

BHAGAVAD GITA

**The Global Dharma
for the Third Millennium**

Chapter Nine

Translations and commentaries
compiled by Parama Karuna Devi

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Chapter 9

Raja guhya yoga: The Yoga of the supreme secret

The supreme secret of *Bhagavad gita* is pure devotion to the Supreme Personality of Godhead. It is not the cheap and superficial devotion of materialistic simpletons, but the pure love of those selfless souls who have come to this level through the path already traced by Krishna in the previous chapters.

Such path is so sublime, simple and clear that it can be followed successfully by everyone, including those who are less qualified materially in terms of erudition, austerity, ritual purity and so on.

In chapter 1, Krishna utilized the disillusionment expressed by Arjuna to move our attention from the ordinary material concerns to the pursuit of spiritual knowledge and realization. In chapter 2, Krishna clearly explained what is the difference between the temporary material body and the eternal transcendental spirit soul, called *atman*. In chapter 3, the *yoga* of action is explained, by which we can work on the spiritual level while still living in the material body and world - performing our duties selflessly, as an act of worship to the Supreme, or *yajna* (sacred action). This could be called the ABC of Self realization.

The next group of chapters takes us deeper into the understanding of the transcendental science. Chapter 4 teaches that adequate knowledge (*jnana*) is required in order to remain in spiritual transcendental consciousness, for our own benefit and for the benefit of society in general. Chapter 5 explains the importance of

genuine detachment (*vairagya*), also called renunciation (*sannyasa*) - something that is not limited to superficial appearances. Chapter 6 unites the application of knowledge and the development of genuine detachment, to guide us into the practice of true meditation, consisting in engaging the mind in the service of the Supreme.

The next chapters bring meditation to a new level: from theory into practice (*vijnana*) as explained in chapter 7, that is also called devotion (*bhakti*), consisting in seeing the Supreme Personality of Godhead as the source and support of all manifestations, material and spiritual. Chapter 8 continues to elaborate on the meditation on the Supreme, especially in preparation for the moment when we will be able to leave the present body, so that we can remain on the liberated platform. Chapter 9 reveals how the Supreme Consciousness manifests through his divine energies, and how we can always concentrate on this consciousness and attain full perfection.

VERSE 1

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।

śrībhagavānuvāca ।

इदं तु ते गुह्यतमं प्रवक्ष्याम्यनसूयवे ।

idaṁ tu te guhyatamaṁ pravakṣyāmyanasūyave ।

ज्ञानं विज्ञानसहितं यज्ज्ञात्वा मोक्ष्यसेऽशुभात् ॥ ९-१ ॥

jñānaṁ vijñānasahitaṁ yajjñātvā mokṣyase'śubhāt ॥ 9-1 ॥

sri-bhagavan: the wonderful Lord; *uvaca*: said; *idam*: this; *tu*: but; *te*: to you; *guhyatamam*: the most secret; *pravaksyami*: I will explain; *anasuyave*: to the non-envious; *jnanam*: knowledge; *vijnana*: wisdom; *sahita*: united; *yat*: that; *jnatva*: (by) knowing; *moksyase*: you will become free; *asubhat*: from all inauspiciousness.

The Lord said:

"I will explain to you this supreme secret, because you are not envious. By knowing (reality) with/ through this theoretical and practical knowledge, you will be free from all inauspiciousness."

All along the *Bhagavad gita*, the text repeats that Krishna is Sri Bhagavan, the wonderful Supreme Personality of Godhead, and not a mere human being.

The knowledge we find in *Gita* has an extraordinary value because it opens for us the door into the consciousness of the Personality of Godhead, which is the precisely the characteristic that defines God. Krishna is God - not because he says so, or someone else says so, but because of what he says about the perception of Reality: an unlimited dimension of consciousness that covers everything that exists. *Vasudeva sarvam iti* (7.19). This is the supreme secret: the secret of Krishna Consciousness.

The word *guhyatama* ("the most secret") is the superlative form of the adjective *guhya* ("secret"), while the comparative is *guhyataram* ("more secret").

Bhagavata Purana (2.9.31) also offers homage to the supreme secret (*jnanam parama guhyam*), that is the Transcendental Consciousness expressed respectively as *jnana* (the study of material and spiritual natures, *vijnana* (the practical application and realization of knowledge), *rahasya* (the attraction and

dedication to the divine consciousness) and *tad anga* (the supreme Consciousness himself).

Translated into the technical *bhakti* language, *jnana* corresponds to the preliminary stage of *sadhana* or *vaidhi bhakti*, *vijnana* to the *sambandha* (establishment of a personal relationship) with the manifestation of the Supreme Guru in everybody's heart as the specific form of Krishna called Madana Mohana, *rahasya* to the *abhidheya* or actual devotional service to the form of Krishna called Govinda, and *tad anga* to the *prajoyana* or the attainment of the permanent union with the form of Krishna called Gopinatha.

The concept of *guhyam* is also confirmed in other verses of *Bhagavata Purana* such as in 11.11.49: the *paramam guhyam* ("greatest secret") that can be given only to a person who is not envious - a friend (*sakha*) and a servant (*bhritya*) of God.

Interestingly, this verse in the *Bhagavata* uses the definition *su-gopyam* ("very confidential") associated to the definition *paramam guhyam*. We can comment here that the word *gupta* ("hidden") comes from the same root. Sometimes the best way of keeping a secret is to put it in full view, but covered by a layer of illusory energy, and this is exactly what Krishna does (4.6, 7.13, 7.25).

This *maya* ("illusion") is based on the perception of material duality, created by the centrifugal tension called selfishness or separatism. Another definition for this centrifugal force is "envy", therefore the only way to overcome such illusion is to renounce envy: this concept was already introduced in verse 7.14 (*mam prapadyante mayam etam taranti te*, "they can overcome the illusion of *maya* by taking shelter in me").

The same idea was expressed in 7.15 (*na mam prapadyante mayayapahrta jnana*, "they do not take shelter in me because they are deluded"), 7.25 (*maya samavritah*, "I am hidden by *maya*"), 9.3

(*asraddhadhanah*, "they do not believe") and 9.11 (*avajananti mam mudha*, "they disrespect me").

Specifically, the word *anasuya* means "not envious", "not finding faults", "not malicious", "free from ill will", "free from spite". This refers to the fact that doubting and questioning must always be expressed from a sincere approach, free from any hostile motivation, from any hidden agenda.

The prerequisite of being free from envy does not apply only to the relationship between the individual devotees and Krishna. It also applies to the relationship between the devotee and the *guru*, and to the relationship between the *guru* and Krishna.

It is not possible for a student to learn much if there is any envy towards the teacher, because he will not listen properly with an open mind and he will give too much importance to marginal defects of expression or to the inevitable limitations of body and mind. *Chandogya Upanishad* (6.14.2) says that one should see the qualified teacher as the personification of Knowledge (*acharyavan purusho veda*), and this means that one should strive sincerely to understand knowledge even when it is presented in a form that seems difficult to grasp, or appears to have some superficial defects due to the material package in which it is delivered.

This is confirmed in *Bhagavata Purana* 1.5.11: *abaddhavati api*, "appearing irregular". Of course we are speaking here of superficial irregularities due to the limitations of the physical body and mind, and not to adharmic activities or conclusions, therefore we must make sure that we are choosing a *guru* that has no envy towards Krishna. For example, the *guru* should not demand or expect to be worshiped instead of Krishna.

Some people are interested to use the *Gita* (or any of the many other forms of God) for their individual or collective (sectarian)

aggrandizement or material benefit, rather than helping people develop that same supreme consciousness that Krishna is showing to Arjuna. This is because they want to channel the manpower and the resources of a spiritual seeker towards themselves, and maintain such power over people through a politicized or organizational hierarchical system, by giving the impression that the general mass of people can merely be ordinary followers, servants or devotees, and can never qualify for the direct attainment of the supreme consciousness.

The litmus test is the fact that they demand a person to follow them, worship them, serve them, listen to them, and obey to them unquestionably, but in exchange for such total dedication of the disciple they do not accept any real responsibility for the disciple's actual progress and attainment of the supreme realization.

These people carefully draw a line, more or less visible officially, between theory and practice, starting from the very first step in God realization, explained by Krishna in the beginning of *Bhagavad gita*: all beings are pure consciousness, and their material bodies are merely circumstantial, temporary and completely irrelevant in regard to the potential of perfect consciousness. Guiding their follower to this supreme realization, however, would make him/ her independent, therefore the fake *guru* cannot allow that, so they keep their follower strictly chained to the the illusion of duality, and of bodily identification and belonging, while superficially preaching the opposite.

On the other side, Krishna in *Bhagavad gita* explains that *jnana* and *vijnana* must be perfectly consistent and work together as united, and not separated. Theoretical knowledge is not sufficient: we must come to the realization level, the practical applied wisdom that is direct perception (*aparoksha*) rather than *uparoksha* (something that is learned from others).

This does not invalidate the need for the guidance of a genuine spiritual teacher, as stated by *Svetasvatara Upanishad* (6.22-23): *vedante paramam guhyam pura-kalpe pracoditam, na aprasantaya datavyam na aputraya sisyaaya va punah, yasya deve para bhakti yatha deve tatha gurau, tasyaite kathita hy arthah prakasante maha-atmanah*, "The purpose and conclusion of Vedic knowledge is the supreme secret that was explained in a previous age. It should not be given to a person who is restless (with material interests) or to one who is not as well known as one's own child or disciple. This (secret knowledge) must be transmitted only to those who have affection both towards the Lord and towards the teacher: this is the meaning that has been explained by the great souls."

VERSE 2

राजविद्या राजगुह्यं पवित्रमिदमुत्तमम् ।

rājavidyā rājaguhyaṁ pavitramidamuttamam ।

प्रत्यक्षावगमं धर्म्यं सुसुखं कर्तुमव्ययम् ॥ ९-२ ॥

pratyakṣāvagamam dharmyam susukham kartumavyayam ।। 9-2।।

raja: king/ chief; *vidya*: knowledge; *raja*: king/ chief; *guhyam*: secret; *pavitram*: pure/ sacred; *idam*: this; *uttamam*: supreme; *pratyaksa*: by direct experience; *avagamam*: understood; *dharmyam*: in accordance to the ethical principles; *su-sukham*: very pleasurable; *kartum*: to be performed; *avyayam*: eternal/ imperishable.

"This is the king among all sciences, the king among all secrets, the highest purifier/ sanctifier. It is known through direct experience, it is dharmic, it is easy/ joyful to practice and it is imperishable/ eternal."

This is one of the most important verses of *Bhagavad gita*, extensively memorized and quoted.

The word *raja*, literally meaning "king", comes from the root *raj* (with a long *a*), meaning "to shine". In human society, the king is a person who shines with charismatic power (*tejas*) that comes from the *guna* and *karma* that define him (18.43). The word *vidya* derived from the root *vid* - the same of the word *veda* - is generally used to refer to spiritual knowledge. Transcendental knowledge as explained in *Bhagavad gita* is the most important of all sciences, because it gives us a much better perspective of all other forms of knowledge and perception, both in this world and in the next. Without it, all other forms of knowledge become irrelevant.

The expressions *guhyam* and *pratyaksha avagamam* confirm the meanings expressed in the previous verse about the need of directly experiencing this most secret knowledge of the universal Consciousness.

Devotion to Krishna, or Krishna consciousness, is not merely a question of faith, but must be directly experienced, by each and every individual. Nobody can be a *vaishnava* by proxy, by power of attorney, by inheritance, by affiliation, by birth, by tradition, by legal certification, or by vote. Those who entertain such a delusional idea are simply demonstrating their total ignorance and lack of understanding about what Vishnu is.

The definition of *pavitra* includes all those *punya-phalam pradistam* (8.28) such as the study of the *Vedas*, the performance of *yajna*, *tapas* and *dana*. These meritorious and purifying activities increase our credit towards progress and realization, and destroy our karmic debts.

Among all meritorious activities, spiritual knowledge and *bhakti yoga* have the strongest effect, because through Krishna

consciousness we lose all separate dualistic interests and we are only acting for the universal benefit, without any trace of selfishness.

This pure consciousness destroys all karmic ties, whether they are *prarabdha karma phala* (already fructified), *aprarabdha* (not fructified yet), *kuta* (in the form of sprouts or seedlings) and *bija* (in the form of seeds). This is confirmed in *Bhagavata Purana* (6.1.15): *kecit kevalaya bhaktya vasudeva parayanah agham dhunvanti kartsnyena niharam iva bhaskaram*, "Only through genuine *bhakti* to Vasudeva (Krishna) all results of bad activities are destroyed completely, like fog disappears when the sun comes."

The word *dharmyam* means that Krishna consciousness, *bhakti yoga* or *buddhi yoga*, is never contrary to the fundamental, eternal and universal ethical principles. If we see anyone behaving in some adharmic way or preaching adharmic conclusions, we can rest assured that s/he is not a true *bhakta* or in Krishna Consciousness: he or she must be a fraud. This is one of the most important tests to verify the genuineness of the conclusions and practices that we are asked to follow.

Anything very important expression in the verse is *su-sukham kartum*, meaning "it is performed very easily" and "it is performed very joyfully". Often this verse is quoted to support the idea that *bhakti yoga* is just about hearing and telling nice stories, singing songs and dancing, eating good food, enjoying flowers and scented incense, beautiful rituals, the attractiveness of the forms worshiped in the temple, and so on. *Bhakti yoga* does not require strict austerities or deprivation from sense enjoyment. It allows space for sense enjoyment, provided that such pleasures are dharmic and sattvic, and directly connected to Krishna as an act of worship. Later (9.27) Krishna will clearly say, "Whatever you do and eat, offer it to me."

Since we can offer only sattvic and dharmic items to Krishna, there is no danger in happily accepting and consuming Krishna's *prasadam*.

However, we should not get in the mode of the entertainment "*gurus*" and take up religious life simply as a nice way to gratify our senses, because the purpose of all such activities should be Krishna's pleasure, not our personal pleasure. We get to enjoy, but only as a by-product of our service - which is the actual source of satisfaction.

Everyone has experienced the fact that material sense gratification can never really satisfy the soul's hunger. People who have enough always want more, and those who have more want even more, to the point that wealthy, healthy and beautiful people commit suicide by recklessly risking their lives for a bit of adrenaline rush - bungee jumping, para gliding, free climbing, swimming with sharks, driving full speed in the wrong lane of the highway, consuming dangerous drugs, playing the Russian roulette, and pulling other similar unnecessary stunts.

It is a fact that we, as individual *jivatmas*, can find satisfaction only in service. We feel good when we have done our job or our duty properly, when we have pleased our loved ones, brought a smile on a child's face, given a present to someone who appreciates it. If we do not have customers or family members, children, friends, or a lover to serve, we may find joy in getting a dog or a cat and lovingly serve them by feeding them and taking care of all their needs, including the cleaning of their excreta.

Some people will object that it is better to be served than to serve, but that is not demonstrated by facts. What we really want is the loving reciprocation of service, something that we can only get when we serve selflessly to please a selfless and deserving person. The Supreme Personality of Godhead is the best choice.

Once we attain this level of genuine *bhakti*, we lose all attraction for everything else, therefore true *bhakti* is *avyaya*, "imperishable", "permanent".

Another meaning of this word indicates that every small step of sincere devotion remains a permanent asset and is never lost even if we somehow fall back into material life before we have attained actual realization (6.40).

VERSE 3

अश्रद्धधानाः पुरुषा धर्मस्यास्य परन्तप ।

aśraddadhānāḥ puruṣā dharmasyāśya parantapa ।

अप्राप्य मां निवर्तन्ते मृत्युसंसारवर्त्मनि ॥ ९-३ ॥

aprāpya mām nivartante mṛtyusaṁsāravartmani ।। 9-3 ।।

asraddadhanah: those who have no faith; *purusah*: the persons; *dharmasya*: in the *dharma*; *asya*: in this; *parantapa*: o tormentor of the enemies (Arjuna); *aprapya*: without obtaining; *mam*: me; *nivartante*: they return; *mṛtyu*: death; *samsara*: cycle of; *vartmani*: on the path.

"O Parantapa (Arjuna), those persons who have no faith in this *dharma* wander back to the path of *samsara* and death, without attaining me."

The *Bhagavata Purana* (11.2.42) compares the experience of *bhakti yoga* with the process of eating: at each mouthful we can feel the taste, pleasure and satisfaction of good food, and at the same time we can feel that our stomach is becoming full and our hunger is disappearing.

There is no need for anybody else to tell us that we are getting our food: it is *pratyaksa avagamam*, "experienced directly".

Similarly, by the experience of *bhakti* we feel the taste and happiness of the direct personal relationship with the Supreme Personality of Godhead, we become nourished with energy, blessings and realizations, and our sufferings and material attachments gradually disappear.

Faith has a role to play in the process, but only in the beginning, when the aspirant is still unable to have the direct experience of *buddhi yoga*. One must first approach the Vedic system in the proper way, with an open mind, and acquire *jnana* and *vijnana*, *vairagya* and *punya*.

To continue with the example of eating: before we can actually put the food in our mouth, we need to earn the money to purchase the ingredients, then we must get to the kitchen and cook the meal properly, and then we will be able to eat. This applies to all experiences: even the simplest and most empirical experience initially requires a certain amount of faith because without following the instructions of an expert and investing the required time and energy, it will be impossible to actually obtain the success we desire in that particular field.

The four types of *duskritinah* that do not approach God (7.15) are all characterized by a lack of faith: the foolish gross materialist, the cynical person who has no ethical principles, one who is confused by an egotistic use of academic knowledge, and one who has chosen to be an *asura*.

The previous verse defined *bhakti* as *dharmyam*, "what is in accordance to *dharma*", and we already mentioned how genuine *bhakti* will never motivate actions that are contrary to *dharma*. In the Vedic system, all children enter the *gurukula* - the *guru's*

family - to learn *dharma* and *vidya* in theory and practice, to become able to make the proper choices during their lives. And the greatest *dharma* and *vidya* consists in raising one's consciousness to the supreme level of Krishna Consciousness, the awareness of the transcendental, eternal and universal *tattva* that is called Brahman, Paramatma and Bhagavan. This is the "me" Krishna is talking about in this verse.

Bhagavata Purana (1.2.6) states, *sa vai pumsam paro dharmo yato bhaktir adhoksaje ahaituki apratihata yayatma suprasidati*, "The supreme *dharma* for all human beings is loving devotion (*bhakti*) to the inconceivable Lord, and this *bhakti* can completely satisfy the soul when it is selfless and constant."

It is important to note that *bhakti* must be selfless, not motivated by selfish considerations, either individual or collective. Collective or expanded selfishness means shifting one's individual selfish separatist mentality to a larger group of persons with whom one identifies on the material level, such as family, interest group, community, nation, race, or even species.

As already explained in verse 5.8, the person who possesses the true *vidya* (knowledge) is a *sama darshi* ("sees equally", without prejudice) all beings, from the qualified learned *brahmana* to the cow and elephant, and even the dog and the uncivilized human being who is accustomed to eating dogs' flesh.

Since the previous verse (9.2) clearly stated that *bhakti* is the supreme *vidya*, it stands to reason to conclude that a true devotee of Krishna will never commit any injustice against any being on the basis of material prejudice, and rather s/he will gladly and affectionately accept the cooperation of any being that is behaving in a favorable way towards *dharma*, and will see all beings as *jivatmas*, parts and parcels of the Supreme Lord.

As long as one has not realized this level of consciousness, s/he will have to go round and around the wheel of *samsara*, the cycle of births and deaths, experiencing the many different conditions of existence (*bhutani*) of all the living beings (*bhutani*), to learn how to feel the sufferings of others and to become detached from material identifications. The word compassion (*karuna*) derives from the Latin *cum-patere*, "suffering together with" and refers to the ability of a sensitive person who can feel the sufferings of other beings, without any prejudice or separatist dualism: this is also another definition for Krishna Consciousness.

Although Krishna does not identify personally with the specific beings and is not attached to their sufferings, he perfectly understands them because he lives in the hearts of all living beings.

Sometimes sensitive persons observe the sufferings of apparently innocent beings and, confused by the abrahamic cultural influence (denying the concept of reincarnation and *karma*), blame the all-powerful God for such injustices. Or, misunderstanding the concept of reincarnation and *karma*, and not knowing the Vedic principles of governance and the duties for the various categories of human beings, they feel that blaming the victims for their sufferings is nothing but a cruel joke and a justification of the unethical behaviors of those who cause damage to others.

The truth of the facts is that there is no justification whatsoever for aggression and unethical actions, and each and every *arya*, or civilized person belonging to the Vedic society, has the duty to step in and make the aggression stop, with whatever means the situation requires. *Kshatriyas* are particularly suited to this job, and therefore they are expected to fulfill this responsibility by carefully, dispassionately and wisely, applying the exact amount of force and strategy to protect the victims - without considering whether their sufferings are due to their previous *karma* or not. Giving spiritual instructions to the victims about their karmic

problems is certainly not the job of the *kshatriyas*; gentle *brahmanas* can step in later, when the aggression has been averted or stopped, and compassionately help the victims overcome the shock and come to terms with the facts in a positive and progressive way.

VERSE 4

मया ततमिदं सर्वं जगदव्यक्तमूर्तिना ।

mayā tatamidam sarvaṁ jagadavyaktamūrtinā ।

मत्स्थानि सर्वभूतानि न चाहं तेष्ववस्थितः ॥ ९-४ ॥

matsthāni sarvabhūtāni na cāhaṁ teṣvavasthitaḥ ॥ 9-4 ॥

maya: by me; *tatam*: pervaded; *idam*: this; *sarvam*: all; *jagat*: world/ universe/ people/ beings; *avyakta*: non-manifested; *murtina*: by the form; *mat-sthani*: situated in me; *sarva-bhutani*: in all beings/ in all existences; *na*: not; *ca*: and; *aham*: I; *tesu*: in them; *avasthitah*: situated/ contained.

"All this universe is pervaded by me in my non-manifested form. All beings exist in me, but I am not in them."

In this verse Krishna is briefly explaining what Krishna Consciousness is.

The sum total of the consciousness of all the beings and life conditions and existences in the universe is only a part of Krishna's Consciousness, as it corresponds with the Brahman and Paramatma consciousness. Krishna is also the Consciousness of Bhagavan, that is the origin and foundation of them all (*brahmano hi pratisthaham*, 14.27, *aham sarvasya prabhavah*, 10.8, *sarvasya hrdisannivistho* 15.5).

The expression *avasthitah* ("not contained", "not limited") specifically says that Krishna Consciousness is greater than the consciousness of all beings together. All beings exist in this supreme Consciousness, but the supreme Consciousness is not limited to them.

Another extremely interesting expression in this verse is *avyakta murti*, "non-manifested form". This may look like a contradiction in terms, because a form is usually considered as "manifested"... if something is not manifested, how can it have a form? The answer is that the Sanskrit words *vyakta* and *avyakta*, or "manifested" and "non-manifested" have a more complex significance that applies respectively to the ordinary material manifestation and to the eternal spiritual existence, that both have forms.

The difference is that the spiritual form is made of consciousness, and therefore it is perfectly directed by intelligence and deliberation. This means it is eternal (non subject to change), full of knowledge and bliss; it is the ideal form, a sort of conceptual blue print of reality, that becomes visible when the observer is properly tuned in with the appropriate vibrational frequency of awareness. As Krishna says in *Gita*, when he has "divine eyes" (*divya caksu*, 11.8).

On the other hand the *vyakta* form is a temporary and circumscribed form expressed through the universal laws of material nature, from the smallest living being to the immense *Virata rupa* that includes the entire material universe itself.

In this verse, Krishna says that the *vyakta* form of the *Virata rupa* is pervaded by the *avyakta* form of the Supreme Consciousness - just like the individual consciousness of the *jivatman* pervades the entire body. This is the important correspondence between microcosm and macrocosm: "as above, so below". For this reason, the teachings of *Bhagavad gita* start with the knowledge of the

nature of the *atman* compared to the material body that constitutes its vehicle and house.

Also the *Mahabharata*, in the *Vishnu sahasra nama* (*Mahabharata, dana dharma parva*, 189) lists the name *amurtiman*, "who has no form", in the same passage together with the apparently contradictory names *visvamurti* ("whose form is the universe"), *mahamurti* ("the great/ greatest form"), *diptamurti* ("radiant form"), *anekamurti* ("innumerable forms"), *satamurti* ("hundreds of forms"), as well as *avyakta*.

This rather difficult concept, of the "form of the formless", has created a famous controversy between two different perspectives of the same Transcendental Reality in regard to the existence of the material manifestation - whether it is a transformation of God (*parinama*) or a delusional perception (*vivarta*).

Parinama vadis and *vivarta vadis* have been debating for a rather long time, just like the various proponents of the *siddhantas* ("conclusions") called *advaita* ("non-dualism" or "monism") and *dvaita* ("dualism"), generally described as "impersonalists" and "personalists" respectively. Here is the origin of the long controversy between the supporters of the *advaita* ("non-dual") philosophy and the *dvaita* ("dual") philosophy, Actually the contradiction between the two perspectives is simply due to a lack of understanding of the subject. If we sincerely want to understand the *tattva*, we must follow the path of the *mahajanas* (*mahajano yena gatah sah panthah, Mahabharata, vana parva* 313.117), the great *acharyas*, who have elaborated on this problem to help us overcome the limitations of the dualistic material logic.

Adi Shankara has explained the nature of Brahman simply as *advaita*, "non dual", which is amply confirmed also in *Bhagavad gita* and *Upanishads*. The great *acharyas* who appeared later have continued by presenting the same Knowledge in perspectives that

are slightly different from each other, so that we can have a vision that is as multi-dimensional as possible.

Ramanuja, who appeared some hundreds of years after Adi Shankara, proposed the vision called *visista advaita*, "non-duality characterized by variety". More than one century later, Madhva presented his perspective called *visista dvaita*, "duality with variety", that constitutes an extreme vision, at the opposite side of the *kevala advaita* ("pure and simple non-duality"). The perspectives called *dvaita advaita* or "simultaneous duality and non-duality" and *suddha dvaita* or "spiritual duality" have been presented respectively by Nimbarka and Visnusvami, the other two *acharyas* that are most famous for their teachings on *Vedanta*.

Still more recently we find Chaitanya's perspective, defined as *acintya bhedabheda*, or "inconceivable simultaneous diversity and non-diversity (or duality and non-duality)" that rightly puts the issue of Brahman realization on a level that goes beyond mere intellectualism. In fact, Chaitanya preached the primary importance of *bhakti*, devotion towards the Supreme Brahman in its forms of Paramatma and Bhagavan, that enables us to cross the abyss of intellectual elaborations beyond which we can find the pure perception of Reality.

It is important to understand that according to the perspective of the genuine *acharyas*, the differences of opinions expressed in their commentaries are meant to offer a variety of perspectives (*darshana*) on the same reality (*tattva*), that are not in competition between themselves, but rather should help us to widen our field of understanding by reconciling apparent differences, exactly like the statements of the various genuine scriptures. Of course this applies only to the teachings of the realized souls, not to the mental speculations of those "empirical" philosophers that are simply grappling for answers or want to establish their beliefs in a dogmatic form, as an "absolute truth", considered as such only

because it destroys other truths by stamping them as falseness *a priori* because they are presented by the "opponents".

VERSE 5

न च मत्स्थानि भूतानि पश्य मे योगमैश्वरम् ।

na ca matsthāni bhūtāni paśya me yogamaiśvaram ।

भूतभृन्न च भूतस्थो ममात्मा भूतभावनः ॥ ९-५ ॥

bhūtabhṛnna ca bhūtastho mamātmā bhūtabhāvanaḥ ॥ 9-5 ॥

na: not; *mat-sthani*: situated in me; *bhutani*: living beings/ states of being; *pasya*: look; *me*: my; *yogam*: of *yoga*; *aisvaram*: control/ glory/ power/ opulence; *bhuta-bhrit*: the support/ sustenance of all beings; *na*: not; *ca*: and; *bhuta-sthah*: in the being/ (material) existence; *mama*: my; *atma*: the Atman/ the Self; *bhuta-bhavanah*: the origin of (all) being/ existence.

"(At the same time) the beings are not in me. See my divine yoga! I maintain/ support/ create/ contain all existences/ beings, but I am not contained in the various beings, (because/ although) I am myself the source/ creation of all beings."

In the previous verse Krishna said, "all beings are in me, but I am not limited to them". Now he is saying, "I am distinct from these beings" and "these beings are not necessarily conscious of me".

By applying the two meanings of *bhuta* as "living beings" and "conditions of being", we can expand the elaborations on the significance of this verse without any contradictions.

The *avyakta murti* of Krishna is not directly engaged or concerned in this material universe, as everything is done automatically

through the laws of nature. Contrarily to what some people think, God is not some old dude living in the clouds that spends all his time watching what people are doing, to reward those who are faithful to him and punish those who are not. What is he doing then? He lives in the spiritual dimension, where the consciousness is focused on loving exchanges, and is engaged in attracting all souls. Therefore the name Krishna is sometimes associated with the root *karsh*, that means "attracting", and translated as "the all-attractive". From the same root comes the name Sankarshana, that is also applied to the principle of gravitation as the most important powers in the universe - immediately after the Consciousness.

It is also interesting to note that the color black, described in connection with Krishna's complexion, is the sum total of all colors, the most concentrated form of the power in the universe, as in the black holes - the most mysterious objects contemplated by scientists.

The expression *bhuta-asthah* means "staying within the beings", while *bhuta bhrit* means "supporting the beings", and *bhuta-bhavana* "causing the existence of the beings". *Bhagavata Purana* (1.11.38) confirms, *etad isanam isasya prakriti-stho api tad gunaih, na yujyate sada atma-sthah yatha buddhih tad-asraya*, "Although the Lord is situated in his nature, he is never affected by her qualities, and similarly also the devotees who take shelter of that intelligence remain unaffected by matter."

The expression *yogam aisvaram* is very interesting. It will be used again in 11.8 to refer to the vision of the universal form, or the form of the universal consciousness, when Krishna tells Arjuna that he is going to show him. One could translate it as "mystic opulence", but this does not help us to understand why Krishna speaks about *yoga* as the connection between him and the devotee, also considering that almost as often the same version translates *yoga* as "devotional service".

In previous chapters and verses, Krishna has always used the word *yoga* with reference to the *sadhana* and meditation that the individual *jivatman* performs with the purpose of attaining a higher level of consciousness, or more specifically to "unite" with the universal Consciousness. In fact the word *yoga* is mentioned so many times in *Bhagavad gita* that generally *Gita* is considered the most important text on *yoga*, even more important than the famous *Yoga sutras* of Patanjali. The various approaches or limbs (*angas*) of this *yoga* practice have been described as *buddhi*, *karma*, *sankhya* etc. Here we see that Krishna is applying the same definition to himself, and later (11.4, 11.9, 18.74) Krishna will be called Yogesvara, "the Lord of Yoga". This greatly expands our understanding of the concept of *yoga*, and takes us one step closer to the actual Krishna Consciousness.

The expression *pasya me*, "look at me", "see me", is particularly important in this verse as Krishna is explaining the *darsana* or *darshana*, the "vision of Reality" of which so many perspectives exist. This is why the name of Darshana is used to refer to the six most important philosophical schools in the Vedic tradition, i.e. *Nyaya* (the science of logic), *Yoga* (control of body and mind), *Sankhya* (analytical philosophy), *Vaisesika* (cosmology and physics), *Purva mimamsa* (commentaries to the *Kalpa sutra*), and *Uttara mimamsa* (also known as *Vedanta sutra*).

VERSE 6

यथाकाशस्थितो नित्यं वायुः सर्वत्रगो महान् ।

yathākāśasthito nityam vāyuh sarvatrago mahān ।

तथा सर्वाणि भूतानि मत्स्थानीत्युपधारय ॥ ९-६ ॥

tathā sarvāṇi bhūtāni matsthānītyupadhāraya ॥ 9-6 ॥

yatha: just like; *akasa*: in space/ ether; *sthitah*: situated; *nityam*: constantly; *vayuh*: the air; *sarvatra-gah*: that goes everywhere; *mahan*: great; *tatha*: similarly; *sarvani*: all; *bhutani*: beings/ existences; *mat-sthani*: situated in me; *iti*: thus; *upadharaya*: (you should) try to understand.

"Understand that just like air is always (present) in space although it blows everywhere as the great (winds), similarly all the beings are situated in me."

The example presented by Krishna in this verse is particularly significant. We should really make an effort to try to deeply understand it, as Krishna is explicitly requesting.

The material element called *akasa* or *akasha* is often translated as "ether", a definition that most people are unable to understand, because it is not in their normal experience.

Most people just do not bother to understand: they content themselves with mechanically repeating or "chanting" the Vedic texts, not unlike ignorant parrots, with the intention of acquiring some personal benefit called religious merits, or a good position in society, name and fame, respect from the neighbors, or even monetary profit. However, this is not what Krishna asks.

Krishna very clearly says, *upadharaya*, "make a sincere effort to understand these things", because simple mechanical recitation is not sufficient.

Mere mechanical recitation it is like carrying a load of books on one's back: it is certainly a meritorious activity because in this way the books are preserved from oblivion and from the attacks of the *asuras* - who always try to destroy the visible manifestations of genuine spiritual knowledge - but it does not do much good to one's personal realization and cultivation of knowledge.

If your children merely carried their textbooks up and down to school without ever reading them, you would certainly understand why they are failing their exams and you would want to teach them the proper method to study.

A genuine *guru* must do the same with his/ her disciples: if s/he is not doing that, you should start to worry and seek for alternative options.

The word "etheric" or "sub-etheric" belongs to the advanced study of physics, as well as to the ancient vision of the world popular in various cultures. The average ordinary people, on the other hand, will more likely understand "ether" as the volatile flammable liquid formerly used as anesthetic and presently used as solvent and reagent.

In several ancient cultures, the definition of "ether" was explained as the element filling all the space in the universe, beyond the atmosphere of the earthly planet; this idea was also shared later by Gnostics and Rosicrucians, Alchemists, and other secret groups that continued to cultivate knowledge in medieval times in spite of the cruel and relentless persecutions they were subjected to.

In more recent times, Theosophists Helena Blavatsky, Annie Besant and Charles Webster Leadbeater described it as the fourth of the planes of existence in their cosmology (beyond solid, liquid and gaseous). This view was presented also by Alice Bailey, Rudolf Steiner and Walter John Kilner, and became an object of study in Victorian physics as *Luminiferous aether*, the medium that supports the movement of light and electromagnetic radiations.

In the 20th century the concept was considered controversial and its existence "disproved", also because in the late 1880s the famous Nikola Tesla had used it to formulate the *Unidirectional Pulses* fractioning electricity into etheric energy as spatially distributed

voltage, which is the primary operating principle of his Magnifying Transmitter, a truly revolutionary device that seems to be producing electricity from space itself or better from ether, that he described as a fluid dynamic structure similar to crystal but infinitely subtler.

With this understanding of the expression *akasa stha* in this verse, referred to *vayuh mahan* that is described as *sarvatra-go*, we can better elaborate on the mystic connection between Krishna and the various beings in the universe.

The expression *vayu mahan* is also very interesting. The adjective *mahan*, related for example to the expression *mahat tattva*, refers to the sum total of the manifestations of the air element, not simply to ordinary gases, otherwise it would not be called *sarvatra go* ("that goes everywhere").

In Vedic literature, the word *vayu* is often applied to the *prana*, that "life air" that circulates within the body at a subtler level than the ordinary air we breathe. *Prana* runs within the subtle energy channels called *nadis* (sometimes mistranslated as "nerves") and in the *chakras* (that can be detected only by instruments similar to the Kirlian camera, photographing the aura of living organisms), where obviously there is no gas - oxygen or others.

So both these realities in the universe - *akasa* and *vayu* - are extremely subtle and all-pervading, although sometimes they cannot be perceived by our ordinary senses. This makes them excellent comparison terms for Bhagavan and Atman respectively.

Also, both elements - *akasa* and *vayu* - never really touch the various objects and qualities in this universe, although they are really deeply connected to each other, and *vayu* cannot exist without *akasa*. *Vayu* can temporarily associate with them and therefore acquire temporary qualities such as smell, color (due to

smoke or dust) etc, but *akasa* is never touched by them and never even comes in contact with them (*asanga*) even though it pervades everything.

Another interesting point is that in the process of the manifestation of the *mahat tattva*, *akasa* generates *vayu*, which in turn generates the next element, and so on. Since the mode of this generation is sound (*sabda*), we can understand how this example offered by Krishna can apply to the connection of the *jivatmas* with *paramatma* and *brahman* through the original sound, the *pranava omkara*, the syllable Om.

We have already mentioned how the *Upanishads* and other important Vedic texts refer to the *pranava omkara* as the Atman itself, the origin of the *jivatman* and its final destination.

VERSE 7

सर्वभूतानि कौन्तेय प्रकृतिं यान्ति मामिकाम् ।

sarvabhūtāni kaunteya prakṛtiṁ yānti māmikām ।

कल्पक्षये पुनस्तानि कल्पादौ विसृजाम्यहम् ॥ ९-७ ॥

kalpakṣaye punastāni kalpādaḥ visṛjāmyaham ॥ 9-7 ॥

sarva-bhutani: all the beings/ existences; *kaunteya*: o son of Kunti (Arjuna); *prakritim*: into nature; *yanti*: they go; *mamikam*: my; *kalpa-ksaye*: at the end of the *kalpa*; *punah*: again; *tani*: them (those same); *kalpa*: of the *kalpa*; *adau*: at the beginning; *visrijami*: I manifest; *aham*: I.

"O son of Kunti (Arjuna), all beings enter my *prakriti* at the end of the *kalpa*, and again at the beginning of the (next) *kalpa* I manifest them."

This thread of discussion already started in 8.16, answering Arjuna's question on how to remember God at the time of death, and Krishna said that death and rebirth are a normal occurrence in the material world - even at the level of Brahma. Then verse 8.17 started to illustrate the duration of the *kalpa*, the day of Brahma, that lasts 1000 cycles of *yugas* each. Verses 8.18 and 8.19 were very similar to 9.7: "At the beginning of each day what was *avyakta* (non-manifested) becomes *vyakta* (manifested) and at the beginning of the night (everything) returns into non-manifestation; all classes of beings continue to appear and disappear automatically with the cycle of day and night."

There Krishna explained how the *yogi* can choose the *sukla* path or the *krishna* path, respectively called "the path of non-return" and "the path of return" to the earthly planet. In this verse the discussion returns to the cycle of manifestation and non-manifestation of all beings, that always remain in God at all times like air remains in space. So what is actually changing with the manifestation and non-manifestation of beings?

The answer to this question is "form". Any material or spiritual form is manifested by *prakriti*, nature, the feminine principle within God that is called the Mother Goddess.

Vishnu or Krishna contains both sides - the feminine and the masculine - therefore Vedic scriptures and Tradition always highlight the importance of worshiping God together with his Shakti. When the Mother Goddess is not personally visible as Lakshmi, Bhu or Nila, Radha, Sita, etc, it is the name Sri or the very form (*rupa*) of the Deity that represent the Mother Goddess and makes God perceivable.

Prakriti is not necessarily illusory, and illusion is not necessarily contrary to the benefit of the *jivatman*, or conducive to materialistic consciousness.

The delusion of material identification and attachments is caused by *mahamaya*, "the great illusion", that encompasses even Brahma himself, the creator of this universe (*muhyanti surayah, Bhagavata Purana*, 1.1.1). On the other hand, the particular type of illusion that enables us to have a direct personal relationship with Bhagavan - the sum total of Existence - is called *yogamaya*, "the illusion for union". This is called *bahiranga shakti*, or "external power", and are identified with Mother Durga, who can either bless the living being with pure devotion (*prema bhakti*) or shackle him/her with material delusion (*ahankara* and *mamatva*). Durga also manifests in many other forms and names by which the one Mother Goddess is known and worshiped.

A secondary manifestation of Durga is the *pradhana* or *mahat tattva*, from which all the material elements (*bhuta*) are created, specifically the *pancha maha-bhuta* (ether, air, fire, water and earth) and the subtle *bhutas* (material identification, intelligence and mind) that compose the material bodies. This material nature is called *apara prakriti*, or "non-supreme nature".

Another manifestation of *prakriti* is the *antaranga shakti*, or "internal power", that manifests the spiritual forms according to the particular *rasa* or *lila* expressed and felt by Bhagavan. In this modality we find Radha, who expresses the most intimate form of Krishna's feelings and activities in *madhurya rasa*, and Lakshmi, who expresses the glorious opulence of Vishnu's feelings and activities in *aisvarya rasa*.

Radha and Lakshmi manifest all the forms and core personalities (called *akshara* in 15.16) respectively in the dimensions called Goloka and Vaikuntha by the *vaishnava bhakti* literature.

The ordinary *jiva-atmans*, or *anu-atmans*, are called *tathasta shakti*, or "marginal power". They are part of the *brahmajyoti* ("the spiritual light") of Bhagavan or Paramatman, and get the

opportunity to develop a fully functional spiritual body (*siddha deha* or *siddha svarupa*) through the evolution of their consciousness. Ultimately, these *jiva atmans* become *nitya siddha* or *akshara* "in the following of" one of the original core personalities in Goloka or Vaikuntha and function as their expansions, friends, servants or associates. They will never return to the material level, and the original core personalities of the spiritual world will never fall to a material level, either. The idea that someone has fallen from Goloka is therefore unfounded.

The controversy over the origin of the *jiva atmans* or *anu atmans* can be easily clarified by understanding that the Paramatman, from whose *jyoti* the *anu atmans* are created, is also a form of Vishnu, although he appears in the material world as Purusha avatara or Kshirodakasayi Vishnu. This specific form of Vishnu resides in Dhruvaloka, the polar star, that is also called Prapancika Vaikuntha, "almost Vaikuntha", or maybe we could say "the Consulate of Vaikuntha". This is the place where Brahma comes to pray Vishnu for help when the management of the universe becomes difficult; this is where the four Kumaras arrived and had a clash with the two doorkeepers Jaya and Vijaya; this is where Durvasa Muni, Bhrgu Muni and all the other Rishis and Devas come when they want to meet Vishnu.

From this place one can definitely return to the material world, either with a confused consciousness or with the sacred, pure and deliberate act of descending among conditioned souls for a mission of deliverance. Into this form of Vishnu all the beings are absorbed at the end of the *kalpa*, the day of Brahma. At the end of the life of Brahma, however, the entire universe is withdrawn back into the body of Karanodakasayi Vishnu (including Kshirodakasayi Vishnu and Garbhodakasayi Vishnu) for the time of one of his inhalations.

This complete dissolution is mentioned in *Bhagavata purana* 12.4.5-6 (*dvi parardhe tvatikrante brahmanah paramesthinah tada*

prakritayah sapta kalpante pralayaya vai, esa prakritiko rajan pralayo yatra liyate anda-kosas tu sanghato vighata upasadite sanghata), where it is said that all the elements are fused into the universal egg (*anda kosa*) which is then reabsorbed by Vishnu.

VERSE 8

प्रकृतिं स्वामवष्टभ्य विसृजामि पुनः पुनः ।

prakṛtiṁ svāmaṣṭabhya visṛjāmi punaḥ punaḥ ।

भूतग्राममिमं कृत्स्नमवशं प्रकृतेर्वशात् ॥ ९-८ ॥

bhūtagrāmamimaṁ kṛtsnamavaśaṁ prakṛtervaśāt ॥ 9-8 ॥

prakritim: nature; *svam*: own; *avastabhya*: by entering; *visrijami*: I manifest/ I create; *punah punah*: again and again; *bhuta-gramam*: the categories of beings/ the aggregate of beings; *imam*: these; *kritsnam*: completely; *avasam*: without control/ controlled automatically; *prakriteh*: by nature; *vasat*: under the control.

"Entering my own *prakriti*, I repeatedly manifest (create), the entire sum total of all beings, that is automatically under the power of *prakriti*."

The word *visrijami* ("I manifest") is interesting because it applies to the manifestation of the beings from the Lord, while in 4.7 a similar (but not identical) word, *srijami*, applied to the manifestation of the *avatara* or the visible form of God within this world. The prefix *vi* used in the construction of Sanskrit words is a shortened form of *visesa* ("differentiation") or *vigata* ("devoid of") and can indicate specificity, difference, a practical function, application (as in *vijnana*), separation, absence, also in a negative sense (as in the word *vikarma*, "bad actions"). In this case, *vi* brings the meaning of "separate manifestation" as applied to the

material phenomena, as opposed to the spiritual manifestation of the *avatars* that are not separate or different from the original Personality of Godhead.

The word *avasthabhya* means "controlling, leaning, resting, initiating, igniting, entering", and it indicates the act of will, the resolution to perform an action, also called *kratu* or *sankalpa*. This *kratu* (will power) is one of the fundamental factors of success in action, together with *daksha* (skill), *manisha* (inspiration) and *medha* (wisdom). *Chandogya Upanishad* (6.2.3) expresses this act of will (*sa kratum kurvita*) with the famous aphorism *eko bahu syam*, "I will become many".

In this verse Krishna continues to explain the creation of the various beings or conditions of being within the material universe, that happens simultaneously, for all species of life, although during the long period of manifestation of the universe some species may appear or disappear (evolve or become extinct) due to temporary circumstances.

The expression *prakrite vasat* means, "under the control of *prakriti*", indicating that nature is the active principle of the manifestation, development and dissolution of the beings - both the living entities and the conditions of being - without the direct participation of the *purusha*. In other words, "Mother is the Boss."

In the previous commentaries we have already given some explanation about the meaning of *prakriti*, and this verse gives us the opportunity to elaborate more.

The fundamental concept in Vedic culture, *dharma*, expresses the ideal of harmony and selfless cooperation for the support, prosperity and progress of the collectivity. All the members of society are expected to work together seamlessly, like the various limbs of one single body, described in the famous *Purusha sukta*

hymn (3.14-15, *Svetasvatara Upanishad*). It is not easy for western conventional academia to understand this concept, because for many centuries western society has been poisoned by the asuric attitude of inequality and exploitation, that created the hostility between social classes and even between genders. The natural condition of human life is ideally shaped by the individual tendencies, qualities and skills (4.13) for the division of work.

In all societies or human groups there are individuals who have a greater inclination to acquire knowledge and a greater capacity to understand things: these are called intellectuals and are compared to the head of the social body. Similarly, those who are inclined to defend others, and have the strength to do so, are called warriors and are compared to the arms. Those who are unable to perform these functions can at least provide the material necessities of life, take care of good animals and cultivate useful plants, and supply functional tools and objects: these are called merchants or entrepreneurs, and are compared to the belly of the social body. Those who are only able to follow orders and depend on others for their sustenance are called laborers, and are compared to the legs and feet, that carry the others around and carry out the directions of their employers.

Similarly, by natural arrangement women are structured to give birth and nurture children, educate them and train them in the basic social skills and ethical values, and therefore they tend to take care of the home as the environment where the children can live safely and happily.

Ordinarily, as "queen of the house", the woman watches over the cooking of the food, the ministrations of water, the necessities of all the family members, and the service of the family Deities - all activities that can be easily woven into a good home caring schedule. According to this arrangement and task division, the man of the family has the duty to provide whatever is available outside

the house, such as food provisions and other things, according to his abilities.

Like in the natural society, in Vedic society there is no competition for power and no exploitation of one member by another, and no strict limitations in regard to the roles: young women who have no children can choose to engage in activities that are not connected with children and home-making, and even mothers can leave their children in the care of responsible persons and join their husbands in their activities if they so desire. There is ample evidence that such choices are (or were) perfectly respected and even admired, and not only in times of emergency.

However, because there is no competition or hostility between the genders (or the classes), individuals could engage in the activities they were naturally able and happy to perform, for the benefit of the collectivity and not to demonstrate something to themselves or to others, or to gain a modicum of dignity or respect or freedom, or some power over their own lives. On the other hand, such problems are very evident in societies shaped and governed according to the sociology models created by mainstream academic authorities.

The original Vedic society is not patriarchal or matriarchal, simply because there is no opposition between men and women: just like in the Godhead, the masculine side and the feminine side are one harmonious unit, and their diversity is functional simply for the increase of the pleasure of both, as in a dance or in intercourse. In the same way, *brahmanas* and *kshatriyas* do not try to rule one over the other, but simply share the responsibilities towards society and work according to their abilities, in a selfless way (2.47) as Krishna explains very clearly in *Bhagavad gita*.

When everyone works with the same purpose and motivation, and tasks are distributed according to functionality and actual abilities,

the members of the group are not concerned about power games, petty interests and selfishness, personal gains and losses, position, hierarchy, bureaucracy, etiquette, definitions of rights and duties, prejudice, conventional expectations, conformism, imposed conformity to roles or the other artificial devices that create problems in contemporary societies. They just work together, as a family, as a team, for a common purpose.

As microcosmic manifestation of the macrocosm, or "part and parcel of God", each human being has a feminine side and a masculine side, incarnated in the two hemispheres of the brain that control the two halves of the body. The prevalence of one of the two energies in the subtle body of the individual at the time of birth determines which gender the body will be - boy or girl. Sometimes the two energies are more balanced or indecisive, and thus the individual develops with a detached mental disposition, or a "trans-sexual" tendency. In any case, the purpose of *yoga* consists in learning how to balance these two hemispheres perfectly and uniting the two energies in the Sacred Marriage within one's own body, with the purpose to overcome duality and the feeling of need and dissatisfaction that naturally comes with it.

This *ha-tha yoga* ("the union of the masculine and feminine") is the practice of balance in one's identification, and is connected to the realization of Brahman; while materialistically imbalanced people see the world of duality as a fighting arena, where "one side" must fight viciously to prevail and dominate "the other side", because they project their imbalances on the external reality. Thus the problem expands into society and negatively impacts the minds of other people, reinforcing the vicious circle and creating male chauvinism and extreme feminism - just like it creates extreme totalitarian political ideologies that equally cause sufferings and damage to human beings, even if they appear to have opposite theories on how to achieve perfection in society.

VERSE 9

न च मां तानि कर्माणि निबध्नन्ति धनञ्जय ।

na ca mām tāni karmāṇi nibadhnanti dhanañjaya ।

उदासीनवदासीनमसक्तं तेषु कर्मसु ॥ ९-९ ॥

udāsīnavadāsīnamasaktam teṣu karmasu ॥ 9-9 ॥

na: not/ never; *ca*: and; *mam*: me; *tani*: them/ these; *karmani*: activities; *nibadhnanti*: bind; *dhanañjaya*: o conqueror of wealth (Arjuna); *udasina-vat*: in a neutral position; *asinam*: situated; *asaktam*: detached; *tesu*: in those; *karmasu*: activities.

"O Dhananjaya, I am not bound by such actions, as I am situated neutrally, without any attraction for such activities."

As we were explaining in the previous commentary, Bhagavan is not directly involved in the process of creation, maintenance and dissolution of the universe, in the manifestation of the beings, and in their control and education, because that is the work of the Prakriti: Mother is the Boss.

As exemplified by the symbolic representation of Mother Kali that stands on Shiva's body, Prakriti is the principle of action, while Purusha is the principle of consciousness or feeling. This is confirmed in 13.21 (*karya-karana-kartritve hetuh prakritir ucyate, purushah sukha-dukhhanam bhoktritve hetur ucyate*) and applies both to the individual *purusha* and to the supreme *purusha*. Even more clearly, 3.27 says that only a *vimudha* believes he is performing the action, while in fact it is the *prakriti* that does everything.

Again, 13.32 repeats that the Paramatman, the Supreme Purusha, does not take part in any activity and simply remains as a witness, an advisor and a friendly helper to the individual soul directing

him/ her on the path to realization (*anaditvan nirgunatvat paramatmayam avyayah, sarira-stho 'pi kaunteya na karoti na lipyate*). In 4.14 Krishna clearly said so: *na mam karmani limpanti na me karma-phale spriha, iti mam yo 'bhijanati karmabhir na sa badhyate*.

The expression *udasina vat*, "sitting like a neutral (observer)" is very clear in this regard. *Mundaka Upanishad* (3.1.1) gives the example of the two birds, inseparable friends, that are sitting on the same tree. One is busy eating the fruits and the other is just sitting and watching, but is always ready to illuminate his friend and offer him the perfect satisfaction of all desires on the level of the consciousness. Because real happiness can be attained only on the level of the consciousness, not through the contact of the senses with the material sense objects. The Lord is called *aptakama*, "one whose desires are all fulfilled" from the very beginning, and the path to happiness for the individual *atman* leads inwards, into the *atman* itself (2.41, 2.45, 2.55, 3.17, 3.43, 4.41, 5.26, 6.5, 6.10, 6.15, 6.18, 6.19, 6.20, 6.25, 6.26, 6.28, 6.29, 6.32, 7.18, 12.11, 13.25, 13.29, 14.25, 15.11).

The example of the etheric space supporting air offered in 9.6 will be repeated in 13.33 to reiterate that neither the individual *purusha* nor the supreme *purusha* are really touched by the material influences and activities. The same point was also stated in 5.14 where it was said that all actions are performed by nature only. Consequently, the Lord is not concerned by the actions or the merits of the individual souls, but with their consciousness. (5.15, 9.29) and specifically with their efforts to unite with the universal Consciousness.

Of course, the fact that Bhagavan is not directly involved or attached to the manifestation of the beings does not mean that he is not conscious of them: actually, Bhagavan is the supreme Consciousness, and therefore he knows very well everything -

every situation, every action, every thought and every feeling of all beings in the past, in the present and in the future. This is the Universal Consciousness, and it is characterized by the same qualities of consciousness manifested in the microcosm: intelligence, identity, personality, will power, relationships, compassion, and so on.

In fact, Bhagavan is *rasa*, "sentiment", or "taste", as stated in the *Upanishads*: *yad vai tat sukritam raso vai sah, rasam hy evayam labdhva anandi bhavati, ko hy evanyat kah pranyat, yad esa akasa anando na syat esa hy eva anandayati (Taittiriya Upanisad 2.7)*. *Rasa* and *ananda* are strictly connected, and they are the purpose that every fragment of God is trying to attain, the ultimate Reality that transcends the world of changes.

Because the Supreme Consciousness is *sat* (eternity), *cit* (awareness) and *ananda* (happiness), he is not attracted or interested in the changes of the world. Even the embodied soul can lose interest in the objects of the world when he is tasting actual happiness (*vishaya vinivartante niraharasya dehinah rasa-varjam raso 'py asya param drishtva nivartate, 2.59*)

The *Vishnu Purana* explains the Transcendental Reality of *sac-cid-ananda* as connected to the attributes of *hladini sandhini samvit*, the threefold manifestation of the one *para prakriti* (*hladini sandhini samvit tvayy eka sarva-samsraye*) while the material duality of joy and sorrow (*hlada tapa kari mishra*) does not affect him (*tvayi no guna-varjita*) because they belong to the *bahiranga shakti*, the external manifestation of the Prakriti.

The *Upanishads* clearly state that Bhagavan, the Supreme Consciousness, has many *shaktis* that are in charge of all the activities: *na tasya karyam karanam ca vidyate, na tat-samas cabhyadhikas ca drsyate, parasya saktir vividhaiva sruyate, svabhaviki jnana-bala-kriya ca (Svetasvatara Upanisad 6.7–8)*.

These energies are also known as *jnana*, *bala* and *kriya*, or "knowledge", "strength" and "duty/ action".

Krishna calls Arjuna *dhananjaya*, "conqueror of wealth", to remind him that he collected tributes from other kings during the *asvamedha yajna*, but not for selfish purposes: those resources were meant to finance the protection of the kingdom. Each individual has a task in society according to the *guna* and *karma*, and such task is called "duty": the activities performed are therefore determined by the nature of each individual and carried out by that same nature, that same *shakti* that consists of determination (will power), strength (physical and mental), and intelligence (wisdom, knowledge etc). What is the individual *purusha's* responsibility, then, if everything is done by the *prakriti*? The *purusha* can modify his/her own level of consciousness, which will bring him/her under the shelter of a different function of *prakriti*: either the material consciousness or the spiritual consciousness; *sattva* rather than *rajas* or *tamas*; *bhakti* rather than *ahankara*.

Everything else will fall into place through the action of nature.

VERSE 10

मयाध्यक्षेण प्रकृतिः सूयते सचराचरम् ।

mayādhyakṣeṇa prakṛtiḥ sūyate sacarācaram ।

हेतुनानेन कौन्तेय जगद्विपरिवर्तते ॥ ९-१० ॥

hetunānena kaunteya jagadviparivartate ।। 9-10 ।।

maya: by me; *adhyakṣeṇa*: by the instruction/ direction; *prakritiḥ*: nature; *sūyate*: manifests/ gives birth; *sa*: together with; *cara*: those that move; *acaram*: those that do not move; *hetuna*: for the

purpose; *anena*: this; *kaunteya*: o son of Kunti (Arjuna); *jagad*: the world; *viparivartate*: goes around/ keeps working.

"O son of Kunti (Arjuna), under my order this *prakriti* manifests all things, both moving and non-moving; by this cause the universe revolves/ functions/ is created cyclically."

After clearly explaining that all actions are performed by *prakriti* and all beings are manifested automatically under the control of *prakriti* herself, Krishna states that such manifestation happens under the direction of the consciousness - the *purusha*.

We should remember here that the individual *purusha* can be manifested either in a male or in a female body: still it remains a *purusha*. Here we also need to remember that the *purusha* is the consciousness (feelings, sentiments etc) while *prakriti* is the instrument or medium for action.

Consciousness gives the direction for the manifestation of the action through the *prakriti*: therefore Bhagavan is the supreme controller, and similarly the individual soul is responsible for his/her choices - if not in the short run, certainly in the long run, because even the influence of the *gunas* and *karma* that determine our present choices can be modified by the action of consciousness through the proper application of the will power, strength (or effort) and dutiful action (*jnana, bala, kriya*).

The word *adhyakshena* includes the meanings of direction, order, supervision, desire, without any direct involvement in the action. Still, this concept is summarized as "control", both at the supreme level and at the individual level. The *purusha* always has a choice about where to go in the *prakriti*, but while the Lord is always perfectly liberated and therefore always in control of the *prakriti*, the individual soul is subject to the power and control of the *prakriti* (*prakriteh vasat* 9.8) because of the limited power of his/

her consciousness. So the individual *purusha* can only choose whether s/he wants to be controlled by the *prakriti* in the material mode (Mahamaya) or in the spiritual mode (Yogamaya).

The word *hetu* indicates "cause, reason, purpose", and as an act of the pure consciousness, it triggers the activities of the *prakriti* and makes the world go round, in the *samsara* or cycles of creation and dissolution. One of the important questions that a human being can ask is "why all this?"... "what is the purpose of the world?". After the primary question "what am I?", the issue of the purpose of the material manifestation is certainly the most universal and eternal concern of all intelligent persons.

Some ideologies avoid the question by claiming that God's will is mysterious, and that it is impossible to know why he created the universe. So people may conclude that perhaps God was feeling lonely, perhaps he wanted some followers and worshipers, or he just acted on a whim. Some say that it is impossible to know why the universe exists - or that everything happens by chance, by the random combination of elements which in turn were created by chaos from a previously existing matter for whose creation there is no explanation possible.

Often these ideologies conclude that the universe is simply a product of lust - the sensual attraction between the male and the female bodies - and is simply meant to fulfill the desire for lust and greed. This asuric mentality (16.8-10) prompts the conditioned souls to exploit and destroy for their own selfish purpose, without caring for others or for some higher or universal purpose. The Vedic version is rather different.

As the original source of the universe is Consciousness (characterized by existence, awareness and happiness as *sat cit ananda*), the purpose of the cosmic manifestation is to create opportunities for the Consciousness fragments, the *jiva atmans* or

anu atmans, to develop in existence, awareness and happiness. Why, then, we find so much suffering in the universe, if its purpose is the tasting of happiness?

The answer is that the world would be a much better place if people simply followed the original map provided with it: learn how to use the universe first by understanding *dharma* and *vidya* in theory and practice, then engage in an appropriate and civilized professional occupation in a selfless way, just for the satisfaction of doing a good job: if everybody in society does their part in the proper way, prosperity comes automatically.

After *dharma* and *artha*, the third *purushartha* in this universe is *kama*: the honest and joyful pursuit of sense gratification; as this pursuit is based on dharmic or ethical foundations, it does not entail sufferings for others and is not damaging for one's body and mind. After having enjoyed life in the fullest possible way, free from guilt and mental deviations or imbalances, a human being naturally engages in the pursuit of the highest possible happiness, found on the platform where one is liberated from all material conditionings.

It is true that the nature of this cosmic manifestation is defined as a place of suffering and impermanence, *duhkhalayam asasvatam* (8.15), but ideally this simply refers to the fact that everything in this world has a beginning and an end, and therefore those who are attached to identifications and possessions or affiliations will have to suffer when they lose what they liked and when they get what they do not like - such as heat or cold (2.14, 6.7, 12.18). One should simply learn to tolerate.

This does not mean that one should passively accept sufferings without taking action to mitigate or solve it (as many misinformed people think). The endowment of intelligence that comes with the human form of life includes the ingenuity and resourcefulness

required to build proper clothing to alleviate the impact of heat and cold, and proper housing where one can live comfortably both in the summer and in the winter.

Even the loss of youth or health can and should be counteracted with appropriate methods (as described for example in the *Ayur Veda*), but it is not possible to completely eliminate old age and disease, or death. Trying to fight them or dominate them will simply bring more and more misery to our lives, individually and collectively.

The impermanence of material conditions is a fundamental characteristic of the material manifestation, and it is meant to push us forward, to improve ourselves, expand our consciousness, and set higher goals and objectives for our existence. Even considering the defect of impermanence, this process is supposed to be joyful, like the blossoming of a flower, or the graduation course of a good university student, or the developing of a good relationship between balanced, caring and responsible persons.

However, man should understand that it is not in his power to stop the cycle of seasons itself. He can mess with it - as he has done, causing dangerous climate changes - but he cannot really dominate it to his advantage.

The best thing one can do is to "dovetail" one's own consciousness by tuning it into the supreme Consciousness and working in harmony with it, like a swimmer that decides to follow the current of the river instead of trying to go upstream: in this way we become able to actually enjoy the changes and appreciate summer and winter for their own characteristic qualities and opportunities, rather than trying to fight against them. When we tune in properly, we find out we are able to appreciate what we have when we have it, instead of always thinking about what we do not have.

VERSE 11

अवजानन्ति मां मूढा मानुषीं तनुमाश्रितम् ।

avajānanti mām mūḍhā mānuṣīm tanumāśritam ।

परं भावमजानन्तो मम भूतमहेश्वरम् ॥ ९-११ ॥

param bhāvamajānanto mama bhūtamaheśvaram ॥ 9-11 ॥

avajananti: they do not recognize; *mam*: me; *mudhah*: the fools; *manusim*: human form; *tanum*: body; *asritam*: I take up; *param*: supreme; *bhavam*: nature/ birth; *ajanantah*: (because) they do not know; *mama*: my; *bhuta-mahesvaram*: the great Lord that controls all beings/ all existences.

"Fools disregard/ disrespect me when I manifest in a human form. They have no knowledge of my supreme/ transcendental nature as the great Lord of the living beings/ of the existences".

This concept has already been stated in previous verses (7.13, 7.15, 7.24, 7.25, 9.9) and will be repeated later (10.3, 16.20): the lack of intelligence and understanding of the power of Consciousness is due to the influence of ignorance and illusion, that is extremely strong (7.14). It also connects with verse 9.1, where it was stated that only a person who is free from envy (*anasuya*) can come to understand God.

In this regard, we would also like to remember the difference between the expression "Supreme Personality of Godhead" and "Supreme Person". The first implies the unity of all personalities as parts of the Supreme Godhead, while the second expression gives the idea of God as merely a bigger and more powerful person among many other independent, separated and different persons - something like the "monotheism" that says that there is a good God who must be made the winner and many other bad gods that must

be defeated because they are manifestation of the "supreme bad god" called Satan.

Many people influenced by academic secularism tend to believe that Krishna was simply a great man, and they sometimes describe him as a philosopher and a politician, or a powerful warrior. By this they often mean no disrespect, because they are projecting on him the qualities and abilities they would like to have, and because such descriptions are by comparison much more favorable than the offensive opinions expressed by the opponents of the Vedic tradition. However, we can do much better than that.

First of all, one who has really studied and understood the *Bhagavad gita* will never say that Krishna is an ordinary human being, because the text itself offers many statements to the exact opposite. The concept of Krishna's divinity is also expressed in several other recognized texts, such as the *Bhagavata Purana*, but *Gita* is the most effective in this regard. Why? Because it shows Krishna's supreme Consciousness.

Anyone can claim to be a divine Personality and tell some stories on his own childhood miracles (real or imagined), and even get some followers and supporters to invent such stories and circulate them to substantiate the divinity claims. There have also been individuals who have gone to a civil court to get their divine position of *avatara* certified by the government, but of course all this is very inconclusive to say the least.

Materialistic courts have no authority to ascertain the divinity of an individual, and if the popular method to endorse such claims is the "miracle evidence", we should remember that any individual soul can develop mystic powers that can appear miraculous simply through the practice of *yoga* or magic, or more precisely, through the intimate scientific knowledge of the laws of material nature.

Yoga is a very deep and complex science, and "magic" or "miracle" are usually the definitions given by less knowledgeable people for anything they do not really understand.

What really demonstrates Krishna's divinity is the expanse of consciousness he is showing. How can you tell a knowledgeable person from an ignorant fool? Government certificates or court orders, or a large number of followers are not demonstrating anything - but you can immediately recognize the level of consciousness of an individual by what he says. It is said that a fool can remain undetected or even pass for a great divine personality, especially if he has mastered the art of dressing and acting smart, but he can do so only as long as he does not talk, or as long as he is not faced with a difficult choice.

In the Indian folk tradition there is a very popular story about a jackal that had fallen into a dyeing vat and had come out colored in an intense blue. The animals of the forest, amazed by that very unusual sight, asked him who he was, and the jackal replied he was Vishnu. So the naive residents of the jungle accepted him as a divine *avatara* and worshiped him with all the best they could offer, and the jackal was very careful not to expose himself for what he really was. However, one day one of the animals inadvertently dropped a bone and the jackal foolishly blew his cover by jumping down from his *simhasana* to catch the bone.

The teaching of the story is that external appearances can be very deceiving, and only talk and action can really demonstrate the level of consciousness of a person, and hence his divinity.

The nature/ existence (*bhava*) of Krishna is called supreme (*param*) because he can perfectly control (*mahesvaram*) all states of existence (*bhuta*). Krishna's body appears just like an ordinary human body (*manusim tanum asritam*) but it is perfectly controlled and operated by Consciousness, therefore it does not have the

limitations of ordinary material bodies. This is why it is called a spiritual body - a body made of consciousness.

Many Vedic texts also speak about this special nature of Krishna's body, especially the *Bhagavata Purana*, that describes the appearance and the activities of Krishna. In verse 3.21.8 we find a description of Vishnu's form as *sabda brahma vapuh*, "the body composed of spiritual vibrations", and in verses 7.10.48 and 7.15.75 we find, *gudham param brahma manusya lingam*, "the Supreme Brahman (the Supreme Consciousness) hidden by a human appearance".

The word *bhuta* is connected to the word *bhu*, or "earth", therefore it is sometimes translated as *yukte kshmad avrite bhutam* (*Amara kosa* dictionary) "whatever is covered by earth", where by "earth" we intend all solid substances that form a body - flesh, bones, etc. However, we can also translate *bhu* as the earthly platform or dimension of this planetary system, and therefore the word *bhuta* can be applied to all the embodied living beings that inhabit the earthly plane or dimension.

Of course this also applies to the *archa vigraha*, the Deity of the Lord worshiped in the temple, that can manifest in a form shaped with various earthly materials - gems, stone, metal, wood, clay, sand etc.

The foolish iconoclasts remain unable to understand that the Deity of the Lord is not identical with the form made of earthly materials in which it manifests, and therefore it can be present or absent according to the level of consciousness of the devotee who worships it. Therefore when the iconoclasts disrespect the *archa vigraha* of the Godhead, they are not touching the actual form of the Lord at all, but simply the external shell in which it was manifested. They cannot keep God as a prisoner by capturing the statue where the *archa vigraha* was worshiped, and certainly they

cannot destroy or harm God by destroying or mutilating the statue: simply the divine presence becomes non-manifested in that form.

VERSE 12

मोघाशा मोघकर्माणो मोघज्ञाना विचेतसः ।

moghāśā moghakarmāṇo moghajñānā vicetasah ।

राक्षसीमासुरीं चैव प्रकृतिं मोहिनीं श्रिताः ॥ ९-१२ ॥

rākṣasīmāsurīm caiva prakṛtiṁ mohiniṁ śritāḥ ॥ 9-12 ॥

mogha-asah: confused in their desires; *mogha-karmanah*: confused in their actions; *mogha-jnanah*: confused in their knowledge; *vicetasah*: devoid of awareness; *rakshasim*: of the Rakshasas; *asurim*: of the Asuras; *ca*: and; *iva*: certainly; *prakritim*: the nature; *mohinim*: confusing; *sritah*: taking shelter in.

"Entertaining delusional hopes/ desires, engaging in delusional activities, and delusionally convinced of their knowledge, (such people are) confused by incorrect awareness, so they certainly take shelter in the bewildered nature of *raksasas* and *asuras*."

We have already mentioned that the individual soul, that does not have the immense power of the Supreme Consciousness, can only choose whether to take shelter in the spiritual nature or in the material nature.

This is confirmed also in verse 7.14 *asuram bhavam asritah*, "(the evil doers) take shelter in the nature of the Asuras", 9.13 *daivim prakritim asritah*, "take shelter in the divine nature", and 12.11 *mad yogam asritah*, "take shelter in my Yogamaya".

Chapter 16 of *Bhagavad gita*, entitled *daivasura sampad vibhaga yoga*, will describe more specifically the difference between the daivic and the asuric personalities, by describing their respective characteristics. The asuric qualities are listed as arrogance, pride, selfishness, anger, cruelty and ignorance (16.4) and will further be elaborated with several examples. The words *daivi* and *asuri* are usually translated as "divine" and "demoniac", but these definitions may confuse the minds of people who are burdened with abrahamic cultural superimpositions.

In abrahamic ideologies - incorrectly classified as "monotheistic" - Jahveh is presented as the "good god" and Satan as the "bad god", so whatever applies to Jahveh is considered "divine" and whatever applies to Satan is "demoniac", especially his servants that are called demons or devils. According to the abrahamic ideology, a human being can never be demoniac unless s/he is possessed by one of this demoniac beings. In such a case, the behavior of the demonically possessed person is simply characterized by a sort of allergy to everything that is connected to the "good god" - especially the Christian symbols such as the cross etc, which are then used to "exorcise the demon" from the human being.

In the Vedic ideology, however, all individual souls are equally divine because they are *amsa* (parts) of God (15.7), but they can choose to take shelter (i.e. focus, develop, take action) in the *daivi prakriti* (divine nature) or in the *asuri prakriti* (asuric nature) - both potentially present in each individual. When the individual chooses to develop divine qualities and activities that support the progress and happiness of the entire universe, the asuric tendencies become harmoniously engaged in the destruction of obstacles. On the other hand, when the individual chooses to develop asuric qualities and activities that are destructive for the progress and happiness of others, the divine tendencies become eclipsed and cannot be seen any more although they still exist - just like the sun

or the moon are temporarily covered during an eclipse. There are no devils or demons proper: those that act as such (as for example in the case of so-called "demoniac possession") are simply individual *jivatmas* that have developed strong asuric tendencies and continue to act in that consciousness even without having a physical body.

The word *a-sura* is simply the contrary of *sura*, the definition for the *devas* that work in the administration of the universe to support the progress and prosperity of all embodied beings. The *Rig Veda samhita* (1.22.20) says, *tad visnoh paramam padam sada pasyanti surayah*, "the *suras* are those who always contemplate the supreme position of Vishnu". The *Padma Purana (Patala khanda, 111)* states, *dvau bhuta-sargau loke 'smin, daiva asura eva ca, visnu bhaktah smrto daiva, asuras tad-viparyaya*, "In this world there are two types of beings - the *devas* and the *asuras*. The *devas* are those who are serving Vishnu, and the *asuras* are those who oppose them."

We should be very careful not to misunderstand this statement, because the *devas* are not simply servants who are loyal to the side of the "good god", for some kind of sectarian or political allegiance. Vishnu is the name of the Supreme Consciousness, the sum total of all Existence, therefore the *devas* who are serving Vishnu are serving the interests of the entire community of the beings in the universe, while the *asuras* are merely interested in their own separatist selfish material advantage.

This is confirmed by the *Satapatha Brahmana* (5.1.1.1) with the description of the creation of the *asuras*: both *devas* and *asuras* were born from Brahma, but the *asuras* immediately decided to serve only their own selfish interests, by placing offerings into their own mouths. Similarly, in his commentary to *Bhagavad gita*, Madhva writes, *asusu rata asurah*, "*asuras* are those who are (only) attached to their selfish gratification".

In various parts of the Vedic literature, *asuras* are sometimes called Daityas or Danavas, because traditionally the descendants of Diti and Danu (both wives of Kasyapa Rishi, together with their sister Aditi the mother of the *devas* or Adityas) followed the asuric mentality. However, this is not necessarily always true, because we see for example the great *vaishnava* devotee Prahlada, son of Hiranyakasipu, direct son of Diti (10.30).

There is some difference in the definition of *rakshasa*, that is often equated to the definition of *asura*. Specifically, the *rakshasas* are described as a particular humanoid race that traditionally prefer the conclusions and the behaviors of *asuras*. The race of the Rakshasas are the descendants of Pulastya Rishi (like Ravana and his brothers), that are endowed with great mystic/ magic powers and are fond of eating human flesh and blood. However, among the Rakshasa people there were/are/ can be also some very good and saintly individuals, such as Vibhishana, Ravana's brother, who was a devotee of Rama.

Some historians claim that Devas and Asuras (and Rakshasas etc) were merely different human populations on this earthly planet, that waged war against each other in pre-Vedic times, and the winners got to "write history" with the opportunity to demonize their opponents. There might be some value in such hypothesis, especially considering the Zoroastrian ideology based on the eternal fight between the "good God" Ahura (or Asura) Mazda and the "bad God" Ariman ("the Enemy"); this vision later developed into the abrahamic faiths.

However, this theory does not explain why all over the world, in all cultures, there are consistent tales of a race of black magicians with superhuman powers that perfectly fit the Vedic descriptions of Rakshasas. Although a human being can become an *asura* in this very lifetime, he usually needs to take another birth in order to become a *rakshasa*.

In both such cases, the individual *jivatman* takes shelter in the *asuri prakriti*, "the asuric nature" that is based on a confused state of mind, by which one develops strongly dualistic desires (*asa*) due to ignorance (*ajnana*) and then acts on them (*karmana*) because of lack of proper awareness (*vi-cetasah*). If these *jivatmas* were properly aware of their actual nature, and of the fundamental connection between all fragments of consciousness, they would never try to pursue selfish gratification to the expenses of other beings.

VERSE 13

महात्मानस्तु मां पार्थ दैवीं प्रकृतिमाश्रिताः ।

mahātmanastu mām pārtha daivīm prakṛtimāśritāḥ ।

भजन्त्यनन्यमनसो ज्ञात्वा भूतादिमव्ययम् ॥ ९-१३ ॥

bhajantyananyamanaso jñātvā bhūtādimavyayam ॥ 9-13 ॥

maha-atmanah: the great souls; *tu*: but; *mam*: me; *partha*: o son of Pritha (Arjuna); *daivim*: resplendent/ of the *devas*; *prakritim*: in the nature; *asritah*: taking shelter; *bhajanti*: they worship/ serve; *ananya*: undivided; *manasah*: attention/ meditation; *jnatva*: knowing; *bhuta-adim*: the origin of (all) existences/ beings; *avyayam*: imperishable/ eternal.

"However, o son of Pritha (Arjuna), the great souls take shelter in the divine nature and worship/ serve me with undivided attention, knowing that I am the inexhaustible origin of everything/ all beings."

Again this verse proclaims the reason why Krishna is God: he is the sum total of all existences and beings, the Universal Consciousness, from whom everything becomes manifested.

Therefore the *devas* - from the highest creature in the universe, Brahma, to the ordinary human beings who situate themselves in a favorable position in regard to the Universal Consciousness - are those who take shelter in that same nature of *sat, cit* and *ananda* that is the nature of the Supreme Brahman. The first verse of the *Gopala tapani Upanishad* (1.1) proclaims: *om sac cid ananda rupaya krishnaya*, indicating that the *devas* worship and serve Krishna as presented in *Bhagavad gita*.

In practice, this means that the individual *jivatmas* that have taken shelter in the *daivi prakriti* become *mahatmas* ("great minds") expanding their consciousness and awareness and becoming free from all selfishness; this is always accompanied by compassion. The exact opposite of *mahatma* is *duratma* ("bad mind" or "difficult mind"), a definition that clearly describes the callousness, insensitivity and cruelty of a selfish person, who does not care about the happiness and progress of others. This is why the true *brahmana* is called *bhu-deva*, the *deva* that lives on earth.

The correct way to remain concentrated on this supreme level of Consciousness is the attitude of sincere service (*bhajanam*) towards the Supreme, that includes all beings and existences and is eternal (*bhuta-adim avyayam*) - which is precisely the attitude that characterizes the *devas*. One cannot claim that he is worshiping or serving God and at the same time callously create sufferings to innocent beings in the pursuit of one's selfish material advantage, either individual or collective, because that is the hallmark of the asuric mentality, as we will see later on in chapter 16.

The first and most popular meaning of the expression *ananya manasah* is "with undivided attention/ meditation" because we should not allow any other concern to obstruct our service; only when we have become free from all material "luggage" and distractions, such as material identifications and attachments, we can really engage in devotional service.

Another meaning of the expression *ananya manasah* refers to the fact that the Supreme includes all beings and existences (*bhuta-adim*), and can be translated as "without any sectarian mentality, without a dualistic illusion".

As Krishna himself states in *Bhagavad gita*, he is the best friend of all living entities (*suhridam sarva bhutanam*, 5.29, *isvarah sarva-bhutanam hrid-dese tishthati 18.61*) and remains present in the hearts of all beings (*sarvasya caham hridi sannivisto*, 15.15, *sarva-bhuta sthitam*, 6.31), without considering the merits or demerits of anyone (*nadatte kasyacit papam na caiva sukritam*, 5.15).

God does not have a single chosen people - neither the Jews nor the Indians - and actually does not care whether one believes in him or not, or even follows his instructions or not. He equally loves and cares for all living beings, that are like his children (*aham bija-pradah pita*, 14.4), but he does not interfere with their training, schooling and homework, that are entrusted to Mother Nature.

The word *tu*, "however", connects this verse with the previous verse, where the confused *asuras* and *rakshasas* were described. The context says, "Confused people create problems to the universe, but those who have chosen to develop a divine consciousness worship God".

This worship and service to Krishna can be perceived and applied at various levels.

The most elementary level consists in learning about Krishna's teachings and recommendations especially in *Bhagavad gita* and following them, without being distracted by other concerns - fears, attachments, identifications, etc. In daily life, this worship and service takes the form of ritual ceremonies meant to keep our mind

focused on the divine consciousness, and the favorable work that supports the universe and is allotted to us as specific duty in accordance to our *guna* and *karma*. This is also called *bhuh*, the "earthly level", that is accessible at present in a relatively easy way.

At the intermediate level, the ritual ceremonies become increasingly internalized because we become more clearly aware of our true spiritual nature, therefore we meditate on the Supreme Personality of Godhead in our heart (*om tad vishnoh paramam padam*) and we effectively become instruments (*nimitta matra bhava*) or bodily parts (*anga* or *amsa*) of God. This is also called *bhuvah*, the level of the existence of the *devas* that are the limbs or bodily parts of God in this world.

At the advanced level, we become situated in the supreme consciousness, called Krishna Consciousness, and our nature becomes totally spiritualized. It is very difficult to speak about this level, because it cannot be expressed through material logic or examples, therefore a person who is still situated on the level of material consciousness and identification can easily misunderstand and misinterpret it. This supreme level can also be called *svah*, the real identity of the Self, the *atman/ brahman*, to whom the oblations of the sacrifice are offered.

The expression *ananya manasah* can similarly be explained at different levels, from the elementary platform on which the sincere devotee invests attention, intelligence, work and desires, to the intermediate platform on which we perceive ourselves as never separated (*anya*) from the *param atman*, the Soul of our soul, to the complete union (*visate tad anantaram*, 18.55) that constitutes the final word in the teachings of *Bhagavad gita*.

It is important to remember that one should be constantly aware of Krishna as the eternal origin of all beings/ existences (or *rasas*);

the superficial and mechanical ritual worship of a sacred form or image is not sufficient, although of course it can slowly accrue the *punya* or merits/ credits that will ultimately take one to actual spiritual life.

VERSE 14

सततं कीर्तयन्तो मां यतन्तश्च दृढव्रताः ।

satataṁ kīrtayanto mām yatantaśca dṛḍhavratāḥ ।

नमस्यन्तश्च मां भक्त्या नित्ययुक्ता उपासते ॥ ९-१४ ॥

namasyantaśca mām bhaktyā nityayuktā upāsate ॥ 9-14 ॥

satatam: always/ constantly; *kirtayantah*: chanting/ singing/ discussing; *mam*: about me; *yatantah*: making sincere efforts; *ca*: and; *dridha-vratah*: firmly observing their vows; *namasyantah*: offering their obeisances; *ca*: and; *mam*: me; *bhaktya*: with love and devotion; *nitya-yuktah*: always engaged (in *yoga*); *upasate*: they worship.

"Always speaking (chanting, etc) about me, they engage in firm vows with great determination, they offer me their obeisances and worship me with devotion, eternally connected with me/ in Yoga."

This beautiful verse further elaborates on the meaning expressed in the previous verse as *mahatmanah bhajanti mam*, "the great souls worship me", and delineates the fundamental requirement for the development of *bhakti*: the process that starts with *sravana* and *kirtana* (listening and speaking), that blossoms into *smarana* (remembering, or remaining conscious/ aware), and so on.

Mere superficial ritualistic worship in the temple, without the proper divine consciousness cannot be defined as *bhakti* or devotion, whereas the discussion about the Supreme Personality of Godhead (his names, forms, qualities, activities, teachings, companions, energies etc) is self-sufficient as a method of worship, and does not need any other ritualistic formality. It is said that in Kali yuga this method of loving discussion on Krishna is the actually appropriate religious practice.

In previous *yugas* one could successfully engage in the other prescribed religious practices, such as Deity worship (Dvapara yuga), ritual sacrifices and offerings to the fire (Treta yuga) and meditation (Satya yuga), because in those periods people were intelligent and sincere enough to understand that *sravana* and *kirtana* are the foundation for such activities. How can one worship the Deity, perform a *yajna* or engage in meditation without remembering/ knowing the Supreme Personality of Godhead? It is impossible: if someone tried to practice these religious activities without the proper consciousness, only the external shell of the activity would remain - like an empty box that only appears to be a container of food because it is labeled as such.

However, in Kali yuga people actually are stupid, lazy and unfortunate, so they easily delude themselves into thinking that the external practices can really be sufficient to grant success. So they simply go to the temple or to the *guru* to make a superficial and temporary show of devotion and get some "blessings" in return, expecting God and Guru to magically change their karmic situation and make everything perfectly happy in their material lives.

What to speak of those foolish people who believe they are engaging in *yoga* just because they practice some physical gymnastics for a better health or weight loss or stress relief, without even bothering to observe the fundamental *vratas* required for *yoga*, such as the *yamas* and *niyamas*.

Even some so-called "yoga teachers" are not ashamed of eating meat in their daily life, and we heard some of them state that actually following the instructions of the *yoga shastra* would be "stupid fanaticism".

Considering such situation, we should not be surprised when we find out that some imaginative people have invented things as the "yoga for dogs" or the "yoga for couples" involving ordinary sexual stimulation or intercourse they call "*tantra*".

As in so many other verses in *Bhagavad gita*, the word *satatam* ("always, constantly") indicates that *bhakti yoga* is not a hobby, a social opportunity or a part-time job, but it is a full-time engagement of senses, body, words, mind, intelligence and soul, requiring full surrender and concentration. A very similar verse will be found in 10.9, where the purpose of the *kirtana* will be elaborated further.

The word *kirtana* is usually translated as "singing devotional songs", especially together with other devotees, to the accompaniment of musical instruments on the occasion of religious festivals and ceremonies, usually in a temple. However, it also includes the discussion, the study and the teaching of everything that concerns God - the universal Consciousness that contains all existences. The subject of God's teachings, nature, missions, activities, qualities, names, position, etc, is the most interesting and important subject, because when we understand it, we can attain the level of Krishna Consciousness, the origin and foundation of all things, including our own existence and purpose of life. Every evolved human being is naturally attracted by this type of discussion.

In the abrahamic ideologies, the healthy practice of *kirtana* is distorted into the mechanical presentation, memorization and repetition of unquestionable dogma, as in the catechism, that is

meant to define the allegiance of the congregation and separate its members from other groups. On the other hand, genuine *kirtana* as discussion about *tattvas* is also called philosophical debate, and traditionally it was done in public assemblies, so that the people participating to the meeting could profit from the explanations, proper information and examples. The declared purpose of the practice is to reconcile the apparent differences or contradictions, to expand the limited understanding, and to eliminate all misconceptions and false information, including the prejudice and the unfounded popular beliefs called *laukika sraddha*. To borrow a brilliant definition, "to comfort the confused and to confuse the comfortable".

Another very effective method for *kirtana* consists in writing articles or books, and publishing them. Bhaktisiddhanta, one of the greatest exponents of Gaudiya Vaishnavism, called his printing press the *brihat mridanga*, "the great drum" that sustained his *sankirtana*, or "congregational *kirtana*", beyond the limits within which an ordinary drum could be heard.

There are some asuric people who believe they can solve philosophical disagreements or controversies by banning books, magazines, topics or people, denying permission to speak in assemblies or entrance in public assemblies, functions and temples. They also resort to conducting character assassination campaigns by spreading false accusations or denigration based on bodily identification, or even by physically persecuting, intimidating, threatening, or killing people. This is certainly not the Vedic system or the path of *bhakti yoga*: those who tolerate such adharmic nonsense are also responsible for its karmic consequences, and should not delude themselves into thinking they are serving God.

The word *yatantah* ("making efforts") is also important for the seriousness of the process. For most people, who remain on a

relatively low level of personal evolution, religion is a mental need for social affiliation, and therefore it is associated with the community of birth, family, and ethnic identity. In a sense, we could say that all religions are same, including Hinduism, because at this level nobody is really interested in understanding the spiritual truths and their application. A little daily prayer, some sentimental devotion, a little cheap morality, pious gatherings for social occasions, and seasonal greetings are not very different from one camp to the other. Even some so-called devotees of Krishna have this superficial approach, but this is not recommended in *Bhagavad gita*. Krishna's instructions clearly say that his devotees should illuminate each other (*bodhayantah parasparam*, 10.9) into deeper and wider visions of his Consciousness.

The expression *dridha-vratah*, "firmly observing their vows", applies to the *sadhana* or regulated spiritual/ religious practices that the individual is expected to follow as a routine to modify his/ her consciousness for the better. The most popular *vrata* is the *japa vrata*, defined by Krishna in *Bhagavad gita* as the best form of *yajna* (10.25) because it is by far the easiest, the most effective and the most essential of all religious practices, especially suited for the people of Kali yuga. This is confirmed in the *Kali santarana Upanishad* (verses 1-11) from *Krishna Yajur Veda*, in the *Brahmanda Purana* (*Uttara khanda*, 6.55-60), *Agni Purana*, *Padma Purana* (*Svarga Khanda* 50.6), as well as the *Ananta samhita* (*Narada Pancharatra*), that present the Hare Krishna *maha mantra* as the most powerful *mantra*. The most basic form of the Hare Krishna *mantra* is *hare krsna, hare krsna, krsna krsna hare hare*. A more elaborated form adds the corresponding names of Rama in this way: *hare rama, hare rama, rama rama, hare hare*.

The *japa vrata* consists in softly or mentally chanting the holy Names of the Personality of Godhead or *hari nama*, arranged in

genuine *mantras* properly received from a realized teacher (preferably in person, but also possibly through the heart). The most popular method works by fingering a rosary (*japa mala*) of 108 beads plus a bigger bead (*meru*) that helps the counting (*sankhya*), but the ancient method utilized 108 small balls made of various pure substances to be moved from one side to another at the completion of each *mantra*, or counted the *mantras* on the finger joints of both hands.

The beads of the *japa mala* can be made from a variety of pure substances, mostly *tulasi* wood for *vaishnavas* and *rudraksha* seeds for *shaivites*. Also popularly used are *sphatika* (clear quartz crystal) beads, *chandana* (sandalwood) beads or imitations, or *padma bija* (lotus seeds).

Padma Purana (Brahma Khanda 25.15-18) also details the rules for the chanting of this *mantra*, and specifically the 10 types of offenses to be avoided. This, together with the sincere and serious observance of the traditional *yama* and *niyama* rules, constitutes the basis for the *vratas* mentioned in this verse.

There are several other practices called *vrata*, such as the special worship offered to Krishna in the month of Kartika and the fasting observed on Ekadasi, but the *japa vrata* is the best, either performed daily with a prescribed number of repetitions, or with a cumulative number over a period of time.

The particular modalities of the *vrata* will be personalized according to the needs and abilities of the disciple, and given by the *guru* after considering all the factors involved. The general principle is that the practice of *sadhana* should remain *su-sukham* (9.2) or easily performed with joy, so that the disciple will be inspired and encouraged to continue, rather than developing a more or less subconscious feeling of resentment for what s/he experiences as a difficult burden. There are different levels of

sadhana that are more suitable for different mentalities and abilities, also according to the *varnas* and *ashramas*, as well as according to time, place and circumstances. Some people prefer to write the holy names instead of chanting them; as the actual emission of the voice vibration is not required in the practice of *japa* (and rather it is not even encouraged, as mental recitation is much more powerful for individual practice), writing names is as good as a *japa mala* to support devotional meditation.

The words *namasyantah* and *bhaktya* refer to the sentiments of surrender, respect and love that a devotee must develop towards the Supreme Personality of Godhead, accepting God's will in the understanding that God's plan is not always easy to see and to understand, but it is always for the better. Indirectly, this also applies to the attitude of a genuine devotees towards other people, because Krishna clearly says that "everyone follows his way" (*mama vartmanuvartante*, 3.23) and therefore the opinions and beliefs of others should always be respected, as long as they are not adharmic in nature or contrary to the final conclusions of all the vedic scriptures.

VERSE 15

ज्ञानयज्ञेन चाप्यन्ये यजन्तो मामुपासते ।

jñānayajñena cāpyanye yajanto māmupāsate ।

एकत्वेन पृथक्त्वेन बहुधा विश्वतोमुखम् ॥ ९-१५ ॥

ekatvena pṛthaktvena bahudhā viśvatomukham ॥ 9-15 ॥

jnana: of knowledge; *yajnena*: by the sacrifice; *ca*: and; *api*: certainly; *anye*: others; *yajantah*: that perform sacrifice; *mam*: me;

upasate: they worship; *ekatvena*: in oneness; *prithaktvena*: in the couple; *bahudha*: in multiplicity; *visvatah-mukham*: as the universal form.

"Others engage in the sacrifice/ cultivation of knowledge, others worship me through various rituals, as the One, as the Two, as the Many, or as the Universal form."

Krishna continues to elaborate on the method of worship and service to God.

After establishing the importance of *bhakti* - the central subject of the chapters 7, 8 and 9 - and affirming that it must be supported by a constant remembrance and discussion about God, here Krishna explains that the cultivation of knowledge is a sacred act in itself, a *yajna*, by which the Supreme Personality of Godhead is worshiped and the entire universe is supported. Why? Because the cultivation of knowledge culminates in the *raja vidya* (9,2), the transcendental science of *atman* and *brahman*, by which a human being can truly serve God in divine consciousness.

The word *upasate* ("worship") we saw in the previous verse is repeated again here, and refers to the loving meditation on God, specifically on the form of God that is most cherished by the devotee, and that is called *ista devata*.

The word *anyate* refers to the different groups of people who prefer to worship God in all such different and genuine forms. These different perspectives are not incompatible or even opposed to each other - actually they complement each other, as the intelligent and knowledgeable people can understand. This is why these various groups are described as engaged in the *jnana yajna*, "sacrifice of cultivation of knowledge".

Worshipping God in *ekatva*, "oneness", can be interpreted at different levels. The most elementary level consists in the

realization of the *atman/ brahman*, that gives liberation from material identifications and attachments.

Once the individual *jivatman* realizes its position of fragment, or "part and parcel" of the universal Consciousness (*mama ivamso jiva loke*, 15.7), it enters (*visate*, 18.55) into the Transcendental Reality, liberated from all other concerns and feelings of separative duality - that are repeatedly condemned by Krishna in *Bhagavad gita*.

Another interpretation of *ekatva* is offered by some *vaishnava* groups that have embraced a type of monotheism resembling the abrahamic image of one Supreme Lord that excludes the worship or contemplation of all other Personalities of Godhead. We are walking here on thin ice, because in fact Krishna states in *Bhagavad gita* that the worship of many different forms of Godhead (9.22) is due to a lack of proper knowledge and a diversion from the correct method (*avidhi purvakam*). Also, there is absolutely nothing wrong in focusing on one specific form of God only, especially if such form is Vishnu or Krishna, as long as one does not commit the tragic and disastrous mistake of actually disrespecting the other forms and Personalities of Godhead - from the various *svamsas* of Vishnu and his *avatars*, to the *vibhinna devas* that are serving and representing Vishnu in the administration of the universe.

Here is where the concept of *vaishnava aikantika bhakti* abruptly separates from its abrahamic look-alike, because it remains non-offensive.

We have mentioned that the *Padma Purana* cautions *bhaktas* against the offenses in the chanting of the holy names, and that one of such violations is considering the *devas* as separate and independent from Vishnu.

However, the worst of all offenses - called the "mad elephant offense" because it totally destroys one's advancement in *bhakti* just like a maddened elephant utterly devastates all the plants of a garden - consists in *vaishnava ninda*, "being disrespectful towards a *vaishnava*". Showbottle affiliates to politically religious institutions are very keen to exploit this idea to escape the questioning about their own bad behaviors and conclusions or those of their associates (claiming such questioning is an "offense" against them), but they do not show any hesitation in openly insulting the *devas*, who are much greater *vaishnavas* than any paltry human being.

The *ekatva* described in this verse can be considered as *aikantika hari bhakti*, but it really needs to remain within the dharmic and ideological guidelines of the *sruti* and *smriti* - all the *Puranas* (not just the *vaishnava Puranas*) and all the other genuine Vedic texts, otherwise it will not simply be "imperfect": it will become a dangerous nuisance to society.

The meditation called *prithaktva*, "by distinction", may apply to the *lilas* of the Divine Couple manifested in so many forms through the development of the *rasas* in devotional relationships, or by the *svamsa* forms, including those of the *avatars*.

The meditation called *bahudha* ("in multiplicity") can be directly connected to its qualifying attribute *visvatah-mukham* ("as the universal form"), and applies specifically to the visualization offered by *Bhagavad gita* for our meditation, in 7.7-12 and then again in the next verses 9.16-20. Again on Arjuna's request, Krishna will offer more of the same meditations in 10.19-42, then will actually show the visualization directly in 11.15-30.

Then briefly Krishna will show Arjuna his four-armed Vishnu form and again two-armed Krishna form (11.50), closing the circle and returning to the *ekatva* meditation, but with a strong warning:

contemplation on God's human-like form may appear easier and more comfortable than the visualization of the Visva rupa, but is actually extremely rare to experience in truth, even for the greatest personalities in the universe (11.51-55). Much more emphasis is given to this concept than on the meditation of the form itself. What does that mean? Everybody could see the "normal" two-armed Krishna on the battlefield. What to speak of the great *devas*, even the *asuras* that went to try and kill Krishna in Vrindavana could very easily see him. Or could they?

Actually, they could not. Unqualified people remained unable to see the actual Krishna even while he was personally present in front of them as *avatara*: all they saw was their own mental projection, as it is clearly explained in the *Bhagavata Purana* episode when Krishna enters the wrestling arena of Kamsa in Mathura and is perceived in very different ways by different categories of people - because they were all projecting their own mental images of Krishna on the true Krishna. This illusory projection is called *maya* ("what is not"), and as we have seen, it can be favorable to *bhakti* as *yogamaya*, or unfavorable to *bhakti* as *mahamaya*.

Yogamaya is achieved only through a precise and very demanding method, while *mahamaya* is easily available to all conditioned souls. *Yogamaya* brings us closer to the real Krishna and elevates us to the divine level, while *mahamaya* takes us farther from the real Krishna and keeps us in ignorance and delusion. At any time, we can make the conscious deliberate choice of changing the polarity of this energy, simply by turning our "face" (*mukha*) towards the inner reality (*antah*) rather than the external reality (*bahir*). God is everywhere, always, wherever we turn our face (*visvato-mukha*), but to see him we need to turn our face in the proper direction, too: this seems a contradiction, but it is not. It is a very specific method that can be considered the origin of the Koan

in Zen meditation, meant to expand the greatness of the mind (*maha-atmanah*) by eliminating its materialistic limitations.

So the *ekatva*, *prithaktva*, *bahudha* and *visvatah-mukham* mentioned in this verse can be explained variously according to the level of evolution of the devotee - we can make the example of the series of 7 musical notes that repeat themselves with different sound pitches and produce different melodies, but are still the same fundamental sacred syllable *omkara*, the unheard subtle vibration of life and power that is the actual basis of reality in all its different manifestations.

In this musical science of God there is no inherent contradiction but there can be wrong sequences that create superficial disharmonies, that we call ignorance and *adharmā*; we need the guidance of an expert teacher to avoid becoming mistakenly attached to some cacophony that we may call music but is not (*ma aya*, "not this").

Although it may appear strange, *ekatva* can indicate both Brahman and Bhagavan realizations (at two different "sound pitches", like the same note played an octave higher), while *prithaktva* can indicate both Paramatma and *madhurya rasa* realizations (in the contemplation of the Divine Couple and their *rasa* for each other), and *bahudha* can indicate Bhagavan and Brahman again in the reverse order. This is because in the very intimate relationship that Krishna Syamasundara is manifesting with each and every one of his closest devotees like in the *rasa lila*, he takes a very great number of equal forms to dance with each and every one of his *gopis* exclusively, or in the mind of the *gopis* that could see Syamasundara everywhere, and everything reminded them of Syamasundara (*visvato mukhah*).

This is the deepest sense of the *bahudha* form meditation, while the easiest meaning is the variety of powerful and majestic material

manifestations in the universe that Krishna wants us to meditate on. Without actually going through this level according to Krishna's orders, it will be almost impossible to penetrate the inner meaning.

All we would be able to see then is our own cheap mental projection of a blue (black, bluish, grayish, whitish, pinkish, etc) boy with a peacock feather on his head and a flute in his hand: not any different from what you could easily see at a costume party or in any TV serial, cheap calendar or incense stick wrapping, especially in India.

Such a "vision" does not make us any special or advanced at all, because there is no real devotion involved - at most some sentimentalistic attraction (just like the one people feel for cute dog puppies, especially the photoshopped ones) or ethnic folkloristic or regional identification... just like for mutton *hyderabady biryani* or *bengali* fish curries. It is a beginning - much better than worshipping some Bollywood or cricket idol, or their western equivalents - but it's only the beginning.

VERSE 16

अहं क्रतुरहं यज्ञः स्वधाहमहमौषधम् ।

aham kraturaham yajñah svadhāhamahamauśadham ।

मन्त्रोऽहमहमेवाज्यमहमग्निरहं हुतम् ॥ ९-१६ ॥

mantra'hamahamevājyamahamagniraham hutam ।। 9-16।।

aham: I (am); *kratuh*: the Vedic ritual; *aham*: I (am); *yajnah*: the sacred action; *svadha*: the offerings to the Pitris; *aham*: I (am); *aham*: I (am); *ausadham*: the medicinal herb/ the psychotropic

substance; *mantra*: the *mantra*; *aham*: I (am); *aham*: I (am); *eva*: certainly/ also; *ajyam*: the oblation of clarified butter; *aham*: I (am); *agnih*: the fire; *aham*: I (am); *hutam*: the offering itself.

"I am the *kratu*, I am the *yajna*, I am the *svadha*, I am the *ausadha*, I am the *mantra*, I am the clarified butter, I am the fire and I am the act of offering."

In this new series of visualizations, Krishna gives us plenty to meditate about, starting with the first established link of connection between the macrocosm and the microcosm at the beginning of creation: the act of sacrifice (3.10-16) as a deliberate offering to feed the root of the universe, and thus contribute to the task of supporting the universe.

In the previous verse, Krishna spoke about the *jnana yajna*, the sacred act of cultivating knowledge, and about the meditation on God as one, two, many, and everything. Yet, these are the chapters dedicated to the description of *bhakti*. Obviously, genuine *bhakti* is much more than the superficial sentimental devotion and social religiousness that usually goes under such name.

Kratu is the religious ritual proper (the act of meditation and worship), *yajna* is the sacred selfless performance of one's duties, and *svadha* (also called *tarpana* or *sraddha*) is the relation of family kinship that connects the virtuous personalities at all levels of the universe.

Through the basic concepts of *kratu*, *yajna* and *tarpana* mentioned in this verse, a human being actively contributes to the support of the entire universe, therefore these acts are called *dharma*. In the category of *kratu* (personal religious duties for purification) we can include the *nitya karma*, that are the mainly the daily *agnihotra* and *sandhya* performed daily by all *dvi-jas* ("twice born"), those who have received the sacred thread at the time of initiation as

brahmanas, *kshatriyas* or *vaisyas* (with specific requirements according to their level of capability). We also include some *naimittika karma* or instrumental religious rituals such as the many *samskaras* - from the *garbhadhana* (conception) to the *vivaha* (marriage) - and the *kamya karma* or optional rituals performed to obtain a particular blessing or purpose. Some specific rituals, such as the *agnistoma* or *jyotistoma* (that includes the preliminary *prayascitta* or atonement) are meant to purify and redeem a person who had fallen from the proper position in his duties to society, or in any case start a religious life in the Vedic tradition.

In the category of *yajna* (payment of one's debts to the universe) we find the *panca maha yajnas* called *brahma yajna* (study of the scriptures, meditation for Brahman realization, practice of *sadhana* and *yoga*), *pitri yajna* (also overlapping the category of *svadha*), *deva yajna* (worship to the Deity), *bhuta yajna* (consisting in giving food and other beneficial and pleasurable things to the ghosts and lower animals, and practicing non-violence), and *nri yajna* (consisting in hospitality, charity, social cooperation towards human beings). These duties also include the observance of the seasonal festivals all along the calendar year, the offering of various good things as tokens of gratitude and affection to the *devas*, and some *naimittika karma* that include one's honest professional occupational duties and family duties, the regular cleaning of the house and temple, and the daily bathing activities. In connection with these two groups of religious activities, the invocation *svaha* is called to present the offerings to the Personalities of Godhead - the *devas*, personifications of the principles of the universe and not ordinary individual souls.

The invocation *svadha*, on the other hand, is addressed to the *pitris* - ordinary individual souls who have qualified as virtuous personalities during their lives on earth, and that are honored by the *devas* and cooperate with them for the administration of the

universe and often for the guidance of the deceased souls during the period between incarnations. Mostly the *svadha* is connected with food offerings, called *sraddha* or *pindi*.

A *mantra* is a very characteristic component of the Vedic religious tradition and way of life, so much that the definition has leaked into the dictionaries of several languages even on a metaphorical level, sometimes assimilated with words such as "slogan", "motto", etc. However, the actual meaning in Vedic culture refers to a sacred formula consisting of names of God, that is repeated (usually silently) as a *sadhana* for one's purification and meditation, as we have already mentioned in commentary 9.14 about the *japa yajna*.

The oblation of the clarified butter, called *ajyam*, refers to the completion of the action, that gives the desired result. It is also considered to indicate success and victory (*jayam*).

Regarding *ausadha*, the offering of burning incense - called *dhupa* or *agarbatti* or *jhuna* - is considered an essential ingredient in all religious rituals, and sometimes the participants inhale clouds of incense smoke, but in this case, too, the beneficial effects depend on the composition of the incense. Traditionally, the resin used was guggul (*Commiphora Mukul*), a very powerful medicinal herb that Ayurveda recommends for treating all *vata* and *kapha* imbalances, including paralysis, arthritis, joint pains, rheumatism, atherosclerosis, high cholesterol and lipid levels in the blood, heart diseases, skin disorders, acne, sore throat, sinusitis, allergic rhinitis, cold and bronchitis, renal stones, urinary tract infections, erectile dysfunctions, dysmenorrhea, allergies and fungal infections, piles, excess bile, constipation, difficulties of digestion, diabetes, hypothyroidism, lympho-adenopathy, obesity, etc. Its application promotes the union of bone fractures. It is immunostimulant, tonic, anti-inflammatory, analgesic, disinfectant, and strengthens the body. Its neutralizers are alcohol, excessive

physical exercise, standing in the heat for a long time, and the consumption of sour and pungent foods (such as onion and garlic). Unfortunately, today incense sticks are made of coal powder, generic sawdust powder, some type of chemical glue and synthetic perfumes - and inhaling their smoke is not exactly a recommended method to improve one's health. The best that can be said about them is they can help in keeping mosquitoes away. It is still possible to create healthy incense sticks with different beneficial herbs, but they are not easy to find.

Another medicinal ingredient used in traditional worship is the very aromatic camphor or *Cinnamomum camphora* (called *karpura* in India) that is burned in the *arati* lamp and sometimes also sprinkled on offerings. The original camphor has a direct effect on the brain and spinal cord and is used in extremely low dosage to treat mental disorders including hysteria, depression and obsessive anxiety. Its properties are analgesic, anti-spasmodic, cardiac, carminative, diuretic, hypertensive, insecticide, laxative, and stimulant. It will produce a strong anesthetic effect, reduce swelling of the body (for example in case of rheumatism and arthritis) and blood pressure, treat sprains, stimulate circulatory and nervous system, facilitate sleep, treat epilepsy, relieve gout and rheumatism, treat eye diseases, heal chapped lips, calm inflammation and spasms (especially in bronchitis), soothe respiratory tracts and sinuses, improve digestion, kill internal parasites, revive people from faints, treat wounds, and even reduce flatulence and teeth plaque. Unfortunately it has become very rare, just like the genuine *guggul*, and in its place people use a sort of soft and greasy plastic dust that never evaporates spontaneously and does not even have any good smell. Similarly, sandalwood - *chandan* - is a very valuable Ayurvedic medicine, both for external and for internal use, with cooling, calming effects. It is mostly used for skin damage.

Two other famous *aushadhas* used in Vedic religious rituals are *soma* and *bhang*. *Soma* is the non-fermented juice of a very beneficial plant called *Ephedra*, that is known to contain a good alkaloid used even today to boost physical and mental performance, and so effective that its concentrated extracts have been banned in professional competitive athleticism. *Soma* is at the center of several types of *yajnas* and is offered to Indra and the *devas*; its medicinal properties are too many and too important to be dismissed in a few lines, so we will give some more space in the commentary to 9.20.

Bhang is offered only to Shiva Mahadeva, but it also has important medicinal properties as well as psychotropic properties, that in ancient times were considered perfectly legitimate, normal and desirable effects, that were pursued with the proper consciousness and modalities. Nobody smoked *ganja* to get stoned stupid during the weekend, or ate funny mushrooms just to see the pretty colors and have a laugh with friends. The consumption of alcoholic drinks was considered normal and even medicinal when done within limits and by people who knew how to deal with it, such as the well trained *kshatriyas*, but it was never meant for drinking oneself into a stupor to forget one's problems. Excesses were extremely rare and unintentional damage to people and property due to drunk behavior was unheard of.

The fire and the act of offering mentioned in this verse are the other essential factors in all religious performances, worship, purification and meditation.

Now, Krishna states that he is all this - such consciousness can help us in two ways: first of all it will make us appreciate more and more all these factors and components of religious activities, and focus our awareness better, which will give much better results. The second way is when our consciousness is firmly and genuinely fixed on Krishna consciousness: then all the external aspects of

religious activities become secondary and can be substituted by a more intense spiritual awareness.

VERSE 17

पिताहमस्य जगतो माता धाता पितामहः ।

pitāhamasya jagato mātā dhātā pitāmahaḥ ।

वेद्यं पवित्रमोँकार ऋक्साम यजुरेव च ॥ ९-१७ ॥

vedyam pavitramoṅkāra ṛksāma yajureva ca ॥ 9-17 ॥

pita: the father; *aham*: I am; *asya*: of this; *jagatah*: universe; *mata*: the mother; *dhata*: the supporter/ maintainer; *pitamahah*: the grandfather; *vedyam*: the object of knowledge; *pavitram*: perfectly pure; *omkara*: the sacred syllable *om*; *rik*: the *Rig Veda*; *sama*: the *Sama Veda*; *yajur*: the *Yajur Veda*; *eva*: certainly; *ca*: as well.

"I am the father of this (world), I am the mother, the supporter, the grandfather, I am the object of knowledge, I am the source of purification, I am the Omkara, and the Rig, the Sama and the Yajur (Vedas)."

As in the previous verse, Krishna is personally giving us the precise type of meditation we must perform on his Personality - meaning that all the factors mentioned represent Krishna and therefore must be honored and kept in the center of our lives, but also meaning that on a higher level, meditation on his Personality is automatically fulfilling all the benefits usually given by the other factors.

Materialistic simpletons (*prakrita sahajiyas*) prefer to skip this type of passages in the *shastra* and to forget Krishna's divine

glories to jump directly into the contemplation of the amorous pastimes narrated in the *panchadhyaya* ("5 chapters") from 29 to 33 of the 10th canto of *Bhagavata Purana* that deal with the *rasa lila*, but the "*rasa*" ("taste") they derive from such recitation is not spiritual, but material. It is true that the *gopis* liked to see Krishna simply as their handsome boyfriend, but they were not ignorant fools or even ordinary persons - they were direct manifestations of God's internal potency, and their younger friends and assistants the *sakhis* were great liberated sages. They knew very well that Krishna was the Supreme Personality of Godhead, and they reminded him and each other about that, too.

This is why the *acharyas* sternly warn us against skipping the first 9 cantos of *Bhagavata Purana* and directly going to the amorous pastimes in Vrindavana: without properly studying and realizing the transcendental science and the immense glories of God, we will remain unable to perceive the real Krishna, and we will simply see a naughty but attractive cowherd boy who is adored by some young, romantic and simple minded village girls. Any ordinary good looking boy could play this part, and indeed many not-so-good looking boys play it as well, because all silly girls are more than ready to get a crush on boys, and make a big entertaining story out of it. Thousands of love stories are told by novels and movies, or from one friend to another, but hearing or reading them does not give the same effect of hearing and reading the Krishna *rasa lila* with the proper knowledge and consciousness.

There is a very famous verse from the *Mahabharata* that says, *tvam eva mata ca pita tvam eva, tvam eva bandhus ca sakha tvam eva, tvam eva vedyam ca dravinam tvam eva, tvam eva sarvam mama deva deva*, "O Great God! To me, you are mother, father, friend and family. You are my knowledge, my Veda, my wealth, you are everything for me". It is a deeply touching, very personal prayer that can never be called "impersonalistic" - a point

confirmed by the fact that a very similar prayer is offered in *Bhagavata Purana* (1.11.7) by the residents of Dvaraka when Krishna returns to his city after the Kurukshetra war.

Another very similar verse is expressed by Ramanuja: *tvam eva mata ca pita tvam eva tvam eva bandhus ca gurus tvam eva, tvam eva vidya ca dravinam tvam eva, tvam eva sarvam mama deva deva.*

The *Varaha Purana* states, *prapitamaho me bhagavan iti sarva janasya tu, guruh sri brahmano visnuh, suranam ca guror guruh,* "People in general honor Vishnu as their prime ancestor/ great-grandfather, the *guru* of all the *devas*".

Naturally father and mother are the first and most important influences in one's religious life.

Here Krishna not only presents himself as the father, but as the mother, too, so we should not think that there is some contradiction in meditating on Krishna as the Mother Goddess, in a feminine form: attributing physical limitations to God is always wrong.

Here we must understand what is the position of mother and father in the genuine Vedic culture: *Bhagavata Purana* (5.5.18) says, *gurur na sa syat sva-jano na sa syat, pita na sa syaj janani na sa syat, daivam na sa syan na patis ca sa syan, na mocayed yah samupeta-mrityum,* "One should not become a *guru*, a companion, a father, a mother, a *deva*, or a husband, without being able to liberate (others) from further deaths."

In order to be a real father or mother it is not sufficient to have sex and give birth to a baby, without properly fulfilling the responsibilities required by the role. A materialistic attachment to non-civilized family life, filled with lust and greed, quarrel and envy, jealousy and revenge, does not represent Krishna at all. However, when the parenting role is fulfilled properly (which can

be done even by adoptive parents), the child benefits immensely and develops a healthy, balanced, strong, self-sufficient and responsible personality.

In our days there is a lot of controversy about gay marriages and adoptive parenting, and we should be careful not to let ourselves be dragged into some sort of abrahamic-styled puritanism and try to interfere in the private lives of other people - something that Vedic culture always avoids.

Even those who have disgraced themselves by actually committing aggression against innocent good people, or criminal actions contrary to the principles of *dharma* (truthfulness, compassion, cleanliness and self-control) or seriously neglecting their duties to family and professional occupation, should simply be ostracized by their particular community but they should remain free to join another less demanding community, or move to a different city or kingdom (no need for passports or visas), or perform the required purification and be welcomed again in their original community.

Per se, consensual gay unions based on the same principles of ordinary heterosexual marriages cannot be defined as aggression, criminal action or infringement on family or professional responsibilities. They are simply a personal matter of choice that should be respected, and if one or two persons (irrespective of their sexual orientation) want to lovingly accept, feed and raise a child that would otherwise remain abandoned in the hands of impersonal institutions, they should be commended and praised, not obstructed, just like heterosexual individuals who do the same.

The word *dhata* means "supporter/ maintainer", as well as "creator", "ordainer" as in "boss", or "employer". With the suffix *vi* (*vidhata*) it is used to refer to Destiny or Providence as the universal plan of the supreme Consciousness.

The word *pitamahah*, "the grandfather", is often applied to Brahma, the first creature of this universe, from whom all other living beings were generated: thus he is the true ancestor of everyone, the original teacher and *guru*, the original ancestor that established the proper dharmic tradition for the family, and he should always be respected and honored.

The word *vedyam*, "the object of knowledge", has a great depth of meaning. Krishna (as the supreme universal Consciousness) is the purpose of the *Vedas* (15.15) and the knowledge we all seek to understand ourselves, the universe, and the purpose of life.

In 9.2 Krishna used the word *dharmyam*, "the object of *dharma*", to describe the Yoga of the supreme Consciousness: both *vidya* and *dharma* should always go together.

The word *pavitram*, "perfectly pure", refers to something that has the power to purify the things it touches - like the wind, the sunlight, fire, and so on. All such things are considered religiously sacred because of their power of purification.

The *omkara*, the sacred syllable *om*, is mentioned several times in *Bhagavad gita* and in many other Vedic texts, because of its great importance and power. Patanjali's *Yoga sutras* state, *tasya vacakah pranavah*, "The *pranava* is his sound" (1.27), and *taj-japas tad-artha-bhavanam*, "the chanting of the *omkara* is done with the understanding of its meaning and scope" (1.28), meaning that the *japa sadhana* of a *mantra* will automatically bring the realization of its significance, but that one should chant the *mantra* purposefully and attentively, trying to concentrate on its meaning. Mere mechanical repetition has much less effects.

The *Vedas* mentioned in the verse are the *samhitas* or collections of hymns known as *Rig*, *Sama* and *Yajur*. Some commentators explain that the word *ca* indicates the *Atharva*, the fourth *Veda*.

VERSE 18

गतिर्भर्ता प्रभुः साक्षी निवासः शरणं सुहृत् ।

gatirbhartā prabhuḥ sāksī nivāsaḥ śaraṇam suhṛt ।

प्रभवः प्रलयः स्थानं निधानं बीजमव्ययम् ॥ ९-१८ ॥

prabhavaḥ pralayaḥ sthānam nidhānam bijamavyayam ॥ 9-18 ॥

gatih: the goal; *bharta*: the nourisher; *prabhuh*: the Lord; *sakshi*: the witness; *nivasah*: the abode; *saranam*: the shelter; *suhrit*: the friend; *prabhavah*: the creation; *pralayah*: the destruction; *sthanam*: the maintenance; *nidhanam*: the storage; *bijam*: the seed; *avyayam*: that is never destroyed.

"I am the destination, the nourisher, the Lord, the witness, the abode, the shelter, the friend. I am the origin, the end, the foundation, the resting place and the seed that never perishes."

The word *gati* has a number of meanings, mostly "destination, goal, purpose, end of a journey". Some commentators say that in this verse it refers to the result of *karma* that ultimately is attained, but we can also raise this meaning to higher levels, and specifically to the ultimate goal and purpose of life, that is liberation from material illusion, attainment of spiritual realization and pure love for God - that will be mentioned in 9.32 as *param gatim*.

In a deeper devotional sense, Krishna is the ultimate destination and the purpose of all actions for the devotee, who constantly meditates on him and only desires to attain him.

The *surah* ("devotees, divine personalities") always keep their vision on Vishnu, who is the supreme destination: *om tad visnoh paramam padam sada pasyanti surayah diviva caksur atatam visnor yat paramam padam*.

This is the verdict of the *Rig Veda samhita* (1.22.20), repeated in several *Upanishads* (*Paingala*, 4.30-32, *Subala*, 6.6, *Tara sara*, 3,9, *Tripura tapani*, 4.13).

In his instructions in *Bhagavata Purana* (7.5.30), Prahlada mentions that the persons who identify with their family (*grha vratah*) and do not control their senses (*adanta gobhih*) walk into a dark path (*visatam tamisram*). In the subsequent verse (7.5.31) he continues to explain: *na te viduh svartha gatim hi visnum, durasaya ye bahir artha maninah, adha yathandhair upaniyamanas, te 'pisa tantryam uru damni baddhah*, "They do not know that Vishnu is the goal of life, and thus they cultivate high egotic ambitions and consider the external things to be actually valuable in themselves. They are just like blind people led by other blind people, strongly tied up by the power of God."

The same point will be established by Krishna later in *Bhagavad gita* 16.23: *na sa siddhim avapnoti, na sukham, na param gatim*, "they cannot achieve perfection, happiness or the ultimate purpose".

The word *bharta* means "nourisher, maintainer", and therefore it refers to a person who lovingly takes care of his dependents, like a husband or an employer - someone in the category indicated by the *Bhagavata Purana* (5.5.18) as *guru*, father, mother, *deva* and so on. Such a person, who is only concerned with our good, deserves all our respect and affection.

In verse 13.23 Krishna will again mention the quality of *bharta* as one of the main characteristics of God (*bharta, bhokta, mahesvarah, paramatma, parama purusha, upadrasta, anumanta*).

The word *prabhu*, "lord", is from the same root of *prabha*, "power". It is used to refer to God and sometimes also to refer to powerful personalities, saints and devotees. Its deep meaning can

be understood from the description of *Svetasvatara Upanishad* (3.17): *sarvasya prabhum isanam sarvasya saranam brihat*, "Isana, the Lord, has power over all, and is the immense shelter for everything and everyone."

The word *sakshi*, "witness", appears in many places to describe Bhagavan, of whom Paramatma is an expansion. *Bhagavata Purana* (4.20.7) describes this supreme Self as *ekah suddhah svayam jyotir, nirguno 'sau gunasrayah, sarva go 'navritah sakshi, niratmatma atmanah parah*, "The One/ All, pure, effulgent in itself, free from all designations but origin of all qualities, omnipresent (going everywhere), never covered (by material identification), the witness, selfless self of the self - totally spiritual."

It refers to the fact that Krishna is the Soul in the heart of all beings, but remains detached observing the activities of the individual soul. What is exactly this presence? It is simply Consciousness: the pure awareness that transcends the limitations of time and space and phenomenon. It is the eternal, blissful, and awakened state of being that we are, when we overcome the identification and the movements or modifications of the mind and body. This is what Patanjali describes in his *sutras* as the purpose and meaning of Yoga, and therefore one of the earliest practices of meditation consists in becoming conscious of ourselves as the detached and blissful witness of the movements and activities of our body and mind.

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

Similarly, king Bahulasva of Videha prayed, *bhavan hi sarva bhutanam atma saksi sva drg vibho, atha nas tvat padambhojam smaritam darsanam gata*, "Your Grace is the Self of all being, the witness, that sees itself/ self illuminated, the powerful. You have shown yourself to us, because we are always remembering your lotus feet" (10.86.31).

The word *nivasah*, "abode", is applied to Krishna in several other verses of *Gita* and especially in the description of the universal form of God (11.25, 11.36, 11.45), but also in 12.8, and is echoed by the synonym *dhama* (8.21, 10.12, 11.38, 15.6) and similar words (*visanti*, 8.11, 11.21, 11.26, 11.29, *visate*, 18.55). It is also the root for Vishnu's name Srinivasa, "the abode of Sri".

In *Bhagavata Purana* we find this definition in the description of Devaki while pregnant with Krishna: *sa devaki sarva jagan-nivasa nivasa bhuta nitaram na reje*, "The womb of Devaki had become the abode of the abode of everything, but she kept that radiance to herself." (10.2.19)

The word *saranam* means "one who delivers others from danger" and therefore "protection, shelter, refuge", and is used very frequently in prayers by which the devotees surrenders to God seeking his protection. Krishna also uses the word in 2.49 when he speaks about "taking shelter in intelligence", and recommending to "take shelter" in God as in 18.62 *saranam gaccha*, and 18.65 *saranam vraja*. A synonym is *prapannam* ("surrender") as in 2.7.

Krishna also describes himself as the supreme friend (*suhrit*) of all beings, not only here but also in 5.29. Another synonym is *sakha*, that is used specifically to refer to the relationship between Arjuna and Krishna (4.3, 11.41, 11.44).

The word *prabhava* means "creation, origin of existence, manifestation, beginning of things", while *sthanam* means both

"maintenance, conservation, continued existence" and "position, background, basis". It is directly connected with *pralayah* (the destruction) and *sthanam* (the maintenance), that is also connected to the name *nivasah*.

The word *nidhanam* means "treasure, store for the future, savings, investment", and is mentioned in 2.28 in reference to the living beings or states of existence that are "stored" into God in the period of non-manifestation. It is also found in Arjuna's prayers to the universal form (*param nidhanam*, 11.18, 11.38).

Closely related to this meaning are the two other words *bijam* ("the seed") and *avyayam* ("that is never destroyed"). The supreme Consciousness is the seed that contains the existence of the entire tree of the universal manifestation, in which innumerable seeds are produced (7.10, 10.39, 14.4).

This is an extremely powerful meditation, to be practiced every day to remind ourselves what we are supposed to do, and why, in the course of our daily activities.

Whatever we do, eat, sacrifice, endure, or give away (9.27), we must remember that Krishna is the purpose we want to attain (*gati*), the strength that carries us across, the witness of everything that happens, our friend and shelter, the power that brings beginnings and ends, and the imperishable bank account where we store all our merits.

When we are able to remember this, every day is a success, irrespective of what we have been able to accomplish on the gross material level.

VERSE 19

तपाम्यहमहं वर्षं निगृह्णाम्युत्सृजामि च ।

tapāmyahamahaṁ varṣaṁ nigṛhṇāmyutsṛjāmi ca ।

अमृतं चैव मृत्युश्च सदसच्चाहमर्जुन ॥ ९-१९ ॥

amṛtaṁ caiva mṛtyuśca sadasaccāhamarjuna ।। 9-19 ।।

tapami: I heat up; *aham*: I; *aham*: I; *varsham*: the rain; *ngrihnami*: withhold; *utsrijami*: send forth; *ca*: and; *amritam*: immortality; *ca*: and; *eva*: certainly; *mṛtyuh*: death; *ca*: and; *sat*: sat; *asat*: asat; *ca*: and; *aham*: I (am); *arjuna*: o Arjuna.

"I am the origin of the heat (of the sun), I pour down or withhold the rains. I am immortality and death as well. I am sat and asat, too, o Arjuna."

All the world cultures recognize the Sun as the original Deity, from whose immense power everything is created and destroyed. The Sun bestows both life and death, and therefore manifests both the "good" and "bad" aspects of power - the fierce and the benevolent, defined in Sanskrit as *saumya* and *asaumya*.

The words *sat* and *asat* are difficult to translate because they contain many levels of meanings, all in the category of opposites or polarities: spiritual and material, permanent and temporary, good and bad, higher and lower, and so on. The path of progress leads from *asat* to *sat* (*asato ma sad gamaya, tamaso ma jyotir gamaya, mṛtyor ma amritam gamaya - Brihad aranyaka Upanishad 1.3.28*), "from ignorance lead me to truth, from darkness lead me to light, from death lead me to immortality".

However, to really appreciate God we need to understand that God is the source of everything - not only the things we consider good, but also the things that appear bad.

Everything that exists has a purpose, and is arranged by the universal intelligence according to precise and perfect laws, meant for the progress and support of all. What we consider bad is just the absence of good, just like darkness is just the absence of light. However, darkness too is created by the sun, in daytime because of clouds (created by the sun by evaporating water) and in the night because the mass of the earth (also created by the sun when the planets were separated from the original mass, and moved in its orbit by the gravitational pull of the sun) remains between our eyes and the sun itself.

The abrahamic ideologies we often mention as a wide-spread cultural contamination at global level are closely related to the Parsi ideology created by Zarathustra - depicting two rival Gods: Ahura Mazda and Ariman. Once Zarathustra had chosen Ahura Mazda as his "good God", Ariman automatically became the Enemy, "the God of the others" (as in "the other peoples who are our enemies and we must vanquish").

As a consequence, a strange theology developed, according to which "the good God" created all the good things and whatever bad or evil things exist in the world were created by Satan, the enemy of God. Both *satan* and *ariman* literally mean "the enemy".

In the Bible, Satan was originally Lucifer (a Latin word literally meaning "the bringer of light"), who entered the Garden of Eden and tempted the first two human beings - Adam and Eve - to disobey God (Jahweh) and eat the apple of knowledge. Jahweh did not want them to eat the fruit of knowledge because by actually becoming able to tell good from evil, they would become as powerful as him. Eve ate the apple and gave it to Adam, and Jahweh kicked out both from his garden, cursing them to suffer for everything in life, from growing their food to giving birth. However, somehow the descendants of these two people prospered and built a great civilization; Jahweh did not like it and killed

almost all of them, including all animals, with the Great Flood - only Noah was spared because Jahweh tipped him beforehand and told him to build a big boat. Some time later, when people had recovered from that mass slaughter and developed another great civilization, God chose a man called Abraham and told him to become his follower. In exchange he promised him many descendants and domination over all the lands. As evidence of their allegiance to Jahweh, Abraham and all the males of his family would have to practice genital mutilation and animal sacrifices, because what pleases Jawheh most is the blood and pain of the innocent... so much that, thousands of years later, in order to "save the entire mankind", Jahweh will organize for the brutal torture and death of "his only son" Jesus, and by the blood and pain of Jesus, Jahweh would be appeased. From the recorded history of the last 2000 years, however, it seems Jesus' sacrifice was simply not sufficient, and much more blood and sufferings were required.

This is the basic theology of what is called "abrahamic monotheism", that means "only accepting one God" and fighting against all the other Gods. On the other hand, Vedic monotheism means "accepting that there is one God that manifests in many forms"; as Krishna confirms in this verse, he is *sat* and *asat* at the same time, and yet he is not limited by them.

But who created Satan in the first place? If God is all-knowing and all-powerful, he must have calculated the nature of Satan to work exactly as it worked, and in the worst case, God should have destroyed Satan as the *asuras* are systematically destroyed along the course of history.

Since abrahamics say he hasn't, the entire abrahamic theology remains built on the inherent ontological duality between good and evil, creating a deep imbalance - a sort of fundamental schizophrenia - in the minds of the followers, because this so-called enemy God lives within each and every human being, in the

form of the material body, the world, nature, or the feminine hemisphere of the brain connected to the left side of the body. The imbalance caused by the hostility towards nature and by the intention to defeat, oppress and dominate it, creates fear and aggressiveness against everything feminine (like nature and like the origin of the body), and the natural duality (called *sat* and *asat*, and that must be overcome by transcending it on a higher level of consciousness) becomes an obsessive never-ending war rather than the joyful, graceful and passionate sacred dance it is supposed to be. In the eyes of the abrahamics, spirit and matter become antagonists and enemies to each other, and man and woman can never be friends or cooperate with each other.

The victory of armored patriarchy, that became firmly established with the abrahamic ideologies, caused the bondage of women in various degrees of oppression because women as a class represent nature and the beauty of material things - bodies, sex, children, pleasure, sweetness, tenderness, and so on. Rape appeared for the first time in human history as an instrument of oppression. Previously, in dharmic human societies, there had been sexual acts dictated by the passion of the male, but because of the general ethical values of society and human nature, they had been mostly physical discharges of lust, devoid of the intention to hurt and humiliate the woman who had become the target of the sexual urge. It was more similar to the animals' sexual encounters than to the rape as we have known it for the last 3000 years - an act that is more similar to the mentality of *rakshasas*, the asuric beings who enjoy the sufferings of other people.

Rape always goes together with slavery and torture, because all these are based on the idea that the victim has no rights to decide on her/ his own life and to oppose what others want to do with her/ his body. This of course deeply changed the dynamics of family, because women lost all decisional power in the matter of marriage

and children, so the system of arranged marriages started and marriage itself became just a form of institutionalized and legalized rape. In the same period we also observe the beginning of wars, crude iron weapons among the uncivilized tribes, use of horses and chariots for the hostile invasion of peaceful territories, pillaging, reducing animals and land to objects of private property (without inherent rights of the animals and land to proper use), mistreatment of children, painful bodily modifications (circumcision, mutilation, cranial elongation, feet shrinking etc), unnecessary felling of trees, destruction of property (such as houses etc), division of society in classes, hereditary of social positions (especially in priesthood), male priesthood, etc.

Hopefully, we are coming to the end of this horrible parenthesis in human history, and the last throes of the monster can be less disastrous if we have been able to attract more people to the sanity and beauty of dharmic ideologies. Unfortunately, Hinduism too has been poisoned by such alien infiltrations at conscious and subconscious collective level so that a lot of confusion has been created; we have the mission to clean the mess up. Our greatest hope is *Bhagavad gita*.

There are fools who are questioning the "relevance of *Gita* for our times", but they simply have not understood anything about the *Gita*, and are very confused about the problems that we are to face at this moment in time. Just this one verse of *Gita* offers the perfect solution to the ideological schizophrenia of eternal conflict: God is the sum total of everything that exists, the place where all dualities are overcome because they unite and reconcile. God is *sat* and *asat* at the same time - existence and non-existence, spirit and matter, cause and effect, heat and rain, death and immortality. Fear is thus immediately vanquished, and when fear vanishes, a human being really starts to live.

VERSE 20

त्रैविद्या मां सोमपाः पूतपापा

traividyaṁ māṁ somapāḥ pūtapāpā

यज्ञैरिष्ट्वा स्वर्गतिं प्रार्थयन्ते ।

yajñairiṣṭvā svargatiṁ prārthayante ।

ते पुण्यमासाद्य सुरेन्द्रलोकं

te puṇyamāsādyā surendralokaṁ

अश्नन्ति दिव्यान्दिवि देवभोगान् ॥ ९-२० ॥

aśnanti divyāndivi devabhogān ॥ 9-20 ॥

traī-vidya: those who know the 3 *Vedas*; *mam*: me; *soma-pah*: drink the *soma rasa*; *puta*: purified; *papa*: wrongful actions; *yajnaiḥ*: with sacrifices; *istva*: by worshipping; *svah-gatim*: attainment of Svarga; *prarthayante*: they pray for; *te*: they; *puṇyam*: virtuous/ meritorious; *asadya*: attaining; *sura-indra-lokam*: the planet of the King of the *devas*; *asnanti*: they eat; *divyan*: divine; *divi*: in heaven; *deva-bhogan*: the pleasures of the *devas*.

"Those who know the three (*Vedas*), who drink the *soma* and who are purified from all wrongs through the (acts of) sacrifice, worshipping me (in this way) pray to attain Svarga. After reaching the pious (planets) of the King of the *suras* (Indra) in heaven, they enjoy the celestial pleasures of the *devas*."

Krishna speaks here of the *traī vidya*, "the three forms of knowledge", and we might easily conclude that he is referring to the three main *Vedas* called *Rig*, *Sama* and *Yajur*, that deal with

the same hymns and the same understanding of the universe, and are focused on the glorification of the *devas*.

The fourth *Veda*, called *Atharva*, is considered slightly different as it contains various specific formulas to solve daily problems such as dealing with controlling natural and atmospheric calamities, neutralizing environment pollution, fighting ghosts and hostile spirits, and alleviating the negative influence of the planets.

Another interpretation of the *trai vidya* reference is the triad of *sruti*, *smriti* and *agama*, which form the foundations for a genuine engagement in religious life. It can also refer to the knowledge of the three levels or dimensions of existence, called Bhu, Bhuvah and Svah - the earthly or material levels, the intermediate subtle levels, and the higher or spiritual levels.

Svah or Svarga is already considered almost spiritual because it is the residence of the *devas*, the limbs and representatives of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, in charge of the administration of the universe. Indra himself is considered to be a direct manifestation of Vishnu, so much that in this verse Krishna says, *mam istva*, "by worshiping me" referred to the offerings of *soma* and the invocations to the King of the *devas*.

This higher planetary system is said to be composed by the planets Mahar, Jana, Tapa and Satya, that is the abode of Lord Brahma, the architect of the universe. Those who have properly studied Vedic scriptures cooperate with the *devas* in the proper administration of the universe, by dutifully performing their *karmas* and by serving *dharma* as prescribed. In the course of their religious ceremonies, these saintly persons become purified by the performance of their duties and by drinking the famous *soma rasa*.

Some commentators believe that this reference to the *soma* is symbolic and stands for the power of intelligence, but even a literal

meaning is not out of place. However, we need to clarify some misunderstanding regarding the *soma rasa*, the juice of the *soma* plant or *soma lata*.

Colonial scholars explained that the *soma rasa* was the milky juice of the *Sarcostemma viminalis* (or *Asclepia acida*) turned alcoholic with the fermentation with flour and butter - but this procedure does not correspond with the original texts in regard to the preparation or to the beneficial and purificatory effects described in the traditional texts.

On the other hand, the ancient Ayurvedic tradition identifies the *soma lata* with the *Ephedra gerardiana*, the Indian variety of the ubiquitous Ephedra, a very popular medicinal herb that grows spontaneously in Asia, Europe and America, where it is called *Mormon Tea* and *Squaw Tea*. The *Susruta samhita* (which is part of the *Ayur Veda*) lists those places where the *soma lata* grows spontaneously in two varieties: the mountain and the marsh.

Ephedra contains a bland alkaloid called ephedrine, comparable to the "good caffeine" of *guaranà* and *yerba matè*, used in Ayurvedic medicine as a stimulant at the mental and physical level, for curing headaches, allergies and rheumatism, and improving metabolism and digestion. Its active principles stimulate the natural production of adrenaline, and in fact it is very popular among sports people and students during the exam periods, and also for the purpose of burning off excess weight.

Synthetic ephedrine is catalogued by the International Olympic Committee and by the World Anti-Doping Agency among the banned substances in professional sports, so much that some athletes have been disqualified in some competitions.

Hymn 4 of *mandala* 9 of *Rig Veda* (completely dedicated to the *soma rasa*) prays, "may we obtain agility, strength and mental

power, to win and repel our enemies, and to become better persons."

This, in the Vedic culture, is considered true purification; some enemies of Vedic culture have concocted cruel and gruesome fantasies about the concept of purification and have inserted them into manipulated texts of the *Manu samhita*, for example, and simpletons have even gone as far as to believe them, but *Gita* is very clear about this subject, both here and later (17.5-6, 17.14-19).

In the various descriptions of the *Rig Veda* we also find the important information that the *soma* plant does not have leaves or bark, but smells like pine and tastes rather bitter. Depending on the variety and the age of the plant, the color goes from bright green of the evergreen to green with golden or dark red hues.

The stems are pressed with special stones, then the juice is filtered and left to macerate for one night: a procedure that is normally used in herbal medicine to extract the active principles, but does not imply alcoholic fermentation, which would require a longer time.

It is interesting to see that Soma as the juice of the plant is identified with the Deity Soma (the Moon) and the other way around, and that in traditional iconography it is represented as a bull, a bird or a human embryo.

The word *asnanti* in this verse is particularly interesting because it focuses on the fact that in this material world, eating always remains the greatest pleasure, and trying to deny oneself the healthy and sattvic pleasure of the tongue will simply twist around the natural pleasure propensity towards more dangerous directions. Even the *devas* enjoy their foods - and sattvic food is the best.

VERSE 21

ते तं भुक्त्वा स्वर्गलोकं विशालं

te taṁ bhuktvā svargalokaṁ viśālaṁ

क्षीणे पुण्ये मर्त्यलोकं विशन्ति ।

kṣīṇe puṇye martyalokaṁ viśanti ।

एवं त्रयीधर्ममनुप्रपन्ना

evaṁ trayīdharmamanuprapannā

गतागतं कामकामा लभन्ते ॥ ९-२१ ॥

gatāgataṁ kāmakāmā labhante ॥ 9-21 ॥

te: they; *taṁ*: that; *bhuktvā*: enjoying; *svarga-lokaṁ*: of Svargaloka; *viśalam*: great; *kshine*: after having exhausted; *punye*: the virtuous merits; *martya-lokaṁ*: on the planet of mortal people; *visanti*: fall down; *evam*: thus; *trayi-dharmam*: of the three dharmas; *anuprapannah*: following; *gata-agatam*: coming and going; *kama-kama*: desire for desires; *labhante*: obtain.

"After a long time spent in the enjoyment of Svargaloka, those who have exhausted their virtuous merits fall down again to the level of mortals. In this way, following strictly the path of the three dharmas, they develop a lust for desires and they continue to take birth and die."

In verse 9.19, Krishna mentioned that he is death and immortality at the same time, and in these subsequent verses there seems to be some sort of overlapping of the two concepts when we speak of Svargaloka, the world of the *devas* as opposed to Martyaloka, the world of mortal human beings. Actually, Svargaloka too is a place reached by death, although the duration of life there is different for different degrees of *devas*.

Besides the main Personalities of Godhead there - the 12 Adityas, the 8 Vasus, the 11 Rudras, the 2 Asvini kumara and the 49 Maruts - there is a large population of *devas* and *upadevas* (Gods and "under-Gods") that is usually calculated around the tune of 33 million people. There are innumerable administrative posts to be filled in the universal government capital, and only the most qualified are appointed there by dint of their own personal *punya*, or virtuous merit. This is indicated by the expression *trayi-dharmam*, "by the three *dharmas*", that can be translated in a variety of ways just like the expression *tray-vidya* (9.20) - the three dimensions of Bhu, Bhuvah and Svah, as well as the knowledge of the three main *Vedas* (*Rig, Sama, Yajur*).

Thus *trayi-dharma* refers to the dutiful performance of one's work on the three levels of existence (earthly, subtle and religious/spiritual), or to the three main *sva-dharmas* in the *varna* system of *brahmanas*, *kshatriyas* and *vaisyas*, because *sudras* are not expected to perform the *yajnas* for the higher planets. The word *dharma* means "duty", therefore it can apply here to family, society and mankind, and also to the pursuance of the cultivation of *dharma*, *artha* and *kama*, in the cycle of death and rebirth.

These are the *dharman* (in the plural) Krishna will mention in 18.65, when he will say that one should abandon all such identifications and simply surrender to the supreme universal Consciousness to attain permanent liberation.

Non unlikely the noble souls that have reached the Pitrilokas and are maintained there by the credit of the *sraddha* offered by their descendents, the residents of Svargaloka attain and maintain their positions by credits.

If they do not distinguish themselves by their selfless and careful work in their particular post, at some point they exhaust their credits and must return to earth, just like men who live in a very

expensive luxury residence hotel but are not earning sufficient money will eventually have to leave and find a more modest accommodation.

Similar verses are found in *Bhagavata Purana*, for example in 3.32.1-4, where Kapila explains that *grihamedhis* (people attached to family life) perform many religious duties (*dharman*, in the plural) while living at home and enjoying *dharma*, *artha* and *kama*, and engaging in ceremonies (*kratu*) to worship *devas* and *pitris*, without being interested in the pure Krishna Consciousness (*bhagavat-dharma*). By drinking the *soma rasa* during such worship, these people will attain the higher planets but will ultimately fall down again, if not earlier, by the time Mahavishnu withdraws the universe into his body.

Another series of verses is found in *Bhagavata Purana* (11.10.22-26), where Krishna explains to Uddhava that those who properly perform the Vedic duties without any mistake are elevated to Svarga, where they enjoy the same pleasures of the *devas*. Shining with the power of their virtuous merits, they travel around in wonderful airplanes, surrounded by beautiful women and glorified by the Gandharvas' songs. Then, when their old merits are exhausted, they are forced to leave those wonderful places and to return to earth to work.

Here we clearly see that the problem is not pleasure in itself, or even desire in itself, but rather the deliberate choice to cultivate desires for sense gratification as the purpose of life. This constitutes a major distraction because it is simply impossible to achieve real satisfaction through sense gratification - one simply wants more and more - and in the process one completely forgets the purpose of human life, the realization of the Atman.

These people who cultivate the desire for desires (*kama-kama*) use Svarga simply as a luxury vacation resort and not as a service post,

and therefore they miss the great opportunity offered by the company of such great Personalities, choosing simply to enjoy their pleasures.

VERSE 22

अनन्याश्चिन्तयन्तो मां ये जनाः पर्युपासते ।

ananyāścintayanto mām ye janāḥ paryupāsate ।

तेषां नित्याभियुक्तानां योगक्षेमं वहाम्यहम् ॥ ९-२२ ॥

teṣāṃ nityābhiyuktānāṃ yogakṣemaṃ vahāmyaham ।। 9-22 ।।

ananyah: with no other; *cintayantah*: thought/ concern/ interest; *mam*: me; *ye*: those; *janah*: people; *paryupasate*: perfectly worship; *tesam*: to them; *nitya-abhiyuktanam*: always engaged favorably/ constructively; *yoga-ksemam*: what is required for their service; *vahami*: I carry; *aham*: I (personally).

"Those who are interested only in me and my worship are always favorably/ constructively engaged. I personally carry what they need."

A householder carries the burden of the maintenance of his family - the father maintains his children, and the grown up son maintains his elderly parents - and similarly the Lord takes personal care of his family or *samsara*, therefore he is called *bhakta vatsala*, very affectionate and sensitive to the needs of his devotees.

The word *vahami* derives from the same root of *vahana* ("carrier") and literally means "carrying, transporting". There are many beautiful episodes, in ancient and in more recent times, of the Lord personally appearing in various forms to practically demonstrate the truth of this statement; as for example in the story of

Madhavendra Puri and Kshirachora Gopinatha (who stole a pot of rice pudding for him), a devotee of Jagannatha named Bandhu Mohanty (whose entire family was fed by a mysterious black boy who gave them a huge golden plate filled with food), to Bilvamangala (who was daily fed with milk by Krishna in Vrindavana).

There was also that famous Gita Panda (named Arjuna Mishra) who was studying this very same verse and became perplexed about it. When the Panda went to take bath, his wife was visited by a black-complexioned boy who was carrying a heavy load of food for him as a gift. In this last incidence, the identity of the mysterious donor was highlighted by the fact that he had a deep red scratch across his chest, which the Panda recognized later as a same scratch he had done with his pen on the verse that had left him so dubious.

Another similar example is Draupadi's *sari*, that Krishna kept supplying out of thin air to protect her dignity when she was being disrobed by the order of evil Duryodhana in the assembly of the Kurus. We can also remember the story of the *brahmana* Sudama, narrated in the 10th canto of *Bhagavata Purana*, who returned home without asking anything from his friend Krishna, but found his house had been instantly filled with immeasurable wealth. But there are also every day miracles we can observe in our own lives when we totally devote them to the service of God, without any other consideration.

These necessities not only apply to the material ingredients or maintenance, but also to the spiritual realizations and inspiration to continue in our service. The previous verse was speaking about ordinary virtuous people, who engage in the three types of duties, and after attaining the higher planetary systems and spending some time there, must return to the earthly platform to earn new merits. Such people are not selfish, because the influence of *sattva guna*

keeps them free from egotism and exploitation: they are simply concerned about their own maintenance and the maintenance of those who depend on them.

Here Krishna reassures his devotees that they do not need to be worried about anything: he will take care of them personally at every step of the way, for each and every necessity.

However, we should not forget the required qualifications that entitle the devotee to the personal attention of Krishna: 1) exclusive concern with Krishna's service, 2) perfect performance of worship, 3) continued, regular and consistent favorable engagement.

Exclusive concern with Krishna's service means that the devotee is not interested in his/ her own pleasure or benefit, and rather s/he is ready to sacrifice everything and engage everything in Krishna's service, following to Krishna's explicit instructions and not some imaginative plan that is not in accordance to the principles of *dharma* and the conclusions of the *shastra*.

Ananya means "no other", and refers to the total surrender of the devotee, who has no mental reservations in his dedication to God. The perfect performance of worship does not refer to the particular technical details, which can be adjusted from time to time according to the circumstances. It rather refers to the purity of the desire to serve Krishna, and the love and devotion that is engaged in the process.

The concept of continued and consistent favorable engagement refers to the identification of the devotee as Krishna's servant only; the pure devotee completely depends on Krishna and surrenders everything to him, without remaining attached to any expectation or identification. We should be careful not to misinterpret this verse to mean that we can just do some little *pūja* to Krishna,

without actually working sincerely to perform our duties, and expect that Krishna will take care of everything for our maintenance.

The tendency of a lazy person is to expect everyone else to work for him, but the characteristic of a devotee is exactly the opposite: he works for Krishna, and performs his duties sincerely and carefully, including those to society and family, because he sees everyone and everything as belonging to Krishna, and he turns all actions into a service to God.

The expression *nitya abhi yuktanam* indicates a perfect constant union in *yoga*, the highest level of success in the pursuance of the evolution of Consciousness.

The words *yoga* and *kshema* respectively apply to what is necessary to connect with God and what is required for one's protection and maintenance.

VERSE 23

येऽप्यन्यदेवताभक्ता यजन्ते श्रद्धयान्विताः ।

ye'pyanyadevatābhaktā yajante śraddhayānvitāḥ ।

तेऽपि मामेव कौन्तेय यजन्त्यविधिपूर्वकम् ॥ ९-२३ ॥

te'pi māmeva kaunteya yajantyavidhipūrvakam ॥ 9-23 ॥

ye: those; *api*: also; *anya-devataḥ*: other *devas*; *bhaktah*: the devotees; *yajante*: worship; *śraddhayanvitah*: with that faith; *te*: them; *api*: also; *mam*: me; *eva*: certainly; *kaunteya*: o son of Kunti (Arjuna); *yajanti*: they are worshipping; *a-vidhi*: not according to the knowledge/ rules; *purvakam*: previous.

"O Arjuna, those devotees who worship the *devas* separately with that faith, are actually worshiping me only, but they are acting in a way that is not in accordance with the proper knowledge."

This is the famous verse used as evidence by those who claim that worshipping "the demigods" is contrary to devotional service and amounts to an offense towards Krishna. The other evidence they give is the verse from *Padma Purana (Brahma Khanda 25.15-18)* that lists, second among the 10 main offenses to be avoided in the chanting of the holy names, *sivasya sri-visnor ya iha guna-namadi-sakalam dhiya bhinnam pasyet sa khalu hari-namahita-karah*, "separating Vishnu from Shiva (and their names, qualities etc) by considering Shiva as different and independently existing from Hari".

The other verse of *Bhagavad gita* quoted as "condemning demigod worship" is 7.20: *kamais tais tair hrita-jnanah prapadyante 'nya-devatah, tam tam niyamam asthaya prakritya niyatah svaya*, "Those whose knowledge is confused by a variety of desires approach other *devas*, and according to their nature they follow the (specific) regulations."

However, usually the next verse is forgotten: *yo yo yam yam tanum bhaktah sraddhayarcitum icchati, tasya tasyacalam sraddham tam eva vidadhamy aham*, "Whatever form the devotee wishes to worship with faith, I (Krishna) strengthen the determination by which s/he will become established (in that method)." (7.21) So it is Krishna himself who is encouraging such worship. Happily enough, there are no verses in *Bhagavad gita* "condemning" (what to speak of "prohibiting") the worship offered to the *devas*. At most, Krishna says that it is done without the proper awareness of the supreme Unity of the Transcendental Consciousness.

To begin with, verse 9.23 does not exactly say that one should not worship "other *devas*" - or even that a devotee of Krishna should stop other people from worshipping the *devas*, as several confused persons have been led to believe. This would be in contradiction with other passages, especially 3.10-14, where Krishna clearly says that one who does not offer sacrifices to the *devas* in gratitude for their gifts is just a thief.

This verse (9.23) simply says that the worship offered separately to the *devas* actually reaches Krishna, but without the knowledge of the worshiper. It is amazing how some people can carve out such offensive hostility against the *devas* from this terse, neutral and simple statement of Krishna.

We would better understand this problem if we examine the basic abrahamic ideology, in which "the other god" is nothing less than Satan himself, the Great Enemy that man must oppose and destroy in all possible ways (including by killing cats and dogs) because Jahweh is not capable or willing to do it himself. If we want to actually understand and apply Vedic knowledge, we need to get rid of these faulty and damaging cultural superimpositions.

The proper way (*vidhi purvakam*) in Vedic culture is to always show respect to the *devas* as limbs and representatives and servants of the Supreme Consciousness. Not worshipping them as "competition Gods", and also not disrespecting them: both these attitudes would be wrong.

During the meditation on the Supreme Lord, we offer worship to the various limbs of his body, beginning with his feet, and then we honor the Lord's companions and intimate servants, at various levels and degrees. The *devas* are not separate from the Lord, rather they are his limbs - his dear companions and assistants - and the Lord personally intervenes to help them and save them from the *asuras*, as we see in innumerable episodes in the *Puranas*.

This is also confirmed in *Bhagavata Purana* 10.40.9-10: *sarva eva yajanti tvam sarva devamayesvaram, ye 'py anya-devata bhakta yady apy anya-dhiyah prabho, yathadri prabhava nadyah parjanyaapuritah prabho visanti sarvatah sindhum tadvat tvam gatayo 'ntatah*, "Everyone actually worships you, Lord, because you are the sum total of all *devas*, even if devotees meditate on the other forms separately from you. Just like the rivers are born from the mountains where the rainwater is collected, and then end up into the ocean, all paths ultimately attain you, Lord."

The problem lies only in the minds of the worshipers who delude themselves into thinking that they can cut some corners in life by bribing some lower-rung minister in the government and obtain benefits without having actually earned them. This is explained in verses 7.23 ("Persons of lesser intelligence seek temporary benefits") and 4.12 ("Those human beings who desire to achieve perfection in their actions worship the *devas* in this world, because in this way perfection can quickly be attained through one's efforts.").

There is nothing wrong in respectfully making friends and associating with the *devas* - just like there is nothing wrong in making friends with powerful virtuous personalities in the government - because by associating with them we can learn to work and live like them on a sattvic and responsible platform, and cooperating with them for the support of the society and the universe is always required by the proper established system.

The mistake would be considering them as authorities in themselves, as separate and independent from the Government, and expecting them to support and protect us even if we engage in illicit and illegal activities, or to give us what is not lawfully destined to us. A famous example in this regard is offered by *Bhagavata Purana* (4.31.14): *yatha taror mula nisecana tripyanti tat skandha bhujopasakhah, pranopaharac ca*

yathendriyanam tathaiva sarvarhanam acyutejya, "Just like by watering the root of a tree all its branches and twigs are satisfied, and by feeding the *prana* all the senses are nourished, by worshipping Acyuta, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, one can please everything (in the universe)."

This example is particularly suitable because intelligent people are able to understand that, besides watering the roots and feeding the *prana* in the body, it is always good to wash the leaves of the tree to remove the dust that obstructs the proper functions of the photosynthesis, as well as to brush one's teeth, apply eye balm and proper hair and skin massage oils or ointments.

VERSE 24

अहं हि सर्वयज्ञानां भोक्ता च प्रभुरेव च ।

aham hi sarvayajñānām bhoktā ca prabhureva ca ।

न तु मामभिजानन्ति तत्त्वेनातश्च्यवन्ति ते ॥ ९-२४ ॥

na tu māmabhijānanti tattvenātaścyavanti te ॥ 9-24 ॥

aham: I (am); *hi*: certainly; *sarva-yajnanam*: of all the *yajnas*; *bhokta*: the beneficiary; *ca*: and; *prabhuh*: the Lord; *eva*: certainly; *ca*: and; *na*: not; *tu*: but; *mam*: me; *abhijananti*: they know; *tattvena*: in truth; *atah*: therefore; *cyavanti*: (they) fall down; *te*: they.

"I am the Lord and beneficiary of all *yajnas*. Those who do not understand my *tattva* will have to take birth again."

Again, this verse repeats that all sacred actions should be dedicated to the Supreme Consciousness, that is the ultimate and true beneficiary, as we had already seen in verse 3.9.

The downfall mentioned in this verse is the cycle of births and deaths, in which the conditioned soul keeps revolving, even when he qualifies for a position in the higher planets and the company of the *devas* - that are temporary manifestations of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. As we have seen explained in several verses, those who aspire simply to attain the higher planets for better sense enjoyment will have to fall back again when their virtuous merits have been spent, while those who consistently make an effort in *yoga* to attain a level of transcendental consciousness become liberated - whether they continue to perform their ordinary religious duties to society and family, or they enter the order of renunciation.

A deep lack of understanding of this verse is the cause of the old and bitter controversy between the exponents of *smarta* brahmanism based on the ritualistic *karma kanda* path on one side, and the shankarite *sannyasis* who follow the path of renunciation and a more philosophical interpretation of Vedic knowledge on the other side, as we mentioned in commentary to verse 3.1. Only after properly studying chapter 3 (and remembering it) we will be able to understand chapter 9, otherwise we will simply perpetuate the misunderstanding.

For someone who has really read and understood the instructions of Krishna until this point of *Bhagavad gita*, it should be already very clear that this verse does not prohibit or minimize the importance of the *yajnas* or the worship to the *devas*, but simply states that - as for everything else - all our actions should be performed on a higher level of awareness, not simply to obtain some material benefits but to actively participate to the universal Consciousness.

The *devas* do not have any animosity or competition feelings towards the Supreme Personality of Godhead, and if sometimes there appear to be some disagreements, they are meant to create a

lila that will enthrall the attention of human beings as a wonderful story of adventures - just like the actors of a same troupe will play out different scripts to make their repertoire more interesting.

In the end, all the *devas* always cooperate with each other and they always worship the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Vishnu, who is called *deva deva*, "the God worshiped by the Gods".

In this understanding, we can read the many verses from the *vaishnava shastra* where Vishnu is presented as the Supreme, without remaining confused by the illusion of duality typical of so-called monotheism.

In recent times, there has been a controversial theory according to which the concept of reincarnation is not an original idea in Vedic culture, because the *Veda samhitas* - considered by mainstream western academia as the most ancient part of the Vedic scriptures - do not speak about reincarnation at all.

It's like saying that because in the texts about mathematics and calculus there is no mention about cooking recipes, mathematicians never eat food, or do not believe in eating food.

The Rig Vedic hymns are meant to worship the *devas* and to raise the consciousness of the worshipers to a divine level, to bring him into the personal company of the *devas*. That is precisely to avoid reincarnating on a lower level. Reincarnation is never the purpose of Vedic knowledge: such an idea is never expressed in any Vedic text, ancient or more recent. The purpose is to achieve *moksha*: reincarnation is just the mechanism by which those who fail in one lifetime can try again in a next birth. The Rig Vedic hymns are meant to worship the *devas* and to raise the consciousness of the worshipers to a divine level, to bring him into the personal company of the *devas*. That is precisely to avoid reincarnation on a lower level.

One of the main problems is that non-Vedic academia wants to demonstrate that Vedic knowledge/ culture is a "work in progress", and that it started from a primitive level. This obviously is an attempt to show that in the course of time, one should "progress beyond Vedic knowledge" and arrive at the "superior knowledge of the mainstream academia".

Trying to give an interpretation of Vedic scriptures according to some hypothetical "linear historical development" is futile, as the Vedic scriptures themselves clearly state that the entire corpus of Vedas - *Samhitas, Brahmanas, Aranyakas, Upanishads, Puranas, Mahabharata* - was compiled at the same time by Vyasa about 5000 years ago at the beginning of Kali yuga. Also, there is no evidence that disproves this statement of the Vedic scriptures: absence of proof is not proof of absence, especially when so much evidence supporting the Vedic version has been destroyed by the opponents of Hinduism.

These academics that date Vedic scriptures only according to the manuscripts in their possessions are practically telling you that your grandmother did not exist, because there are no documents about her identity. The simple fact is that grandmother did not need passports or certificates to prove that she existed. Also, we all know that passports and certificates can be falsified by dishonest persons, so they don't have much value anyway.

VERSE 25

यान्ति देवव्रता देवान्पितृन्यान्ति पितृव्रताः ।

yānti devavratā devānpitṛnyānti pitṛvratāḥ ।

भूतानि यान्ति भूतेज्या यान्ति मद्याजिनोऽपि माम् ॥ ९-२५ ॥

bhūtāni yānti bhūtejyā yānti madyājino'pi mām ॥ 9-25 ॥

yanti: they go; *deva-vratah*: those who dedicate themselves to the *devas*; *devan*: to the *devas*; *pitrin*: to the *pitris*; *yanti*: they go; *pitri-vratah*: those who dedicate themselves to the *pitris*; *bhutani*: to the ghosts/ beings; *yanti*: they go; *bhuta-ijyah*: those who sacrifice to the ghosts/ beings; *yanti*: they go; *mad-yajinah*: those who sacrifice to me; *api*: certainly; *mam*: me.

"Those who dedicate themselves to the worship of the *devas* will go to the *devas*, those who worship the *pitris* will go to the *pitris*, those who worship the ghosts and other beings will join them. In the same way, those who sacrifice for me will come to me."

Whatever level of consciousness we have developed during the time allotted to us for this lifetime, we will be able to retain it at the time of death, and whatever we remembers at the time of death will be our next destination (8.6). It is not a reward for an allegiance, but the development of a natural attachment, of the tendencies and qualities that are most suited for a particular level of consciousness, that will automatically attract us to our next destination.

The *vidhi* or *niyama* specific for each different type of worship is meant to stimulate certain qualities and tendencies: worship to the *devas* for the purpose of attaining their planets lead to developing sattvic qualities in sense enjoyment, and a conditioning to material joy and power. What is worship? Association.

When we worship the *devas* by remembering them, calling them to accept our offerings, and talking about them - their names, their activities, their qualities, etc - we are associating with them and therefore we develop the same characteristics, thus automatically qualifying ourselves to reside with them and to become their personal companions and assistants in their valuable service to God.

We will not - as some fools have dared to say - go to hell or fall to a lower level of life.

On the other hand, worship to the *pitris* means full dedication to family and society life in the *karma kanda* system, with a strong attachment to tradition; when the ancestors worshiped were virtuous people worthy of attaining the dharmic planet of Dharmaraja, the worshipers also develop the same qualities and ultimately attain the *pitris'* planet or in the very least they obtain rebirth in the same family among the same people. Also in this case, honoring and worshiping the ancestors will take us higher, and not lower - provided of course that our worshiping is performed according to the principles of *dharma*. Also, such ancestors must have been actually qualified as civilized human beings, or even saintly personalities who actually reside in Pitriloka, and not asuric people who became ghosts or reincarnated in a lower form of life.

In Kali yuga, this path is becoming increasingly distorted and difficult because people are unable to actually follow it, and therefore they only keep the externals, or simply the identification label, with no actual substance - of course, this is not sufficient to grant access to the higher planets.

These are the two paths that Krishna had already described in verses 8.23 to 8.27 as *deva ayana* and *pitri ayana*, for those who have cultivated the knowledge of Brahman. However, there is also another path, that does not take higher but remains within the earthly level or even lower than that, and keeps the individual soul in the world of harsh conditions.

Worship to the *bhutas* refers to the dedication to the worship of conditioned souls on the earthly level or even lower levels (subterranean, or lower planetary systems), whether they are embodied or not. This also includes the worship to materialistic

conditioned people, such as movie stars, professional sports stars, music stars, politicians, or other popular or cultural icons that become true idols and gods in the eyes of their fans. At the time of death, their most loyal and passionate fans will follow them in whatever destination they have attained.

Many people in India claim to be tantric worshipers devoted to the Mother Goddess or Shiva in their terrifying forms, but in fact they associate with those servants of Bhairavi or Bhairava that are in the categories of *dakshinis*, *vinayakas*, *vitalas*, *yakshas*, and *pisacas*. Whenever a tantric worships with impure substances (such as liquors, meat, blood etc) the offering is accepted not by Bhairavi or Bhairava, but by their followers and companions, the ghosts.

Often simple-minded people are strongly attracted to these creatures because of the power they can manifest on the subtle level, and because of the favors they can render to their human associates; there is a fine line between honoring them as servants of the Mother or Father, and actually establishing a personal relationship with them or even entering into some pact with them. By doing so, one inevitably develops similar characteristics and tendencies.

In modern times, ghost worship has taken a new dimension through the popular culture of horror movies - zombies, vampires, ghosts, serial killers, dark mystery etc - and also due to the sharp increase of suicides, violent deaths, drug abuse and mental illnesses, that are all connected to the ghostly world and qualities. A sensitive person will immediately feel when the people around him/ her have developed this particular tamasic character, and will avoid their company.

On the other hand, those who constantly think about Krishna as the Supreme Personality of Godhead - Bhagavan, Paramatma, Brahman - will enter that dimension of consciousness and at the

time of death they will not need to take another birth in this material world.

VERSE 26

पत्रं पुष्पं फलं तोयं यो मे भक्त्या प्रयच्छति ।

patraṁ puṣpaṁ phalaṁ toyam̐ yo me bhaktyā prayacchati ।

तदहं भक्त्युपहृतमश्नामि प्रयतात्मनः ॥ ९-२६ ॥

tadahaṁ bhaktyupahṛtamaśnāmi prayatātmanaḥ ।। 9-26 ।।

patram: one leaf; *pushpam*: one flower; *phalam*: one fruit; *toyam*: some water; *yah*: one who; *me*: to me; *bhaktya*: with love and devotion; *prayacchati*: asks to accept; *tat*: that; *aham*: I; *bhakti-upahritam*: (because it is) presented with love and devotion; *asnamī*: I eat; *prayata-atmanah*: sincerely dedicated/ in purity of mind.

"If someone, with sincere love and devotion, offers me even one leaf, one flower, one fruit or some water, I will accept the offering because of that love and devotion."

This verse is also very famous and important, and needs to be understood properly.

In all personal relationships, food constitutes a very strong bond and an intimate exchange. The affection between mother and child develops through feeding, especially breast feeding, so bottle-feeding, restricted feeding times, or wet-nurse feeding of infants is going to weaken the connection with the natural mother, especially in the first days after birth, and create the basis for an emotionally frustrated adult.

An asuric culture based on compulsive emotional consumerism and mind control through manipulation of low self-esteem of the public will certainly obstruct a healthy and natural relationship between mother and child.

When a boy and a girl fall in love, they enjoy eating together and exchanging chocolates or candies, or cooking for each other. It is also common knowledge that the best way to a person's heart is through the stomach, so a good wife should train herself to become a good cook and put love in her cooking.

When we go to meet someone important we bring a gift of food - sweets, a bottle of drink, etc - and seasonal and festival gifts were originally based on food, either cooked, or uncooked. Similarly, when devotees visit temples, they bring food offerings especially in the form of fruits and sweets. Flowers are also an all-popular gift in all affectionate relationships. The "essence of flowers" is often presented in the form of perfumes, scents, after-shave lotions, scented candles etc, which brings us back to the flower idea. Thus, the very popular offering of incense and flower garlands in temples perfectly fit in the "*puspam*" definition given in this verse.

The *patram* (leaf) mentioned in the verse mainly refers to the leaves of sacred plants, especially *tulasi*, that is considered the best offering for Krishna for several reasons. The *tulasi* plant grows easily and wildly in many places, especially those places that have been purified by some religious/ spiritual activity or by the presence or passage of a great soul, therefore an offering of *tulasi* leaf is easily affordable for everyone. Even more important, *tulasi* (*Ocimum sanctum*), has extraordinary medicinal properties, fighting infections, fevers and contaminations of all kinds.

In a wider sense, the leaf, flower and fruit mentioned in the verse refer to a sattvic vegetarian diet, as there is practically no violence, no killing, involved in collecting leaves, flowers and fruits from

plants, and they can be consumed without even cooking. This is the perfect *yoga* diet, free from *karma*, and it becomes perfectly spiritualized when such ingredients are offered to God in sincere love and devotion. For those who are unable to follow this strict diet, there are provisions for other sattvic vegetarian ingredients, such as food grains and pulses, roots vegetables, nuts and seeds of various types and their derivatives.

In a proper environment and society, milk is obtained without causing any suffering to the animals, and as cows are honored like mothers, a positive direct relationship is developed between the cow and the human beings who drink her milk. Just like in humans, a mother cow can produce more milk than what is actually needed by the newborn, and the flow of milk increases with the deepening of affection and the requirement of feeding - of course, within reason. Genetic manipulation, artificial insemination and other unnatural practices in dairy farms, and even more so the forced separation of the calves from their mothers, create an asuric condition by which milk becomes contaminated by bad *karma* and thus generates diseases in the human beings that consume it. In such conditions, it is better to opt for a vegan diet.

In commentary to verse 2.64 we have already discussed about the *prasadam*, the sanctified pure vegetarian food offered to God. Here we may add a few more considerations.

First of all, the most important factor in the offering of foods to God is *bhakti*. Without sincere love and devotion, God is not bound or forced to accept anything - not by government or institutional order, by political appointment of the priest, by dint of the priest's ancestry, or even by complicated ritual procedures or regulations, or because of the material value of the food that is being offered. We should remember the episode when Krishna went to Hastinapura and refused to attend the royal banquet prepared by Duryodhana, but was happy to eat the very simple

food offered lovingly by Vidura. Also, we should remember the humble gift that the *brahmana* Sudama had carried to Krishna's house; on that occasion, Krishna speaks this very same verse (9.26) to Sudama (*Bhagavata Purana* 10.81.4).

God is not a "*prasada* vending machine", to which you supply the *bhoga*, click away with the correct alphabetical sequences, sprinkle some water, and presto! the *prasadam* is ready. If there is no *bhakti*, God does not accept any offering. In some exceptional cases, God may accept the offering even if the priest is not qualified, but only because there are sincere devotees outside who are hoping to obtain the sanctified food and will honor it properly.

Also, *bhakti* means total dedication (*prayata atmanah*). One should not offer simply a leaf or a fruit to Krishna, and eat a big feast himself without offering it to Krishna.

The expression *prayata atmanah* can be better understood by reading in *Bhagavata Purana* (8.16.62) the instructions of Kasyapa explaining to Aditi how to perform the *payo vrata*: *tasmat etat vratam bhadre prayata sraddhaya acara bhagavan paritusta te varan asu vidhasyati*. The Lord is pleased when a devotee is *bhadra* (benevolent, gentle, friendly to everyone, wishing good for everyone), *sraddhavan* (sustained by consistent and strong faith in God), and behaves (*achara*) according to the rules of *yoga* (*yama* and *niyama*) and the requirements of sincere *bhakti*. There must be dedication and consistency in consciousness, and purity of heart.

Some commentators believe that this purity refers to the body, therefore people of the "wrong caste" and women, especially during their menstrual periods, cannot offer anything to Krishna. This is incorrect. Of course when we speak about institutionalized religion, official temple worship aimed at social aggrandizement, and appeasement of materialistic and ignorant people, it might be useful to maintain some professional priests and establish some

elaborate grandiose rituals and build an impressive temple that could add prestige to the enterprise, but that has no relevance to direct *bhakti*, because Krishna does not care for such externals.

The only justification for such theatrical trappings is the limited value of their attractiveness in the eyes of the ignorant masses, that can somehow be inspired by the idea of the entertainment provided, and will acquire some *ajната-sukriti* (unconscious merit) by seeing the gorgeously decorated Deity in the temple and assisting to some emotionally charged, folkloristic, solemn, grandiose and expensive ceremony.

Purification is already guaranteed by the mere remembrance of the Lord, as we are reminded constantly by the popular *mantra* from the *Garuda Purana*: *om apavitrah pavitro va sarvavastham gato 'pi va, yah smaret pundarikaksam sa bahyabhyantarah sucih*, "One who remembers the lotus-eyed Lord immediately becomes purified internally and externally, no matter whether s/he has performed the prescribed ablutions or is in an impure condition of any type."

Now: either we believe in the statements of the *shastras*, or we don't. If we repeat *mantras* without actually believing what we say, we are not better than ignorant animals who just parrot what they heard without understanding. Of course, this should not be an encouragement to become lazy and simply avoid taking bath or observing the rules of cleanliness: it is all in the sincerity of the heart. The most important purity is the purity of the heart.

Bhagavata Purana (4.31.21) confirms: *na bhajati kumanisinam sa ijjyam harir adhanatma-dhana priyo rasa-jnah, sruta dhana kula karmanam madair ye, vidadhati papam akincanesu satsu*, "The Lord never accepts any offering or sacrifice from persons who have a dirty mind/ heart. He is dear to those who have abandoned all identifications and attachments to material things, and simply depend on the Atman. On the other hand, those who are arrogant

by dint of their ancestry, learning, wealth and great deeds are simply sinful people, who mistreat the devotees."

The word *prayaccha* means "asking". When we offer something, we are asking Krishna to accept our offering, because it is a favor that Krishna is doing to us, not the other way around. Krishna does not need our offerings. He does not need food or worship, because he is already perfectly satisfied in himself, and he can get unlimited pleasures and valuables from his own internal *shaktis* - those same *shaktis* that create the entire universe. When we offer something to God, the only merit we accrue is the result of our *bhakti*.

VERSE 27

यत्करोषि यदश्नासि यज्जुहोषि ददासि यत् ।

yatkaroshi yadaśnāsi yajjuhoṣi dadāsi yat ।

यत्तपस्यसि कौन्तेय तत्कुरुष्व मदर्पणम् ॥ ९-२७ ॥

yattapasyasi kaunteya tatkuruṣva madarpanam ।। 9-27।।

yat: whatever; *karosi*: you do; *yat*: whatever; *asnasi*: you eat; *yat*: whatever; *juhosi*: you sacrifice; *dadasi*: you give in charity; *yat*: whatever; *yat*: whatever; *tapasyasi*: you endure as austerity; *kaunteya*: o son of Kunti (Arjuna); *tat*: that; *kurusva*: you (should) do; *mad-arpanam*: for my sake.

"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."

Krishna does not require complicated rituals or great deeds: it is sufficient that we remember him with love and devotion all the

time, in every action we do. We do not need to constantly remember the *lilas* of Syamasundara playing the flute or dallying with the *gopis*; it is sufficient that we realize that Krishna is the sum total of the entire Consciousness, and we remain tuned in on the proper frequency of awareness - the spiritual, transcendental existence of Brahman, Paramatma and Bhagavan.

Bhagavata Purana (1.5.5) confirms this point in the instructions of Narada to Vyasa: *kurvana yatra karmani bhagavac chikshayasakrit, grinanti guna namani krsnasyanusmaranti ca*, "One should perform one's duties properly, as instructed by Krishna, and at the same time s/he should always remember Krishna's names, qualities, etc."

Again in 11.2.36, we find: *kayena vaca manasendriyair va buddhyatmana vanusrta svabhavat, karoti yad yat sakalam parasmai narayanayeti samarpayet tat*, "Whatever activities one performs according to one's true nature by body, speech, mind and intelligence, one should be focused on the *atman* and offer everything to Narayana."

Our daily work in our professional occupation should be offered to Krishna, because Krishna has given clear instructions that we should perform our duties in the best possible way, albeit without personal selfish attachment.

Our activities in family and society should be offered to Krishna because all the people we interact with are children and servants of Krishna, and Krishna lives in their hearts and is their best friend. Whatever we do for fun or relaxation, including simple sleep, or to keep our bodies and mind in shape as required by our work, should also be offered to Krishna because our bodies and minds belong to Krishna, and we must take proper care of them to be able to utilize them in his service.

Whatever we eat should be offered to Krishna - either officially, with the proper ritual and *mantras*, or unofficially, with a simple mental offering by which we remember Krishna's presence within us, and his supreme Consciousness as the leader of our individual consciousness. Thus the very act of eating - for pleasure and for nourishment - becomes a sacred act of sacrifice.

Adi Shankara wrote in his *Soundarya lahari: japo jalpa silpam sakalam api mudra viracana, gatih pradaksinya kramanam asanady ahuti vidhih, pranamah samvesah sukham akilam atmarpana drsa, saparya paryayas tava bhavatu yan me vilasitam*, "Let every sound I pronounce be a prayer to you and a repetition of your holy name, let every work and movement of my hands be ritual gestures in your worship. Let each step I take be a *pradaksina* - a mark of homage - to you, let my eating and drinking be sacred offerings in the fire of your reality, let my laying down to rest be a prostration to your feet, and let whatever gives pleasure to my life become a sacred offering to you."

The meritorious acts of ritual ceremonies (*yajna*), distribution of charity (*dana*) and the voluntary facing of difficulties in pursuance of a higher purpose (*tapas*) are considered fundamental religious duties, and they are listed in this verse as *juhosi*, *dadasi* and *tapasyasi*.

We have already discussed about the various types of *yajnas*, especially in 3.9 to 3.16, and 4.23 to 4.34; here we may simply add that traditionally, even those who are most strongly attached to the *karma kanda* path always pronounce the *mantra sri krishnaya samarpana astu*, "I am offering this to Sri Krishna", indicating that the ultimate purpose of the ritual is to please Krishna.

There are a lot of misconceptions about charity and austerity, and they will all be cleared later by Krishna in chapters 16, 17 and 18.

VERSE 28

शुभाशुभफलैरेवं मोक्ष्यसे कर्मबन्धनैः ।

śubhāśubhaphalairēvaṁ mokṣyase karmabandhanaiḥ ।

संन्यासयोगयुक्तात्मा विमुक्तो मामुपैष्यसि ॥ ९-२८ ॥

sannyāsayogayuktātmā vimukto māmupaiṣyasi ॥ 9-28 ॥

subha: auspicious/ favorable; *asubhah*: inauspicious/ unfavorable; *phalaih*: the results; *evam*: thus; *mokshyase*: you will become free; *karma-bandhanaih*: from the bondage of activities; *sannyasa-yoga*: in the *sannyasa yoga*; *yukta-atma*: engaging your self; *vimuktah*: liberated; *mam*: me; *upaisyasi*: you will attain.

"O Arjuna, by engaging in the *sannyasa yoga* (the principle of renunciation), you will become free from the bondage of activities, and from the favorable and unfavorable results of actions. Thus you will attain me."

The principle of renunciation (*sannyasa*) has been already amply elaborated in chapter 5, entitled specifically *Sannyasa Yoga*. To summarize it, we can quote the famous verse 2.47: "You certainly have the right to perform actions but never (the right) 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."

Some foolish and ignorant people suggested that *Bhagavad gita* is outdated and irrelevant today, because Krishna says, "Do your duty without being concerned about the results of your activities". In their foolishness and ignorance, they interpret this instruction to mean that one should be irresponsible and callous towards the effects of one's actions, like a reckless driver that does not care for the safety of other people on the road.

But this is not Krishna's instruction. Krishna said (2.47) that one should perform the proper duty selflessly, not for the personal benefit that one can derive from it, but out of a spirit of sacrifice. Rather than comparing the *buddhi yogi* to a reckless driver, we should compare it to a benevolent gardener, who plants virtuous and useful trees in public places to benefit everyone, without planning to keep the fruits for himself only. Without this spirit of selfless social service to the community, people become selfish and greedy and end up suffering from their own miserliness, because nobody gets any fruits as nobody plants trees.

The Bhakti literature (*Bhakti rasamrita sindhu* 2.255) offers a valuable key to understand this concept in the light of the higher consciousness of service to Krishna as the Sum total of all Consciousness and Reality: *anasaktasya visayan yatharham upayunjatah, nirbandhe krsna-sambandhe yukta-vairagyam ucyate*, "*Yukta vairagya*, or *yoga vairagya*, is the quality of detachment and renunciation by which one carefully and sincerely engages in one's prescribed duty, considering it a service in relationship with Krishna Consciousness."

Genuine renunciation does not mean abstaining from good actions, but it is about engaging in proper work with a selfless spirit, as it is repeated many times in *Gita*: 2.71, 3.4, 3.5, 3.7, 3.8, 3.9, 3.18, 3.19, 3.30, 3.33, 4.17, 4.18, 4.20, 4.21, 4.22, 4.23, 4.41, 5.2, 5.3, 5.6, 5.7, 5.8, 5.9, 5.10, 5.11, 5.12, 5.13, 5.14, 6.2, 6.3, 18.2, 18.5, 18.6, 18.7, 18.8, 18.9, 18.10, 18.11, 18.12, 18.23, 18.24, 18.25, 18.48, 18.49.

Renouncing egotism and selfishness (also called *ahankara* and *mamatva*) covers both the good results and the bad results (gain or loss, victory or defeat, joy or sorrow) that may come from the proper performance of one's duty: *yo na hrisyati na dvesti na socati na kanksati, subhasubha-parityagi bhaktiman yah sa me priyah*, "A devotee who is not distracted by joys or sorrows,

worries or aspirations, and is detached both from positive and negative circumstances, is very dear to me" (12.17). The point is that a devotee performs his/her duty without being hampered by his/ her own emotions or other distractions due to his/ her own body or mind.

All these emotions are simply circumstances created by the material body and mind, and are temporary like the appearance and disappearance of heat and cold during the various seasons, and they should simply be tolerated (2.14, 6.7, 12.16) while we continue to perform our duty in the best possible way.

This is the only way to attain *moksha* (liberation).

VERSE 29

समोऽहं सर्वभूतेषु न मे द्वेष्योऽस्ति न प्रियः ।

samo'ham sarvabhūteṣu na me dveṣyo'sti na priyaḥ ।

ये भजन्ति तु मां भक्त्या मयि ते तेषु चाप्यहम् ॥ ९-२९ ॥

ye bhajanti tu mām bhaktyā mayi te teṣu cāpyaham ।। 9-29 ।।

samah: equally disposed; *aham*: I (am); *sarva*: (towards) all; *bhutesu*: the living beings; *na*: not; *me*: for me; *dvesyah*: (someone who is) hated; *asti*: there is; *na*: not; *priyah*: (someone who is) dear; *ye*: those; *bhajanti*: offer sincere service; *tu*: but; *mam*: me; *bhaktya*: with devotion; *mayi*: in me; *te*: them; *tesu*: in them; *ca*: and; *api*: certainly; *aham*: I (am).

"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, they are in me and I am in them."

This verse presents two extraordinary points, that can totally change our ideas on religion.

The first point is God's personal impartiality towards all beings. There is no chosen people - neither Jewish, Indian, Hindu, Islamic or Christian, American, Bengali, Tamil, Brijabasi or Puribasi. There is no chosen group: no high caste or dalits/ Harijans, no special family or ethnic background or any other denomination.

There are no favoritisms to white, brown or black, men or women, or people affiliated to a particular organization or group, or another. Even the idea of "caste *vaishnavas*" is a totally unfounded superstition that is not confirmed by any genuine scripture, because Vishnu reciprocates his devotees individually, for the personal devotion that each one of them sincerely and genuinely offers to him, and not for the merits of some distant ancestors.

In fact, God equally loves all living beings, those who are super-human and those who are sub-human, and wants them all to progress and find the ultimate happiness. Therefore God does not condone any unnecessary violence or disrespect towards his creatures, and allows each and every individual to make their choices and learn from the consequences. All the time, he remains everybody's hearts as the Paramatma, the most benevolent and intimate friend, even when they fall into the most degraded forms of life. The sun equally shines over everyone, and we can choose whether to appreciate it or not. Lotus flowers bloom in their full splendor and perfume under the sun, while bats go to hide in dark places until sunset. God is benevolent even towards the *asuras*, those human or over-human people that choose to act against the progress and benefit of others and against the order of the universe. Sometimes God appears personally to engage in battle with them, and then by his direct contact the *asura* is instantly enlightened and becomes liberated.

However, God is not interested in killing or protecting anyone (*Bhagavata Purana* 8.5.22), in neglecting or glorifying anyone: he simply engages his nature (*maya sakti*) for the creation, preservation and dissolution of the material manifestations, for the benefit and progress of all. This is confirmed in *Bhagavata Purana* 8.16.14, for example, where Aditi speaks to Kasyapa Rishi, who says that he is equally benevolent to all his sons, *devas* and *asuras*, just like the Supreme Personality of Godhead, who lovingly serves his devotees. This sentiment of God towards his devotees is called *bhakta vatsalya*, indicating that he is "affectionate to his devotee like a cow loves her calf". Another confirmation is found in *Bhagavata Purana* 10.86.59, where God is called *bhakta bhaktiman*, "devotee of his devotees".

Human beings cannot anger God by insulting or disobeying him, or bribe him by praising or worshiping him. This is explained in *Bhagavata Purana* 6.17.22: "God has no kith and kin, no relatives or friends, no chosen people, as he does not favor anyone over others. This is because he is not touched by the transformations and fluctuations of material nature, by joy or sorrow, by attachment or by anger."

We can only please God by our sincere devotion, that can be expressed in several ways detailed scientifically in the Bhakti literature, that we have already mentioned in previous comments. Talking and listening about God's names, qualities, activities, teachings, and remembering them is the most important of all, because it brings us closer to the Transcendental Consciousness that is our real original nature.

Pada sevana, "serving the feet of God", is a symbolic expression for following the instructions offered by God, but this will work only when it is done with sincere devotion, and not in a mechanical or sycophantic way.

The definitions of *bhajan* and *bhakti* ("worship and serve with devotion") also include the others of the nine forms of devotional service, namely offering pleasurable objects (as in *archana*), offering sincere homage and prayers (*vandana*), remaining always ready to serve God (*dasya*), becoming close friends with God (*sakhya*) and dedicating oneself fully to God (*atma nivedana*).

And when we establish such sincere loving personal relationship with God, the most wonderful thing happens: God reciprocates with us exactly in the same way. Krishna does not say that he will bless us, or reward us: he says he will also worship his devotees and serve his own devotees with sincere devotion (*bhajami aham*, 4.11).

VERSE 30

अपि चेत्सुदुराचारो भजते मामनन्यभाक् ।

api cetsudurācāro bhajate māmananyabhāk ।

साधुरेव स मन्तव्यः सम्यग्व्यवसितो हि सः ॥ ९-३० ॥

sādhureva sa mantavyaḥ samyagvyavasito hi saḥ ।। 9-30 ।।

api: even; *cet*: if; *su-dura-acarah*: very bad behavior; *bhajate*: offers sincere service; *mam*: me; *ananya-bhak*: without any other attachment or concern; *sadhur*: a good person; *eva*: certainly; *sah*: s/he; *mantavyah*: must be considered; *samyak*: completely; *vyavasitah*: situated; *hi*: indeed; *sah*: s/he.

"When a person is fully immersed and engaged in true devotional service, without any other concern or desire, must be considered a *sadhu*, even if he shows a very bad behavior. This is because his/ her position is completely different."

The expression *su-dura-acarah* especially applies to behaviors that are contrary to virtuous social conventions, such as the violation of the rules of civilized life expected from a *yogi* and an *arya* - especially those regarding food and other personal life habits. It is an expression similar to *duratma* ("bad person"), but while *duratma* refers to a person's nature, *duracara* only refers to the external behavior.

A *bhakta* normally shines with high sattvic qualities demonstrated consistently in his/her behavior, as described for example in *Bhagavata Purana* 1.16.26-30, or in *Madhurya kadambini*, a Bhakti manual written by Visvanatha Chakravarti where it is said, *sarvair gunais tatra samasate surah*, "a genuine devotee shows all the good qualities of the *devas*". For example, s/he is always peaceful, meek, kind and mild, does not quarrel with anyone, talks pleasantly and tactfully, and is only interested in spiritual topics, with a strong disinterest in material affairs.

However, sometimes we also find great devotees or even divine Personalities that, for some reason, exhibit a behavior that does not exactly correspond to these expectations, and this creates ripples in social interactions and conventions. Such apparent defects are instrumental to the particular mission of those devotees, because a sincere and genuine devotee, completely immersed in pure devotional service as clarified in this verse, has no other concern and certainly no personal attachments or identifications to accommodate.

It is said that the true mission of a reformer is to "comfort the disturbed and disturb the comfortable", because both extremes of the mental condition in a human being create a blockage that prevents progress in spiritual realization. Sometimes a devotee comes to shake the boat and wake up the sleeping souls, even if that might be perceived as a social disturbance or subversion of the established order.

For example we see that Vasistha Rishi ate the *asura* Vatapi, and Ganga drowned her own children. Shiva lives in crematoriums and drank the *halahala* poison. Rama killed Vali. Krishna danced with the married *gopis*, abducted Rukmini and organized the abduction of his sister Subhadra (both girls were very happy about the abduction, though), and gave the Pandavas apparently questionable instructions on how to defeat their enemies.

As confirmed in *Bhagavata Purana* (10.33.29): *dharma vyatikramo drsta isvaranam ca sahasam tejiyasam na dosaya vahneh sarva-bhujo yatha*, "Sometimes we see that greatly powerful personalities appear to transgress the conventional religious or moral principles, but one should not dare imitate them artificially, because they are like fire, that can devour everything and still remain pure."

This concept is described in the verse under study with the expression *samyak vyavasitah*, "they are in a very special position", because they have no personal selfish interest in such actions, either individual or collective. If we carefully analyze the actual motivations and effects of such apparently questionable actions, we find that they were always aimed at a greater benefit, both for the people that were directly involved in the action and for the universe in general.

Here is a crude example about this higher level of *dharma* that appears to break the conventional idea of *dharma*: let's say that we are sitting at the door of our house, when an innocent and terrified child comes running desperate to find shelter, as she is pursued by a criminal who wants to harm her. We watch as the child hides out of sight, and in the meantime the criminal arrives on the scene. When the criminal asks us if we saw a little girl running away, what should we say? Should we be fanatically loyal to the fundamental principle of *dharma* - truthfulness - and reveal the hiding place of the little girl? Certainly not. We should give the

criminal some false information that will keep him running in the wrong direction long enough to ensure the protection of the innocent girl.

Yet, truthfulness and honesty is the most important principle in religious and spiritual life, without which it is not possible to make any advancement or even to maintain the position one has already reached. Therefore we should be very careful to always remain free from all selfish motivations, identifications and attachments, because this idea "for the greater good" can be dangerously twisted by a mind that is not perfectly pure yet.

Some people abuse this verse by taking it as an authorization to continue to commit illicit activities or even serious crimes on the strength of their so-called "devotion" to God, sometimes even claiming that they are indulging in their violent, immoral and/or dishonest activities as a form of devotional service, usually to defend their own material, social or political position and prestige, or the material interests of some institution or organization to which they are affiliated.

Such misinterpretation is not substantiated by any scripture or genuine *acharya*. Nowhere Krishna has stated or implied that one can use violence or dishonesty in devotional service, either in the preaching of his glories and teachings, or in any other devotional method of worship. It is ok to be bold and straightforward in speaking up about the scriptures and their application, and engage in debates and discussions, but there can be no physical violence or aggression under any circumstance, either against persons or against books or images etc, or to harm dissenters or people who ask difficult questions.

The use of force is only allowed in self defense and the defense of innocent and good people when some aggressors literally come forward with dangerous weapons such as guns and knives, fire, etc;

otherwise a devotee must not get into physical fights or brawls or engage in persecution or harassment of any type. Krishna certainly does not condone the cynical behavior of false devotees who deliberately continue to engage in wrongful acts, counting on their fake devotion to neutralize their karmic effects: this is clearly an offensive attitude, and listed among the 10 main offenses to be carefully avoided in devotional service. If by any chance we happen to meet so-called devotees who secretly or openly - or even boastfully - commit criminal actions, we should very carefully avoid any association with them and keep a distance, albeit without showing disrespect.

VERSE 31

क्षिप्रं भवति धर्मात्मा शश्वच्छान्तिं निगच्छति ।

ksipram bhavati dharmātmā śaśvacchāntim nigacchati ।

कौन्तेय प्रतिजानीहि न मे भक्तः प्रणश्यति ॥ ९-३१ ॥

kaunteya pratijānihi na me bhaktaḥ praṇaśyati ॥ 9-31 ॥

ksipram: very quickly; *bhavati*: s/he becomes; *dharmā-atma*: totally dedicated to *dharmā*; *śaśvat*: permanently; *santim*: peace; *nigacchati*: s/he attains; *kaunteya*: o son of Kunti (Arjuna); *pratijanihi*: (please) declare; *na*: not; *me*: my; *bhaktah*: devotee; *pranasyati*: is destroyed.

"My devotee quickly becomes fully dedicated to *dharmā* and attains a permanent peace. O son of Kunti, you can (safely) say that my devotee is never destroyed."

In verses 4.36 and 9.30, Krishna had already stated that sincere engagement in devotional service can purify anyone, irrespective of his or her past activities.

We have seen the special case of greatly powerful personalities that exhibited apparently questionable behaviors; now we will examine the case of an ordinary devotee who happens to accidentally fall down on the path to perfection.

Sometimes it is not easy to distinguish one category of devotees from another, because often great personalities present themselves very humbly, as ordinary individuals, and declare that they have committed some mistake or offense, although the action was obviously instrumental to the Divine plan. In this case a devotee could manifest a bad behavior due to a weakness that is ascribed to some previous bad habits, a curse, and/ or very difficult circumstances, that cause a temporary downfall to a lower level of consciousness.

Maharaja Parikshit became distracted by fatigue, thirst and hunger, and unwittingly offended an innocent *brahmana*. Entering the *ashrama* of Samika Rishi he hoped to receive a decent welcome and at least some water, but the Rishi was deeply immersed in meditation and did not even notice the king's arrival. Parikshit suspected that the *brahmana* was only pretending to be in a trance to avoid taking care of his guest, so he tried his patience by hanging a dead snake around the neck of the *brahmana*, in a mock imitation of the image of Shiva meditating. When the young son of Samika, named Sringi, returned home, he saw Parikshit leaving and discovered the bad joke at the expenses of his father, so he cursed Parikshit to die within 7 days. Informed about the curse by a concerned Samika, Parikshit recognized his fault and accepted to submit to the curse.

Another example is Bhishma, considered one of the 12 *mahajanas* or greatest spiritual/ religious authorities of the universe, who became confused by the material affection for his father Santanu and for the wayward Duryodhana and sided with him against the Pandavas. At the end of the battle, making ready to die on his bed

of arrows, Bhishma consoled Yudhisthira and the other Pandavas by saying that they should not be sorry for his death, as he had deserved it by his own bad choices.

Visvamitra Rishi broke his meditation and austerities several times, falling prey to the power of *kama* and *krodha*. Every time he recognized his fault and atoned for his bad behavior, engaging in even more rigid austerities until he had completely conquered his senses.

And there are also other examples of good devotees who committed mistakes due to some particular circumstances. The story of the Syamantaka jewel is all centered on a miraculous gem that Satrajit accused Krishna of having stolen. While searching for the gem, Krishna was faced with Jambavan who fought him off until he recognized him. As soon as they realized their mistake, both Satrajit and Jambavan begged forgiveness and offered Krishna their daughters in marriage, with great happiness of the concerned girls.

We may legitimately believe that such actions were actually organized by Krishna according to the Divine plan, because in all instances greater good came to all the concerned and to the universe at large, but since these devotees explicitly recognized their bad behavior and atoned for it, we must understand that they were setting the example for us to follow - recognizing our defects and mistakes, and humbly accepting to pay the price for them.

As long as we have a material body, we are subject to the 4 material defects: the possibility of making a mistake, the limitations of our sense perception, the attraction of illusion, and a tendency to cheat - to choose a vision of reality that is more subjective than objective. However, true devotees are ready to recognize their faults, defects or mistakes, striving to atone and reform themselves. They accept the consequences of their actions,

knowing that *karma* must take its course, and they do not try to escape or beg their way out.

The most common pitfalls created by bad habits or difficult circumstances consist in irregularities in diet (wrong food, too much food, impure food, food eaten without the proper consciousness), sex (any violation of the *brahmacharya* rules), intoxication (any activity that creates an artificial state of consciousness), dishonesty (any misappropriation or lack of truthfulness), and lack of self control (anger, etc).

All this simply refers to the external and occasional behavior of a person, and not to his/ her normal nature, because a person that is normally and deliberately engaged in harmful and immoral activities cannot truly be a devotee of God. Krishna clearly says (7.28) that the devotees who worship him are liberated from the illusion of duality, have accumulated pious activities and abandoned all bad activities. Those who are *duskritinah*, "evil doers" will never be able to approach Krishna truly (7.15).

Two famous verses from the *Bhagavata Purana* are often quoted in this regard:

sva pada mulam bhajata priyasya, tyaktanya bhavasya harih paresah, vikarma yac cotpatitam kathancid, dhunoti sarvam hrdisannivistam, "One who has given up all other interests and is engaged in serving the lotus feet of Hari is very dear to him. If he accidentally commits some bad action, the Lord that resides in his heart removes all impurities." (11.5.42)

yadi kuryat pramadena yogi karma vigarhitam, yogenaiva dahed amho nanyat tatra kadacana, "If a *yogi* should commit some bad action because of momentary confusion, the practice of *yoga* itself will burn the negative consequences. There is no need of seeking other remedies." (11.20.25)

VERSE 32

मां हि पार्थ व्यपाश्रित्य येऽपि स्युः पापयोनयः ।

mām hi pārtha vyapāśritya ye'pi syuḥ pāpayonayah ।

स्त्रियो वैश्यास्तथा शूद्रास्तेऽपि यान्ति परां गतिम् ॥ ९-३२ ॥

striyo vaiśyāstathā śūdrāste'pi yānti parāṁ gatim ।। 9-32।।

mam : me; *hi*: indeed; *partha*: o son of Pritha (Arjuna); *vyapasritya*: have taken full shelter; *ye*: those; *api*: even; *syuh*: if they are; *papa-yonayah*: born from impure sexual intercourse; *striyah*: women; *vaisyah*: business people; *tatha*: also; *sudrah*: manual workers; *te*: they; *api*: also; *yanti*: attain; *param*: the supreme; *gatim*: destination.

"O Arjuna, those who have completely taken shelter in me will attain the supreme destination, even if they were born from impure intercourse, women, business people and traders, or manual workers."

This verse is often misused by misogynists who claim that women are impure by birth and therefore they should not be allowed to study Vedic knowledge or engage in religious activities.

Some commentators translate *papa-yonayah* associating it with *striyah* and giving it the meaning of "prostitutes", but this does not seem to be Krishna's intention, first of all because the Vedic model of prostitution was not considered a sin. Still in Krishna's time we can see the examples of Kubja (Trivakra) and the *ganikas* of Dvaraka that were great devotees like all the other residents of Krishna's city (*Bhagavata Purana* 1.11.19-21).

The idea of prostitutes as "sinners" came to India only with the infiltration of the abrahamic ideologies, while in Vedic times (any time before the first islamic invasions) the *ganikas* ("women who

associate with the public") or *svarinis* ("independent women") were very respected and their presence was considered auspicious, so much that they were regularly invited to various religious functions for family and society to bless the participants with their presence.

Still today an echo of this tradition remains with the habit of transexual males who dress as women. We may remember in this regard that the presence of a real sinner is considered so contaminating that even seeing his face calls for a complete bath and change of clothing.

Another reason is purely grammatical. This verse is divided into two lines, and the expression *papa-yonayah* belongs to the first part, while the second half of the verse lists the other categories, in descending order of purity or importance. Obviously *sudras* are less qualified than *vaisyas*, so we must conclude that since Krishna has a reason for the order in which he lists the various categories, women should be considered more qualified than *vaisyas*.

If we wanted to stretch the meaning of the verse to mean that all the categories described are "of sinful birth", we should accept the idea that *vaisyas* are born in a sinful condition - something that is certainly not supported by any other declaration in Vedic scriptures. Thus, the *papa yonayah* must be a separate category, that does not include the other categories listed in the second part of the verse. We could even say that the category described as *papa-yonayah* is considered by Krishna as more qualified than ordinary women (as well as than *vaisyas* and *sudras*), and this interpretation makes perfect sense if we apply it to all those individuals who were born from "impure intercourse", or from sexual unions that were not properly purified by the *samskara* prescribed by Vedic culture for the higher categories of civilized human beings: the *garbhadana samskara*.

The definition itself - *papa yonayah* - refers to children who have been conceived without the proper purificatory rituals called *garbhadhana samskara*. All the *dvi-jah* (*brahmanas*, *kshatriyas*, *vaishyas*) that are in the *grihastha* (family) *ashrama* are expected to regularly perform a number of purificatory ceremonies, starting from the *vivaha* or solemnization of the marriage of the parents, to the *garbhadhana* ("giving the embryo") at the time of conception.

After conception and before birth, the child is purified through the *pumsavana* and the *simantonayana samskaras*, then at birth the *jatakarma* is performed. After 6 months from birth, the name is given (*nama karana*), then the first grains are fed to the baby (*anna prasana*), then around 2 years of age the hair is cut (*chuda karana*). The *karna bheda* (wearing ear rings) is done only for *brahmanas*. The next *samskara* is the *upanayana* (accepting the sacred thread) and is followed by a number of minor rituals for the student life purification, all categories under the name *prajapatyam*. Next comes the *vivaha* or marriage.

The "purification of the womb" that removes the *papa* from the *yonis* - the ritual called *garbhadhana* - is meant to ensure that a sattvic, civilized, progressive and ethically and religiously inclined soul will be attracted to take birth from that specific sexual intercourse.

When the fecundation and conception is done through a whimsical act of mere animal lust, or worse, the child generated is called *papa yonayah*, and is not considered as a legitimate member of the *varna* to which the parent belong. This also applies if the two parents were legally married; the *papa* ("negativity") does not refer to social considerations, but rather to the level of consciousness at the time of the intercourse and conception.

Such *papa-yonayah* are simply the *antyajah*, all those persons who were born outside the original system of *varnas* and *ashramas*,

irrespective of their actual natural *guna* and *karma* - which could make them suitable candidates even for the highest positions in society. To tell the truth, it is extremely difficult if not impossible to find today someone who was born from a purified womb through the *garbhadana samksara*, even among the highest castes of traditional orthodox Indian Hindus.

According to the original Vedic system, those *antya-jah* or *papa-yonayah* who possess the required *guna* and *karma* can become full-fledged members of the higher *varnas* - *brahmanas* and *kshatriyas* - simply by undergoing the prescribed purificatory ceremonies called *prayascitta* and *vratyastoma* or *suddhi*, and receiving the appropriate *upanayana diksha* from a qualified *guru*. This is unequivocally confirmed in several passages of the scriptures, for example in *Bhagavata Purana* 2.4.18, *kirata hunandhra pulinda pulkasa abhira sumbha yavanas khasadaya, ye 'nye ca papa yad apasrasrayah sudhyanti tasmai prabhavisnave namah*, "Kiratas, Hunas, Andhras, Pulindas, Pulkasas, Abhiras, Sumbhas, Yavanas, Khasas etc, even those who were born in still more degraded cultures, are immediately purified when they put themselves under the guidance and protection of those who have taken shelter in Vishnu. Therefore I offer my homage to the all-powerful Sri Vishnu", 3.33.7: *aho bata sva-paco 'to gariyan yaj-jihvagre vartate nama tubhyam, tepus tapas te juhuvuh sasnur arya brahmanucur nama grnanti ye te*, "It is wonderful to see how those who have accepted to invoke your holy name are immediately glorified as civilized persons (*aryas*) and are called *brahmanas*, even if there were born in uncivilized families. The very fact that they call your name qualifies them for the performance of sacrifices and austerities according to tradition" and 11.14.21, *bhaktiyaham ekaya grahyah sraddhayatma priyah satam, bhaktih punati man-nistha sva-pakan api sambhavat*, "Only devotion enables one to attain me. The devotees who serve me with faith and transcendental attachment are completely purified

through their devotion, even if they had been born in uncivilized families."

Even the historical chronicles and archaeological findings confirm that often individuals or entire populations of foreign origin chose to become part of Vedic society, adopting Sanskrit names and the rules of the *varna ashrama*, like for example the Scythian kings who became known as Satyasimha and Rudrasena.

The women (*striyah*) described in this verse are ordinary women, those who are mainly interested in family and social affairs, a good husband and nice children, a beautiful house and a prosperous life full of beauty and pleasure, palatable foods, elegant clothing and ornaments, and so on. The Vedic system does not despise this nature, because it tends to create a safe, pleasurable, affectionate, beautiful and sweet environment for the earliest experiences of children, which in turn will help the new generations grow without the physical and psychic damage and chronic dissatisfaction that is conducive to criminality. The caring and loving support of a good woman is also important for men in general, as they become able to achieve more in their professional and social life with the cooperation of their good wives. A woman must be a good administrator of the house, a good organizer of the servants and a good caretaker of all the people in the family and clan, and especially educate the children to the higher values and principles in life. Compared to a good wife's, the duty of the *vaisyas* is certainly easier and requires less qualifications and effort, because it is simply about managing laborers, animals, plants, land, money, and inanimate objects such as minerals and other merchandise.

By definition, *sudras* are less qualified than *vaisyas* because they cannot even take care of themselves and organize their own survival, therefore they depend on other more intelligent people who will give them instructions and provide to their maintenance.

VERSE 33

किं पुनर्ब्राह्मणाः पुण्या भक्ता राजर्षयस्तथा ।

kim punarbrāhmaṇāḥ puṇyā bhaktā rājarṣayastathā ।

अनित्यमसुखं लोकमिमं प्राप्य भजस्व माम् ॥ ९-३३ ॥

anityamasukhaṁ lokamimaṁ prāpya bhajasva mām ॥ 9-33 ॥

kim : what/ how much; *punah*: again; *brahmanah*: the *brahmanas*; *punya*: endowed with religious merits; *bhakta*: endowed with loving devotion; *rajarshayah*: the saintly kings; *tatha*: also; *anityam*: impermanent; *asukham*: devoid of real happiness; *lokam*: world; *imam*: this; *prapya*: have come to; *bhajasva*: being immersed in devotional service; *mam*: to me.

"What to speak of the *brahmanas*, (the virtuous devotees) and the saintly kings (who are rich in religious merits and devotion), and who are immersed in a service of devotion to me even in this impermanent and unsatisfactory world."

After listing the categories that are less qualified in regard to social position and religious inclinations, Krishna compares them to the two remaining categories in the Vedic social order: the *brahmanas* and the *kshatriyas*, that are properly qualified as per *guna* and *karma*. The comparison is meant to indicate greater expectations; in the previous verse Krishna declared that even those who are *papa yonayah* can attain the highest perfection of life, so for more qualified people should be even easier. The expression *kim punah* means "what to speak of/ no need to say more".

What are these qualifications? *Guna* means "qualities" and *karma* means "activities" or "performance of duties": both these requirements for these two higher *varnas* are amply described in

the scriptures. In verse 4.13, Krishna has already stated very clearly that categorization in one of the *varnas* depends on the *guna* and *karma*, and not on *jati* (birth).

A child who was born according to the proper purificatory system (*garbhadhana samskara*) in the higher *varnas* of society is not a *papa yonayah*, but his *guna* and *karma* must be ascertained thoroughly and he must be trained by a responsible *guru* before he can be recognized as a true and functional member of the *varna* of his parents. Therefore the *varna* system is not hereditary, as misinformed people believe.

In 18.42, Krishna says, *samo damas tapah saucam kshantir arjavam eva ca, jñanam vijñanam astikyam brahma-karma svabhava-jam*, "Equanimity, self-control, austerity, purity, tolerance, honesty, knowledge, wisdom and religiousness - these are the natural qualities determining the duties of the *brahmana*."

The *Mahabharata* confirms: *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* (the ethical principles that constitute the foundations of religion). 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 seriously determined in the study of Vedic scriptures and in religious activities: these are the 12 fundamental qualities of a *brahmana*." Again in the *Mahabharata* (*Vana Parva* chapter 180) we find: *satyam danam ksama-silam anrsyamsam tapo ghrna, drsyante yatra nagendra sa brahmana iti smrtah*, "A person who is truthful, charitable, forgiving, sober, kind, austere and free from hatred is called *brahmana*."

In the *Bhagavata Purana* (7.11.21) Narada Muni states: *samo damas tapah saucam santosah ksantir arjavam, jnanam dayacyutatmatvam 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."

One who does not show such qualities cannot really be considered a *brahmana*.

In the *Mahabharata* (*Vana Parva* chapter 180), Maharaja Yudhishthira states: *sudre tu yad bhavel-laksmā dvije tac ca na vidyate, na vai sudro bhavet 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 a 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."

Again the *Mahabharata* gives further clarifications in this regard (*Anusasana Parva* 163.8, 26, 46), where Shiva tells Parvati that society should be progressive: *sthito brahmana-dharmena brahmanyam upajivati, ksatriyo vatha vaisyo va brahma-bhuyah sa gacchati, ebhis tu karmabhir devī subhair acaritais tatha, sudro brahmanatam yati vaisyah ksatriyatam vrajet, etaih karma-phalair devī suddhatma vijitendriyah, sudro'pi dvija-vat sevya iti brahmabravīt 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) even 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*."

Another verse of the *Mahabharata* (*Anusasana Parva* 143.50) explains even more precisely: *na yonir napi samskaro na srutam na ca santatih, karanani dvijatvasya vrttam eva tu karanam*, "Neither birth, nor purification rituals, scholarship or ancestry constitute legitimate qualifications for the position of *brahmana*. Only the behavior as *brahmana* constitutes the basis for the position of *brahmana*."

The position of *brahmana* is particularly delicate because *brahmanas* are responsible for the proper material and spiritual progress of society; they must teach, train, inspire, direct and purify the other *varnas* and even the *antya-jah*, those who were born outside the *varna* system. If they do not perform such duties, or they disgrace such duties by awarding the sacred thread irresponsibly to unworthy people without any training, they should be exposed and ostracized from the community of *brahmanas*. We should not take these matters lightly.

The position of *kshatriya* is also very important and only qualified people should be allowed to occupy it. A true *kshatriya* is a *rajarshi*, a saintly warrior that is totally dedicated to the protection of the *prajas* and especially of the good people and the sacred places. The definition is composed by the two words *raja* ("king") and *rishi* ("self-realized sage") and refers to the deep knowledge and realization of the transcendental science.

Some misinformed people believe that any fighter can be called a *kshatriya* - including bullies, criminals, and warmongers - but this is wrong.

Krishna in 18.43 describes the qualities of a *kshatriya*: *sauryam tejo dhritir dakshyam yuddhe capy apalayanam, danam, isvara-bhavas ca kshatram karma svabhava-jam*, "The natural qualities determining the duties of the *kshatriya* are: loyalty to the ethical principles (*sauryam* means "the quality of *suras*", referring to the *devas* who support and protect the universe), radiance/ charisma/ personal power (*tejas*), determination (*dhritih*), expertise/ resourcefulness (*dakshyam*), courage and stability in battle (*yuddhe capy apalayanam*), generosity (*danam*), and the ability to direct and manage people (*isvara-bhava*)."

The words *punya* ("who have virtuous merits") and *bhakta* ("devotees") could be applied to the *rajarshi*, or it could also be interpreted as a category in itself. In this case it refer to virtuous and devotional persons that do not identify with any particular *varna* but simply dedicate themselves to *sadhana* and personal spiritual development, such as the *sannyasis*.

VERSE 34

मन्मना भव मद्भक्तो मद्याजी मां नमस्कुरु ।

manmanā bhava madbhakto madyājī māṁ namaskuru ।

मामेवैष्यसि युक्तवैवमात्मानं मत्परायणः ॥ ९-३४ ॥

māmevaiṣyasi yuktvaivamātmānaṁ matparāyaṇaḥ ॥ 9-34 ॥

mat: of me; *manah*: think; *bhava*: become; *mat*: of me; *bhaktah*: devotee; *mat*: of me; *yaji*: a worshiper; *mam*: to me; *namah kuru*:

offer respect; *mam*: me; *eva*: certainly; *eshyasi*: will come/ attain; *yukta*: connected; *evam*: therefore; *atmanam*: the *atman*; *mat-parayanah*: devoted to me.

"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.

The word *yukta* here refers to the path of *yoga*, or "union" with the Supreme, that is the constant motif of *Bhagavad gita*. This union is achieved through the proper meditation, or consciousness, and therefore it is also called Krishna Consciousness.

This is one of the most famous and important verses in *Gita*, establishing the preminence of devotion (*bhakti*) in spiritual progress and God realization. We have already mentioned that the chapters 7, 8 and 9 are the central focus of *Bhagavad gita* and present the great importance of *bhakti*; however, an attentive and intelligent study of these chapters will help us understand that such *bhakti* is not the mere superficial sentimentalism of social or folkloristic religiosity. Being able to tell the difference between sentimentalism and devotion is not so difficult: one is material, and one is spiritual. A person who is still identified on the material level is unable to understand Bhagavan, therefore it is very unlikely that s/he will actually have genuine devotion. Some people try to justify sentimentalism by labeling it as "intimate/familiar" devotion, but a real *rasika* devotee is never a materialist identified with the gross body or attached to personal sense gratification.

The expression *prakrita sahajiyas* indicates a category of people who superficially imitate the *gopis* or utilize the *lilas* of Krishna as a form of cheap and titillating entertainment. Because the intimate *lilas* of Krishna with the *gopis* are based on the erotic mood (called *sringara* or *madhurya rasa*), some people may come to think that

prakrita sahajiya refers to some type of "yogic sex", but that idea is not correct

The words *prakrita sahajya* actually mean "materialistic" and "simpleton" respectively; the definition applies to people who take "devotion" as a form of entertainment for the public, expressed usually through the superficial recitation of the most popular stories of Krishna, mostly in the *sringara rasa* but also in *vatsalya rasa*, as in the episodes of Krishna's early childhood. Sentimentalist people "love baby Krishna because he is so cute and is stealing butter", and so they keep pictures of a faintly bluish chubby baby with a peacock feather on his head (the imaginative or artistic projection/ interpretation of what they consider to be Krishna). But cats are cute, too, and they are perfectly able to steal and eat butter as well, and their pictures are put on calendars and postcards and Facebook pages, exactly in the same way.

Teenager Krishna is even more popular, because everybody likes a nice love story, especially when it involves some period of separation or some secrecy, some sad romantic longing of unfortunate young and passionate lovers. All along history, there have been thousands of poems, songs, novels, dramas, tales, paintings, and more recently also films about this type of stories. No story can attract the public if it does not contain a bit of romance, and if the relationship becomes physically sexual and its consummation is described in lyric tones, it becomes even more popular. What to speak about deliberate entertainment business - even the private romantic and sexual lives of ordinary people are attractive for lusty gossipers and peeping toms.

Of course reading or singing about the superficial external vision of the love games between what people call Krishna and the girls of Vrindavana is better than getting engrossed in the romance stories of fictitious or historical ordinary people, but for the *prakrita sahajiyas* it is still a manner of material entertainment to

attract people through material sense gratification and not through devotion. Bhaktivinoda strongly condemned this tendency to entertaining oneself or the public with Krishna's stories. Bhaktisiddhanta did not like his Bengali followers to launch into virtuoso performances with their singing and playing *mrdanga*, so in order to disrupt their delusion, he used to start banging the *karatalas* to a different rhythm.

Genuine Bhakti literature, such as the *Bhakti rasamrita sindhu* (1.2.101) compiled by Rupa Gosvami, clearly points out that devotion is never cheap and ignorant: *sruti smriti puranadi pancharatri vidhim vina, aikantiki harer bhaktir utpatayaiva kalpate*, "so-called exclusive devotion to Hari is simply a disturbance to society when it is not solidly based on the knowledge contained in *sruti, smriti, Puranas* etc".

This ignorant sentimentalism is particularly dangerous when such superficial entertainment "devotion" is presented by professional reciters - that is to say, by persons or groups that commercialize the process for the materialistic purpose of monetary gain, fame, name, adoration, and so on, even to the point where they consider themselves the sole depositories of a sort of monopoly (by caste or by "succession") that they would like to be legally enforced to their exclusive profit.

The superficial readings and dramatic renditions of Krishna's transcendental *lila* (which we see for example in many Indian tv and movies) certainly do not give the actual results of the genuine meditation as per the actual Krishna Consciousness. The Names themselves will only manifest as a shadow of the real thing, for those who do not have the sufficient attitude and realizations.

We should not think that simply by imagining oneself to be a *gopi*, one will be actually situated on the level of *gopis*. The *gopis* were not ordinary people or stupid village girls. They were direct

manifestations of Krishna's internal *shakti*, and their assistants (the *sakhis*) were great liberated saints and sages. If we actually read the chapters of the *Bhagavata Purana* where the *rasa* dance is described, this point is repeated again and again.