gifts from outside people, he should distribute them to deserving others according to the principle of utility in such higher service, if possible instructing them to sell the expensive articles and use the money for better purposes. Of course we need to adjust the externals of *sannyasa* to the present *desa, kala, patra*, but the principle of renunciation must remain the same, otherwise there will be a rajasic/ tamasic meaning in the definition itself (18.31, 18.32).

The verse from *Bhagavata Purana* (11.18.17) we quoted earlier is extremely interesting, because it further illustrates the meaning of the verses we are studying (18.51, 18.52, 18.53). *Mauna* means "silence" as we have seen in 18.51 and 18.52 (this verse), and we will see in 18.53 (next verse) represented by *santa* ("peaceful, quiet"). The word *aniha* means "without greed, without hankerings, without selfishness", and it corresponds to dropping all sense objects (*visayam tyaktva*) and abandoning the duality of attraction-repulsion (*raga dvesau vyuda*) as in verse 18.51, and to controlling speech, body and mind (*yata vak kaya manasa*) in the present verse (18.52), as it is also explicitly mentioned in the *Bhagavata Purana* (*danda vag deha cetasam*). The *Bhagavata* verse adds *pranayama* (*anila yama*) as an important practice to control speech, body, mind and *prana* or life energy, connecting *prana* with *cetasa* ("consciousness") as an alternate definition of "mind" (*manasa*, 18.51).

The expression *dhyana yoga parah* clearly indicates that a *yogi* should give priority or supreme position (*parah*) to meditation; this applies to multiple terms of comparison. The most immediate meaning is that a *yogi* should focus his/ her entire life on meditation as the main purpose of his/ her existence; *yoga* is not a hobby or an ancillary health practice used to enjoy some physical exercise and relaxation for one hour twice a week.

It is not even a "second job" to make some extra bucks or get some other similar benefits. Also, within the practice of *yoga*, *dhyana* is much more important than *dharana*, *pranayama*, *pratyahara* and *asana*, and even more than *yama* and *niyama*, because all these *yoga angas* ("limbs") are meant to support *dhyana* or meditation, and they constitute only preliminary and subordinate practices. When the *yogi* becomes perfect in *dhyana* (the actual purpose of *yoga*), meditation itself becomes *nitya dhyana*, technically called *samadhi*, or *sama dhi*, or *sama dhyana* ("constant equal meditation"). Another meaning of the expression interprets the word *para* as "Supreme" as in *brahman*, *paramatma*, *bhagavan*; meditation should only focus on *atman* / *brahman*, not on material objects. All these meanings are also confirmed by the expression *samupa asritah* ("fully possessed, taking full shelter").

VERSE 53

अहंकारं बलं दर्पं कामं क्रोधं परिग्रहम् ।

ahaṅkāraṁ balaṁ darpaṁ kāmaṁ krodhaṁ parigrahaṁ ।

विमुच्य निर्ममः शान्तो ब्रह्मभूयाय कल्पते ॥ १८-५३ ॥

vimucya nirmamaḥ śānto brahmabhūyāya kalpate ॥ 18-53 ॥

aham karam: I am the doer; *balam*: strength; *darpaṁ*: pride; *kamam*: lust; *krodham*: rage; *parigraham*: seeking gifts/ favors; *vimucya*: completely free; *nir mamah*: without a sense of proprietorship or belonging; *santah*: peaceful; *brahma bhuyaya*: the level of *Brahman*; *kalpate*: wishes.

"completely free from *ahankara*, pride for one's strength, lust, anger and expectation of honors, free from *mamatva*, and peaceful: (this person's) desires are on the level of Brahman.

An alternate (and more literary) translation of this verse is: "One who has become completely free from *ahankara* and *mamatva*, from the sense of material strength, pride, lust, anger and greed, and is peaceful, focuses his/ her desires towards Brahman." Other commentators have translated *brahma bhuyaya kalpate* as "can aspire to attaining the level of Brahman", but a person who is qualified in the manner described in these verses is already on the level of Brahman. The same meaning was expressed in verse 14.26 (*sa gunan samatityaitan brahma bhuyaya kalpate*, "develops desires on the Brahman level, transcending all these *gunas*").

The first line of this verse starts with *ahankara* ("I am the doer"), that is the single most detrimental obstacle to spiritual realization; the other bad qualities and habits listed in the first line are merely consequences created by *ahankara*. Material identification with the body and mind, that constitutes the *ahankara*, creates and thrives on the pride for one's own strength (*balam darpam*) as well as on physical strength and fitness as a value in itself (*balam*) and on pride and arrogance as a value in itself (*darpam*). So one who "practices *yoga*" because s/he is (or wants to be) proud of his/ her own body fitness or strength is automatically a failure and cannot progress.

The addition of *kama* next to *bala* and *darpa* is also illuminating, because generally those who pride themselves in their own bodies (fitness, sexyness etc) are eager to engage in subtle or gross sex and sense gratification; already the simple fact of being proudly conscious of one's body and identifying with it (*ahankara*) is a sort of narcissistic sexual activity. It does not matter if people cover their bodies up completely when they go out in public: lust and sense gratification and sexual urges remain undiminished even

under a *burqa* and they are not dissolved even by artificial repression or mere abstention (3.6, 3.33). The only real solution is to drop the identification with the material body altogether, and move one's focus to our true identity as *atman/ brahman*. A real *yogi* does not wish to make the body strong and fit (2.70), even if this means that s/he is going against the opinion of the public (2.69) and is subjected to a barrage of impressions in that direction (2.70); his/ her wishes are on the level of Brahman (*brahma bhuyaya kalpate*).

The word *balam* means "force, material power, violence, strength", as well as "impact, clout, leverage, influence, affluence, position, fame, attachment" as these are elements of such material power. Together with arrogance (*darpa*), lust (*kama*), anger (*krodha*) and the exploitation mentality (*parigraha*), this material power is nothing less than asuric: *dambho darpo 'bhimanas ca krodhah parusyam eva ca, ajnanam cabhijatasya partha sampadam asurim, asa pasa satair baddhah kama krodha parayanah, ihante kama bhogartham anyayenartha sancayan, ahankaram balam darpam kamam krodham ca samsritah, mam atma para dehesu pradvisanto 'bhyasuyakah*, "The characteristics of those born of asuric nature are hypocrisy, impudence, conceit, rage, rudeness, and of course ignorance. Bound by hundreds of ropes in the form of desires, always immersed in lust and anger, they desire to increase their desires and for that purpose they adopt any means to accumulate wealth. Taking shelter in *ahankara*, physical strength, arrogance, lust and anger, they show envy and hatred against me, as I reside in their own bodies and in the bodies of others." (16.4, 16.12, 16.18).

Specifically, it is the mixture of lust, greed and anger that obstructs the evolution of the soul: *kama esa krodha esa rajo guna samudbhavah, mahasano maha papma viddhy enam iha vairinam, tri vidham narakasyedam dvaram nasanam atmanah, kamah*

krodhas tatha lobhas tasmad etat trayam tyajet, kama krodha vimuktanam yatinam yata cetasam, abhito brahma nirvanam vartate vidadatmanam, "This (negative power) is (the mixture of) desire and anger, and it is born from *rajas guna*. Know that it is all-devouring, the cause of great sins, and the (true) enemy in this world. The threefold gate to hellish life and to self-destruction consists of this mixture of lust, greed and anger, therefore one should abandon them. The saintly persons who are completely free from lust and anger and have their consciousness steadily fixed (in *atman/ brahman*), who have realized the Self: (for them) there is *brahma nirvana* very soon." (3.37, 16.21, 5.26).

The mixture of *kama-lobha-krodha* is born from the influence of *rajas* on *ahankara* (material identification) and *mamatva* (material attachment), therefore by dropping *ahankara* and *mamatva*, and taking shelter in the Supreme through *sattva* and *visuddha sattva*, we automatically become free from this great enemy of progress. *Ahankara* and *mamatva* are also the source of *parigraha*, the tendency to accumulating and keeping superfluous things, acquiring wealth and property, expecting gifts and favors and service from others, exploiting or depending on others for one's own maintenance, and so on. This also applies to the religious field, of course, as we have seen that *asuras* also love to present themselves as religionists (16.10, 16.15, 16.17), and ordinary religious activities can also be performed with the wrong motivations and with bad effects (17.5, 17.6, 17.12, 17.13, 17.18, 17.19, 17.21, 17.22, 18.31, 18.32), and with the wrong attitude and understanding (18.7, 18.8, 18.21, 18.22, 18.24, 18.25, 18.27, 18.28). Only a sincere *sadhaka*, who is free from *ahankara* and *mamatva* and has overcome all the bad qualities born from *rajas* and *tamas*, can attain peace and rise to the level of Brahman, the *brahma bhuya* or *brahma nirvana* (5.26). And only from that level, true *bhakti* or devotion to Isvara Bhagavan can start, as the next verse will clearly state.

VERSE 54

ब्रह्मभूतः प्रसन्नात्मा न शोचति न काङ्क्षति ।

brahmabhūtaḥ prasannātmā na śocati na kāṅkṣati ।

समः सर्वेषु भूतेषु मद्भक्तिं लभते पराम् ॥ १८-५४ ॥

samaḥ sarveṣu bhūteṣu madbhaktiṁ labhate parām ।। 18-54।।

brahma bhutah: the state of *Brahman*; *prasanna atma*: satisfied in the self; *na socati*: does not lament; *na kanksati*: does not hanker; *samah sarvesu bhutesu*: equally disposed towards all beings/ towards all existences; *mad bhaktim*: *bhakti* to me; *labhate*: obtains; *param*: spiritual/ transcendental.

"One who is established in the state of Brahman is satisfied in the self; he does not lament or hanker (after anything), is equally disposed towards all beings and achieves transcendental devotion to me.

Brahma bhuya or *brahma bhuta* is the existence of Brahman, or "being" Brahman, the level of *paramahansa* that constitutes the perfection of the evolution in human beings - *samsiddhi*, or *moksha*, liberation from the ignorance and illusion of material identification and attachment. Without attaining this level, devotion can only be impure, contaminated by material ignorance and motivations that we project on God; before the *atman/ brahman* realization, religious devotion can only be a shadow or glimpse of true *bhakti*. Such sentimental devotion should not be condemned, because it is a step in the proper direction (10.10), but it should not be presented as the genuine article, either, because people would be confused and misled into believing they have

already attained the goal when they are actually just dreaming and fantasizing, so they will stop making efforts to attain the true realization and they will miss the main point and the special opportunity of human life.

What is the existence of Brahman? The word *bhuta* ("being") refers both to the condition of existence and to the individual consciousness who lives in that particular existence; the word is a derivative from the verb "becoming" (*bhavati*), therefore it indicates a process of development, such as birth, evolution or realization. The individual soul starts as *anu atman* ("atomic self"), a non-developed spark of consciousness that is meant to evolve and grow into a fully fledged *siddha svarupa*, or transcendental/spiritual body, made of pure consciousness (*sat cit ananda*) just like the body of God. So the *anu atman* enrolls in the school of the material world and becomes a *jiva atman* or *jiva buta* ("living being"); in the beginning there is some confusion about the body-identity thing, so the tiny *atman* incorrectly identifies with the material body he has developed. Through a series of experiences and with the proper education and teachings, the *jivatman* will finally attain the full understanding (realization) of its true identity and the meaning of "transcendental body". This is the *brahma bhuta* level.

One might ask why God, who is so good and omnipotent, puts the *jivatmans* through such a long and painful process. Can't he create fully perfect emanations, already developed, already in the adult *siddha deha* form, and spare us all this trouble? The answer is that true love must be based on free choice, on real appreciation that comes through a contrast with some other term of comparison. This is the purpose of duality, this is the purpose of the entire material manifestation. As *jivatmans*, we get the opportunity to participate in the *lila* of creation, preservation and destruction of the world, and we can always choose the role we want to play.

God does not get angry at us if we do not make the right choices, but the game has some in-built rules that the *jivatman* cannot break, because they are stronger than him (7.14, 3.5, 3.33, 13.30, 18.40). Foolish and ignorant people throw insults at their Mother Mahamaya, calling her "witch", or "evil stepmother", just like stupid children get angry with mother because of their own failures and limitations, or with the teacher because they are asked to study more effectively. If they really want to overcome their problems, they should rather seek the blessings of Mother and make a sincere effort to understand what she wants from them: she just wants us to grow up.

How can we grow up? By developing the same level of consciousness of Isvara (*mam eva ye prapadyante*, 7.14), that is benevolent neutrality and detachment towards all beings and circumstances, due to the fact that we find perfect happiness and satisfaction in the self (*prasanna atma*). What is the different between a child and an adult? The adult can take care of himself and does not need or depend on others, either materially or emotionally, irrespective of the age of the body in years. An adult makes the best use of what he gets, without complaining or obsessing about what he has and doesn't have (*na socati na kanksati*) and remains balanced in joys and sorrows (*samah sarvesu bhutesu*). At that level, we can really engage in real devotional service and not simply in a childish imitation of devotion.

We should carefully dispel the various misconceptions on the points offered in this verse, starting with the widespread but mistaken idea that Brahman realization is "impersonal" as opposed to "personal". This is particularly foolish because by definition in the Absolute (*advaita*) there is no duality and therefore there can be no contradiction between personal and impersonal. All the genuine *shastra* keep repeating that Transcendence, by definition,

is what transcends the limited comprehension of the material mind and speech based on the experience of duality, time and space that we can have with the material body. The subtler (and therefore sharper and more penetrating) our consciousness becomes, the more we can realize that duality, time and space are not what they seem to be (as the illusory projection of *maya*). The fact is that individuality is eternal and constitutional, therefore it cannot be annihilated when entering or merging into the Brahman consciousness; what is annihilated is the *ahankara*, the material identification of a separate interest and action that is not in complete harmony with the Supreme.

A limb or cell in the body can never really function properly unless its consciousness is completely aligned with the consciousness of the entire body; when the DNA code in the cell is different from the DNA code of the rest of the body, or when the cell acts in a way that is not the purpose pursued by the body, we have a problem. To materially identified and conditioned people, this may appear to belittle the role of a human being in the universe, or to diminish the importance of free will, presenting God as a sort of intolerant dictator.

This happens because in this world we have the experience of foolish and ignorant conditioned beings trying to play God without being God, and without even understanding what God really is. One of the best definitions is offered by the *Bhagavata Purana* (1.2.11): *vadanti tat tattva vidad, tattvam yaj jnanam advayam, brahmeti paramatmeti, bhagavan iti sabdyate*, "Those who know the *tattva* declare that *tattva* is undivided Knowledge, variously called Brahman, Paramatma, and Bhagavan".

God is existence, knowledge and consciousness - the sum total of all existence, knowledge and consciousness that is, has been and can ever be - and the source of everything as well. In other words, Krishna Consciousness is not "being conscious about Krishna" but

it *is* Krishna himself as Consciousness. When we "dovetail" our consciousness with God as Consciousness, we are not losing or missing anything, because everything is there and nothing exists without it or outside it - if "without" and "outside" actually could have a meaning when we speak of all-pervading omnipresence).

Realizing Brahman is like a drop of water entering the ocean, like some computer data entering the supreme software that creates the entire hologram - every molecule of water still retains its atomic identity, every bit of information still retains its script, and similarly every *atman* or bit of consciousness retains the consciousness of everything (otherwise, it would not be consciousness). Not easy to explain in words or to grasp with one's material intellect, but there is no surprise there, as Transcendence by definition transcends both words and material intellect.

Again, we need to clarify a possible misunderstanding here; when we say that Transcendence cannot be defined materially, it does not mean that it is a "mystery of the faith" and that it should not be discussed. It means that it has to be realized individually, with a paradigm shift called enlightenment (*prakasa*) or realization, a flash of actual comprehension that consists in directly *seeing* the meaning (*darshana*), after having heard and read so much about it. Human intelligence is not sufficient to understand Transcendence, but it holds the key to open its door, so we need to cultivate and purify it with regular practice as explained in *Bhagavad gita*.

When we have attained this realization we can see the Big Picture, so there is no cause for complaining or running after things; we can certainly continue to make plans and strategies and to work, and we can see the difference between joys and sorrows, but we are not bound to them any more because we know that everything is perfectly organized and balanced as One Consciousness, as clearly stated by *Svetasvatara Upanishad* (3.9): *tenedam purnam purusena sarvam*, "by his arrangement the universe is made

complete and perfect" and by *Isa Upanishad* (8): *yathatathyati 'rthan vyadadhat*, "he fulfills the requirements of all". So we happily perform our functions and we finally achieve that transcendental identification, possession and belonging that is the true reality, of which any material identification, possession and belonging is just a shadow. The material universe is a world of shadows, covered by the cloud of *ahankara*, and the illusion (*maya*) consists in the fact that a shadow looks very similar to the real thing but has no substance. This is where Krishna had started his teachings in *Bhagavad gita*: *nasato vidyate bhavo nabhavo vidyate satah, ubhayor api drishto 'ntas tv anayos tattva darsibhih*, "Those who see the truth know that what is illusory/ temporary will not continue to be, while what is real/ eternal will never be destroyed. They have carefully observed both categories and reached this conclusion." (2.16).

A *yogi* who has attained the Brahman realization can still continue to live in a material body in this world as *jivan mukta* (4.21, 5.11, 5.13, 5.14, 5.19, 5.23, 10.3, 13.33, 14.20, 15.10, 15.11) and he is aware that he automatically receives what he needs (9.22), although the package may also contain some bitter medicines. There is no need to leave or destroy the body or even the mind in order to achieve liberation; a conditioned soul's trying to achieve *moksha* by merely leaving his body will simply lead to a new reincarnation, and trying to get rid of the mind will simply lead to a deep tamasic state - exactly the opposite of what we are seeking. In fact, a realized soul can continue to live a long and full life, because serving God in the material world is just as good as (or even better than) serving God in Vaikuntha (*jijivisech chatam samah, Isa Upanishad, 2*).

The word *labhate* ("obtains, attains"), applied to actual *bhakti*, indicates that genuine devotion to Bhagavan is something that we find through the process of realization, a diamond that is hidden

under layers of dirt and becomes visible when impurities are burned or washed off. It does not depend solely on *sadhana*, and certainly it does not correspond to *sadhana*, or Krishna would have said, "*kurute*" ("s/he does, performs"); *bhakti* therefore is not a particular type of activity such as religious rituals or practices, or a sentimental or cultural attachment to a projected form of God. These things are just the vessels or opportunities for developing *bhakti*,

VERSE 55

भक्त्या मामभिजानाति यावान्यश्चास्मि तत्त्वतः ।

bhaktyā māmabhijānāti yāvānyaścāsmi tattvataḥ ।

ततो मां तत्त्वतो ज्ञात्वा विशते तदनन्तरम् ॥ १८-५५ ॥

tato mām tattvato jñātvā viśate tadanantaram ।। 18-55 ।।

bhaktya: through *bhakti*; *mam*: me; *abhijanati*: one can understand; *yavan*: as much as; *yah ca asmi*: as I am; *tattvatah*: in truth; *tatah*: then; *mam*: me; *tattvatah*: in truth; *jnatva*: knowing; *visate*: enters; *tat*: that; *anantaram*: eternally/ without end/ constantly.

"Through *bhakti* one can understand me as I really am. By knowing this *tattva*, one finally enters (in me).

We found a very similar verse already in the chapter describing the Virata Rupa: *bhaktya tv ananyaya sanya 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" (11.54). The word *visate* was also found in verse 8.11 (*yad aksaram veda vido vadanti visanti*), that mentions the *akshara brahman*, the unchangeable eternal existence of

consciousness, saying that those who "know that knowledge" enter there.

This verse (18.55) is also quite difficult to understand properly, because superficially it appears to be contradictory; the word *visate* ("enters") is a synonym of *pravisyate* ("enters", infinitive form *pravestum*) and seems to indicate a loss of individuality or a physical movement in space from one place to another. Neither of these are actually correct. We need to remember that this *tattva* (Brahman, Paramatma, Bhagavan) is Knowledge and Consciousness and is not limited by a material body, therefore attaining Bhagavan realization means entering the existence of Knowledge and Consciousness, or according to the *bhakti* dictionary, "entering his *lila*". Because this Consciousness transcends the limits of material intellect and not just the limits of material form, it is not sufficient for us to speculate about it, but we must fine tune our pure consciousness, just like we do when we develop a strong loving relationship with someone. Some call it telepathy, some call it "the language of the heart", but it is actually our most fundamental nature - loving harmonious consciousness.

The *Bhagavata Purana* (11.14.21) confirms in the teachings given by Krishna to Uddhava: *bhaktyaham ekaya grahyah sraddhayatma priyah satam, bhaktih punati man nistha sva pakan api sambhavat*, "I can be attained through pure *bhakti* by a faithful devotee. I am the *atman*, dear to the good people (*sat jana*), and such *bhakti* in full dedication purifies anyone, even the savage dog eaters". This pure *bhakti* is gradually developed through *jnana* or cultivation of sattvic knowledge and *karma* or proper performance of one's duties (*Bhagavata Purana* 11.20.6), as Krishna has been explaining all along the text of *Bhagavad gita*.

Bhakti (devotion) is the supreme expression of *yoga* (6.47), but one cannot attain true *bhakti* without evolving to the level of *brahma bhuta*, and for this we need to cultivate *jnana* (knowledge)

and *vairagya* (renunciation) while fulfilling our prescribed duties (*karma*). In the chapter on *vijnana yoga*, Krishna has clearly stated: *bahunam janmanam ante jnanavan mam prapadyate, vasudevah sarvam iti sa mahatma su durlabhah*, "After many lifetimes, one who has knowledge attains me, realizing that God is everything. Such a great soul is very rare." (7.19). We should not take *bhakti* cheaply, because in that case we would just get a cheap imitation of the genuine article. Sometimes superficial and ignorant people equivocate on the idea of pure *bhakti* as free from *jnana* and *karma* (*jnana karmady anavritam*), imagining that a neophyte sentimentalist devotee can instantly attain the stage of genuine pure *bhakti* (*mad bhaktim param*) by artificially abandoning the cultivation of knowledge and the prescribed duties towards family and society.

Especially we should be wary about those who say that in order to attain pure devotion to Krishna we need to stop listening to intelligence, good sense and conscience (that are the voice of the *antaryami paramatma*) and even to neglect the instructions of genuine *shastra* such as the teachings of Krishna in *Bhagavad gita*.

Many *prakrita sahayyas* ("materialistic simpletons") prefer to indulge in pinkish saccharin fantasies about the *rasa lila* and the childhood adventures of Krishna in Vrindavana rather than studying and understanding and following the instructions of *Bhagavad gita*, but contrary to their delusions of grandeur, their position is not as sublime as they think. They want to use Krishna for their own pleasure and entertainment rather than rendering a favorable service to the Supreme Good, so their devotion has very little value, and in fact according to one of the most famous authors of medieval *bhakti* literature it is even detrimental to society: *sruti smriti puranadi pancharatra-vidhim vina, aikaintiki harer bhaktir utpatayaiva kalpate*, "So-called exclusive *bhakti* to Hari (Vishnu or Krishna) that is not in accordance to the *sruti*, the

smriti, the *Puranas* and the other Vedic scriptures, as well as with the science of the *Pancharatra*, is simply a fantasy that will create a lot of trouble in society" (*Bhakti rasamrita sindhu* 1.2.101, quoting from *Brahma yamala Purana*).

What trouble could that be? "Let one thousand flowers bloom", will say superficial religionists, "after all, these people are just doing their best to worship God, and Vishnu/ Krishna actually is the supreme Personality of Godhead (11.45, 11.46, 11.50)". Certainly we should never physically persecute anyone for their incorrect beliefs, but we have the duty to expose unfounded and dangerous arguments because we must protect the good and innocent people from confusion (4.8).

The problem we need to highlight consists in the idea of "exclusivity" (*aikantika*), a typically abrahamic concept that infiltrated India through the islamic invasions and was already widespread at the time when the *Bhakti rasamrita sindhu* was written. This "monotheistic" approach denies the value of the proper use of intelligence and conscience, and emphasizes absolute obedience to the "religious authorities" that claim to represent "the only true God", while all other forms and personalities of Godhead are considered inferior if not false or despicable - and their devotees are unjustly insulted, attacked and persecuted. This is a very serious deviation from the Vedic vision, the real intolerance that we should not tolerate, and it creates havoc in society because it prevents people from following the proper path and causes offenses to the *shastra* and to the Devas as well as to many good people and genuine *acharyas* (such as Adi Shankara). Besides, it deludes people into thinking they have already gone beyond the prescribed social duties and even *dharma* and *vidya*, when in fact they are living as noxious parasites of society and giving a bad example to others, against the precise instructions of Krishna (3.21, 3.22, 3.23, 3.24, 3.25, 3.26).

The path of devotion (*bhakti*) starts from the sincere cultivation of knowledge by approaching a genuine *guru*: *tad viddhi pranipatena pariprasenena sevaya, upadeksyanti te jnanam jnaninas tattva darsinah*, "You should learn this knowledge by approaching those who directly contemplate the Truth, asking them all possible questions and offering them service. Those who have the knowledge will initiate you into this science." (4.34). The stage of *vaidhi bhakti* or *sadhana bhakti* is simply the sincere practice of *yoga* as described by *Bhagavad gita* and by Patanjali's famous *Yoga sutras*; one needs to start with *yama* and *niyama*, which consist in purifying one's existence from the gross attachments to bad qualities and behaviors. Then one should engage one's body (*asana*) in the service of *atman/ brahman* by performing the activities of one's prescribed duties in a spirit of devotional dedication of one's life energy to the Supreme (*pranayama*), and by learning to control the senses of perception and action (*pratyahara*). This will gradually help the *sadhaka* to control his/her mind (*dharana*) and engage it in an increasingly efficient way (*dhyana and samadhi*). The *Narada pancaratra* confirms, speaking of five subsequent divisions of knowledge: 1. *jnana*, 2. *yoga*, 3. *vairagya*, 4. *tapah* and 5. *bhakti*, presented as a special function of *vidya* or transcendental knowledge.

The search for the knowledge of Brahman (*brahma jnana*) does not need to be pursued on the level of supreme *bhakti* because it has already been attained (2.52). Knowledge or realization must be sought as long as one does not have it, just like one goes to school to learn, but upon graduation he does not need to attend classes any more, because he is directly contemplating and applying the realized knowledge that now has become a part of his own nature. After attaining direct realization, it is not possible to return to ignorance, so when we say that we leave *jnana* behind, it does not mean that we really abandon knowledge.

In this verse, the word *yavan* ("as much as") indicates that the supreme Reality can be understood not completely but truly, without misconceptions and confusion, as opposed to the imaginative projections of the fantasy of ignorant and foolish people. Of course this knowledge or understanding (*abhi jnana*, "specific knowledge") includes the Personality of Godhead, as Krishna clearly mentions the personal pronoun three times in the verse (*mam*, "me", *asmi*, "I am", *mam*, "me"). Adi Shankara himself declared at the beginning of his commentary on *Bhagavad gita* that Narayana is beyond the *avyakta* or non manifested Brahman (*narayanah parah avyaktat*). A famous passage of *Katha Upanishad* (3.10-3.11) confirms: *indriyebhyah para hy artha arthebhyas ca param namah, manasas tu para buddhir buddher atma mahan parah, mahatah param avyaktamavyaktat purushah parah, purushan na param kinchit sa katha sa param gatih*, "Beyond the sense organs are the objects of the senses. Beyond them is the mind. Beyond that, there is *buddhi* (intelligence). Beyond that, is the *paramatman*. Beyond the *paramatman* is the unmanifest Brahman. Beyond that is the Purusha. There is nothing beyond the Purusha: that is the goal, that is the supreme."

Interestingly, the *Katha Upanishad* continues to declare in the subsequent verses: "This Purusha is hidden in all beings, so he is not visible to material eyes, but he can be seen by those wise *yogis* who strive to focus their meditation. A *yogi* who has knowledge and a sharp intelligence should engage/ unite the words in the mind, the mind in the intellect, the intellect in the *paramatman*, and the *paramatman* in the supreme divine Reality. Arise! Awake! Seek that pure knowledge by following intelligent teachers who practice what they preach. The expert sages explain that the path is a risky one, as sharp as the edge of a knife, and it is not easy to walk or cross over. When one knows what is beyond the perception of sound, touch, sight, taste and smell, that eternal unchangeable Reality that has no beginning nor end, greater than

the greatest, permanent and consistent, one becomes free from the hungry claws of death" (*Katha Upanishad*, 3.12, 3.13, 3.14, 3.15).

The last word in the verse, *anantaram*, is also very interesting. It conveys the meanings of "eternally, constantly, without end, without limits", while some commentators have translated it as "thereafter, instantly", which can easily confuse superficial and foolish people into falling for the *prakrita sahajya* delusion. The actual meaning of the word is better explained by Jada Bharata to king Rahugana: *jnanam visuddham paramartham ekam, anantaram tv abahir brahma satyam, pratyak prasantam bhagavac chabda samjam, yad vasudevam kavayo vadanti*, "The experts explain that Vasudeva is that perfectly pure knowledge, the only supreme value, eternal and omnipresent (that has no outside), Brahman, Truth, that is directly realized, the perfect peace, also known by the name of Bhagavan" (*Bhagavata Purana* 5.12.11).

VERSE 56

सर्वकर्माण्यपि सदा कुर्वाणो मद्यपाश्रयः ।

sarvakarmānyapi sadā kurvāṇo madvyapāśrayaḥ ।

मत्प्रसादादवाप्नोति शाश्वतं पदमव्ययम् ॥ १८-५६ ॥

matprasādādavāpnoti śāśvataṁ padamavyayam ।। 18-56 ।।

sarva karmani: all activities; *api*: although; *sada*: always; *kurvanah*: performing; *mad vyapasrayah*: under my protection; *mat prasadat*: by my blessing; *avapnoti*: one achieves; *sasvatam*: eternal; *padam*: the position; *avyayam*: imperishable.

"While still performing all the activities of his/ her own prescribed duties, one achieves the eternal and imperishable position by my blessing and under my protection.

If by reading the previous verse someone had developed the idea that by engaging in some superficial sentimentalist acts of devotion one can consider himself over and above the prescribed duties of a sattvic society, here Krishna immediately disenchant him.

Several times Krishna has clarified this point along the *Bhagavad gita*, and if some foolish ignorant people have used the pretext of renunciation and devotional life to subtract themselves from their actual responsibilities, it is not fair to blame Krishna. From the very beginning, when rebuking Arjuna for his idea of abandoning the battle to become a *sannyasi*, to the conclusion in this chapter, Krishna has unequivocally declared that a devotee and a self realized soul should continue to engage in his duties to support society and earn his own livelihood honestly by his hard work - in the very least, to give a good example to the general mass of people.

Specifically, here Krishna says, *sarva karmani* ("all the prescribed activities") and *sada* ("always"), so there is no provision for cherry-picking the duties one whimsically likes to perform and the ones that seem to be unpleasant. Ascertaining one's *sva dharma* as per *guna* and *karma* (18.41) is necessary, but then one needs to sincerely engage in all the prescribed duties, without cutting corners or jumping back and forth from one position to the other to enjoy rights and dodging duties on the pretext of being a transcendental follower of "*daivi varnashama*".

Actually all *varnas* and *ashramas* are divine (*daivi*), as they were established directly by Krishna (*catur varnyam maya sristam guna karma vibhagasah*, 4.13), and blatant disregard and disobedience to scriptural injunctions and Krishna's orders - all in the name of transcendence - can only add insult to the injury and bring the disastrous results we have seen practically happening again and again to so many people.

There is no need to speculate about inventing "new methods" to solve the problems of ignorant people. Neglecting the instructions of the genuine scriptures is certainly a disaster in the making (16.23, 16.24, 17.5). So rather than saying that they are "above the *varnas* and *ashramas*", these fallen pretenders should recognize the simple fact that they have no qualifications and they are striving along as much as they can; there is no need to present oneself as a great *sannyasi* or *brahmana* in order to develop genuine *bhakti* and inspire others.

It is better to remain humble than to become frauds and violate the last principle of *dharma* (truthfulness); "fake it till you make it" is a sure recipe for disaster, and the people preaching it should be exposed for what they are.

Of course *sarva karmanam* does not include prohibited actions or *vikarma*, that the *yogi* and devotee should have abandoned already from the very beginning of *sadhana* (7.28) by strictly observing the rules of *yama* and *niyama*.

Yet, it is all too common to see people feigning devotion who precisely choose to continue in *vikarma* or prohibited activities, while neglecting the *nitya karmani* or prescribed activities on the pretext that they have "transcended ordinary duties", and how revealing is the fact that such issue is usually avoided in the discussions and publications of some religious organizations, while there should be an abundance of quotes by their founder *acharyas*, who were very vocal about this problem.

The expression *sasvata pada avyaya* ("the eternal and unchangeable position") can be elaborated in a number of meanings. Once one has attained the *brahma bhuta* (18.54) there is no chance to fall back (5.17, 8.21, 15.4, 15.6) because that evolution of consciousness permanently changes one's vision. People with a materialistic vision remain unable to understand the

difference between Svarga (the heavenly planets) and Vaikuntha, therefore they imagine that Vaikuntha is a sort of heaven where one can sit with Vishnu rather than with the "demigods" who reside in the higher planetary systems, just like they imagine that Vishnu is another separate God that is simply more powerful than the other "gods".

It is no surprise then that such confused and ignorant people speculate that the *jivatmans* were once engaged in fully transcendental *lila* and service to Vishnu or Krishna in Goloka Vrindavana, and then due to the influence of ignorance and time they fell down into the material world as a punishment for their disobedience (this is the fundamental idea of the Garden of Eden narrated in the Bible).

The surprise will rather be theirs when they find themselves not in Vaikuntha but taking birth in Bila Svarga, the lower planetary systems where the *asuras* live, and that correspond more precisely to the visualizations and projections they have cultivated so fondly in their "devotional meditations".

The scriptures clearly say that in Bila Svarga, too, there is no need for the light of the sun or the moon (15.6) because of the radiance of the jewels decorating the inhabitants' heads (that could be mistaken for *cinta mani* spiritual stones), and the wonderful opulence of the place - gardens, palaces, agricultural villages, dairy farms etc - surpasses even the beauty of the higher Svarga planets.

The best course of action is to sincerely take full shelter in God (*mat vyapasrayah*) and only depend on what he sends (*mat prasadat*), making serious efforts to understand the science of *Bhagavad gita* and dropping all material identification and attachments and desires for selfish gratification, individual or collective.

VERSE 57

चेतसा सर्वकर्माणि मयि संन्यस्य मत्परः ।

cetasā sarvakarmāṇi mayi sannyasya matparaḥ ।

बुद्धियोगमुपाश्रित्य मच्चित्तः सततं भव ॥ १८-५७ ॥

buddhiyogamupāśritya maccittaḥ satataṁ bhava ॥ 18-57 ॥

cetasa: by awareness; *sarva karmani:* all the activities; *mayi:* to me; *sannyasya:* renouncing; *mat parah:* dedicated to me; *buddhi yogam:* in *buddhi yoga*; *upasritya:* taking shelter; *mat cittah:* in my consciousness; *satatam:* always; *bhava:* become.

"Renouncing all activities in your consciousness, dedicate yourself fully to me, taking shelter in *buddhi yoga*, and you will permanently become my consciousness.

No, it is not a translation mistake. The sentence "permanently become my consciousness" may not make sense to a person who has not attained the realization of Brahman and still believes s/he is a body and a mind. Yet, this is what Krishna is saying here: "*become* my consciousness". The word *citta* specifically means "consciousness", while the adjective form of the term is *cetana* ("conscious") also used as a noun meaning "mind" or "conscious being". In other passages to indicate a conscious being Krishna has used the expressions *prajna*, *jnani*, *vit*, *darshi*, that are also synonyms for "conscious person" or "one who knows".

The idea of "becoming divine consciousness" appears easier to understand when we realize that as individuals we already *are* consciousness (*atman*). When our true identity is clouded by material identification, we develop a material body, and when this cloud is dissipated by the warm light of knowledge, our original

and true identity as consciousness shines brightly again. At a deeper devotional or *rasika* level, it makes perfect sense too: we will remember here that the word *bhava* also means "consciousness" as "ecstatic feeling in the relationship with Krishna", and that it is one's *sthayi bhava* ("permanent feeling") that constitutes the *siddha deha* or *siddha svarupa* of the fully realized devotee.

So at the level of Brahman, at the level of Paramatma and even at the most intimate level of Bhagavan, everything is pure consciousness - knowledge, feeling, perception. Without attaining this level, one cannot come in direct contact with Bhagavan because the material body is a thick and clumsy covering that greatly limits our potential and activities as *atman*; however we can outgrow it by developing our consciousness/ identity as a special *siddha deha*.

The *siddha deha* is very real, in fact it is more real than the gross bodies that we can touch and see and smell with our material senses, but it is not restricted by time, space and duality, therefore it is not normally seen by material senses. It is important to understand that such *siddha deha* or *siddha svarupa* is not "another body" that one takes after leaving the present material body - it is the inherent nature of the *atman* and is fully developed through the proper method, and it can already act perfectly while one still lives in the material body (*jivan mukta*).

In some cases, the *siddha deha* can bypass the perception of material senses and connect directly with the perception of the *atman* in others (11.8, 11.48, 11.52, 11.53, 11.54), but such manifestation is not done without a valid purpose, and remains impossible to actually understand for unevolved people (9.11, 10.3, 15.10); yet it is the only form in which we can truly come in direct contact with Bhagavan and spiritual reality in general.

We can understand and realize these things through *buddhi yoga*, or the engagement of the higher functions of intelligence or intellect. The material mind and senses are not subtle enough, because they are encrusted by *ahankara* and *mamatva*, while intelligence is made purely of *sattva* and therefore constitutes the bridge between the subtle dimension and the spiritual dimension, much like the *prana* constitutes the bridge between the gross physical body and the subtle body made of energy and mind. True, *buddhi* is listed among the eight elemental principles of the material world (7.4), but by definition it is consciousness and knowledge, and as such it can never be bogged down by *tamas* or ignorance, or distracted by *rajas* or greed. In fact, actual intelligence is the sharp sword that can cut through illusion (4.41, 5.25, 15.3). This is also confirmed by the first word in the verse, *cetasa* ("consciously, with awareness") that is closely related to the expression *mat citta* in the second line of the verse.

The reference to *buddhi* and *cetasa* automatically excludes *adharma* and *vikarma* from the vast range of activities (*sarva karmani*) that one can offer to God in pure devotional service (*mat parah*, "dedicated to me"), even with the idea of personally renouncing the enjoyment of their results (*sannyasya*, "renouncing while performing"). For example, Krishna simply asks for pure offerings such as a leaf, a flower, a fruit, and water, and the *smriti* also confirms that one can present the Deity with a vast range of pure vegetarian ingredients and preparations. There is not one single passage in the scriptures where God requires the offering of non-vegetarian or impure items; when such offerings are allowed, they are meant to facilitate the development of devotion in neophyte persons influenced by the lower *gunas*, and when performed in that way, they are supported by intelligence and consciousness as they can wean the individual away from ordinary butchery meat.

Renunciation to all activities must be done in one's consciousness (*cetasa*) by offering the fruits to the Supreme as the center of one's life (*mat parah*) and acting selflessly; on this level of renounced (detached) consciousness one can and actually should continue to perform all activities for the service of the Supreme. Of course this is a gradual process. In the beginning the *sadhaka* starts to worship God with a sentiment of devotion that is mixed with some personal desires (*sa-kama*) and is still clouded by material concepts (*prakrita*), therefore the position of such devotee is called *kanistha* ("immature"). In the intermediate stage (*madhyama*) the devotee purifies his/ her intelligence (*buddhi*) and cultivates knowledge (*jnana*) and detachment (*vairagya*), that bring the realization of the supreme Consciousness in an increasingly clear vision. Finally, at the highest level (*uttama*) the devotee takes full shelter (*upasritya*) in this supreme Consciousness and is not distracted by any separate interest (*ananya*) and fully concentrates on the supreme Consciousness only (*aikantika*). Again, these stages are present in all the forms of *yoga*, starting from the deliberate effort to engage in the search for the Supreme Consciousness and ending in *samadhi* or complete and constant immersion in that Supreme Consciousness (*satatam*).

VERSE 58

मच्चित्तः सर्वदुर्गाणि मत्प्रसादात्तरिष्यसि ।

maccittah sarvadurgāṇi matprasādāttariṣyasi ।

अथ चेत्त्वमहंकारान्न श्रोष्यसि विनङ्क्ष्यसि ॥ १८-५८ ॥

atha cettvamahāṅkāraṇna śroṣyasi vinaṅkṣyasi ॥ 18-58 ॥

mat cittah: in my consciousness; *sarva durgani*: all difficulties; *mat prasadat*: by my grace; *tariyasi*: you will overcome; *atha*:

but; *cet:* if; *tvam:* you; *ahankaran:* because of egotism; *na srosyasi:* you will not listen; *vinanksyasi:* you will be lost.

"In my consciousness you will overcome all difficulties by my grace. However, if you choose not to listen, because of egotism, you will be lost.

It is important to understand that this verse is not the threat of a punishment for a disobedience or lack of faith. It is a simple statement of a scientific truth about the natural laws of the universe: the more we develop our intelligence and consciousness, the better we will be able to overcome all difficulties, while by choosing ignorance because of foolish personal ego and pride against our conscience and the harmony of the universe we only become lost and suffer unnecessarily.

There is a supreme order in the universe (*rita*) by which the planets move in their proper orbits, the elements regularly fulfill their functions, and all beings work for the support and the progress of the entire universal community. Except for human beings, all creatures evolve in a predetermined way, according to the stringent laws of nature that dictate their reactions and behaviors; human beings too are carried around in the machinery of the cosmos (*yantrarudhani mayaya*, 18.61) but due to their particular intermediate position they can choose the direction of their movement and actions by leaning on one side rather than the other. These two sides are the *daivi prakriti* and the *asuri prakriti* (see chapter 16), that will pull the individual higher or lower respectively; these are also called *para* ("supreme") and *apara* ("not supreme"), or in an approximate English translation, "spiritual" and "material".

The definitions of spiritual versus material can be misleading for those who suffer from cultural prejudice, because abrahamic ideologies openly demonize material nature (this world, the bodies,

etc) and therefore one could be tempted to condemn material nature and try to fight against it. This would be a spectacular mistake, inevitably doomed to failure, because material nature is the divine Shakti (*daivi hy esa gunamayi mama maya*, 7.14), and the individual *jivatmans* are utterly impotent against her. In fact, without the blessings of Mother Mahamaya, one will never be able to make any progress either materially or spiritually. When the *jivatman* chooses to take shelter in the *daivi prakriti*, he is not approaching a different personality that is opposed or rival to *asuri prakriti*: he is simply appealing to the divine "side" of the same supreme Goddess, and showing that he is ready to evolve and cooperate for the common good. On the other hand, those who want to be "tough" and show asuric qualities and characteristics will be met with the Goddess' fierce and terrifying side.

It is important to understand here that the *asuras* are not the people who worship the fierce aspect (*asaumya* or *ugra rupa*) of the Goddess, but those who oppose the laws of the universe to enforce their own ego, and therefore become subject to the punishment given by the Goddess. Those who find this point difficult to understand because they are attracted by the "peaceful" Vishnu should remember that Vishnu too has his own *ugra* forms (Narasimha, for example), and *asuras* certainly do not worship such forms but enter in contact with them in a rather different way.

The name Durga literally means "fort, prison" (and by extension, "restriction, limitation, difficulty" as in this verse) and indeed Mother Durga is fully in charge of the fortress of this world and providing suitable holding cells for all those crazy, violent and dangerous criminals who refuse to listen, understand and cooperate with the rest of society. Chapter 16 has given a very detailed portrait of such people (16.4 to 16.24), comparing them to the people who have chosen to take shelter in the divine qualities and behaviors (16.1, 16.2, 16.3) that are based on mutual support and

cooperation with the universal community. Because of the particular position of human birth, at any time one can decide to change direction and qualify for liberation; there is no prejudice or injustice in this system, just like there is no favoritism in the law of gravity. What may seem to be different standards of treatment are actually due to the fact that the favored individual has a better knowledge or consciousness of the general laws and principles, and uses intelligence to navigate difficulties: this is what is clearly expressed in this verse.

Krishna had already stated very clearly that he is not interested in the merits and demerits of the individual souls and does not want anything for himself (3.22, 5.15), but he gladly reciprocates (4.11, 4.14, 9.9, 9.29) with those who want to learn, evolve and unite with him. Krishna never gives orders to anyone, but simply asks us to listen (2.39, 7.1, 10.1, 13.4, 16.6, 17.2, 17.7, 18.4, 18.19, 18.29, 18.45) to his good advice; he explain facts and things with logic and reason, and then lets us decide what we want to do (18.63, 18.64).

God Consciousness (*mat cittah*) is not consciousness "about" God, but rather the conscious perception of the entire Reality as microcosm and macrocosm, inside us and outside us, and of the eternal and universal mechanisms that move it - the three material *gunas* (*sattva*, *rajas*, *tamas*) in the material dimension and the three spiritual *gunas* (*sat*, *cit*, *ananda*) in the spiritual dimension. Therefore this Consciousness is the position (*pada*) or abode (*dhama*) both in this material universe and in the spiritual dimension.

To develop and maintain this focus on the supreme Consciousness, we need to hear (or read) about it from the genuine scriptures and from those devotees who have already attained the level of direct realization: *nasta prayesv abhadresu nityam bhagavata sevaya, bhagavatya uttama sloke bhaktir bhavati naisthiki*, "All

inauspicious things are destroyed by constantly serving the discourses on Bhagavan; in this way one becomes firmly situated in the dedication to Bhagavan, who is described by wonderful verses" (*Bhagavata Purana*, 1.2.18). The simple act of hearing or listening (*sravana*) is already considered a valid service and a meritorious action, and the engine of progress and evolution. It is important to understand here that service (*seva*) indicates regular association or practice in a favorable sentiment, just like we have seen in verse 6.20 of *Bhagavad gita* with reference to dedication to *yoga* (*yoga sevaya*).

It is interesting to notice that Krishna is saying "you will overcome all difficulties", not "you will not find any difficulties" or "all difficulties will disappear". Many unevolved people believe that religion is about praying God to give us free food and an easy life, without temptations or difficulties, and that all the consequences of our past deeds, our debts and trespasses, should be magically and repeatedly deleted any time we ask God to do so. This idea is delusional: we should all earn our food by honest work, face the difficulties meant to test us and stimulate our evolution, take our stand in support of *dharma* and the universal family, and bravely and honestly be ready to pay our debts and dues at the right time, and even take some responsibility for the other less mature siblings.

It is only small children who ask Father to solve all problems for them, in exchange for some praise and flattering. Grown up sons and daughters are competent to help Father and do some good useful work, and they are ready and willing to face the inevitable difficulties in the discharge of their duties. As Krishna has already stated (3.20, 3.21, 3.22, 3.23, 3.24) even perfectly liberated souls and even divine *avatars* give a good practical example in this matter, so that nobody can say they are above the need to face difficulties and hard work.

VERSE 59

यदहंकारमाश्रित्य न योत्स्य इति मन्यसे ।

yadahankāramāśritya na yotsya iti manyase ।

मिथ्यैष व्यवसायस्ते प्रकृतिस्त्वां नियोक्ष्यति ॥ १८-५९ ॥

mithyaiṣa vyavasāyaste prakṛtistvāṁ niyoṣyati ॥ 18-59 ॥

yat: if; *ahankaram:* in egotism; *asritya:* taking shelter; *na yotsya:* you will not fight; *iti manyase:* thinking like this; *mithya esah:* all this is false; *vyavasayah:* with determination; *te:* your; *prakritih:* nature; *tvam:* you; *niyoṣyati:* will compel to engage.

"If because of egotism you think, 'I will not fight', this will be a false decision, because your own nature will force you to become engaged.

The previous verse clearly mentioned *ahankara* (egotism as material identification with body, position and attachments) as the cause for delusion and dereliction of one's duty. This was also explained in verses from 18.5 to 18.9: one should never give up the dutiful activities of sacrifice (*yajna*), charity (*dana*) and austerity (*tapah*), but certainly one should give up the illusion of *ahankara* (*kartavyan*, 18.6). A person who is influenced by ignorance tends to do exactly the opposite of what should be done (16.7, 18.30, 18.31, 18.32), therefore instead of renouncing *ahankara* and sticking to their duties, foolish and ignorant people will renounce their duties and stick to *ahankara*.

Apart from the obvious bad results on the general functioning of the universe, for which they will have to pay the consequences, these fools have taken their stand on very unstable ground, because

their understanding is clouded by illusion (*mohat*, 18.7). If they refuse to perform their prescribed duties, greed and ignorance will engage them in more degrading activities, source of much greater future sufferings. Krishna has stated many times that the delusional incorrect vision of oneself is a product of ignorance (9.12, 14.17, 16.10, 16.16, 18.7, 18.9, 18.25, 18.35) and cannot bring good results, but we can directly verify the truth of such statement by observing the lives of people around us.

The tamasic and rajasic tendencies of the present degraded society are geared to indoctrinate people in the asuric direction, presenting the idea that hard work and study are for foolish nerds and social losers, while cool successful people do not do any real work but simply have fun all day spending money on unnecessary luxuries and industrial food products. Similarly, those who are sincerely interested in spiritual life and personal evolution in the ethical principles are presented as gullible, unreasonable, superstitious and fundamentalist fanatics, while cynical exploitation and selfishness, the unlimited endless pursuit of possessions and positions, and the ostentation of status symbols and arrogance are the road to happiness and success.

The naked reality is that such approach to life only brings sufferings and anxiety from beginning to end. People are forced to work very hard and long hours in jobs they hate to get the money to pay for things they don't need, to impress people they don't care for them. It's sharks eating sharks, and the baddest of all become bigger and bigger and take over the government to legalize their thieveries and criminal aggressions against the general people, and in the end everyone is expected to blindly worship real or imaginary characters that are nothing but *asuras*.

The bad but expensive food makes them sick, their medicines are engineered to increase their dependencies on pharmaceuticals and medical business, their nice vacations are ordeals from which they

need to recover when they come back, their fancy shoes and clothing are very uncomfortable and their relationships are a disaster. All this because they did not want to accept the little healthy difficulties in the journey of personal evolution, the sincere dedication to their natural duty, and refuse to work in harmony with the rest of the universe and develop relationships based on care and true love.

Everybody is compelled to act in one way or another: *na hi kascit ksanam api jatu tisthaty akarma krit, karyate hy avasah karma sarvah prakriti jair gunaih*, "Never, at any time, can a person remain without acting even for one moment, because he is forced to into action by all the *gunas* born from *prakriti*" (3.5). In fact, the activity itself is carried out by nature only: *prakriteh kriyamanani gunaih karmani sarvasah, ahankara vimudhatma kartaham iti manyate*, "All activities are actually performed by the qualities of nature, but a foolish person who is confused by egotism thinks 'I am doing'." (3.27).

We need here to clarify that *ahankara* is not necessarily an excess of pride and arrogance due to overestimation of oneself. The delusional material identification called *ahankara* is also the cause for low self esteem or excessive humility. Therefore a self realized soul will never say "I am not able to do this", when life puts something difficult in front of him. Most of the times, it is just fear speaking these words, not intelligence or good sense, and if we actually engage in the action with full attention, a positive attitude and some detachment, we will find it was not so difficult after all, even when it was something we never dreamed of being capable of doing. When we sincerely and bravely perform our duty, we have nothing to lose. As Krishna told Arjuna in the beginning of his discourse (2.37), if we succeed we will be able to use the results of our success, and if we fail we will equally obtain blessings albeit in a different form - experience, realizations, purification.

The support of the universe is not one man's job, so even if we do our part properly, it is possible that externally our efforts will not appear to be successful, but we have been paving the way for the work of others who will build on our sacrifice and bring the entire enterprise to the final success. Our merit will not be lost.

The word *mithya* is particularly interesting. People confused by ignorance tend to mistake *sat* for *asat*, and vice versa, so at times we find some artificial *sannyasi* who preaches that this world is false, our duties are false, society is false, individuality is false, and everything is false, while only the particular path he is offering is the real truth.

We should be very careful, because this is precisely what has been described in verse 18.22 as a position characteristic of *tamas* and in verse 16.8 as characteristic of the asuric mentality - whether it is proposed by *advaitins*, *dvaitas*, *vaishnavas* or anybody else - and is in violation of the instructions of the *shastra*, including the teachings of *Bhagavad gita*.

So we should remain determined (*vyavasayah*) and focused (*vyavasayatmika buddhi*, 2.41) in our service to *dharma* and *vidya*, following in the footsteps of so many great teachers, *acharyas* and even *avatars* who have invested time, energy and efforts in this work. When we take shelter in the *daivi prakriti* (9.13), we will certainly be fully engaged, and such engagement will give full satisfaction to the *atman*.

The *Bhagavata Purana* (1.2.6) confirms: *sa vai pumsam paro dharmo yato bhaktir adhoksaje ahaituki apratihata yayatma suprasidati*, "The supreme *dharma* for all human beings is loving dedication to the inconceivable Lord, and this *bhakti* can completely satisfy the soul when it is selfless and constant."

VERSE 60

स्वभावजेन कौन्तेय निबद्धः स्वेन कर्मणा ।

svabhāvajena kaunteya nibaddhaḥ svena karmaṇā ।

कर्तुं नेच्छसि यन्मोहात्करिष्यस्यवशोपि तत् ॥ १८-६० ॥

kartuṁ necchasi yanmohātkariṣyasiyavaśopi tat ॥ 18-60 ॥

sva bhava jena: by that (activity) born from (your) specific nature; *kaunteya:* o son of Kunti; *nibaddhaḥ:* bound; *svena:* by your particular; *karmana:* duties; *kartum:* to perform; *na icchasi:* you do not wish to; *yat:* that which; *mohat:* because of illusion; *karisyasi:* you will perform; *avasah:* involuntarily; *api:* even; *tat:* that.

"O son of Kunti, you are bound by those particular activities that are created by your own nature. Even if you do not wish to perform such duty because of illusion, you will find yourself acting in that way instinctively.

As long as we are incarnated in this world, the elements of the body and mind will be functioning according to the laws of material nature - *guna*, *karma*, etc - and this is a strong bondage, like the shackles of a prisoner. The word *nibaddha* means "shackles, bondage, ties" but can also be used in a positive sense, as in family relationships or social ties, that determine our particular duties towards family and society according to our congenital qualities. This is confirmed by Brahma while talking to Priyavrata: *yad vaci tantyam guna karma damabhih, sudustarair vatsa vayam suyojitah, sarve vahamo balim isvaraya prota nasiva dvi pade catus padah*, "The words of Brahman (the *shastra* and the natural laws of the universe) bind us like a long rope consisting of *guna* and *karma*. This rope is extremely strong, and we are all

bound by it to Isvara, just like a man drives cattle by pulling at the rope tied to their noses." (*Bhagavata Purana* 5.1.14).

Such a rope can be very dangerous when our attachment ties us to people who have chosen to neglect the true purpose of human life: *na te vidum svartha gatim hi visnum, durasaya ye bahir artha maninah, andha yathandhair upaniyamanas te 'pisa tantryam uru damni baddhah*, "Those who focus only on acquiring difficult goals in the external world are oblivious to their real purpose of life - the realization of Vishnu. They are like blind people following other blind people, and they are all bound by very strong ropes." (*Bhagavata Purana* 7.5.31).

As it normally happens when we are tightly bound by ropes and shackles, we develop skin irritation and an itchy feeling. Prahlada explains: *yan maithunadi grihamedhi sukham hi tuccham, kanduyanena karayor iva duhkha duhkham, tripyanti neha kripana bahu duhkha bhajah, kandutivam manasijam visaheta dhirah*, "That (life that is based on) couple relationship and everything that is connected to it, all types of family and society pleasures, are insignificant like the rubbing of hands to relieve an itching. One can never find satisfaction in this material world full of sufferings, but the *kripana* willingly follows all these sorrows as if they were the purpose of life. One who is able to tolerate this itching created by the mind is a sober person." (*Bhagavata Purana* 7.9.45).

If we learn how to use these ropes and shackles to our advantage rather than being hampered by them, we can attain a greater success; we can make the example of the famous martial art called *capoeira*, that was developed in the 16th century by the black slaves imported from west Africa to Brazil by the Portuguese invaders, to be employed in the sugar cane plantations there. The slave workers were shackled with chains at all times, so that they would not be able to walk around too freely, but they were allowed to do some singing and dancing in the night, also for the

entertainment of their masters. So with the pretext of acrobatic dance movements on the rhythmic music they practiced many fighting moves, such as kicking and spinning, even utilizing the weight of the chains to their advantage, and in this way several of them were able to escape and take shelter in the jungle.

It is said that the word *capoeira* comes from the Tupi words *ka'a* ("jungle") and *puer* ("it was"), referring to these hiding places, where a new culture was created together with the local native tribes in revolutionary settlements called *quilombos*, attracting more fugitive slaves and teaching *capoeira* as a combat technique by which they successfully opposed the colonial regime and their military expeditions trying to eliminate the rebellion.

We, too, can use the shackles of the material *gunas* with intelligence, deliberation and purpose, and ultimately earn our liberation from bondage. This is opposed to the helpless blundering of one who has no control on his movements (*avasa*, meaning "without deliberate choice, helplessly, without control"), and is completely confused (*mohat*, "out of illusion").

The present situation in which we were born, with the attending *guna* and *karma*, was created by *samskaras* or previous impressions due to our actions and choices in our previous lifetimes, and it can be modified considerably by applying the same medicine of good *samskaras*. Narada tells Vyasa: *amayo yas ca bhutanam jayate yena suvrata, tad eva hy amayam dravyam na punati cikitsitam*, "The diseases of the living beings can be cured by the (proper) application of the very same thing that caused the disease in the first place" (*Bhagavata Purana* 1.5.33). We can understand from this statement that *samskaras*, *gunas* and *karma* can be used both ways, either for our progress and purification, for our degradation and bondage; the choice is ours (6.5, 6.6).

VERSE 61

ईश्वरः सर्वभूतानां हृद्देशेऽर्जुन तिष्ठति ।

īśvaraḥ sarvabhūtānāṃ hr̥ddeśe'ṛjuna tiṣṭhati ।

भ्रामयन्सर्वभूतानि यन्त्रारूढानि मायया ॥ १८-६१ ॥

bhrāmayansarvabhūtāni yantrārūḍhāni māyayā ॥ 18-61 ॥

isvarah: the Lord; *sarva bhutanam:* of all beings; *hrd dese:* in the place of the heart; *arjuna:* o Arjuna; *tiṣṭhati;* resides; *bhramayan:* going around; *sarva bhutani:* all beings; *yantra:* on a machine; *arudhani:* placed; *mayaya:* under the power of illusion.

"O Arjuna, the Lord of all beings resides in the heart (of all beings), and all beings move around each in its own high position as parts of a machinery under the power of Maya.

The word *yantra* in this verse indicates the one single great mechanism that is the macrocosm, the Virata Rupa of the supreme Atman, as well as the body of the various living entities within the universe, in which the supreme Atman resides as well. All such forms are powered by Maya through the various elements listed by the Sankhya philosophy.

In previous chapters, Krishna has already stated: *sarvasya caham hridi sannivisto mattah smritir jnanam apohanam ca, vedais ca sarvair aham eva vedyo vedanta krid veda vid eva caham*, "I am situated in the heart of all/ everything, and from me come memory, knowledge and forgetfulness. I am the scope of the study of all the *Vedas*. I certainly am the creator of *Vedanta*, and the one who knows the *Vedas*." (15.15), *tesam evanukampartham aham ajnana jam tamah, nasayamy atma bhava stho jnana dipena bhasvata*, "Out of my kindness for them, I destroy the darkness of ignorance

from within their hearts, by shining forth with the radiant lamp of knowledge" (10.11), and *jyotisaṃ api taj jyotisāḥ param ucyate, jñeyam jñāna gāmyam hṛidi sarvasya viśthitam*, "He is described as the light in all radiant things, transcendental to darkness. He is established in the heart of everything, and he is to be known through the cultivation of knowledge." (13.18).

The same point was presented also in 13.28 and 13.29, and in verse 8.9, that declared that Isvara is also present within each atom (*anor aniyam*), echoing a similar verse in *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* (1.2.20): *anor anīyan mahato mahīyan atmasya jantor nihito guhayam, tam akṛatuh paśyati vita soko dhatuh prasadan mahīmanam atmanah*, "Smaller than the atom and bigger than the entire cosmic manifestation (*mahat*), situated in the innermost heart of all living being, he is the witness that does not act, and by his blessing one becomes free from all worries: such are the glories of the Atman". And also in *Svetasvatara Upaniṣad* (6.11): *eko deva sarva bhūtesu gudhah, sarva vyāpi sarva bhūtantarātma karmadhyakṣah sarva bhūtheadhivasah sakṣi ceta kevalo nirguṇas ca*, "God is one, but he is in the heart of each living being. He is all-pervading, yet he is localized in the innermost being of all beings as the Atman. He is the witness of all actions, but above all actions, he is beyond duality and beyond the *guṇas*".

The word *isvara* applies to Brahman, Paramatma and Bhagavan, and in fact even to the Atman: *sarīram yad avapnoti yac capy utkramati isvarah grihitvaitāni samyati vayur gandhan ivasayat*, "The Lord who has entered a body and accepted all these (the mind and senses), then he goes out again, like air carries scents" (15.8). Remembering this verse is important because it protects us from the mistake of considering the living entities as mere puppets devoid of any free will. The Lord of all beings and all existences is not a distant tyrant with a pathological need to control his creatures as presented by some other ideologies; God is Consciousness

itself, so the individual *atman* also directly participates of the identity of God.

This supreme realization is also clearly affirmed in the *maha vakyas* ("great statements") considered the essence of the *Upanishads*: *sarvam khalv idam brahma*, "all this is Brahman" (*Chandogya Upanishad*, 7.25.2, *Nrisimha utara tapani Upanishad*, 7), *prajnanam brahma*, "Brahman is full consciousness/ knowledge" (*Aitareya Upanishad*, 3.3), as well as *aham brahmasmi*, "I am Brahman" (*Brihad Aranyaka Upanishad* 1.4.10), *ayam atma brahma*, "this Atman is Brahman" (*Mandukya Upanishad* 2), *tat tvam asi*, "you are that (Brahman)" (*Chandogya Upanishad*, 6.8.7) and *so 'ham*, "I am that (Brahman)" (*Narada parivrajaka Upanishad*, 6.4).

This sublime knowledge is found in Vedic tradition (Hinduism) only, and constitutes the highest level of the realization of *yoga* (*yoga arudha*, 6.3, 6.4), while the *aruruksa* ("one who desires to attain the high level") is a beginner in the practice of *yoga* (6.3).

We find this same definition (*arudha*) in this verse, connected to the word *yantra*, that literally means "machine, mechanism, device, vehicle". In the science of Tantra, a *yantra* is a geometric symbolic representation of the Deity, that works as a "vehicle" for the Deity's personal presence during the rituals, much like the elaborate *vigrahas* we normally see in public worship, but more suitable for private personal worship.

As we have seen in the chapters on *Vibhuti yoga* and *Visva rupa darshana yoga*, this entire cosmic manifestation is a *yantra*, and so are the bodies of all living entities - they are vehicles and temples at the same time, as both the *atman* and the *param atman* reside in them and can be worshiped through proper service or *sva dharma*. Both types of vehicles are made of *maya* (*mahamaya/ yogamaya*), and therefore we can actually say that all activities are performed

by Prakriti, just like the driver of a vehicle simply gives the directions and the vehicle itself does the work and travels around (*bhramayan*).

The use of the word *arudhani* in connection with the position of Isvara in all the beings (*sarva bhutani*) shows a natural superiority of *atman/ brahman* over the vehicle itself, and of the *param atman* on the *jiva atman*, as it is a "high" position. However, this superiority should not be cause for envy, because on the transcendental level there is no duality, as the natural, happy and healthy position of the cells in the body is to attune to the superior consciousness of the entire body and participate to it through favorable service.

VERSE 62

तमेव शरणं गच्छ सर्वभावेन भारत ।

tameva śaraṇaṁ gaccha sarvabhāvena bhārata ।

तत्प्रसादात्परं शान्तिं स्थानं प्राप्स्यसि शाश्वतम् ॥ १८-६२ ॥

tatprasādātparāṁ śāntiṁ sthānaṁ prāpsyasi śāśvatam ॥ 18-62 ॥

tam: to him; *eva:* certainly; *saranam gaccha:* go and take shelter; *sarva bhavena:* in all the *bhavas*; *bharata:* o descendant of Bharata; *tat prasadat:* by his grace; *param santim:* the supreme peace; *sthanam:* position; *prapsyasi:* you will attain; *sasvatam:* eternal.

"O descendant of Bharata, you should approach and take shelter of him in all circumstances. By his grace you will attain the imperishable position of supreme peace.

Although one, Consciousness manifests in many individual *amsas*, or parts, that are called *svamsas* ("direct parts" as the Devas) and *vibhinnamsas* ("separate parts") as the *jiva atmans* (13.17, 15.6). Krishna teaches us that *atman* and *brahman* are simultaneously and inconceivably identical and different, and that the supreme purpose of human life consists in uniting (*yoga*) the *atman* into the *brahman*, thus realizing their transcendental oneness.

We should not be confused by this, because if the idea is inconceivable through the material logic of mind and senses, it can be directly perceived (*prakasa, darshana*) through spiritual intelligence (*visuddha buddhi*) and the eyes of the scriptures (11.8, 13.35, 15.10). This is the reason why it is not possible to attain any realization without a careful preliminary study of the *shastra* (13.26, 15.20, 16.23, 17.24), and why only *bhakti* can open the last door to perfect realization (4.3, 7.17, 8.22, 9.14, 9.29, 9.34, 11.54, 11.55, 12.14, 12.20, 13.11, 13.19, 14.26, 18.54, 18.55, 18.65).

This is also hinted in this verse by the expression *sarva bhavena* ("with all *bhavas*", "in all *bhavas*"), where *bhava* means "existence, being, nature, body, birth, circumstance of life", and also "emotion, sentiment, loving relationship". The supreme union (*yoga*) between the *atman* and the *brahman* is therefore compared to the mystical moment of merging of the existence of two lovers, the thrill of ecstasy where the ego dissolves and is forgotten. It is the *spandakarika*, the sacred tremor, the throbbing of formless and all pervading happiness, existence and consciousness that is at the very nucleus of creation and dissolution, symbolized by the loving orgasmic union between Shiva and Shakti, between Krishna and Radha. In this ecstasy, all differences lose their meaning, and the two become one. This liberating experience, that radically changes the perception of existence, is deeply feared and hated by the *asuras*, who therefore strive to eliminate and prohibit true love and selflessness from their own lives and from the lives of the people

under their dominion, and replace it with the ultimate and greatest manifestation of egotism - the cruel lust of possession and domination that we call rape.

To facilitate the evolutionary journey of the *anu atmans*, culminating in the ecstatic experience of *atman/ brahman* realization, the supreme Consciousness creates a distinction between the One and the Parts, emanating innumerable "separate parts" (*vibhinnamsas*) and manifesting the cosmos to accommodate them, and even entering into this universe and within each body and each atom to enjoy the pleasure of the company of its parts. As we see exemplified in Arjuna's words about his own relationship with Krishna, this supreme Consciousness is always with us, walking with us, lying down, sitting, eating, joking and having fun, when we are alone or in the presence of others (11.41, 11.42).

The *Bhagavata Purana* (11.11.6) says: *suparnav etau sadrisau sakhayau yadricchayaitau krita-nidau ca vrikse, ekas tayoh khadati pippalannam anyo niranno 'pi balena bhuyan*, "Two birds of similar nature and related by friendship have made a nest in a tree by their own choice; one is eating the food from the banyan tree, the other is not eating but he is more powerful."

The same image is found in *Mundaka Upanishad* (3.1.1): *dva suparna sayuja sakhaya samanam vriksam parisavajate, tayor anyah pippalam svadv atty anasnann anyo 'bhicakasiti*, "Two birds are sitting on the same tree as friends; one bird is eating the fruits of the tree, and the other is simply observing, without eating."

This exact verse is repeated in *Svetasvatara Upanishad* (4.6), and another verse is added (4.7): *samane vrikse puruso nimagno 'nisaya socati muhyamanah, justam yada pasyaty anyam isam asya mahimanam iti vita-sokah*, "Although the two *purushas* are in the same tree, one is experiencing deep anxiety and confusion, but

if he turns towards the Lord and becomes aware of his glories, immediately he becomes free from all worries."

It is not difficult to approach the Lord of all beings (*isvara sarva bhutanam*) and take shelter in him, as he also resides in the same body (8.4, 13.23, 13.32, 15.8, 16.18, 17.6) because of his friendship and love for the individual soul. This *param atman* ("supreme soul" and also "soul of the soul") is always ready to communicate with the individual soul and in fact his voice is known popularly as the "voice of conscience". The relationship of the individual soul with this supreme soul can be understood as similar to the relationship of the consciousness of a body cell compared to the consciousness of the owner of the entire body; at all times the body cell is supported by the entire body and the consciousness that sustains and directs it, through the DNA interface as well as through the constant exchange of nutrition. The nucleus of the cell is identical with the nucleus of the entire body, because it consists of genetic information - consciousness or knowledge.

We have seen that the *Bhagavata Purana* very clearly defines the Supreme as knowledge (*tattvam yaj jnanam advayam, brahmeti paramatmeti bhagavan iti sabdyate*, 1.2.11), and this is also confirmed in the other seminal Vedic texts; for example *Taittiriya Upanishad* (2.1.1), elaborating on the origin of *jivatmans*, clearly says, *satyam jnanam anantam brahma*, "Brahman is the absolute Truth, the unlimited Knowledge".

Already in verse 13.23 Krishna had stated that this *paramatman* is present in the body as the consciousness that witnesses the *jivatman* and its actions; he gives advice and permission (*anumanta*), supports the *jivatman* and oversees and enjoys its activities (*upadrastanumanta ca bharta bhokta mahesvarah, paramatmeti capy ukto dehe 'smin purusah parah*).

Thus the limited consciousness depends on the unlimited consciousness for its activities and existence, and they are distinct and different in scope and level in the course of conditioned life. This is also confirmed in *Vedanta sutras: sariras cobhaye api hi bhedena enam adhiyate*, "Both (the *jivatman* and the *paramatman*) are present within the body, as distinct from each other" (*Vedanta sutra* 1.2.20) and *guham pravistav atmanam hi tad darsanat*, "Both (*jivatman* and *paramatman*) have entered the cave (of the body), but the *atman* is distinct from that (supreme)" (*Vedanta sutra* 1.2.113).

We have already mentioned that the *jivatman* is an emanation of the Supreme, generated directly by God (*mama eva amsa jiva loke, jiva bhuta sanatanah*, 15.7). This is abundantly confirmed in the *Upanishads: sad eva saumyedam agra asid ekam evadvitiam tad aikсата bahu syam prajayeya*, "In the beginning was the Supreme, who was one without a second. He thought: 'Let me become many. Let me become the progenitor of many.'" (*Chandogya Upanishad* 6.2.1), so *'kamayata bahu syam prajayeya sa tapo 'tapyata tapas taptva idam sarvam asrijat. yad idam kincana tat sristva tad evanupravisat. tad anupravisya sac ca tyac cabhavat*, "He desired: 'I will become many, I will father a numerous progeny'. From his *tapah*, he created everything. Then he entered within the world he had created, and he became all that is manifest and all that is non manifest" (*Taittiriya Upanishad* 2.6.1), *sa aikshata lokan nu srija*, "He thought: 'Now I shall create the people/ the worlds.'" (*Aitareya Upanishad* 1.1.2), *yato va imani bhutani jayante*, "From the Supreme these beings were born." (*Taittiriya Upanishad* 2.1.1), *tad atmanam svayam akuruta*, "He created (everything) from his own *atman*" (*Taittiriya Upanishad* 2.7.1), *tasmad va etasmad atmana akasah sambhutah*, "From the *Atman* the *akasha* (space, first of the material elements) was manifested" (*Taittiriya Upanishad* 2.1.1).

We should not project our material limitations on God. We have seen that Isvara Bhagavan is the Father (9.17, 11.43, 14.5), but s/he is also the Mother (9.17, 14.3). This is clearly confirmed in the *Upanishads*: *yad bhuta yonim paripasyanti dhiraḥ*, "The wise see that Brahman is the womb from which everything was born" (*Mundaka Upanishad* 1.1.6), *kartaram isam purusam brahma yonim*, "The Supreme Personality of Godhead is the original creator, the womb from which everything was born" (*Mundaka Upanishad* 3.1.6).

This is the key to true self realization: *ya eko 'varno bahudha sakti-yogad, varnan anekan nihithartha dadhati, vi caiti cante visvam adau sa devah, sa no buddhya subhaya samyunaktau*, "May the one, unrivaled Supreme Personality of Godhead, who for his own purpose created the many varieties of living entities by the agency of his potencies, who created everything in the beginning and into whom everything enters at the end, grant pure intelligence to us." (*Svetasvatara Upanishad* 4.1)

VERSE 63

इति ते ज्ञानमाख्यातं गुह्याद्गुह्यतरं मया ।

iti te jñānamākhyātaṁ guhyādgūhyataraṁ mayā ।

विमृश्यैतदशेषेण यथेच्छसि तथा कुरु ॥ १८-६३ ॥

vimṛśyāitadaśeṣeṇa yathecchasi tathā kuru || 18-63 ||

iti: thus; *te*: to you; *jnanam*: the knowledge; *akhyatam*: described; *guhyat*: more than secret; *guhyataram*: the most secret; *maya*: by me; *vimrsya*: deliberating; *etat*: this; *asesena*: completely; *yatha icchasi*: as you like; *tatha*: that; *kuru*: perform.

"In this way I have described to you the supreme among all the great secrets. Now think carefully about this, and then do as you wish.

Everybody has a conscience, and if we listen carefully we can hear its clear voice and deep down, under all the layers of ego and mental accumulations, we *know* that our conscience is giving us excellent advice and that we should follow it for our own good. However, our conscience does not give orders or force us to do anything; we are always free to choose to disregard and neglect its voice and even forget its existence for any length of time: it is up to us.

God does not interfere and does not get offended if we do not follow his instructions, and whenever we are ready to listen, he will be there to guide us with the same unchanged affection and wisdom. Forced compliance has no real value because when a child is forced to obey, he cannot really learn and evolve; as soon as the prohibition is somehow slackened or can be escaped, he will inevitably try to engage in that very same activity that was once forbidden - and with a stronger and more violent desire, because repression can only aggravate the problem and make it more dangerous and perverted.

The foolish parents and guardians who follow the abrahamic approach of "not sparing the rod to teach a child for his own good" are creating repressed monsters that will some day vent their own festered frustrations on other innocent creatures, becoming fully fledged *asuras* like their elders before them, and losing all sense of intelligence and conscience under a toxic mountain of subconscious guilt and self-loathing, fear, conformism, hatred, anxiety, greed, obsessions and psychological diseases.

In the last centuries the same approach has been imposed for the relationship of the governments with the citizens, and we need to

understand that it is directly derived from the example of the God of the Bible, that whimsically and unexpectedly strikes even his faithful worshipers when he is irritated by some small mistake or even some involuntary accident or just because he wants to do so - and don't ask questions or you will be treated as an offender.

On the other hand, we see that in non-abrahamic cultures and religions people are free to think, speak and live in the way they choose, although aggression is naturally considered a crime; the famous slogan of the Wiccan Rede (presented as "witch-craft" by the dominant abrahamic-based culture) is, "An' it harm none, do what you will" ("as long as it does no harm to anyone, do what you want to do") and it nicely summarizes the point.

The expression *yatha icchasi tatha kuru* ("then do whatever you wish to do") clearly shows the liberality of Krishna's advice and his patience and detachment as well, and it demonstrates the abyss of difference between original Hinduism and the abrahamic faiths.

However, it is important to notice that Krishna does not say, "do as you please", because he wants to make sure that the *jiva atman* makes a responsible and sober choice, that is not simply based on the superficial and childish attraction of likes and dislikes, because growing up means becoming able to understand that what may seem unpleasant in the beginning could be nectar in the end, and the other way around (18.36, 18.37, 18.38, 18.39, 5.22, 16.23). The conditioned *atman* naturally seeks happiness, but he does not have clear ideas on how to find it, therefore Krishna wants to make sure that he properly understands the indications on how to reach true happiness.

It is true that all paths ultimately lead to God (*mama vartmanuvartante manusyah partha sarvasah*, 3.23) because each individual can develop gradually in his/ her own time and sweet will, going through the different experiences in a personalized

order, but it is also true that some courses will lead us more directly to the destination, while by choosing other courses it may take much longer (16.20). However, the entire journey is supposed to be an evolutionary experience tailored according to our individual tastes and preferences, so God does not interfere, and leaves the travel arrangements to the agency of Nature in pursuance of the choices of the individual *atman*. Paramatma is the witness, and advisor and the facilitator only (*upadrasta anumanta ca*, 13.23); like a good parent and teacher, he gives instructions and not orders, as he prefers educating rather than dominating.

We have already mentioned several times that God never demands blind obedience or faith; those who believe and teach that religion consists in submitting to commandments, dogma and fatwas out of fear for God, are actually speaking in the name of something that is not God. While abrahamic ideologies and their derivatives (such as communism etc) demand that their members renounce the use of intelligence, common sense and ethical conscience in the name of faith, obedience and allegiance to the established authorities of the system they follow, *Bhagavad gita* and Vedic tradition encourage people to develop their God-given intelligence and purify it through the understanding of the eternal and universal ethical principles of *dharma*.

This is particularly indicated by the words *vimsrija* ("pondering over, meditating") and *asesena* ("on the whole and specifically"). One should not act whimsically and irresponsibly, because each action will create consequences; ignorance of the laws of nature is no excuse. The lessons offered us by life and Mother Nature are not pointless - on the contrary, they are very carefully and lovingly engineered to help us learn and grow in the best possible way.

We have all experienced the fact that at fist the teacher offers hints without speaking, to see if we are intelligent enough to understand the point by ourselves, then he speaks in a soft voice giving a short

explanation, and then if we still do not understand the explanation becomes longer and harsher and the tone of voice becomes louder to express a sense of urgency and importance. We should not think that our lack of comprehension is hurting the teacher, or that the teacher hates us because he is showing anger when we do not care about our studies; a good teacher is worried about our good or bad results in the upcoming tests and is trying to spare us greater sufferings in the future. We should appreciate that, and remember it when we cry out and wonder why we failed at the exams, and blame God for our shortcomings.

Transcendental knowledge of liberation is called the supreme secret among secrets (*guhyad guhyataram*) but not because it is some incomprehensible mystery that we should accept unquestionably. The entire *Bhagavad gita* consists in a series of questions posed by Arjuna to clarify the doubts that anyone could have in the study of Vedic science, and in Krishna's elaborate answers from all possible angles; the word *akhyatam*, "I have explained", indicates the care and dedication that Krishna has invested in presenting the transcendental knowledge of *Bhagavad gita*, not just in these last verses or on this occasion on the battlefield of Kurukshetra, but many other times as he has already mentioned (4.1, 4.8).

On a deeper level, we should consider this verse meaning remembering that the word *jnana* includes all the modes of *yoga* presented in *Bhagavad gita* - *Arjuna visada yoga*, *Sankhya yoga*, *Karma yoga*, *Jnana yoga*, *Sannyasa yoga*, *Dhyana yoga*, *Vijnana yoga*, *taraka brahma yoga*, *Raja guhya yoga*, *Vibhuti yoga*, *Visva rupa darsana yoga*, *Bhakti yoga*, *Prakriti-purusha-viveka yoga*, *Guna traya vibhaga yoga*, *Purushottama yoga*, *Daivasura sampada vibhaga yoga*, *Sraddha traya vibhaga yoga*, and *Moksha yoga*. The word *jnana* also indicated Bhagavan himself, as we have already mentioned several times.

Therefore we should not be superficial and childish like those fools who dismiss *jnana* as a mere "impurity" in the practice of *bhakti* (*jnana misra bhakti*); this is also indicated by Krishna's instruction here: *vimrisyaitad asesena*. This is confirmed in the *Upanishads* and also in *Bhagavata Purana*: *vadanti tat tattva vidas, tattvam yaj jnanam advayam, brahmeti paramatmeti, bhagavan iti sabdyate*, "Those who know the *tattva* declare that *tattva* is undivided Knowledge, variously called Brahman, Paramatma, and Bhagavan" (*Bhagavata Purana* 1.2.11), and *satyam jnanam anantam brahma*, "Brahman is the absolute Truth, the unlimited Knowledge" (*Taittiriya Upanishad* 2.1.1).

VERSE 64

सर्वगुह्यतमं भूयः शृणु मे परमं वचः ।

sarvaguhyatamaṁ bhūyaḥ śṛṇu me paramaṁ vacaḥ ।

इष्टोऽसि मे दृढमिति ततो वक्ष्यामि ते हितम् ॥ १८-६४ ॥

iṣṭo'si me dṛḍhamiti tato vakṣyāmi te hitam ॥ 18-64 ॥

sarva guhya tamam: the most secret of all (knowledge); *bhuyah*: again; *srnu*: listen; *me*: from me; *paramam vacah*: the supreme instruction; *istah asi*: you are dear; *me*: to me; *dridham*: extremely; *iti*: thus; *tatah*: therefore; *vakasyami*: I am telling; *te hitam*: for your benefit.

"Again hear from me the greatest secret of all, the supreme instruction. You are very dear to me, and this is why I am speaking for your benefit.

In this verse, the word *iti* indicates that the instructions of Krishna in *Bhagavad gita* are drawing to the final conclusion. This means

that the process of teaching regularly needs some test to verify what the student has been able to understand and learn; after explaining the subject from all possible angles, the teacher will sit back and let the student talk and make his choices (*yatha icchasi tatha kuru*).

Krishna is talking with Arjuna in a very confidential manner, because Arjuna is his friend and devotee (4.3, 10.1) and has surrendered to him as a disciple to the *guru* (2.7, 6.39). Bhagavan reciprocates the feelings and service of those who love him (*tams tathaiva bhajamy aham*, 4.11, *ye bhajanti tu mam bhaktya mayi te tesu capy aham*, 9.29). He will personally protect those who take shelter in him (9.31, 11.55), and he has a special affection for those who strive to qualify themselves by developing the divine characteristics and behaviors (12.14, 12.15, 12.16, 12.17, 12.19, 12.20). However, he still is the loving friend of all beings (*suhridam sarva bhutanam*, 5.29).

Bhagavan never tires and never abandons us, even when our disastrous choices drag us into the lowest levels of degradation and stupidity, and even when our ignorance and arrogance force us to obstruct the progress of others. From time to time, the supreme Consciousness descends as *avatara* (4.1, 4.5, 4.8, 2.12) to re-establish the correct understanding of *dharma* and *vidya*, because human beings often misuse their free will and tend to make a mess of things. Bhagavan does not hate anyone (9.29), and even when he is confronting the *asuras* and the *duskritas* ("the evil doers") to stop their destructive activities, he is still moved by affection and benevolence for them. The great Daksha recognized this truth after being shaken from his arrogant complacency: *daksha uvaca, bhuyan anugraha aho bhavat krito me, dandas tvaya mayi bhrito yad api pralabdham*, "O Lord, you have done me a great favor by punishing me and thus destroying (my arrogance)" (*Bhagavata Purana* 4.7.13).

We should not think that because Bhagavan does not give orders and does not become offended when we neglect his instructions, we will not be punished when we make a bad mess of things. Already the laws of material nature normally take care of the proper retribution in the form of what we call "karmic reactions" or more correctly, "reactions to *vikarma*" or "reactions to *ugra karma*". The effect of the law of *karma* is the same on everyone, irrespective of their beliefs and allegiances; it is true that Bhagavan in the form of *jnana* (knowledge) immediately destroys the accumulated reactions of *karma* in his devotees, but the process is not a "free ticket out of jail" as some foolish people like to think.

In abrahamic ideologies, everyone is considered a sinner because of the simple fact of having taken birth (since birth is a demonic contamination for them, the "original sin"), and the only hope for purification and forgiveness is conversion, that is giving total and blind allegiance to God and his official representatives. This simple act of allegiance is believed to destroy all sins not only at the initial moment of conversion, but also along the entire life of the "faithful", every time he is blessed by the official representatives of God.

The most characteristic example is the "sacrament of confession" in the Catholic church, in which one confesses his/ her sins to a priest and is absolved of all responsibilities and faults, without having to pay any debts to the people s/he harmed. The main prayer of the Christians says, "forgive our sins" (Luke 11.2-4), as if by simply pledging allegiance to God and praying to him could liberate us from the karmic debts we incurred towards our fellow creatures: this is the perfect recipe for disaster, because it destroys all sense of responsibility and justice, and encourages evil doers to continue in their bad activities counting on God's repeated and regular blanket absolution and pardon by the blessing of the priests.

It is the most effective way to strengthen one's resolve to disregard the voice of one's conscience - "I made my peace with God, everything is OK now, and I can do it again in the same way any number of times".

Some ignorant and foolish people could be tempted to apply this approach to verse 18.66 that we are going to study soon: *sarva dharman parityajya mam ekam saranam vraja, aham tvam sarva papebhyo moksayishyami ma sucah*, "Leaving behind all differences in duties, take shelter in me alone. Do not worry, I will liberate you from all faults." Misunderstanding the meaning of "taking shelter" (2.7, 2.49, 4.10, 7.1, 7.14, 7.29, 9.13, 9.18, 9.32, 11.38, 14.2, 15.4, 18.57, 18.62, 18.66) and "surrendering" (3.30, 4.11, 5.10, 12.6), they conclude that simply by pledging allegiance to the sectarian worship of Krishna and by keeping in good terms with the "established religious authorities" they can afford to commit any crime or evil deed without the fear of being punished, and they will attain paradise at the end of this lifetime. Vedic knowledge does not encourage this foolish delusion, because it does not limit God to a material personality affected by duality as we see in abrahamic ideologies.

One should take shelter of God and surrender to God in the form of his instructions and consciousness, that are based on equal vision towards all beings, development of a divine personality and purification from all bad qualities and bad activities, beginning with the root of all evils, that is material identification and selfish attachment. Thus God liberates us from all faults because the more we become conscious of God, the more we abandon asuric qualities and develop divine qualities, to the point that we completely overcome the connection with the gross material body - not by demonizing it, but by outgrowing it.

True knowledge (*jnana*) destroys the accumulation of karmic reactions by burning them (4.19), therefore there must be a fire

that consumes them, by reducing to ashes the very root of ignorance that is the *ahankara-mamatva* identification. Bodies will never survive this fire and in fact they are not meant to (2.11-13, 2.16, 2.18, 2.22, 2.23, 2.27, 2.28, 11.27-30), and only the *atman* is not touched by this destruction (2.23, 2.24), so the destruction of the body of an evil doer is not a loss under any circumstance - not even for him.

In the Vedic system, evil doers (*atatayinah*, "aggressors") must be immediately met with lethal force while they are engaged in the act of aggression itself. There is no place for reasonable discussion or negotiation, no place for lawyers' tricks to escape justice or to elicit sentimentalist compassion or demands to "respect the human rights" of the criminals, or space for bribing or sneaking one's way out without paying the price for evil deeds. At the very moment when a criminal engages in attacking a good innocent creature, he is forfeiting all his human rights because he is denying the same rights to his victim; the same thing applies for the so-called "religious freedom" by which we are asked to be tolerant towards the intolerant and recognize them the right to deny the same rights to others (including us). This utter idiocy has been created by the abrahamic ideologies only, because they claim for themselves all rights and no duties towards others. *Karma* is never a one-way street, and those who believe it is are going to pay dearly for that delusion.

After clarifying this, we can elaborate on the ethical principles of *dharma* that teach that a surrendered enemy should not be punished. The aggressor can and should be punished while he is still engaged in committing the crime, but if before being defeated he surrenders, we should abstain from killing him; removing his weapons and rendering him harmless will be sufficient for the protection of the *prajas*. If he tries again to attack innocent people or creatures, the criminal should be considered unrepentant and

exiled out of the kingdom. This is exactly what the laws of nature do through the dynamics of *karma*, when it assigns a lower birth to a repeated offender, by denying him the opportunity of a human form of life (*manusya janma*).

There is a big difference between one's circumstantial position (created by the combined reactions of our previous actions and choices) and the ability to make new and hopefully better choices for our future. Such difference is called *jati* (birth), but contrarily to what ignorant and stupid casteists believe (on the basis of the racist prejudices reinforced by abrahamic influences), *jati* refers to the species of the body one has acquired and not to the particular family of birth. Vedic scriptures describe three kinds of *jati*: *manusya jati* ("birth as a human being") as opposed to *pakshi jati* ("birth as a bird") and *mriga jati* ("birth as a mammal animal"). In this sense, *jati* is a genetic heritage that gives specific fundamental physical characteristics and abilities. But there are no such genetic differences among human beings in regard to religious duties and social occupations, and Vedic scriptures knew this very well.

VERSE 65

मन्मना भव मद्भक्तो मद्याजी मां नमस्कुरु ।

manmanā bhava madbhakto madyājī māṁ namaskuru ।

मामेवैष्यसि सत्यं ते प्रतिजाने प्रियोऽसि मे ॥ १८-६५ ॥

māmevaiṣyasi satyaṁ te pratijāne priyo'si me ॥ 18-65 ॥

mat manah: think of me; *bhava*: become; *mat bhaktah*: my devotee; *mat yaji*: my worshiper; *mam namaskuru*: offer your respect to me; *mam*: to me; *eva*: certainly; *esyasi*: you will come;

satyam: in truth; *te*: to you; *pratijane*: as a promise; *priyah*: beloved; *asi me*: you are to me.

"Focus your mind on me, become my devotee, worship me and offer me respects, and you will certainly come to me. I am truly promising this to you, because you are very dear to me.

Krishna had already given the same instruction in the chapter of the *Raja guya yoga* ("the supreme secret"): *man mana bhava mad bhakto mad yaji mam namaskuru, mam evaisyasi yuktaivam atmanam mat parayanah*, "Always think of me, become my devotee and my worshiper. Offer me your respect and dedicate yourself to me. You will attain me because of this connection." (9.34). Also, we found a similar instruction in the chapter on *Bhakti yoga*: *mayy avesya mano ye mam nitya yukta upasate, sraddhaya parayopetas te me yuktatama matah*, "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 united." (12.2). We need to understand this concept very clearly, because an artificial superimposition of alien abrahamic concepts will contaminate the intelligence of those who have a poor fund of knowledge and confuse their understanding, with potentially disastrous consequences.

As we have already explained, abrahamic ideologies (and their derivatives) present blind faith and allegiance (often mistaken for spiritual devotion) as the only required action for those who want to be considered religious people. This creates the delusional idea that "lip service" (i.e. prayer) is sufficient to qualify one for a higher position in religious and spiritual realization; when applied to the process of *bhakti*, this misunderstanding is compounded by the notion that *sravana kirtana* ("hearing and talking") are independent forms of devotional service in themselves and not simply initial stages of a larger process and limbs (*anga*) of a

scientific method. Thus superficial people conclude that one just needs to make a show of religiosity in theory without substantiating it with one's actual beliefs and behaviors, but this idea is not confirmed by *Bhagavad gita* or any other genuine Vedic text or *acharya*. So for example we see people who consider themselves perfectly situated on the highest platform if they mechanically sit through periodical religious readings, and they expect that such exercise will be sufficient to automatically guarantee them everything they desire and ultimately liberation, too. Technically, this is compared to watering the good plant without bothering to clean out the weeds, and the result is often disappointing because the bad weeds end up consuming all the water and the good plants wither away and do not fructify at all.

It is true that the external modalities of one's worship (*mad yaji mam namaskuru*) can be adjusted according to the individual circumstances and possibilities (*desa, kala, patra*) and that we can even engage in many devotional activities also within our own mind, as *manasa puja* (mental meditation), when it is too difficult to perform them externally (17.19, 18.24, 6.37, 2.40). But we should be honest in our efforts (3.43, 4.12, 6.5, 6.17, 6.25, 6.36, 6.43, 12.11, 15.11); we should strive to engage all our senses in the service of the Supreme, as instructed by the great teachers of *bhakti* such as Narada Rishi: *hrisikesha hrisikena sevanam bhaktir ucyate*, "*bhakti* is defined as engaging one's senses in the service of the Lord of the senses" (*Narada Pancaratra*, quoted in *Bhakti rasamrita sindhu*, 1.1.12). Just engaging the sense of hearing is not enough; it is a crucial beginning step, but we need to use all our senses in God's service, and avoid engaging in activities that are unfavorable to such service.

Bhagavan is very liberal and accepts even very small offerings (9.26, 27) also in the simplest and most ordinary daily activities; he suggests a variety of approaches to the method (12.8, 12.9,

12.10, 12.11) to facilitate the choice of those who have attained different levels of realization. The practice of spiritual/ religious *sadhana* should be comfortable enough to be sustained over long periods of time (*su sukham kartum avyayam*, 9.2), therefore Krishna is not recommending that we should over-exert ourselves with excessive austerities based on egotism, especially when these are not prescribed by the *shastra* or by the *guru* (*asastra vihitam ghoram tapyante ye tapo janah, dambhahankara samyuktah kama raga balanvitah*, 17.5).

On the contrary, one should make controlled efforts in performing one's duties (*yukta cestasva karmasu*, 6.17) and abandon the egotistic desire for over-performance (*sarvarambha parityagi*, 12.16, *lobhah pravrittir arambhah karmanam asamah spriha*, 14.12, *sarvarambha parityagi gunatitah sa ucyate*, 14.25).

Still one must make an effort to qualify oneself by developing the divine characteristics and behaviors (12.14, 12.15, 12.16, 12.17, 12.19, 12.20), by understanding the science of God (13.9, *mad bhakta etad vijnyaya mad bhavayopapadyate*), and by working for the benefit of all beings.

Krishna has described the characteristics of a true devotee in many verses; we can quote here one that summarizes them nicely: *mat karma krin ma paramo mad bhaktah sanga varjitah, nirvairah sarva bhutesu yah sa mam eti pandava*, "My devotee is engaged in working for me and sees me as the supreme Reality. S/he has abandoned all association/ affiliation/ identification, and has no enmity towards any being. In this way, my devotee comes to me" (11.55). He has also given practical instructions (9.27): *yat karosi yad asnasi yaj juhosi dadasi yat, yat tapasyasi kaunteya tat kurusva mad arpanam*, "O Arjuna, whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you sacrifice, whatever you give, whatever you endure in the performance of your duties - do it for me."

We can get a more complete idea of the meaning of *bhakti* from the descriptions of the *Bhagavata Purana*, specifically in Prahlada's teachings about the nine limbs of devotional service: *sravanam kirtanam visnoh smaranam pada sevanam, arcanam vandanam dasyam sakhyam atma nivedanam, iti pumsarpita visnau bhaktis cen nava laksana, kriyeta bhagavaty addha tan manye 'dhitam uttamam*, "Listening, speaking, remembering Vishnu, following his instructions, offering worship and respect, engaging in practical service, developing a personal relationship with God and dedicating oneself fully: thus a person who offers a devotional service to Vishnu according the ninefold method should engage in all of them. I believe this to be the highest instruction." (*Bhagavata Purana* 7.5.23-24).

VERSE 66

सर्वधर्मान्परित्यज्य मामेकं शरणं ब्रज ।

sarvadharmānparityajya māmekaṁ śaraṇaṁ vraja ।

अहं त्वां सर्वपापेभ्यो मोक्षयिष्यामि मा शुचः ॥ १८-६६ ॥

ahaṁ tvāṁ sarvapāpebhyo mokṣayaiṣyāmi mā śucaḥ ॥ 18-66 ॥

sarva dharman: all duties; *parityajya:* leaving behind; *mam ekam:* only to me; *saranam vraja:* come for shelter; *aham:* I; *tvam:* you; *sarva papebhyah:* from all faults; *moksayisyami:* I will liberate; *ma sucah:* do not worry.

"Leaving behind all the differences in duties, take shelter in me only. I will liberate you from all faults, do not worry.

The expression *sarva dharman* is extremely interesting in this verse; as the word *dharma* is expressed in the plural form, it

indicates a dualistic fragmentation of the universal and eternal principle that sustains the universe and the progress of all beings. *Dharma* is always one, although its principles (or "legs") can be listed as truthfulness, compassion, cleanliness, self-control, tolerance, personal progress, cooperation, and so on. This fundamental root that supports existence is identified with Krishna's teachings (2.40, 9.2, 9.3, 9.31, 11.18, 12.20, 18.70) and even with Bhagavan himself (14.2, 14.27) as confirmed also in *Bhagavata Purana* (2.4.19, 7.11.7, 11.15.18) and in the introductory verses of *Vishnu sahasra nama* (*Mahabharata*, Anusasana parva, chapter 149) as follows: *brahmanyam sarva dharmajnam... esa me sarva dharmanam dharmadhikatamo (sloka 14)*.

Also, Krishna's specifically declared mission is to re-establish *dharma* whenever it is weakened (4.7, 4.8), therefore it is not possible that Krishna is instructing us here to abandon *dharma* as a fundamental value of life. Such a foolish and dangerous conclusion could be presented only by the hypocrite *asuras* who have not bothered to study (what to speak of practicing) the teachings of genuine *shastra* (16.17, 16.23, 17.6, 17.13) to understand the principles of *dharma*.

The "various *dharmas*" to which Krishna is referring here (*sarva dharman*) are the temporary and limited definitions of duty that are attached to the material *gunas* as described in the activities and qualities of the different *varnas* (*brahmanas*, *kshatriyas*, *vaisyas*, *sudras*), and that include the externals of the different religious practices of the various *ashramas* (*brahmacharya*, *grihastha*, *vanaprastha*, *sannyasa*).

We had already seen this concept in verse 9.21, where Krishna mentioned the "three *dharmas*" (*trayi dharman*) as the ritual ceremonies prescribed for those who wish to attain the higher planetary systems (*svarga lokan*).

And certainly we can apply the definition *sarva dharman* to the various sectarian approaches that oppose for example a *vaishnava dharma* to a *shaiva dharma* etc.

We should be careful not to make the equivalence *papa* = sin, because the abrahamic concept of sin is nothing but a disobedience to the order of God and his priests, something that is totally irrelevant in the Vedic system. We will try here to better define the terminology used in Vedic tradition for negative actions: *papa* is an act that directly or indirectly causes sufferings to others, while *duskrita* is a bad action in general, *agha* is a truly criminal action but *agas* is simply an irresponsible action. *Droha* is a malicious action against the principle of gratefulness, *pataka* is a degrading action that causes a downfall from the position we were supposed to hold in society, and *dosha* is a character fault or a bad quality (defect). *Aparadha* is a formal act of disrespect, *drugdha* is an action meant to cause harm, *vipatti* is the failure to fulfill some duty, and *anrita* is a lie.

It is important to notice that Krishna is not saying "I will relieve you from all the reactions/ results of your negative activities", but he says, "I will relieve you from all your negative activities", meaning that Krishna will guide his sincere devotee to give up all bad activities and become purified from all adharmic contamination - exactly as we had seen in verses 9.30-31. So those cunning rascals who were planning to dump their responsibilities cheaply and escape the reactions of their bad actions by making some protestation of having taken shelter in Krishna will have to check their maths again, because that is not going to happen.

This verse is indeed the most confidential instruction by Krishna, and the passage in *Bhagavad gita* that can be most easily misinterpreted by someone who has not carefully and properly understood all the other instructions given by Krishna in the previous chapters.

The *prakrita sahayyas* are the materialistic simpletons who convince themselves (or let themselves be convinced by others) that it is sufficient to accept the external appearances of devotion and immediately they should be considered established on the highest transcendental level of *bhakti*.

Therefore they become sentimentally attached to their own projection of God according to their material preferences, just like the admirers or fans of famous actors, singers or musicians, professional sports celebrities, and so on. Becoming a "fan" of Krishna is certainly better than choosing to worship some of those personalities, and even better than developing a strong material attachment for one's children or grand-children as we see sometimes in persons who consider family life as the highest possible value in life.

Krishna quickly became a very popular figure in these last 5000 years because he appears like a handsome, artistic and fun-loving young man, a charming, affectionate, clever and adventurous boy and a very sweet and vivacious cute baby. His idyllic pastimes with the little *gopas* and amorous dalliances with the beautiful *gopis*, his love and respect for his parents and elders, his protective care for the cows and calves all contribute to the aura of tenderness and innocence that attracts all minds. In fact, the very name *krishna* has been explained as meaning "all attractive", from the root *karsati* ("to attract").

Loving Krishna is therefore extremely easy, even on a sentimentalist level, and even *asuras* are generally not intimidated by his character. In fact, we see that many unscrupulous people have tried to take advantage of him in several ways, sometimes imitating him and pretending to be his reincarnation to attract gullible followers, or claiming to be his great *sevakas* and representatives, collecting wealth and prestige in his name for their own self aggrandizement.

To impress the general public they often make a great show of emotional ecstasy or excitement, grand gestures and dramatic performances of devotional sentiments.

Simple-minded people who have little familiarity with the teachings of the *shastra* are usually unable to see the difference between a genuine *avadhuta* and a clever fraudster who is a skilled pretender, or even an ordinary person who suffers from mental imbalances, therefore they can easily be cheated and misled, thus wasting the valuable opportunity of human life.

To save the poor unfortunate souls from the damage of ignorance and foolishness, Bhagavan manifests personally (*svamsa avatara*) or empowers realized souls (*sakty avesha avataras*) to spread the correct knowledge and understanding of *dharma* and *vidya*, and to offer shelter to sincere people. We can ascertain the real value of such preachers by measuring their precepts and example with those of *guru*, *shastra* and *sadhus*, and especially with the recommendations of *antaryami paramatman*.

Because the *param atman* is present in the heart of everybody and speaks with the voice of the conscience even to those who are totally illiterate, the lack of formal education is not a decisive obstacle in spiritual progress. The real problem is when a person has ulterior motives and the fraudulent presentation seems to offer better selfish advantages to the followers; the cheaters and the cheated are attracted to each other because they have a similar view of life.

So, please make sure that when you are "taking shelter in Krishna only", you are not connected to the wrong phone number. You have been warned.

VERSE 67

इदं ते नातपस्काय नाभक्ताय कदाचन ।

idam te nātapaskāya nābhaktāya kadācana ।

न चाशुश्रूषवे वाच्यं न च मां योऽभ्यसूयति ॥ १८-६७ ॥

na cāśuśrūṣave vācyam na ca mām yo'bhyaśūyati ॥ 18-67 ॥

idam: this; *te*: you; *na*: not; *atapaskaya*: to a person who is not austere; *na*: not; *abhaktaya*: to a person who is not a devotee; *kadacana*: never; *na*: not; *ca*: and; *susrusave*: to someone who is not willing to listen; *vacyam*: to be instructed; *na ca*: and also not; *mam*: of me; *yah*: one who; *abhyasuyati*: is envious.

"This (secret) should never be disclosed to a person who has no devotion or austerity. It should not be spoken to a person who is not willing to listen or who is hostile against me.

The key words in this verse are *bhakta*, *tapaska*, *susrusava*, indicating a person who has devotion to Bhagavan, is dedicated to austerity and is honestly willing to listen and understand: these are the fundamental qualifications to become a genuine student of *Bhagavad gita*. In this verse each of these words is preceded by the privative "a", a prefix that expresses negation and that has been inherited from Sanskrit by other languages such as ancient Greek and Latin.

The last word in the verse is *abhyasuyati*, "one who envies", "one who is actively hostile", and that automatically includes all those who approach the study of Hinduism to disprove it in favor of their own ideology - something that has regularly happened in the last several centuries in the academic establishments founded and directed by abrahamic ideologues. Unfortunately this does not

apply only to the foreigners, as some Indians like to believe, but it has been happening regularly in India because the current educational system (as well as the political, legal and bureaucratic systems) is still based on the same ideological lines introduced in colonial times by establishment agents such as Macaulay and Max Muller, who was hailed as the "*go tirtha* ("Ox-ford") *mula* (Muller) *acharya* (teacher of Vedic knowledge)" by the political leaders of "orthodox Hinduism", and whose disgracefully racist theory of the "purity of the Aryan race" is still supported directly or indirectly by the very same casteist fools that claim to represent Vedic tradition today.

The word *abhyasuya* is the opposite of *anasuya*; to this effect we can remember verse 9.1: *idam tu te guhyatamam pravaksyamy anasuyave, jnanam vijnana sahita, yaj jnatva moksyase 'subhat*, "I will explain you this supreme secret, because you are not envious. By knowing this theoretical and applied knowledge, you will be free from all inauspiciousness." Other commentators have explained the word *abhyasuyati* as "caviling, trying to find faults", but such interpretation can be dangerous because it is usually taken to be a one-way street only, to avoid uncomfortable questions about faulty translations and ideological applications. Krishna has clearly shown in his dialog with Arjuna that he is not offended by objections (2.5, 2.6, 3.1, 4.4, 5.1, 6.33), and as a perfect teacher he has always supplied sufficient explanations and clarifications, to make sure that the subject was properly understood. We should be very wary of those who get easily offended when questioned and accuse others of being "envious" of the high position they have attained as *gurus* or *acharyas*, because most likely they are unable to give the proper answers and are trying to divert the attention of the questioners by changing the subject.

We have already found the word *abhyasuya* in the chapter describing the characteristics of the *asuras*: *ahankaram balam*

*darpaṃ kamaṃ krodhaṃ ca saṃsṛitā, māṃ atma para dehesu
pradvisanto 'bhyasuyakah,* "Taking shelter in *ahankara*, physical strength, arrogance, lust and anger, they show envy and hatred against me, as I reside in their own bodies and in the bodies of others" (16.18). In the light of this verse we understand that the secret of *Bhagavad gita* will not be disclosed to anyone who is hostile and envious towards the Atman - who lives both in his body and in the bodies of others - especially *because* of their bodies, and on the basis of material bodily identification (*ahankara, balam*). A person who is hostile and envious towards the Atman and the Paramatman can never be a devotee (*bhakta*) or dedicated to austerity (*tapaska*), or sincerely interested to learn the actual meaning of Krishna's instructions (*susrusava*); why then would someone like that try to study *Bhagavad gita* or other Vedic literature? Their motives must be wrong.

Krishna clearly states here that the "objective" or "secular" academic study of the intimate texts of *Bhagavad gita* should not be accepted as valid; for this purpose it is better to utilize summary studies prepared and taught by genuinely qualified people - those who are truly devoted and austere. This prohibition does not have anything to do with the casteist and racist prejudices of some ignorant fools who claim to be traditional orthodox religious authorities on Hinduism, and believe that "foreigners" and "low caste people" should not even be allowed to study Sanskrit and in any case they would never be able to understand Vedic knowledge because they lack some special DNA structure.

The problem is rather in the blind faith that most people have towards the mainstream academic system, from which they crave recognition and endorsement directly or indirectly. It is rare to find "traditional Hindus" who do not want to know what are your "academic qualifications" according to the mainstream establishment, so that they can judge your competence in

discussing about *shastra*, while no importance is given to your actual realizations and practices in life. At the same time, even those who talk about Vedic literature on the basis of their "birth qualification" or "religious lineage" continue to rely on hostile colonial translations and dictionaries, and especially to use appallingly demeaning abrahamic definitions to describe their own tradition - for example, they say "idol" to refer to Deities or *vigrahas*, "mythology" to refer to the sacred stories or *itihahas* and *puranas*, "seer" to refer to realized souls or *rishis*, "caste" to refer to the genuine system of *varnas*, and so on.

We can easily verify the seriousness of the problem if we consult a good dictionary to verify the actual meaning of these definitions. For example, "idol" means "false god, pretender, impostor, a form of appearance visible but lacking substance, a fallacy, a false conception", while "myth" means "an unfounded or false notion, a person or thing having only an imaginary or unverifiable existence". The word "cult" means "a religion regarded as unorthodox or spurious", while "orthodox" means "conforming to established doctrine especially in religion", which in the case of Vedic knowledge should refer to what is actually written in the *shastra*, and not to a mentality characterized by narrow-mindedness, backward mentality, and blind fanaticism based on gross material bodily identification and the falsely moralistic values absorbed from the toxic abrahamic influence. The arrogance of those who claim they have the right to use their own "special Indian meaning" of such English words clearly shows that they do not possess either *bhakti* or *tapah*, and therefore they should never be considered qualified even to discuss about *Bhagavad gita*, what to speak about teaching about it, or even claiming exclusive monopoly rights on its teaching.

Padma Purana recommends, *asraddhadhane vimukhe 'py asrinvati yas copadesah, siva namaparadhah*, "one who gives

instructions to a person who has no faith and is hostile and unwilling to listen, will cause him to commit *aparadha*"; this does not apply only to the teaching of the secret of *Bhagavad gita* but also to all kinds of instructions. Before taking up responsibility for the material and spiritual progress of an individual, we should make sure that our advice and instructions will be received favorably, otherwise it is better to simply make general statements presenting an elementary level of knowledge that cannot be misinterpreted easily.

VERSE 68

य इदं परमं गुह्यं मद्भक्तेष्वभिधास्यति ।

ya idam paramam guhyam madbhaktesvabhidhāsyati ।

भक्तिं मयि परां कृत्वा मामेवैष्यत्यसंशयः ॥ १८-६८ ॥

bhaktim mayi parām kṛtvā māmevaiṣyatyasamśayaḥ ॥ 18-68 ॥

yah: one who; *idam*: this; *paramam guhyam*: supreme secret; *mat bhaktesu*: to my devotees; *abhidhāsyati*: explains; *bhaktim*: devotion; *mayi*: to me; *param*: supreme; *kṛtvā*: doing; *mam*: me; *eva*: certainly; *esyati*: comes; *asamsayah*: without any doubt.

"One who explains this supreme secret to my devotees is performing the supreme devotional service and will certainly attain me. There is no doubt.

We find a very similar instruction in Kapila's conversation with his mother Devahuti: *naitat khalayopadisen navinitaya karhicit, na stabdhaya na bhinnaya naiva dharma dhvajaya ca, na lolupayopadisen na griharudha cetase nabhaktaya ca me jatu, na mad bhakta dvisam api, sraddhadhanaya bhaktaya vinitaya*

anasuyave, bhutesu krita maitraya susrusabhirataya ca, "This knowledge should not be offered to those who are envious, to the agnostic, to those who are proud of their position, to those who make a big show of religiosity, and to those who do not practice what they preach. It should not be taught to those who are greedy, too attached to the identification with family life, devoid of devotion, or hateful against my devotees. But it should be offered to those loving devotees who have faith and are sincerely desiring to understand, free from envy, friendly to all beings, and eager to render service." (*Bhagavata Purana*, 3.32.39-41).

Also Krishna offers the same advice to Uddhava at the end of their conversation: *naitat tvaya dambhikaya nastikaya sathaya ca, asusrusor abhaktaya durvinitaya diyatam, etair dosair vihinaya brahmanyaya priyaya ca, sadhave sucaye bruyad bhakti syac chudra yositam*, "You should not speak of these things with those who make a great show of religiosity, to those who do not accept the authority of Vedic knowledge, to pretenders or hypocrites, to those who are not interested in listening, to those who have no devotion or sincere desire to learn. One can speak of these things only to someone who has become free from bad qualities, is dedicated to spiritual realization (of Brahman), is gentle and well behaved, has a pure heart and a devotional attitude, and that also includes *sudras* and ordinary women" (*Bhagavata Purana* 11.29.30-31).

Someone trying to teach the supreme secret to the wrong people described in the previous verse (*abhakta, atapaska, asusrusava, abhyasuyaka*) is obviously acting for some selfish materialistic purpose, to get money or prestige, or with even more sinister intentions. We know that Max Mueller translated many Vedic texts and wrote a 50 volume encyclopedia about *The Sacred Books of the East*, but his intentions were openly hostile: "This edition of mine and the translation of the Veda will hereafter tell to a great

extent... the fate of India, and on the growth of millions of souls in that country.... the only way of uprooting all that has sprung from it during the last 3000 years... and that is of a more degraded and savage character than the worship of Jupiter, Apollo or Minerva... It may have but served to prepare the way of Christ... India is much riper for Christianity than Rome or Greece were at the time of Saint Paul." Max Muller was particularly angry at those scholars who, instead of devoting themselves to this "evangelic mission", committed the mortal sin to sincerely appreciate Vedic knowledge: one who did that "should know that he can expect no money; nay, he should himself wish for no mercy, but invite the heaviest artillery... to condone Brahminical idolatry and to discountenance Christianity is to commit high treason against humanity and civilization." Mainstream academic indologists still follow the same orientation today, not only in the West but in India too, and have contaminated with the same mentality many religious institutions and organizations even within the Hindu fold.

On the other hand, one who engages in sincere and constructive discussions with genuine *bhaktas* is inspired by the spiritual happiness that is created (*bodhayantah parasparam kathayantas ca mam nityam tusyanti ca ramanti ca*, "they find great pleasure and satisfaction by always discussing about me, to help each other to better understand me", 10.9). There can be no higher pleasure or satisfaction than this, because this happiness is permanent and does not depend on external circumstances (4.38, 5.13, 5.21, 5.23, 5.24, 6.21, 6.27, 6.28, 9.2, 14.27).

The word *abhidhasyati* ("who teaches") is particularly interesting here. It does not refer to the formal relationship between *guru* and *sisya*, but rather to an open discussion on the various meanings of Krishna's words. A closely related word, *abhidhana*, means "conversation", but also "explanations, definitions", and even "lexicography, dictionary"; it is connected to the words *vritti* and

anuvritti, as we can see in this verse spoken by Suta at Naimisaranya: *aho vayam janma bhrito 'dya hasma, vridhdhanuvrittityapi viloma jatah, dauskulyam adhim vidhunoti sighram, mahattamanam abhidhana yogah*, "How wonderful that we have been raised today to such a position due to our service to great personalities, even though we were born in a lowly family without being blessed by the proper *samskaras*. The conversations that unite us with those who are great souls will very quickly remove all faults from our life." (*Bhagavata Purana*, 1.18.18).

The word *vritti* includes the meanings of "interpretation, alliteration, activity, process, occupation, function, mode of being, condition, respectful behavior, profession", while *anuvritti* means "commentary, repetition, remembrance, act of continuance, following, obedient spirit, propensity, tendency". This is how we can attain and practice genuine transcendental *bhakti* (*bhaktim mayi param kritva*).

VERSE 69

न च तस्मान्मनुष्येषु कश्चिन्मे प्रियकृत्तमः ।

na ca tasmānmanuṣyeṣu kaścinme priyakṛttamaḥ ।

भविता न च मे तस्मादन्यः प्रियतरो भुवि ॥ १८-६९ ॥

bhavitā na ca me tasmādanyaḥ priyatara bhuvi || 18-69 ||

na: not; *ca*: and; *tasmat*: than him/ her; *manuṣyesu*: among all human beings; *kascit*: anyone; *me*: to me; *priya krt tamah*: dearer; *bhavita*: will become; *na*: not; *ca*: and; *me*: to me; *tasmat*: than him/ her; *anyah*: other; *priya tarah*: dearer; *bhuvi*: in this world.

"Nobody among all human beings is dearer to me, and nobody else will ever be dearer to me in this world.

The previous verse (68) clearly stated that explaining the supreme transcendental secret of Yoga to sincere spiritually inclined people is the greatest devotional service. In fact it is such a sacred mission that Bhagavan himself directly descends in this world from time to time to perform the same function: *paritranaya sadhunam vinasaya ca duskritam, dharma samsthapanarthaya sambhavami yuge yuge*, "I manifest myself *yuga* after *yuga*, to protect the good people, destroy the evil doers and to establish the knowledge of *dharma*" (4.8).

This is also confirmed in *Bhagavata Purana* (4.22.16): *vyaktam atmavatam atma bhagavan atma bhavanah, svanam anugrahayemam siddha rupi caraty ajah*, "In this way Bhagavan, the unborn, walks around in the form of a perfectly realized soul to enlighten those who are determined to attain spiritual realization".

The transmission of spiritual knowledge is the greatest gift and the most valuable proof of love and affection: *sa evayam maya te 'dya yogah proktah puratanah, bhakto 'si me sakha ceti rahasyam hy etad uttamam*, "Today I am explaining to you the same knowledge of Yoga that was discussed in the ancient times; because you are my devotee and friend I give you this supreme secret" (4.3).

We have seen that Krishna has said that one should be equally impervious to insult and glorification, joys and sorrows (*tulya priyapriyo dhiras tulya nindatma samstutih*, 14.24), impartial and detached from both friends and enemies, honor and neglect (*samah satrau ca mitre ca tatha manapamanayoh*, 12.18, *mana apamanayas tulyas tulyo mitrari paksayoh*, 14.25), and should see equally everyone, including benefactors, friends, enemies, neutral persons, mediators, envious persons or relatives (*suhrin mitrariy udasina madhyastha dvesya bandhusu*, 6.9) and be friendly with all and not hostile towards anybody (*advesta sarva bhutanam maitrah karuna eva ca*, 12.13).

God also behaves according to these same parameters: *nadatte kasyacit papam na caiva sukritam vibhuh, ajnanena avritam jnanam tena muhyanti jantavah*, "The all powerful Lord does not consider the good or bad merits of anyone. Any difference is only due to the living entities themselves, who are confused as their knowledge is covered by ignorance." (5.15). Another verse added a slightly different angle: *samo 'ham sarva bhutesu na me dvesyo 'sti na priyah, ye bhajanti tu mam bhaktya mayi te tesu capy aham*, "I am equally disposed towards all living beings. I do not hate anyone, and I do not favor anyone. Yet, when someone offers me a sincere service in devotion, I also serve them with love and devotion." (9.29).

We also know that God regularly takes the side of the Devas against the Asuras whenever the proper management of the universe is threatened and they ask for his help. One could then wonder how this is possible, and whether it is not a contradiction; after all most people believe that religion can only be a sort of sectarian pact of covenant between God and his "chosen people", where such people obey orders and offer worship, and God protects them from bad things and answers their prayers granting them all good things. But this is not exactly a fact.

Sukadeva explained this to Parikshit: *sa esa rajan api kala isita sattvam suranikam ivaidhayaty atah, tat pratyanikan asuran sura priyo rajas tamaskan praminoty urusravah*, "God as Time nourishes the many *suras* through *sattva*, therefore those who are hostile to the *suras* - the *asuras* - are destroyed" (7.1.12). How this happens, it is inconceivable for the living beings: *na yasya sakhya puruso 'vaiti sakhyuh sakha vasan samvasatah pure 'smin, guno yatha gunino vyakta dristes tasmai mahesaya namaskaromi*, "The living being cannot understand the friendship of the friend who lives with him in the same body, just like qualities cannot understand those who possess such qualities or the

sense objects cannot understand the senses that perceive them. I offer my respect to Isvara." (6.4.24). We know that the *jiva atmans* are simply projections of the *param atman*, his *amsas* and *shaktis*, so God remains largely inconceivable to us (*adhokshaja*).

Bhagavan is always the best friend of all creatures (4.11, 5.29, 9.18, 9.29), but human beings have a special position in his affection because they are mature enough to take up their share of responsibilities in the work of supporting the universe, but they are also small enough to remain sober and humble in such service. The key expression in this verse is *manusyesu*, "among human beings". As we have commented already in previous passages, the only real qualification to engage in spiritual life and *yoga* is *manusa jati* - having acquired a human form of life (*athato brahma jijnasa, Vedanta sutra* 1.1.1).

Paramatman resides in the hearts of all creatures and even within the hearts of atoms, but only human beings have the faculty to make the free choices to elevate themselves and attain liberation (*moksha*, 13.35, 16.5, 18.66, *brahma bhuta*, 6.27, 18.54). Those human beings who take a new birth on the higher planetary systems thanks to their religious merits also have the opportunity to elevate themselves to liberation, but in that position of sattvic happiness they can become too complacent (14.9) and this will strengthen their bondage to material identification, so they will have to return to the level of human life when their merits have been consumed (9.20, 9.21).

Especially in Kali yuga, taking birth as a human being is a great blessing, as confirmed for example in *Bhagavata Purana* (*kalav icchanti sambhavam kalau khalu bhavisyanti*, 11.5.38), because under the pressure of unfavorable circumstances people can more easily wake up from the delusional hope to find happiness in the sense gratification of the material world, that is actually only a burden (*indriya artha maya sukhaya bharam udvahatah*, 7.9.43).

We should therefore appreciate this wonderful and rare opportunity of a human birth (*durlabham manusam janma, Bhagavata Purana 7.6.1*) and not waste it foolishly in the hope of getting a better birth in a next lifetime. Any level of human birth qualifies us to strive for perfection (9.32), so we should not even wait one minute longer: *ayur harati vai pumsam, udyann astam ca yann asau, tasyarte yat ksano nita, uttama sloka vartaya*, "Every sunrise and sunset take away a piece of the duration of life for a human being, which is lost without gain except for those who use time to understand God", (*Bhagavata Purana 2.3.17*).

VERSE 70

अध्येष्यते च य इमं धर्म्यं संवादमावयोः ।

adhyesyate ca ya imam dharmyam samvadamāvayoḥ ।

ज्ञानयज्ञेन तेनाहमिष्टः स्यामिति मे मतिः ॥ १८-७० ॥

jñānayajñena tenāhamiṣṭaḥ syāmiti me matiḥ ।। 18-70 ।।

adhyesyate: will study; *ca*: and; *yah*: one who; *imam*: this; *dharmyam*: on *dharma*; *samvadam*: conversation; *avayoh*: our; *jnana yajnena*: by the sacrifice of knowledge; *tena*: by him/ her; *aham*: I am; *istah*: worshiped; *syam*: shall be; *iti*: thus; *me*: my; *matih*: opinion.

"One who studies this conversation of ours about *dharma* will be worshiping me through the celebration of knowledge. This is my opinion.

The equation *dharma = yoga = jnana* is very clear, so when Krishna says that he descends from time to time to re-establish

dharma (dharma samsthapanartha, 4.8) when this is somehow lost (*yogah nasta, 4.2*), we should understand that he comes to explain the ancient science of *yoga (yogah proktah puratanah, 4.3)*. Without understanding this point, it is very difficult to make any progress.

Mainstream academics, still bogged into the abrahamic-based colonial indology, still believe that Hinduism "evolved in time" from a so-called Rigvedic period of primitive fire worship of war gods, when there was no concept of reincarnation, ethical vegetarianism, *moksha, yoga* etc. We can understand that they need to do so in order to get official recognition from the establishment mafia, but such position is a disgrace for those who claim to be Hindus and to have faith in Vedic knowledge and tradition.

The entirety of Vedic knowledge has always existed in its perfect and complete form, since the very beginning of creation - of *each* creation - because it is transmitted by the *paramatman* to the Rishis in their hearts (10.11, 15.15) as well as through the formal external teaching from *guru* to *sisya*. At the beginning of the chapter on *Jnana yoga*, Krishna clearly stated: *imam vivasvate yogam proktavan aham avyayam, vivasvan manave praha manur ikshvakave 'bravit*, "I explained this eternal science of Yoga to Vivasvan, and Vivasvan taught it to Manu, and Manu told it to Ikshvaku" (4.1). This is confirmed by both *sruti* and *smriti*, as we can see for example in the opening verse of the *Bhagavata Purana*: *yato 'nvayad itaratas carthesv abhijnah svarat tene brahma hrida ya adi kavaye*, "by whom Brahman knowledge was revealed in the heart of the first scholar, directly and indirectly and in full consciousness" (*Bhagavata Purana, 1.1.1*).

The genuine Vedic tradition teaches that at the beginning of this Kali yuga, Vyasa compiled a new edition of all Vedic scriptures, as clearly explained in the *Bhagavata: catur hotram karma*

suddham prajanam viksyā vaidikam vyadadhah yajna santatyai vedam ekam catur vidham; rig yajuh samartharvakhya, vedas catvara uddhritah, itihasa puranam ca, pancamo veda ucyate; tatrarg veda dharah pailah samago jaiminih kavih, vaisampayana evaiko nisnato yajusam uta; atharvangirasam asit sumantur daruno munih itihasa purananam pita ma romaharsanah; ta eta risayo vedam svam svam vyasyann anekadha, sisyaiah prasisyais tac chisyair, vedas te sakhino 'bhavan; "(Vyasa) divided the one Knowledge of the Vedic rituals in four compilations including the science of the four sacrificial fires and the purifying duties for the people in general. These four compilations are known as *Rig Veda*, *Yajur Veda*, *Sama Veda* and *Atharva Veda*, plus the *Itihasas* and *Puranas*, that are called the fifth *Veda*. Then he entrusted Paila Rishi to elaborate on the *Rig Veda*, Jaimini with the *Sama Veda*, and Vaisampayana with the *Yajur Veda*, Angirasa (Sumantu Muni) with the *Atharva Veda*, and Romaharsana (father of Suta) with the *Itihasas* and *Puranas*. All these Rishis transmitted their respective scriptures to their disciples and those to their own disciples, and in this way the Vedic literature has expanded." (*Bhagavata Purana* 1.4.19, 1.4.20, 1.4.21, 1.4.22, 1.4.23).

This is the proper method for studying Vedic knowledge (*sva-adhyaya*): we receive the original text and the compilation of commentaries by the previous *acharyas*, and then we transmit the original text with our own presentation in the best possible way according to *desa*, *kala*, *patra* and according to our personal realizations. Suta says: *aham hi prsto 'ryamano bhavadbhir acaksa atmavagamo 'tra yavan, nabhah patanty atma samam patattrinas tatha samam visnu gatim vipascitah*, "Having been requested by great *aryas* such as you, I will speak as far as my understanding can reach; just like (different) birds fly in the sky, knowledgeable people will speak about the supreme Personality of Godhead" (*Bhagavata Purana*, 1.18.23).

We remember that a few verses earlier, Suta had said: *aho vayam janma bhrīto 'dya hasma, vridhdhanuvrītyapi viloma jatah, dauskulyam adhim vidhunoti sīghram, mahattamanam abhidhana yogah*, "How wonderful that we have been raised today to such a position due to our service to great personalities, even though we were born in a lowly family without being blessed by the proper *samskaras*. The conversations that unite us with those who are great souls very quickly remove all faults from our life." (*Bhagavata Purana*, 1.18.18).

VERSE 71

श्रद्धावाननसूयश्च शृणुयादपि यो नरः ।

śraddhāvānanaśūyaśca śṛṇuyādapi yo naraḥ ।

सोऽपि मुक्तः शुभल्लोकान्प्राप्नुयात्पुण्यकर्मणाम् ॥ १८-७१ ॥

so'pi muktaḥ śubhāṅllokānprāpnuyātpuṇyakarmaṇām ॥ 18-71 ॥

sraddha van: one who has faith; *anasuyah*: one who is not envious; *ca*: and; *srinuyat*: will hear; *api*: certainly; *yah*: who; *narah*: a human being; *sah*: s/he; *api*: also; *muktaḥ*: a liberated being; *subhan lokan*: the auspicious planets; *prapnuyat*: s/he attains; *punya karmanam*: of those who have performed virtuous deeds.

"Any human being who will listen (to this discussion) with faith, free from envy and hostility, will become liberated and attain the auspicious planets of those who have performed virtuous deeds.

In this verse the word *mukta* ("liberated") is particularly interesting. One who has attained liberation is free from material conditionings, from the need to take another birth in this world,

and from the identification with the body and mind s/he is still wearing (*jivan mukta*). This means that he is also free to remain in the world, or to descend again in this world - not as a prisoner but as a social worker, to assist Bhagavan's mission. These are the Devas who reside on the higher planets (*subhan lokan prapnuyat punya karmanam*) and the Mahajanas ("great personalities") and Ciranjivas ("long-lived") like Dhruva, Prahlada, Janaka, Bali, Sukadeva, Hanuman, Vyasa, Narada, the Kumaras, etc

In the previous verse Krishna clearly stated that the *jnana yajna*, the sacred act of cultivating knowledge through the sincere study (*adhyesya*) of *Bhagavad gita*, is a genuine method of worship that really pleases God (*ista syam*). In fact, it is the best form of worship, as Krishna has said a few verses earlier (18.68). We should ask ourselves whether we really understood the meaning and purpose of worship, because people influenced by *tamas* and *rajas* can easily become confused on the subject, and even project their own mentality and motivations on God, surmising that God must think and act in the same way and logic like they do.

Tamasic and rajasic people only do something good for others when their ego is pampered enough by flattery and praise, when they see some selfish advantage for themselves (generally in exchange for the favor they give), or simply because they are forced to do so by some other force (magic spell etc). Krishna has already explained that sattvic consciousness is not touched by praise or insult, and performs the required good work without expecting anything in return. God is the supreme *sattva* (*hareh sattva nidher, Bhagavata Purana* 1.3.26), therefore we should understand that such qualities apply to Bhagavan even to a greater extent.

When we present various worship articles (*upachara*) to the Deity in the *puja* rituals, we are simply expressing our respect and affection and gratitude for God, because God does not need any

material offering. There is nothing in all the three worlds that God needs or wants to obtain (*lokesu kincana nanavapam avaptavyam* 3.22) and in fact he is the provider of everything for everyone (*yoga ksemam vahamy aham*, 9.22) as also confirmed in the *Upanishads* (*eko bahunam yo vidadhati kaman*, *Katha Upanishad* 2.2.13).

Bhagavan only accepts our offerings when, and because, they are presented with love (*tad aham bhakty upahritam asnami prayatatmanah*, 9.26), therefore we can understand that the best form of worship mentioned here by Krishna is characterized by the deepest love.

Love can only come from actually knowing the object of our love, deeply and intimately; people use the word "love" improperly to indicate a lustful physical attraction, an infatuation, or a perceived affinity of pleasure connected to the presence or contact with a sense object. The fact is that we cannot really love someone we do not know - this realization inevitably comes after some time, when the initial infatuation has weakened and we actually see the object of our sentimental interest for what s/he really is.

Genuine love is built on a deep understanding of the object of our affection, and this is the reason why studying *Bhagavad gita* is the best expression of *bhakti*, as it gradually increases our knowledge, understanding and appreciation for Bhagavan, and leads us through the realization of Brahman, Paramatma and Bhagavan to the solid level of transcendental existence (*brahma bhuta*, 18.54).

By regular association or contact with Bhagavan's teachings we can attain the highest destination, the same level of Bhagavan (8.21, 10.12, 11.38, 14.2, 18.56), what to speak of mere liberation or the higher planets of this universe where good people live (*muktah subhal lokan prapnuyat punya-karmanam*).

The required qualifications for studying *Bhagavad gita* have already been listed in verses 18.67 and 18.68 as well as in previous verses, so here they are simply summarized as *anasuya* and *sraddhavan*, respectively "one who is not hostile" and "one who has faith"; any human being (*narah*) who shows these qualities is therefore entitled to study and practice the most secret science of *yoga* and *dharma*.

Again, we can clearly see that there are no restrictions of caste, race, nationality, gender, occupation etc, therefore it is clear that anyone who tries to stop or obstruct others from accessing this sublime study on some birth pretext is openly violating Krishna's instructions, and should be exposed and condemned. The worst situation for the planet and for human society is when demoniac people take up the positions of *brahmanas* and *kshatriyas* and control society for their own materialistic and demoniac purposes.

In the last few centuries, due to the degradation of Kali yuga (*Bhagavata Purana* 12.2.1) Vedic knowledge has become oppressed because of being imprisoned by the unqualified and evil descendents of *brahmana* families (*vacam devim brahma kule kukarmani*, *Bhagavata Purana* 1.6.21).

This weakness has been compounded by the toxic adharmic influences of invaders, who have found it very convenient for their exploitation and suppression plans, also unwittingly supplying an easy pretext for such unqualified brahmins to blame others (i.e. "foreign" invaders) for the rampant degradation and defilement of knowledge into what some people today call "orthodox Hinduism". What an irony, for an ideological system that is so deeply and fundamentally opposite to the actual version of the Vedic *shastra*.

VERSE 72

कच्चिदेतच्छ्रुतं पार्थ त्वयैकाग्रेण चेतसा ।

kaccidetacchrutam pārtha tvayaikāgreṇa cetasā ।

कच्चिदज्ञानसम्मोहः प्रनष्टस्ते धनञ्जय ॥ १८-७२ ॥

kaccidajñānasammohaḥ pranaṣṭaste dhananjaya ॥ 18-72 ॥

kaccit: if; *etat:* this; *srutam:* (that you have) heard; *partha:* o son of Pritha; *tvaya:* by you; *eka agrena:* with full concentration; *cetasa:* of awareness; *kaccit:* if; *ajnana:* ignorance; *sammohah:* confusion; *pranastah:* destroyed; *te:* of you; *dhananjaya:* o Dhananjaya.

"O Partha, have you listened to all this with full concentration of consciousness? O Dhananjaya, has your confusion of ignorance been destroyed?"

Krishna has kindly presented the teachings of *Bhagavad gita* under all possible angles and answered all the questions and doubts raised by Arjuna. By now the body language expressed by Arjuna must have changed considerably and he must have been showing a deep confidence in such teachings, demonstrating that his initial sadness and confusion had disappeared. But we should not rely only on intuition and subtle communication. Clear and explicit discussion between teacher and student is always essential, because it ensures that all possible blind spots or gray areas are clarified and the possibility of mistakes is radically reduced.

Some confused people, out of foolishness and ignorance, imagine and believe that *guru* and *sisya* do not need to communicate so much, and say that the disciple should just listen and read collectively with all the others and follow whatever order is given directly or indirectly through the "chain of command" of the

institution. Questioning is streamlined and restricted, if not openly discouraged or prohibited.

There are even some "disciples" who have never directly spoken with their "*guru*", and of whom the "*guru*" barely remembers the name (what to speak of other essential things). Such "*gurus*" (from various denominations and groups) only make themselves available to collect money (fees, donations, *guru dakshinas* etc) and worship (*guru puja*, *vyasa puja*, public/ impersonal preaching programs, festival and public events appearances etc). They rarely or never reply to letters or e-mails, what to speak of answering the phone. This means they do not want any personal responsibility for the progress of their disciples.

This is utter impersonalism, based on the incorrect assumption that everyone is the same, has the same qualifications (or lack thereof) and problems, potential and history, realizations and misconceptions, so everyone should simply "follow the system" - read the books of the "big *acharya*" (or those "authorized by the church/ organization") and blindly do whatever they are told. Even when students are tested for their comprehension, it is a standardized exam with pre-determined answers chosen by political and doctrinal considerations, because the examiners themselves lack sufficient personal realization.

Sometimes they even openly say so, stating they do not need to be personally qualified and realized because they are not acting on their own responsibility, but "in the name of the organization". Foolish people mistake this candid admission as a proof of "great humility", and short-circuit the logical process by concluding that *because* the teacher is claiming that he is in fact *not* qualified, he must be humble and sincere, which automatically means he is *actually* qualified - by the fact he is claiming not to be qualified and therefore unable to take any responsibility.

Somewhere in this contortionist reasoning, simple minded people get lost and confused, but then they are told that they are contemplating the "great mystical mystery", and therefore they should be even more awed and intimidated by the sublime qualities of their teachers.

Where does this system come from? You guessed it. It comes from the abrahamic mentality, for which everyone is born a sinner (due to the famous "original sin" consisting in incarnation itself), and because there was no previous individual history (lifetimes before this), everyone (except those who have already been sufficiently indoctrinated in the "only true faith") is considered equally ignorant as all knowledge and realizations "other than the only true path" are considered non-valid or even heretical or blasphemous, and they must be destroyed without even looking at them - just like all books that are not "endorsed by the only true religion" must be burned without even reading them.

Differences in conditions of birth (gender, race, social position etc) and the ensuing categorization are then ascribed to the unquestionable will of God; for example it is believed that women and people from other races have a lesser soul and were created for a subordinate position; since this bodily identification cannot be changed, all individuals in this category are considered unable to qualify on a higher level and therefore they are forbidden even to try to do so (and if they do try, they are insulted, punished, persecuted and ridiculed).

We can easily see how such ideas are heavily influenced by *tamas*, and how the only true solution is the dissemination of genuine knowledge and understanding, explained so beautifully by Krishna in *Bhagavad gita*. *Ajnana* ("ignorance" and *sammoha* ("confusion") always walk together, because the absence of knowledge creates confusing ideas, and pervasive confusion prevent us from acquiring proper knowledge and understanding.

The process of listening (*srutva*) is the solution. It must be attentive (*ekagrena cetasa*) and not simply mechanical, therefore we need to invest sufficient intelligence and good will.

It must be done in the association of people who have already realized this knowledge (*tattva darsis*, 2.16, 4.34, 5.19) and not simply as an exchange of fabricated and uninformed opinions considered as equally valid.

However, this listening should be active, characterized by questions and answers (*pariprasnena*, 4.34), and mutually explanatory (*bodhayantah parasparam kathayantas*, 10.9). It should be repeated under all possible angles until all doubts and misunderstandings are dispelled: as Krishna is showing here, the teacher should personally ask each student, and if something is still not perfectly clear, the teacher is ready to explain everything again.

This is what Krishna is asking Arjuna here. We can rest assured that if Arjuna had expressed more questions or doubts, Krishna would have immediately continued the discussion, presenting the same teachings under yet another perspective and repeating the core concepts as he has done all along these past chapters.

Incidentally, we should also note that this continuing process of studying *Bhagavad gita* and Vedic scriptures in general is meant to be repeated at least 3 times, because these verses are filled with several layers of meanings, and each time we read them we can find new inspiration and insights.

VERSE 73

अर्जुन उवाच ।

arjuna uvāca ।

नष्टो मोहः स्मृतिर्लब्धा त्वत्प्रसादान्मयाच्युत ।

naṣṭo mohaḥ smṛtirlabdhā tvatprasādānmayācyuta ।

स्थितोऽस्मि गतसन्देहः करिष्ये वचनं तव ॥ १८-७३ ॥

sthito'smi gatasandehaḥ kariṣye vacanam tava ॥ 18-73 ॥

arjunah uvaca: Arjuna said; *nastah:* destroyed; *mohah:* confusion; *smrtih:* memory; *labdha:* regained; *tvat prasadat:* by your grace; *maya:* my; *acyuta:* o Acyuta; *sthitah:* firmly established; *asmi:* I am; *gata:* gone; *sandehah:* doubts; *karisye:* I will do; *vacanam:* instructions; *tava:* your.

Arjuna said:

"O Acyuta, by your blessing my confusion has been destroyed and I have regained my memory. I am firmly established and the doubts have gone. I will follow your instructions."

The study of *vidya* and *dharma* is not an artificial imposition on the mind, but rather it is the process of washing off misconceptions, confusion, illusions and ignorance (all under the category of *tamas*) so that the original memory and consciousness of the soul can shine brightly. This is why the study of the scriptures is called *svadhyaya* - it is actually the cultivation of the knowledge of the self, as the self is *atman/ brahman*, pure consciousness that includes all existence.

However, we should not conclude that we can regain this awareness of the universal knowledge without the study of the *shastra* and without the careful guidance of the *guru*, because the conditioned soul is covered by several layers of material

contamination, and these materials project very deep shadows, that can be mistakenly considered real.

The meditation prescribed by the method of *yoga* is a very scientific process, meant to train our awareness to contemplate the true nature of *atman/ brahman* and not the whimsical projections of the mind. The technique called "the witness meditation" consists in becoming detached from all the various thoughts, impressions, memories, sensory stimulations and desires that are normally cluttering the mind and flow through the consciousness. Ultimately, by neglecting them, all these movements will lose power and gradually dissolve, leaving only the pure consciousness of the *atman*.

Confused and misguided people could imagine that when these movements of the mind (*citta vrittis*) are extinguished, the result is some kind of void, and/ or that "meditation on the self" means that we should become aware of our material personality, its qualities and defects etc. But these are all mere projections of the mind, temporary and illusory identifications that do not need to be cultivated and pursued.

At a superficial level we can and should be aware of the qualities of our character, just like we are aware of other external and relative circumstances, such as the time and place, the character and qualities of the people around us, the movements of objects and bodies, and so on. But all these things are only circumstantial, and must be considered on a relative level, not mistaken as actual realities of our true self.

From the very beginning of *Bhagavad gita*, we have learned that the *atman/ brahman* is eternally unchangeable (*avikara*, 2.25), therefore the true meditation on the self must be firm (*sthita prajna*) and undisturbed like the flame of a lamp where there is no wind (*nirvata*).

This would be impossible if we were focusing on material qualities and activities, that by their own very nature must have a beginning and an end. Genuine *svadhyaya* or "contemplation on the self" must therefore apply only to the *atman/ brahman* and eventually to the development of the *siddha deha* or *siddha svarupa*, just like Patanjali explains in the very beginning of his *Yoga sutras* (1.2-4): *yogas citta vritti nirodhah, tada drastuh sva rupa avasthanam, vritti sarupyam itiratra*, "Yoga is the dissolution of the waves of the mind, by which one's true form is revealed, because the waves of the mind are attributed identifications".

The confusion (*moha*) mentioned by this verse is the root of all ignorance, consisting in the identification with the material body and mind, creating a mistaken sense of doership and attachments (*ahankara* and *mamatva*). When this confusion is dispelled, the perception of one's real self comes clearly as a memory reflected by the *param atman*: *sarvasya caham hridi sannivisto mattah smritir jnanam apohanam ca, vedais ca sarvair aham eva vedyo vedanta krid veda vid eva caham*, "I am situated in the heart of all/ everything, and from me come memory, knowledge and forgetfulness. I am the scope of the study of all the *Vedas*. I certainly am the creator of *Vedanta*, and the one who knows the *Vedas*." (5.15).

In that verse, Krishna clearly stated that in order to know him (*atman/ brahman*), one needs to study all the *Vedas* and the *Vedanta*. In these genuine original scriptures, the realizations of the great Rishis and *tattva darshis* are presented with great attention and care, with examples and discussions that are specifically meant to help us understand the subject and avoid misunderstandings and misconceptions that create doubts because of dissonance with the voice of the *param atman*.

After attaining the genuine level of self realization (*atman/ brahman*), one becomes truly able to engage in devotional service

to the Supreme, as we had already seen in verse 18.54: *brahma bhutah prasannatma na socati na kanksati, samah sarvesu bhutesu mad bhaktim labhate param*, "One who is established on the state of Brahman is satisfied in the self, he does not lament or hanker after anything, is equally disposed towards all beings and attains transcendental devotion to me."

VERSE 74

सञ्जय उवाच ।

sañjaya uvāca ।

इत्यहं वासुदेवस्य पार्थस्य च महात्मनः ।

ityahaṁ vāsudevasya pārthasya ca mahātmanah ।

संवादमिममश्रौषमद्भुतं रोमहर्षणम् ॥ १८-७४ ॥

saṁvādamimamaśrauṣamadbhutaṁ romaharṣaṇam ॥ 18-74 ॥

sanjayah uvaca: Sanjaya said; *iti*: thus; *aham*: I; *vasudevasya*: of the son of Vasudeva; *parthasya*: of the son of Pritha; *ca*: and; *mahatmanah*: the great soul; *samvadam*: the conversation; *imam*: this; *asrausam*: that I have heard; *adbhutam*: wonderful; *romaharsanam*: making my hair stand on end.

Sanjaya said:

"Thus I have heard this conversation between Vasudeva and Arjuna, the great soul. It is so wonderful that my hair are standing on end.

The text of *Bhagavad gita* began with the old Dhritarastra, regent to the throne, asking his assistant Sanjaya about the events unfolding at Kurukshetra: *dhritarastra uvaca, dharma ksetre kuru*

ksetre samaveta yuyutsavah, mamakah pandavas caiva kim akurvata sanjaya, Dhritarastra said: "O Sanjaya, what did my sons and Pandu's sons do, after they assembled in the sacred place of Dharma, the battlefield of Kurukshetra, ready to fight?" (1.1). Sanjaya had continued to describe the introductory events (1.24, 1.47, 2.1, 2.9) and also witnessed the manifestation of the Virata Rupa and the Vishnu form (11.9, 11.35, 11.50). Now that the central conversation between Krishna and Arjuna is closed, we find Sanjaya rejoicing with the wonderful revelations that he heard, and expressing his gratitude to his spiritual guide, Veda Vyasa, by whose kindness he had obtained such a blessing, as he will say in the next verse.

We find here several interesting words, the first of which is *vasudeva*, that contains two different and complementary meanings. On the ordinary level, Vasudeva (with a long first "a") is a patronymic name of Krishna, as "son of Vasudeva" (with a short first "a"). In this regard, we may remember that Krishna's father, Vasudeva, was the brother of Kunti, the mother of Arjuna and the other Pandavas, and that Pritha is another name of Kunti. Therefore by using the two names Vasudeva and Partha, Sanjaya is highlighting the strong family connection between Krishna and Arjuna, who are cousins in the first degree, as well as intimate friends.

On a deeper symbolic level, the name Vasudeva is a name of Vishnu meaning "the omnipresent", and refers to the all-pervading quality of the Brahman-Paramatma-Bhagavan consciousness. In relation to this meaning, the name Pritha or Prithivi (meaning "the vast") can be interpreted as referring to Mother Earth, and therefore Arjuna comes to represent all the *narah*, the human beings who live on this planet, as "children of Mother Earth". Based on this particular interpretation, it is very interesting to notice the attribute of *mahatmanah* (*maha atmanah*, "the great

atman") that is referred to Arjuna, indicating that Arjuna - while being a child of the Supreme Mother - is not merely a *jiva atman* but is actually *shiva tattva*, the manifestation of the *param atman* in this material universe as the *param guru* for all living beings.

The *Bhagavata Purana* (4.1.59, 10.69.16, 10.89.59) clearly states that Krishna and Arjuna are Nara and Narayana Rishis, the two great spiritual teachers to whom homage is paid before starting to study the scriptures (1.2.4, 5.19.11, 8.16.34, 10.86.35, 11.5.29-30, and the entire chapter 8 of canto 12). They appeared as the twin sons of Dharma and Murti, daughter of Daksha (1.3.9, 11.4.6) and according to *Bhagavata Purana* (12.4.41) they taught all the *Puranas* to Narada, who in turn transmitted them to Vyasa.

Indirectly, Sanjaya is warning Dhritarastra that Krishna and Arjuna are no ordinary persons, because their conversation is so extraordinary that a sincere soul will be thrilled to hear and remember it again and again. Therefore, Dhritarastra should understand that his evil son Duryodhana is grossly underestimating the Pandavas and Krishna, and he is making a big mistake in waging such an unjust war against them - he will certainly be defeated, because wherever Krishna and Arjuna are, there will always be victory.

The description of hair standing on end was also found in the first chapter (1.29) describing Arjuna's deep anguish in seeing all those who had come to the battle ready to give up their lives: *sidanti mama gatrani mukham ca parisusyati, vepathus ca sarire me roma harsas ca jayate*, "I feel my limbs losing their strength and my mouth drying up. My body is trembling and my hair is standing on end". This symptom, also called hair-rising or horripilation (or goose pimples in case the skin has less hairs), is due to a strong emotion that moves the *pranas* in the body and is accompanied by irregular breathing (temporarily suspended, slowed down, or fastened considerably).

Many positive or negative emotions can have such an effect, both on the material and spiritual level, and in fact this is known as one of the main symptoms of spiritual ecstasy. Others are loss of external consciousness (fainting), tears, tremors, faltering of the voice, contraction of the muscles, widening of eyes and mouth and nostrils, hot or cold perspiration, reddening of the skin, and so on.

VERSE 75

व्यासप्रसादाच्छ्रुतवानेतद्गुह्यमहं परम् ।

vyāsaprasādācchrutavānetadguhyamaham param ।

योगं योगेश्वरात्कृष्णात्साक्षात्कथयतः स्वयम् ॥ १८-७५ ॥

yogam yogeshvarātkṛṣṇātsākṣātkathayataḥ svayam ॥ 18-75 ॥

vyasa prasadat: by the grace of Vyasa; *srutavan:* a listener; *etat:* this; *guhyam:* secret; *aham:* I; *param:* the supreme/ transcendental; *yogam:* yoga; *yoga isvarat:* from the Lord of yoga; *kṛṣnat:* from Krishna; *saksat:* directly; *kathayatah:* speaking; *svayam:* personally.

"By the grace of Vyasa I could hear this supreme transcendental secret of yoga directly from the very words spoken by Krishna, the Lord of yoga.

Sanjaya is certainly a sincere soul, because Veda Vyasa has given him the power to hear the teachings of Krishna; we know from other passages of the *Mahabharata* that he tried several times to encourage Dhritarastra to rethink his position and correct his son. The wise Vidura had done the same thing until the day he was openly insulted by his nephew Duryodhana.

It is not said plainly, but we can easily imagine that Vyasa, who was the father of Vidura (and Pandu and Dhritarastra) and a great spiritual personality with a very clear vision of *dharma*, must have had deep and meaningful conversations with Sanjaya on the occasion of his visits to Hastinapura, and had instructed him to keep a watchful eye on the family. In such case, he had certainly given him the instruments to be able to perform this task, too.

In our commentaries to chapter 1 we elaborated on Sanjaya's position as a combination of secretary, advisor, charioteer and messenger; in the Vedic system of government a *mantri* (a word used today with the meaning of "minister") is the trusted supporter, close associate and personal assistant of a *kshatriya* of the royal order. The position of *mantri* could be filled either by a *brahmana* or a *sudra*, with specific functions based on the *guna* and *karma* of the individual. A *brahmana mantri* would be mostly an advisor, and carry messages of great importance when the receiver could also use some good advice materially or spiritually, or further explanations of the meaning of the message itself. A *sudra mantri* would deliver ordinary messages or simple orders and take care of the personal needs of the king, driving his chariot, guarding his weapons etc. In both cases, it was a position of great importance for a man the king could fully trust with his own life, therefore it required a very good intelligence and complete loyalty.

In this verse and the previous verse the teachings of Krishna to Arjuna are described as *etad guhyam* and *imam samvadam*; *etad* and *imam* are respectively the feminine and the masculine form of the same pronoun meaning "this", and some commentators have highlighted this fact to show how Krishna's teachings are perfectly balanced and inclusive.

Other commentators have seen Sanjaya's expression of gratitude towards Vyasa as an indication of the supreme importance of the officially recognized lineage in the transmission of knowledge or

guru parampara, but this is not the original Vedic system. Here Sanjaya only remembers Vyasa, and not an entire lineage of *gurus* from which Vyasa is supposed to have received his authority. We should understand that Vyasa is the original *guru* - a point well expressed by the traditional celebration of Vyasa puja in which Veda Vyasa is honored as the supreme *guru* of all *gurus*, and not as a mere representative or a link in a chain of disciplic succession.

Of course, when this tradition is distorted and exploited, the Vyasa puja concept dumps Vyasa entirely and only keeps a *vyasa asana*, "the seat/ position of Vyasa", worshipping anyone who is occupying it, legitimately or illegitimately, and calling him "the supreme universal *guru*". Even the day of the celebration is moved to accommodate the date of birth of such individual, so that the entire exercise becomes a sort of glorified birthday party, with a big cake and presents and no spiritual enlightenment at all.

As we see in this verse and in all other passages of the genuine *shastra*, each disciple is fully entitled to have a direct personal relationship with his/ her own *guru*, whether this *guru* is present in a material body or not - a relationship on which nobody else has any right to interfere. The relationship between *guru* and *sisya* is the most deeply personal relationship that can ever exist, and under no circumstance it should be transformed into a collective institutional allegiance or a tradeable property or commodity. Unfortunately, some people have come to believe that the transmission of spiritual realization can be done by proxy or inheritance by some sort of official authority solely based on the merits and qualifications of one's predecessor(s).

This delusional concept exaggerates the importance of the "spiritual lineage" to a point that was never meant in the Vedic system, and is rather typical of the abrahamic ideologies, where the priests do not need to be particularly qualified personally, but must be obeyed and worshiped absolutely because they present

themselves as the sole representatives of God through the historical founder of their particular sect. Such trickery is called "bait and switch" because it attracts followers by presenting a deified figure of the founder (messiah, prophet, *acharya* etc) as the perfect teacher that everyone should follow, inflating the personal charisma of his figure with stories, quotes and information that cannot be verified because this founder has now disappeared and cannot be contacted in the ordinary way. Then, when the gullible follower is converted (and cannot leave, under pain of persecution or even death), the priests hang away the founder's portrait and take his position, to give orders and accept worship in his name, and if anyone objects to their nonsense, he is accused of blaspheming the saintly founder and his entire family/ lineage and God himself.

For the same reason and with the same motivations, some commentators have mistranslated several passages of the *shastra*, for example verse 4.34 of *Bhagavad gita* (presented by them as the most important verse of the entire text), where they used the singular instead of the actual plural form, to give the impression that a sincere spiritual seeker must restrict his/ her choice to only one specific *guru* that is presented as the "authorized" exclusive or sole representative of Krishna. The actual facts are quite different. In that verse, Krishna speaks of "those who directly contemplate the truth" (*tattva darsinah*), and the *diksha* they offer (*upadekshanti*) is knowledge (*jnana*), not a social recognition of indictment and allegiance to a particular sect that presents itself as the unquestionable carrier of the absolute truth. Basically, the genuine reading of that verse destroys the pretense of those people who (albeit admittedly not qualified themselves as *tattva darshis*) claim to be the officially authorized guardians of a particular lineage where the founder *acharya* was a *tattva darshi*, so that anyone who wants to be admitted into the "chosen people" can only receive initiation through them.

This is the evidence of how in Kali yuga people have a strong tendency to take or retain only the worst from all groups and reject whatever good things were found anywhere. In this way, someone who is dissatisfied with an old system approaches a new system and absorbs from it those concepts, beliefs, attitudes and practices that seem attractive or compatible with his previous mentality; without understanding what was wrong in the old system and what may be wrong in the new one, a foolish ignorant person merely collects garbage and spoils everything.

The idea of a non-qualified person giving *diksha* to the new generations in the name of his own material descent from some qualified ancestor in ancient times was typically found in the deluded casteist brahmins plagued by a strong prejudice of bodily identification. Because this serious misconception had greatly weakened the effectiveness of the Hindu tradition, some great religious reformers detached themselves from the label of Hinduism, and re-packaged *Bhagavad gita* to be more appealing for westerners (especially the Anglo-Saxon Protestant Christians in USA, in those times considered the leading model of civilization and development). There were advantages in the strategy: elimination of the birth prejudice and privilege, development of unity and community spirit, emphasis on sincere work and service, direct study of the scriptures, and so on. However, because of a lack of genuine realization in the followers, the original idea became lost and the externals gained importance to the point of duplicating the churchist mentality and all its defects. Now that the Christian influence has been broken by a widespread evolution of consciousness in knowledge, and people are genuinely interested in the original Vedic system, the foolish inheritors of the great Hindu reformers remain attached to the package and have lost the actual valuable contents it was supposed to carry and preserve.

VERSE 76

ॐ राजन्संस्मृत्य संस्मृत्य संवादमिममद्भुतम् ।

१ rājansaṁsmṛtya saṁsmṛtya saṁvādamimamadbhutam ।

ॐ केशवार्जुनयोः पुण्यं हृष्यामि च मुहुर्मुहुः ॥ १८-७६ ॥

१ keśavārjunayoḥ puṇyam hr̥ṣyāmi ca muhurmuḥuḥ ।। 18-76।।

rajan: o king; *samsmṛtya samsmṛtya:* by remembering again and again; *samvadam:* the conversation; *imam:* this; *adbhutam:* wonderful; *kesava arjunayoh:* of Kesava and Arjuna; *puṇyam:* meritorious; *hrisyami:* I feel a great happiness; *ca:* and; *muhur muhuh:* again and again.

"O king, every time I think of this extraordinary and sacred conversation between Kesava and Arjuna, I feel a great happiness.

Dhritarastra is not really the legitimate king, because he was born blind and therefore he would not able to keep a careful watch over the kingdom and engage in battle for its protection. This was the reason why his younger brother Pandu was enthroned, and his sons the Pandavas were the legitimate heirs; Dhritarastra was only supposed to take care of the administration with the help of Bhishma and Vidura until the Pandavas became of age and could take up the job.

However, Sanjaya has sincere affection for the old regent and he calls him "king" to give him pleasure and a sense of self worth. It is important to notice that Sanjaya's respect and affect for the old man did not impair his proper understanding of the actual facts or give way to adulation and compassionate lies, because he is clearly telling Dhritarastra that Krishna and Arjuna are extraordinary personalities and they are going to win the battle against Dhritarastra's son, Duryodhana.

Sentimentalist people believe that if you love and respect someone, especially elderly people, you should not displease them with hard truths, because that can be seen as a sign of disloyalty. Such a delusional idea is extremely dangerous and can be compared to the foolish choice of a sentimentalist physician who reassures the patient about his good health when in fact the patient is dying. What is the benefit? The purpose of human life is to overcome ignorance and attain liberation from material conditionings and identifications.

If we fail in this task, our human life has been wasted and has no more value than the life of any animal; this awareness is naturally part of our original and inherent consciousness, therefore denying it or preventing someone from attaining it is certainly not a proof of love. If your elderly relatives need some encouragement to wake up to the reality of life and engage in spiritual progress, you should also be ready to give them some good instructions, albeit very respectfully and kindly. In Vedic tradition, the definition of *vridhdha* ("elder") does not refer to the age of the body but to the accumulation of knowledge and wisdom (*jnana vridhdha*); if someone correctly follows the Vedic system, the years will be dedicated to acquiring more knowledge and wisdom, but some people only become senile by age.

Some commentators have translated *samvada* as "message" or even "gospel" (since the Greek word *evangelos* means "good news" or "good message"), but this can confuse the minds of people. The word *samvada* is a combination of *sam* ("with", "together") and *vada* ("speech"), therefore it means "conversation", and can only be stretched to mean "news" when one person is giving information to another and they discuss about it.

The expression *muhuh muhuh* ("again and again") indicates that the teachings of Krishna should be remembered at every moment, constantly, or at least they should be studied several times.

The standard method to study Vedic scriptures requires at least 3 readings of each text, from the beginning to the end; the verses should be studied both singularly and in context, separately and together, until the clear meaning of the entire discussion becomes manifest. It is also a good practice to memorize important verses, by repeating each line 10 times and then repeating the entire verse 10 times.

The word *punya* refers to the merit gained by performing a good action, and indicates that by studying Krishna's teachings one already acquires virtuous merits, such as the good effects one obtains from performing *yajnas*, *tapah* and *dana*. Krishna has already said that he considers the sincere study of *Bhagavad gita* as fully fledged worship offered to him, and this verse confirms that it constitutes a genuine religious practice in itself. The accumulation of such *punya*, or virtuous merits, creates a positive movement in our life and rises us to a better next birth, to the heavenly planets, and to liberation from material conditioning: all this is due to the power of knowledge, that burns all ignorance and bad *karma* (4.19, 4.37).

The word *hrishyami* ("I rejoice") indicates that transcendental knowledge and realization are the real source of happiness. Intelligent people do not seek happiness in material pleasures, that depend on the contact of the senses with the material objects and therefore are temporary (5.22); such an unstable situation produces a constant movement (*rajas*) and the movement causes emotions, especially greed, fear and anxiety; only when these emotions are calmed down there can be peace, and without peace there can be no happiness (2.66, 4.40).

We should not think that spiritual life and transcendental consciousness are devoid of pleasure and happiness - in fact, the *atman/ brahman* is the actual source of pure happiness, that is free from all conditionings and therefore is perfect and eternal, as

confirmed by the *Bhagavata Purana* (*ahaituki apratihata yayatma suprasidati*, 1.2.6).

Krishna had already stated that *yoga* is a happy path (9.2) and true happiness is found in freedom from conditionings and in the supreme consciousness of *atman/ brahman* (4.38, 5.13, 5.21, 5.23, 5.24, 6.21, 6.27, 6.28, 14.27). The transcendental existence is defined as *sat* ("existence"), *cit* ("consciousness") and *ananda* ("happiness"). Here Sanjaya confirms that by listening sincerely to the conversation between Krishna and Arjuna, one can easily attain this transcendental existence of eternity and consciousness, that is the ultimate purpose of human life.

VERSE 77

तच्च संस्मृत्य संस्मृत्य रूपमत्यद्भुतं हरेः ।

tacca saṁsmṛtya saṁsmṛtya rūpamatyadbhutaṁ hareḥ ।

विस्मयो मे महान् राजन्हृष्यामि च पुनः पुनः ॥ १८-७७ ॥

vismayo me mahān rājanhr̥ṣyāmi ca punaḥ punaḥ ।। 18-77।।

tat: that; *ca*: and; *samsmritya samsmritya*: remembering again and again; *rupam*: the form; *ati adbhutam*: very wonderful; *hareh*: of Hari; *vismayah*: amazement; *me*: my; *mahan*: great; *rajan*: king; *hrisyami*: I am filled with joy; *ca*: and; *punah punah*: again and again.

"O great king, constantly thinking of the wonderful form of Hari, I am feeling waves of joy and amazement, again and again.

The previous verse said, *samsmritya samsmritya* ("remembering again and again") and *hrishyami ca muhur muhuh* ("I rejoice again

and again"), and this verse repeats, *samsmritya samsmritya* and *hrishyami ca punah punah*. Such repetition is not a literary defect, but it expresses the great importance and wonder of Krishna's teachings; the previous verse mentioned *adbhutam* ("amazing") and this verse echoes *ati adbhutam* ("very amazing"). This overwhelming emotion is the ecstasy of wonder (*vismaya*) that rises from transcendental consciousness and realization.

We mentioned the *spandakarika* as the throbbing of orgasmic happiness in the union between the *atman* and the *brahman*, between *shakti* and *shaktiman*, but here the ecstasy rises from the realization of the intrinsic and inherent unity of *atman* and *brahman*. There can be only union, because they are one and the same, although they dance with each other in the *rasa lila* that consists in tasting the feelings (*rasas*) of the supreme awareness: *raso vai sah, rasam hi evayam labdhva anandi bhavati*, "He is taste, and one who attains this taste becomes happy", (*Taittiriya Upanishad*, 2.7.1).

This eternal dance *is* the form of Hari (*rupam hareh*), because form is *prakriti* and *shakti*; it is Mother who gives the body and everything that is related to the body, both on the spiritual and on the material level (4.9, 7.25, 9.10, 13.20, 13.22, 13.27, 14.4, 18.61). It is only through the agency of the Mother, that the *atman* takes birth from the *brahman* and again unites with *brahman*; devotion is Bhakti Devi, spiritual pleasure is Hladini Shakti, and knowledge is Sri Vidya. In her aspect as Mahamaya, the Mother acts in the material world and manifests the material bodies, while in her aspect of Yogamaya she acts in the spiritual world and manifests the spiritual bodies. The transcendental *gunas* (qualities, powers, energies) of *sat* (existence of the relationship of the Supreme with his parts), *cit* (knowledge and awareness) and *ananda* (happiness and spiritual pleasure) are respectively *bhakti*, *vidya* and *hladini shakti*.

Yogamaya is the "magic of union" that manifests all the spiritual forms, activities, attributes, and so on. Without Yogamaya, Vishnu would have no form, as Yogamaya is form itself as Bhumarupa ("she whose form is all existing things") and Linga Bhairavi ("the formless form of Time"). Yogamaya manifests both the material forms and the spiritual forms, as confirmed in the *Devi mahatmya* of the *Markandeya Purana: sarva svarupe sarvese sarva sakti samanvite*, "you exist as the form of all, ruler of all, possessing all powers" (11.24) and *visnuh sarira grahanam aham isana eva ca karita aste*, "you have caused all of us to take a form - including Vishnu, Shiva and me (Brahma)" (1.84).

Another significant correspondence in these two last verses connects the form of Hari with both Kesava and Arjuna. We know that Hari is worshiped mainly as the Vishnu aspect of the composite form of Hari-Hara, also represented in the previous verse by Krishna and Arjuna, who are Narayana and Nara, Vishnu and Shiva. Together with the Adi Shakti, Yogamaya, they constitute the Triad also known as Jagannatha Purushottama, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, that protects the entire universe.

VERSE 78

यत्र योगेश्वरः कृष्णो यत्र पार्थो धनुर्धरः ।

yatra yogeśvaraḥ kṛṣṇo yatra pārtho dhanurdharaḥ ।

तत्र श्रीर्विजयो भूतिर्ध्रुवा नीतिर्मतिर्मम ॥ १८-७८ ॥

tatra śrīrvijayo bhūtirdhruvā nīratimamama ॥ 18-78 ॥

yatra: where; *yoga isvarah*: the Lord of *yoga*; *kṛṣṇah*: Krishna; *yatra*: where; *parthah*: the son of Pritha; *dhanur dharah*: who carries the bow; *tatra*: there; *srih*: prosperity; *vijayah*: victory;

bhutih: glory; *dhruva*: certain/ permanent; *nitih*: morality; *matih*: opinion; *mama*: my.

"Wherever is Krishna, the Lord of *yoga*, and Arjuna the great archer, there will be prosperity, victory, glory, determination, and morality. This is my opinion.

This closing verse in the text of *Bhagavad gita* is a blessing and a *phala sruti*, a declaration of the merits of association with Krishna and Arjuna through the reading and the remembering of their conversation.

This was already mentioned in verse 18.71: *sraddhavan anasuyas ca srinuyad api yo narah, so 'pi muktah subhal lokan prapnuyat punya karmanam*, "Any human being who will listen to this discussion with faith, free from envy and hostility, will become liberated and attain the auspicious planets of those who have performed virtuous deeds."

According to Vedic tradition, sacred texts are accompanied by some verses stating that their study and recitation will bring virtuous merits, and all material and spiritual success. One should not take this as some kind of magic spell that we can use to obtain the selfish benefits we desire, but rather as the purificatory effect of transcendental knowledge that will raise us from the lower *gunas* to *sattva* and then to *visuddha sattva*. So, the more we invest our sincere attention and intelligence in the study of *Bhagavad gita*, the more we will receive its beneficial effects.

A mechanical recitation will only bring limited results, while true engagement in the path of *yoga* described by Krishna will give the greatest benefits: *vedesu yajnesu tapahsu caiva danesu yat punya phalam pradistam, atyeti tat sarvam idam veditva yogi param sthanam upaiti cadyam*, "A *yogi* obtains greater benefits than those acquired by the prescribed virtuous acts (*punya*) such as reciting

the *Vedas*, performing *yajnas*, engaging in austerities and distributing charity. Knowing all this, a *yogi* attains the supreme and original position." (8.28).

The name *yogesvara* indicating Krishna here has also appeared in the chapter of the universal form, mentioned both by Arjuna and Sanjaya: *manyase yadi tac chakyam maya drastum iti prabho, yogesvara tato me tvam darsayatmanam avyayam*, "O Lord, supreme master of *yoga*, if you think that I am capable of seeing it, then please let me have the direct vision of your imperishable self" (11.4) and *sanjaya uvaca, evam uktva tato rajan maha yogesvaro harih, darsayam asa parthaya paramam rupam aisvaram*, Sanjaya said, "O king, saying these words Hari, the great Lord of *yoga*, showed the supreme majestic form to Arjuna" (11.9).

We can therefore understand that the deepest meaning of *yoga* is the *acintya bheda abheda tattva* of the simultaneous oneness and distinction of the Purusha and the Prakriti, of the Para and the Apra, by which the *yogis* become able to see Purushottama in everything (4.35, 5.7, 5.18, 5.19, 6.29, 6.30, 6.31, 6.32, 7.7, 7.10, 7.19, 8.22, 9.4, 9.5, 9.6, 10.3, 10.15, 10.16, 10.20, 10.39, 11.7, 11.11, 11.13, 11.15, 11.16, 11.20, 11.23, 11.40, 13.14, 13.15, 13.16, 13.17, 13.18, 13.28, 13.29, 13.31, 13.34, 15.13, 15.15, 15.19, 18.20, 18.46, 18.61, 18.62). These are the Rishis, "those who see", whose consciousness is always united in the supreme Consciousness, that is the entirety of Existence (*advaya vastu*).

It is very interesting to note that next to Krishna who is *yogesvara*, Arjuna is mentioned with the names of *partha* ("son of Pritha") and *dhanur dhara* ("the carrier of the bow"), to remind us that the entire *Bhagavad gita* was spoken with the purpose of encouraging Arjuna to engage in the *dharma yuddha* ("ethical battle") to protect the Earth. Contrarily to what many people think, Krishna's teachings are not meant to convince us to leave the world and our duties to the universal community in the name of some vague

renunciation and spirituality. This is clearly demonstrated by the fact that at the end of the conversation, Arjuna says that he is now ready to engage in the battle, and he is certainly grasping his famous bow Gandiva, that he had dropped in the beginning of the text (1.30). We are also called to do the same. In this sacred duty, we should remember the Supreme to whom we are offering our sacrifice, as well as the Shakti that engages us in this service. This is why wherever there is the *bhoktri* (the object of love) and the *bhakta* (the one who loves), there must be *bhakti* (love).

This supreme Goddess, the Adi Para Shakti, is also known as Mahalakshmi; her names are many and all auspicious. Sri means "opulence, beauty, prosperity, blessing", and in this form the Mother Goddess accompanies the names of all good people, male or female, as we can see from the Indian tradition, and especially in the title of *sri yukta* ("joined with Sri") that is referred to married men, who have integrated their life and energy with the feminine power and are therefore qualified (*adhikari*) to perform the sacred rituals. The name Vijaya ("victory") is also characteristically associated to Lakshmi, especially in the form of the Mother Goddess worshiped by kings and protectors of the land and her *prajas*.

The word *bhuti* literally means "power", especially in the sense of "expanding, prosperity, growth, development, evolution"; it is closely related to the word *vibhuti*, to which chapter 10 was entitled. We remember that when Arjuna asked Krishna for specific instructions on meditation (10.17), Krishna told him to meditate on his *vibhuti* (10.19), described in chapters 10 and 11. This instruction is also directed to us, and we should follow it. If we sincerely follow this instruction in a determined and constant way (*dhruva*), we will always be situated on the highest level of morality (*niti*) because our behavior towards all beings will be the service full of love and devotion that we render to the Supreme.

This consciousness includes all the other forms of *dharma*: *yavan artha udapane sarvatah samplutodake, tavan sarvesu vedesu brahmanasya vijanatah*, "Whatever value is found in a pond is also found, for all purposes, also in a large lake, and similarly whatever is contained in all the *Vedas* can be found in a person who has realized the knowledge of Brahman" (2.46). The fact that *niti* is united with *dhruva* indicates that such morality is not merely a matter of social etiquette or a temporary or relative position, but it is eternal.

This is the opinion of Sanjaya, and also the opinion of the great Rishis and Acharyas.