

The Bhagavad Gita: The Roadmap to Conscious Evolution. Understanding the Eternal Reality of Consciousness

Sadna Chopra¹
The Graduate Institute, CT

ABSTRACT

The purpose of my study is to present the knowledge of the Self (our true nature) and the knowledge of what Consciousness is, from the sacred text of the Bhagavad Gita. I have examined how the verses of the Gita unfold into a Roadmap for the Conscious Evolution of the self.

Objectives:

- To present the layers of meaning of the sacred text of Bhagavad Gita, literal and allegorical, as explained by the illumined seer, Parmahansa Yogananda, the great spiritual teacher, Swami Chinmayananda, renowned scholar and philosopher, Dr. Sir. S. Radhakrishnan and, educator and author, Eknath Easwaran.
- To understand the journey that the self undertakes to seek its true nature and to understand how the Gita illumines the ultimate mysteries of the Divine Consciousness, the Brahman;
- To establish that the Bhagavad Gita is a primer in its truest essence, a practical manual to Conscious Evolution.

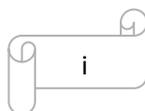
Introduction:

“People travel to wonder at the height of mountains, at the huge waves of the sea, at the long courses of rivers, at the vast compass of the ocean, at the circular motion of the stars; and they pass by themselves without wondering.” – St. Augustine

How does one begin this wondrous journey into one’s inner self? As I pondered, I realized that the path is usually in front of us, we just need to look at it with a fresh pair of eyes. It is like walking in this beautiful valley covered with dense fog-as one treads on the path, a small segment of it, the one right in front of you becomes visible. Though you can’t see very far ahead, you just keep moving, with your intuition guiding you, with the faith that things will be clearer in time. There are many, who have treaded this path, and have discovered their True Selves. The fog does finally lift and reveals the vale, the vale of Beauty and Truth, Serenity and Supreme Peace, of Supreme Joy and Unparalleled Bliss. That sanctuary is right within each one of us. I am reminded of these beautiful lines by T.S. Eliot,

“We shall not cease from exploration,

¹ sadnachopra@gmail.com



And the end of all our exploring

Will be to arrive where we stand

And know the place for the first time”

Fortunately for us, the sages and seers of the ancient wisdom traditions have saved even the minutest observations of this evolutionary journey of self-awareness in the visionary documents, which were, for centuries, committed to memory and then written down to come to us as the earliest, purest forms of the Perennial Philosophy.

Srimad Bhagavad Gita, the Divine Song of the Spirit is the quintessence of the Vedic and the Upanishadic Scriptures. It is the most comprehensive canon of the Perennial Philosophy. The Gita is *“metaphysics and ethics, Brahmagydia and Yogashastra, the science of reality and the art of union with reality.”* (Radhakrishnan, 1948, p. 12) The Gita, the finest mystical treatise is embedded in the vast epic, the Mahabharata, composed by the ancient seer Veda Vyasa.

The Mahabharata presents a vast canvas, and its dramatic layout has brought out the philosophical exposition to its vibrant colors, in the Upanishadic form of conversation between the teacher and the student. The fratricidal struggle, the setting of this Great War forms the ground for the *“development of a spiritual message based on the ancient wisdom, prajna purani, of the Upanisads.”* (Radhakrishnan, 1948, p. 13)

Dr. Sir. S. Radhakrishnan, in his introductory essay to his translation of the Bhagavad Gita writes that, every Scripture has two qualities, one, temporary and perishable, that reflects the ideas of the people, the period and the country in which it is produced; and the second, eternal and imperishable. *“The permanent truths are capable of being lived and seen by a higher than intellectual vision at all times.”* (Radhakrishnan, 1948, p. 6) The Gita is a perennial philosophy; eternal and applicable to the past, present and the future.

How is this study significant to me and to you?

Who am I? What is the purpose of my life? How am I connected to this Universe? How does this individualized soul in each of us come to be? What is the nature of this Divine Ground of Consciousness that we all come from? How does one live in the Highest Self while continuing to work in the world? Is there continuity beyond this life? How does the soul evolve? These and many more are the questions that I am seeking an answer to. As I started trying to understand the Gita, one word, one verse at a time, I felt that the answers to all my questions are right here, in front of me and they have always been. The answers continue to unfold depending on my readiness to receive them. This is just the very beginning of this beautiful journey and the Bhagavad Gita is the most essential primer or the handbook of life to guide me through this Truth that I believe is ultimately realized in the depth of one’s inner self.

The Gita shows how a human being can naturally and consciously evolve through right thoughts and actions while understanding his own natural inclinations and tendencies. The sacred text teaches how each being can live in harmony with Nature’s Divine Wisdom. As the most comprehensive guide on meditation, it shows a step by step method to reverse the flow of consciousness from matter to Spirit. It illumines the inner realm of soul and Spirit.

As Rumi says: “*And you? When will you begin your long journey into yourself?*”

Literature Review:

There are many editions of the Bhagavad Gita and innumerable translations of the sacred text by renowned scholars, linguists, literary figures and spiritual teachers. Dr. Sir. S. Radhakrishnan writes that “*no translation of the Gita can bring out the dignity and grace of the original. Its melody and magic of phrase are difficult to capture in another medium.*” (1948, p. 7)

The commentary on the Gita by the great thinker and Advaitic philosopher Sri Adi Shankaracharya (A.D. 788-820) is the most ancient of the existing commentaries. “*Samkara affirms that Reality or Brahman is one without a second. The entire world of manifestation and multiplicity is not real in itself and seems to be real only for those who live in ignorance (avidya).*” (Radhakrishnan, 1948, p. 13)

For my humble endeavor in understanding the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita, I have very heavily drawn from the works of the following luminaries:

- God Talks with Arjuna. The Bhagavad Gita by Paramahansa Yogananda
- The Yoga of the Bhagavad Gita by Paramahansa Yogananda
- The Bhagavad Geeta by Swami Chinmayananda
- The BHAGAVADGITA by Dr. Sir. S. Radhakrishnan
- The Bhagavad Gita by Eknath Easwaran

Also, the Song of the Lord sung by Bhajan singer, Anup Jalota and its Hindi translations narrated by Pandit Vishnu Sharma and the book, Bhagavad Gita by Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood has been an invaluable resource.

Why did I choose these books for my study?

Eknath Easwaran (1910-1999), educator, developer and teacher of passage meditation and the founder of Blue Mountain Center of Meditation, CA, discovered for himself the Divine Ground of Existence in the teachings of the Gita and wanted to share it with others. Easwaran brings out Gita’s timeless wisdom in his beautifully translated verses which are simple to understand. He gives the historical context, the explanation of the fundamental concepts of the Upanishads and sets the stage for the unfolding of the Scriptural text for the understanding of the modern reader. Easwaran beautifully summarizes each chapter before presenting his translations for each of them.

Dr. Sir Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888-1975), an eminent and erudite scholar and statesman, was the first Vice-President of India (1952-1962) and the second President of India (1962-1967). One of the most influential scholars of comparative religion and philosophy, he wrote authoritative exegeses of India’s religious and philosophical literature for the English speaking world. His birthday, September 5th, is celebrated as Teachers’ Day in India.

His translation of the Gita is very beautifully written. The introduction is very enriching and he explains the historical and social context of the Scripture. His literature review is very extensive. Each verse is beautifully and skillfully translated and is followed by a commentary with quotations from the Vedas and the Upanishads, the Bible, the sacred Puranas, from

Shankaracharya's Brahma Sutra and from the works of the eleventh century philosopher, Ramanuja. Radhakrishnan's explanations are also supported by beautiful lines from Plato's Phaedo, quotes by Socrates, the works of Plotinus, Lucretius, Spinoza, St. Thomas, Sir Edwin Arnold, Aldous Huxley and other luminous minds.

Swami Chinmayananda Saraswati (1916-1993), a great spiritual leader and teacher, inspired the formation of Chinmaya Mission with the noble objective of teaching the wisdom of Vedanta. He started the tradition of Jnana Yagna, to teach the world the message of the Gita and the Upanishads. Swamiji's Bhagawad Geeta is a volume of 14 books containing the translation of the 18 chapters of the Gita. The introduction begins with prayers to meditate on the Gita, and a detailed description on the objective and subjective layers of the mind. The setting of the war of Mahabharata is explained in order to bring out the lessons of life from the rich explanation and commentary on each verse of the Scriptural text. His text is endowed with contemporary examples and it establishes the universality and applicability of the message of the Gita for the modern world.

Swami Paramahansa Yogananda (1893-1952), the illumined sage and seer, the founder of Self-Realization Fellowship, in his books, the Yoga of Bhagavad Gita and God talks with Arjuna-The Bhagavad Gita explains the Royal Science of God-Realization. Yogananda reveals the deeper meaning of Gita's hidden symbology in various names, characters and events. Yogananda gives the genealogy, along with the spiritual significance of each character in the story of Mahabharata, as handed down from his guru's guru, Lahiri Mahasaya. The genealogical descent of the Kauravas and the Pandavas from their ancestor, King Shantanu has been symbolically explained as the descent of the universe and man from Spirit into matter. His translation and extensive as well as equally intensive commentary of the Bhagavad Gita, gives the spiritual instruction of the scientific techniques for attaining direct personal experience of God, through Kriya Yoga, thereby reversing the descent. God Talks with Arjuna has been hailed as unique among the Gita commentaries for its in-depth explanation of the Yoga doctrine, its detailed cosmology, its deep understanding of the spiritual and psychological truths. Paramahansa Yogananda's words, impregnated with life and profound meaning, seem to flow from another realm of consciousness, from the bliss of his communion with God.

This study is my understanding of the revelations of the Gita based on the explanations of the sacred text by the above mentioned literary geniuses. This study has been a spiritual journey for me; each revelation, a reflection of the growth my inner self. The meaning that each one of us sees in the Gita is a reflection of our own life experiences and the various lenses that we don't look at life. As we progress through life, our understanding and our contexts keep changing and so does the meaning that one sees in the Song of the Lord. The Gita guides us through the eternal quest to know our real Self.

What is the methodology involved in the presentation of this eternal knowledge of the ancient wisdom tradition?

This study is a ***theoretical analysis*** of the understanding of the sacred text by the luminaries mentioned above. I have presented the study, in a question-answer format, inspired by the Upanishadic style of conversation between a teacher and a student. In the Gita, Arjuna representing the common man asks questions and Lord Sri Krishna answers all his queries. There are many many more questions asked in this study and the answers have been found in the

wisdom of the Gita. In the last few chapters, I have introduced graphics to effectively summarize the theory.

In accordance with the objectives of the study, I have presented the layers of meaning of most of the verses of the Gita, stringing them together, as answers to the questions asked. The name of the author, the year and the page numbers in parentheses have been cited, when an idea has been presented from a particular book and written in my own words. In case of actual words quoted, they have been presented in italics within the quotation marks. They are quite a few of them, as the mystical truths have been difficult to explain in words other than the ones originally used to define them.

In the study, I have proceeded in sync with the actual chapters of the Gita but have combined some of them and omitted Chapters 10, Divine Splendor/ The Infinite Manifestations of the Unmanifest Spirit and Chapter 11, The Cosmic Vision because of the detailed explanation it required regarding various characters of mythology.

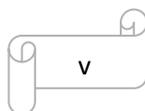
As I proceeded with the Gita, the lessons regarding the development of the self unfolded and I have tried portraying the same for you. I have used a blue colored font where I wanted to highlight how a particular teaching leads to the development of the self, the collective development of the society and the lessons regarding living in harmony with Nature.



Chapter 1

The Body as a Battlefield: The Allegory of the Gita

The battle lines drawn, the vast serpentine armies, all armed to start the war, blow their conches. At that moment the Pandava prince Arjuna, the finest archer and one of the greatest warriors of his times, asks the Divine Incarnate, Lord Sri Krishna, who is his friend and guide, also his charioteer on the battlefield, to take the chariot amidst the two armies, so Arjuna can have an eagle's eye view of both the sides. When Arjuna sees his venerable teachers, his great-uncles and uncles, his cousins, his nears and dears on the other side, he is overwhelmed with grief and starts talking with Lord Krishna about the futility of the war. He lays down his bow and arrow before Sri Krishna and refuses to engage in a war that will make him kill his kith and kin. That is when the sacred dialogue of the Bhagavad Gita, between disciple Arjuna and his guru, Sri Krishna begins....





Sri Krishna and Arjuna blew their celestial conches indicating readiness for battle.

The first chapter of the Gita, called the Despondency of Arjuna, dramatizes the perpetually recurring human predicament through the troubled mental state of Arjuna. Most of us go through life without contemplating about the ultimate questions pertaining to life's true purpose. Only in times of crisis, in extreme sadness and agony, we ask ourselves the perennial questions of why are we here, the meaning of the current state and where do we go from here.

The state of despair and despondency has also been called "Yoga", as this is the state from which one embarks on the inward journey of Self-Realization, of knowing one's true Self. Arjuna, the archetypal Man, wants to find the answers to all the questions that are truly troubling him and to

find out the one right path of action for him. This state of despair and inner turmoil is also called “Yoga” for another reason. It leads to non-attachment and dispassion, which is the very first step of knowing oneself. Only when we see things from a distance, does it give one clarity and vision.

Arjuna is going through a similar state where he needs to detach himself from the quagmire which is pulling him deeper; he needs to look at his current situation by distancing himself from it. Lord Krishna (the Divine Consciousness within) gives him just the opportunity by talking to him about spiritual wisdom, the direct, experiential knowledge of the immortal Soul.

What are the battles of everyday life waged on the Spiritual Battlefield of Man’s body and mind?

1) Righteous War: an instrument of Peace

The Material and Moral Struggle: (Yogananda, 2005, p.15)

Arjuna’s dharma* (abiding by one’s essential nature) requires him to engage in battle, as it is his ennobling duty as a Kshatriya (warrior) to establish a peaceful and just society. Allegorically, this war is not a conflict of ambitions. It is a war between high principles and proud ambition.

(*) The word Dharma has been explained in detail in Chapter 5.

Sri Krishna evokes Arjuna’s sense of duty, saying:

“Having regard for your own duty, you should not falter or waver; there exists no greater good for a Kshatriya (warrior) than a righteous war.” (Verse 2:31)

“If you will not fight this righteous war, then having abandoned your own duty and glory, you shall incur sin.” (Verse 2.33)

When the struggle is between right and wrong, he who abstains from it, out of sentimentality, weakness or cowardice, commits sin. (S. Radhakrishnan, 1948, p. 113) Krishna urges his disciple, Arjuna to fight the war of dharma against adharma (acts contrary to dharma), to uphold the righteousness against ignoble and wrong.

“Treating alike pleasure and pain, gain and loss, victory and defeat, engage in this great battle and you shall not incur sin”, says the Divine consciousness within. (Verse 2:38)

Krishna assures Arjuna that death while fighting would be preferable to a life spent in unrighteousness.



Amidst the two competing forces

2) Inner War: Self Development within

The Psychological war: (Yogananda, 2005, p.15)

Allegorically speaking, the Kauravas, hundred in number, represent the innumerable vile and sinful tendencies within oneself. The Pandavas, five in number, are the divine impulses in the human mind. Swami Chinmayananda very beautifully writes in his translations of the Gita that “*A constant war is being waged within each one of us at all the crucial moments of action.*” (Swami Chinmayananda, 2011, Chap I & II, p. 58)

The negative impulses at times seem mightier than the small divine army of the inner self. At this crucial moment, one tends to feel the despondency and despair that Arjuna felt. “*When, upon the spiritual field of self-development within (Dharma-Kshetra), the lower instincts and the higher ideals array themselves, ready to fight, a true seeker (the captain of the latter), under the guidance of his divine discriminative intellect, takes himself to the no man’s land between the two forces for the purpose of reviewing the enemy lines, without identifying himself with either the good or the evil within. At that moment of his introspective meditations, the egoistic entity comes to feel a morbid desperation and feels incapacitated to undertake the spiritual adventure of fighting this inner war with any hope of victory.*” (p. 59)

There is “*an exact correspondence between the material and spiritual attributes of man as described by Patanjali in his Yoga Sutras and the warring contestants cited in the Gita: the clan of Pandu, representing Pure Intelligence; and that of the blind King Dhritarashtra, representing the Blind Mind with its offspring of wicked sense-tendencies (the Kauravas or Kurus)*” (Yogananda, 2008, pg. 7). Interestingly, the name Dhritarashtra means, “one who rules by holding tightly the reins (of the senses).” (Yogananda, 2008, p. 17)

Paramahansa Yogananda elucidates how each name in the epic of Mahabharata, etymologically traced to its Sanskrit root, reflects a human psychological trait. The very first verse of the Gita begins with the question that the blind King Dhritirashtra (the Blind Mind) asks his honest and trustworthy advisor and charioteer, Sanjaya (impartial introspection):

Tell me, Sanjaya, what my sons and the sons of Pandu did, when they gathered on the sacred field of Kurukshetra, eager for battle? (Verse 1:1)

This is the question each one of us must ask ourselves:

How did the impulsive mental and sensory tendencies, and, the pure discriminative tendencies, gathered together, eager to battle for supremacy, on my bodily field of action, fare today?

Asked in complete earnestness, we can trust our impartial introspection to give us an unbiased and honest answer.

‘Sanjaya’ literally means ‘completely victorious’, ‘one who has conquered himself.’ In the Gita, Sanjaya is the divine insight. Paramahansa Yogananda writes that “*the impartial intuitive self-analysis, discerning introspection*” is the ability of the aspiring devotee “*to stand aside, observe oneself without any prejudice, and judge accurately.*” (Yogananda, 2008, p.15)



Sanjaya, blessed with divine sight by the sage Veda Vyasa narrates the events of the battle of Kurukshetra to the blind King Dhritirashtra.

3) The Yogic Symbolism

The Spiritual battle: (Yogananda, 2005, p.15)

Dharamakshetra Kurukshetra or the holy field of action represents the inner field, the plain *of the cerebrospinal axis and its seven subtle centers # of life and divine consciousness.* (Yogananda, 2007, p. 16) The spine is the path of divine awakening. Paramahansa Yogananda explains how

the life energy enters the body through the medulla oblongata, solidifies as matter and forms the body. At the time of death, the consciousness first withdraws from the extremities to the spine, up the spine to the medulla oblongata and then leaves the body. A yogi, in ecstatic state of deep meditation, withdraws his energy and consciousness the same way, ‘dying’ consciously to return back to the body. Yogananda often quoted this passage from the New Testament, where St. Paul declares, “I die daily*.” (* Yogananda, 2005, p. 505)

Each Pandava brother resembles a chakra from the base to the top; and their wife Draupadi, the power of Kundalini. In order for the Kundalini to awaken, for the energy to ascend from the lower to the higher chakra, the attachment to matter-consciousness must be released. The war is thus between the two opposing forces, discriminative intelligence (buddhi) and the sense-conscious mind (manas). The manas, engaging in the sensory activities, gets carried away into “*the world of delusive relativities, maya*”; whereas the buddhi “*draws the consciousness towards truth*”, the Source or Self-realization. (Yogananda, 2008, p. 17)

(#) The Subtle Centers of life and divine consciousness (Chakras) are elucidated in Appendix A, at the end of the report.

The most formidable among all the psychological forces that opposes the Soul in its journey to be one with the Divine, is the Ego. Ego is represented by Bhishma, the great-grand-sire of the Kauravas and the Pandavas, who is fighting against the pure discriminative powers represented by the Pandavas. The Ego, the most powerful opponent ignites the greatest fear in the spiritual forces poised in the spinal centers, striving towards Union with the Divine. (Yogananda, 2008, pg. 41) Bhishma comes from the Sanskrit root *bhi*, “to frighten”; and in the story of Mahabharata, he is the supreme commander of the entire ‘sense’ army.

A well-known analogy in Kathopanishad, aptly describes the body as the Chariot, which is pulled forward by five horses, the five sense organs, each trotting along its path, attracted by the sense-objects. The manas or the mind represent the reins of the horses that “*receive the impulse from the steeds as well as relays the instructions*” of the charioteer. The “*mind neither cognizes nor exerts guidance*” that is the work of the charioteer. The buddhi or the discriminative intellect is the charioteer that controls and guides the horses, so that they do not turn unruly. (Yogananda, 2008, p. 17) The Soul is the Master of the Chariot.



Chapter 2

Understanding the True Nature of the Self

Arjuna’s state of despair, of doubts and anxieties, of the intense inner struggle to figure out the right path, is a state that we all identify with. At times of uncertainty, we all hope and pray that answers be shown to us. These answers have to be found within. The process itself is vital, that is

what leads to the development of the self. What is required is complete faith and seeking refuge in the inherent wisdom and intuitive perception within.

Arjuna, in the deepest state of despondency, folds his hands and asks Lord Krishna to be his guru. Sri Krishna is the Divine Presence within, always soothing, guiding and reassuring the spiritual seeker.

Paramahansa Yogananda explains how an aspirant on the spiritual path gets distraught not having yet experienced the divine communion. With steady effort in meditation, by controlling the mind and the senses and surrendering the ego, the consciousness is established in one's True Self. The wisdom then comes to the true devotee or spiritual aspirant through his awakened intuitive perception. (Yogananda, 2005, p. 171-173)

The confusion, the feeling of helplessness and grief that one experiences in life's situations is because, like Arjuna, we are conditioned by our body, mind and intellect and fail to recognize the Pure Self within, the seat of all Strength and Wisdom. Thus, the Knowledge of the Self is required for the deliverance of each one of us through the deliverance of Arjuna. (Swami Chinmayananda, 2011, Ch. I & II, p. 148-149)

Arjuna's sorrow symbolizes the longing for the divine truth, an unfulfilled longing for divine communion. The Divinity within exhorts the spiritual aspirant, the determined divine warrior to rise above and become victorious over his ego consciousness.

The Divine Consciousness thus instructs Arjuna on the Nature of the True Self:

Those who are established in wisdom (sthita prajnas) live in conscious awareness that they are not the perishable body, but the Atman. They see the same Self in everyone, for the Atman is universally present in all.

Just as the embodied soul passes through infancy, childhood, youth and old age in this body, so also, does the soul pass into successive bodies. The soul is eternal; its embodiments are not. The seers of truth know that the impermanent has no reality; reality lies in the eternal. The Self is never born, nor does it perish, nor having come to be, will it again, cease to be. The Self is everlasting and Infinite. The Self is unborn, eternal, permanent and ancient. It is beyond all thought and beyond all change. It does not die when the body dies. Just as a person casts off worn-out garments and puts on new ones, so does the embodied soul cast off worn-out bodies and take on others that are new. Death is thus certain for the living, as is rebirth for the one that dies. So, do not grieve for the inevitable. The manifest world of today was unmanifested before and will once again fold into the unmanifest. (Verses 2: 13-2:25)

These lovely lines in the notes of S. Radhakrishnan's translations (1948, p. 109) portray the same truth.

When Crito asks, "In what way shall we bury you, Socrates?"

Socrates answers, "In any way you like, but first you must catch me, the real me. Be of good cheer, my dear Crito, and say that you are burying my body only, and do that whatever is usual and what you think best."

The Insight of Yoga:

Lord Krishna, after giving Arjuna the Cosmic Wisdom of Sankhya (the logic of thought in a philosophy), explains to him the method to attain that Wisdom, through Yoga.

The natural course of one's evolution is the understanding of one's true Nature. That Supreme Wisdom is attained not by philosophical theories or theoretical teachings, but by pursuing the objective of Self-Realization with single-mindedness and one pointed concentration. The real spiritual aspirant, with his mind focused totally on God, recognizes a true guru and a true path of Self-Realization and strives towards his inner awakening through meditation. (Yogananda, 2005, p. 274) Those who engage in rituals for the attainment of pleasure and power remain entangled in fulfillment of their desires and lose their path of spiritual wisdom. The wise do not attach any importance to ritual observances for worldly purposes. The Gita thus skillfully guides the religious-minded to higher states of understanding of the Divine Reality.

The Divine Consciousness, through devotee Arjuna, explains to mankind the art of living where each action is based on the constant awareness of the Self.

Your right is to action alone; but never to its fruit. Let not the fruit of action, be your motive, nor let your attachment be to inaction. (Verse 2:47)

How then is the action performed, if not urged by the desire for results?

The Lord says, "Perform action, Arjuna, being steadfast in Yoga, by abandoning attachment and with an even mind in success and failure. Evenness of mind is called Yoga. (Verse 2.48)

To rise above the conditioning of one's life, the seeker needs to discipline his mind to detach himself from the dualities, of pleasure and pain, gain and loss, success and failure. Yoga is thus the evenness of mind. Krishna tells Arjuna to establish himself in yoga, in equanimity. This is an important lesson, not just for a spiritual aspirant but for all. An even-minded individual can handle favorable and unfavorable events in life better. When one is not overly affected by the results of the events, he can view them from a distance, though still being a part of the drama.

If we establish ourselves in Yoga, in this state of steadfast equanimity, each one of us will become more effective in the realm of action and more importantly find profound peace of mind. There will be clarity in judgment and a greater vision if one is not emotionally entangled in the outcomes of one's action. Yoga is thus, skill in action.

What is gained by the evenness of mind and skill in action?

Desire prompted activities keeps the ego interested in the fruits of actions, which leads to more desire-prompted activities and the cycle continues. Selfless actions, keeps the ego out of the picture. When the act is performed for the good of all, without the feeling of "I am the Doer", it leads to non-attachment. The action then does not lead to further bondages. This purifies the individual's mind for the higher objective of the Knowledge of the Self, which ultimately liberates him from the cycle of births and deaths.

What are the characteristics of the individual who is firmly established in wisdom, who is steadfast in spirit?

When an individual relinquishes all the desires of his mind and when his spirit is content in itself, that individual is steadfast in intelligence (sthita-prajna). He, whose mind is unperturbed by afflictions and who is unattached to the pleasures; he, who is free from attachments, fear and anger, he is called a sage of steady wisdom. He, who neither rejoices at the good nor is disturbed by the bad, he is established in wisdom. A person steadfast in wisdom draws in his senses at will just like the tortoise draws its limbs into his shell.

Spiritual aspirants may abstain from sense objects, yet have a longing for them. They are freed from all longings when they behold the Supreme. When one experiences Supreme Joy, there's no longing for the transitory sensory pleasures.

However, the turbulent effect of the senses can even sway the minds of those striving for perfection.

How can one bring the senses under one's control?

Radhakrishnan writes that self-discipline is not a matter of intelligence, but of will and emotions. It can be achieved when there is vision of the Highest. (1948, p. 125) By constantly striving and keeping one's focus on the Supreme, one can be established in wisdom. Lord Sri Krishna asks Arjuna to remain firm in Yoga and ever intent on Him.

Swami Chinmayananda brings out a very important point of discussion here, regarding the development of the self. Control does not imply mental suppression. The constant striving to move beyond sensory pleasures to the ever satisfying bliss is the blossoming of the inner self. (2011, Ch. I & II, p. 269-270)

What happens when the mind, instead of controlling the reins of the senses, follows the senses?

Mahatma Gandhi quoted, among others, the following verse from the Bhagavad Gita in his Autobiography, saying that these words made a deep impression on his mind.

“If one ponders on objects of the sense, there springs attraction;

From attraction grows desire;

Desire flames to fierce passion, passion breeds recklessness;

Then the memory all betrayed, lets noble purpose go, and saps the mind;

Till purpose, mind and man are all undone.”

When a person dwells his mind on sense objects, he experiences attachment to them. From attachment springs desire, and from desire, comes anger. Anger clouds the judgment and gives rise to delusion; delusion causes loss of memory, one can no longer learn from past mistakes; Lost is the power to choose between the wise and the unwise; this destruction of discrimination leads to ruin. (Verse 2:62-2:63)

Lost is the strength of will and unity of purpose. (Easwaran, 1985, p. 60)

Under the whims of the wandering senses, the mind, like a boat on waters, is neither quiet, nor steady. Unless the mind steadies, one cannot self-evaluate one's life or apply his intellectual discrimination to the everyday issues of life. How can he then self-evolve? (Swami Chinmayananda, 2011, Ch. I&II, p. 279)

The individual attached to the senses, engrossed in material pleasures remains unaware of the Source of Light within. He projects the imperfections of his mind to the world outside and sees the world through lenses of various hues. This causes restlessness and in-harmony in his life. Where there's no peace of mind, how can there be happiness?

Referring to the Chariot analogy in Kathopanishad, "the horses of the senses are not be unyoked from the chariot but controlled by the reins of the mind." (Radhakrishnan, 1948, p. 126)

The verses above describe the very basic and universal human emotions and how they are an obstacle to the development of the self.

In contrast, how does the self-controlled individual navigate his life?

The self-controlled man moves amidst the world of sense objects, with the senses under control, free from attachment and aversion alike, he attains purity of spirit and peace in which all the sorrows end. He lives in the wisdom of the Self. (Verse 2:64 – 2:65)

The true intellectual discrimination comes from intuition powered by the soul-force. The soul is the source of Divine guidance and wisdom. The disciplined soul is "*wakeful to the nature of reality, to which the unwise is asleep or indifferent.*" (Radhakrishnan, 1948, p. 128) With this innate wisdom, comes right action. From being in tune with one's soul, one experiences peace, happiness and divine bliss.

The Gita does not advocate asceticism, but self-control, a training of the mind, body and senses.

Just as the water flowing from all directions into the ocean, does not affect the changeless vastness, so does the "*streams of desires*" get "*absorbed in the changeless Oceanic Self.*" (Yogananda, 2005, p. 319)

He who renounces all selfish desires and acts free from longing, he who breaks away from the ego-cage of "I", "me", and "mine", attains peace. When the ego ends, "*the knower of Truth, in the brilliant experience of the Self becomes the Self.*" (Swami Chinmayananda, 2011, Ch. I&II, p.290) This is the divine state of Oneness with Brahman (brahmisthiti). "Arjuna, attain this and pass from death to immortality (brahmanirvana)." (Verse 2: 71-72)

Plato in Phaedo expresses the same truth. "*If the soul takes its departure in a state of purity, not carrying with it any clinging impurities which during life, it never willingly shared in, but always avoided; gathering itself into itself and making this separation from the body its aim and study.....well then, so prepared the soul departs to that invisible region of the Divine, the Immortal and the wise.*" (Phaedo, Sec 68) (Radhakrishnan, 1948, p. 129)



Chapter 3

Karma Yoga: Skill in Action

The Unmanifest projects “a portion of His consciousness as a cosmic creative force” (Yogananda, 2005, p.335) and “from this vibration-less region”, emerges “all vibratory creation, through a cosmic rhythm of ordered activity.” Karma, literally means deed or action, is a basic law underlying all creation. This universal principle of cause and effect permeates all existence. “The world is bound in its own activity.” (Easwaran, 1985, p. 72) Yogananda writes that “all activity is intelligent vibration.” All manifested creation owes its existence and character to the constant action and interaction of the three inherent gunas, qualities or modes of expression. (Yogananda, 2005, p. 339)

The Sattva guna represents goodness, light and purity and is elevating, the Rajas stands for passion, activity and energy and is activating; Tamas embodies darkness, ignorance and inertia and is obstructing. The Sattvic activities, activities guided by the sattva guna, awaken and guides man towards the Brahman, the Cosmic-Consciousness. The Rajasic tendencies are materially progressive and energizing. The Tamasic activities, takes one on the path of ignorance. Thus consciousness charts its way from tamas to rajas to the sattva and then liberates itself from all gunas.

Each activity that we engage in produces a mental impression or vasana. With repetition of these activities, good or bad, the grooves or impressions become etched on our soul. These impressions are like a memory chip that we carry from one life to another. These vasanas or impressions create new fields of actions where they can exhaust themselves, creating yet more impressions. The cycle of cause and effect thus continues.

How does one free himself from this maze of cause and effect?

By acting selflessly, and without attachment to the results, one attains purity of mind, and that leads to salvation. Each being has a role to perform in the grand schema; and when this role is performed with the sense of duty for the welfare of all beings, one’s actions become ‘selfless’ and ‘desireless’ (without attachment to desires). Such an action does not bind him to the endless cycle of karmic cause and effect.

The path of knowledge and discrimination (Sankhya, or Jnana Yoga) and the path of right action (Karma Yoga) are the two stages of the same path of Self-Realization. Selfless activity, writes Swami Chinmayananda, gives the mind a chance to exhaust its existing mental impressions. Such a mind gains ethereal poise and soars steadily into the subtlest realms of meditation to experience the transcendental Absolute. (Swami Chinmayananda, 2011, Ch. III, p. 12) Liberating spiritual activity (right behavior, moral discipline, introspection, meditation) leads to Wisdom of the Self.

Each selfless act rises from Brahman. Those who realize this, find an eternal source of joy and fulfillment. Their happiness is no longer derived from the external world. Neither people nor things can affect their security. (Eknath Easwaran, 1985, p. 77)

The yogi who attains salvation works without any binding necessity or egoism. He is free from desires and attachments, and acts from divine guidance for the welfare of all. Such yogis set an example for the world to follow, e.g. King Janaka is regarded as a holy sage who attained enlightenment, not by renouncing his responsibilities as a king, but by working dedicatedly with a spirit of non-attachment for the welfare of all.

An important lesson here is: One's actions can be controlled only through the control of one's mind. The mind needs to be convinced by reasoning to make a wiser choice even if it goes against the mind's habitual actions. Thoughts reinforce actions and vice versa. Thus the thoughts and actions both need to be sieved at each instant. Each act needs to be done with complete awareness, guided by compassion and with the welfare of others in mind. The joy, then, arises from within and does not depend on impermanent, outside sources.

What causes the attachment to the action?

All actions are orchestrated by the gunas or attributes of Cosmic Nature (Prakriti). The ignorant, deluded by his egoism, thinks, 'I am the Doer'. He thus stays attached to the results of his action and bound to the cycle of Karma.

The illumined sees his real Self as separate from his senses and sense objects and does not become attached to anything. Aware of the ephemeral nature of the Universe and the play of the triple modes of Nature, he does not consider himself the doer of any action. He thus, remains unattached to the ripple effects of the action. He performs all action guided by the higher purpose and in harmony with Nature.

What is the responsibility of the yogi of perfect wisdom towards those who have imperfect understanding?

The ignorant cling to the activities, deluded by the three fold attributes of Prakriti (Cosmic Nature) and remain engrossed in their material duties. The wise should not disturb them from carrying out their duties. Every individual follows his own path of evolution and his redemption lies in his own sphere of action. A sage of perfect wisdom guides people towards higher principles gradually according to their readiness. A yogi should not unsettle the minds of individuals with imperfect understanding.

Even when we want to be on the path of virtue, sometimes forces compel us, against our will, and drag us into temptation. What binds us to the selfish deeds?

The Divine Consciousness within, answers: Desire and anger are those impelling forces.

Yogananda beautifully weaves this answer, "*Desires are silken threads of material pleasures which the spider of habit continuously spins around the soul to form the shrouding cocoon of ignorance. The soul must manage to cut through this stifling cocoon of ignorance to reemerge as the butterfly of omnipresence.*" (Yogananda, 2005, p. 408) We continue in this desert of delusion

(maya), towards the ever receding mirage of desires, burning with the thirst of unfulfillment which then turns into anger. (p. 408)

The blissful heaven within, the innate wisdom of the soul gets eclipsed by desire, activated by the rajas guna. The senses, mind and intellect are desire's stronghold. Sense pleasures incessantly provide fuel to the fire of material desires. This in turn destroys wisdom and discrimination.

Krishna thus urges Arjuna to use his might to win the war against the enslaving power of the senses, selfish desire and anger, which are embodied by Duryodhana (King Desire) and Duhshasana, the eldest and second eldest of the Kaurava brothers, respectively. The root word 'duh' in Sanskrit means 'difficult' and the root word 'sas' means to 'restrain or control'. (Yogananda, 2008, p. 80)

The senses are superior to the physical body; the mind is superior to the sense faculties; the intelligence is superior to the mind; and the Self is superior to the intelligence. (Verse 3:42)

Radhakrishnan quotes the Mahabharata, saying that all desires are born of *samkalpa* or thought. "O desire, I know thy root. Thou art born of *samkalpa*. I shall not think of thee and thou shalt cease to exist." (Radhakrishnan, 1948, p. 189)

Radhakrishnan in his translation of the Bhagavad Gita quotes from the Kathopanishad that the Consciousness must be raised in steps. The higher we rise the freer we are. Under the sway of the senses we are least free. We are freer under the dictates of the manas; freer yet when the manas is joined with buddhi; the highest freedom is attained when our acts, determined by buddhi are under the divine guidance from beyond, the Self. (Radhakrishnan, 1948, p. 150) The understanding that the ego can be disciplined by the eternal Self, the Divine Light within, one can vanquish the hard to conquer foes, desire and anger.

The most important lesson of life is presented here, when the Blessed Lord Sri Krishna or the Divine Consciousness within, says, that one can stay free from the binding force of any activity when one is not bound by the results of the action. The man performing his karma stays free from it when he performs his work with non-attachment to the result and maintains poise and equanimity to the dualities of life, like gain or loss, pleasure and pain. All karma is then an oblation to the God, performed in the spirit of the *Yagna**. Perform all actions, being absorbed in the Highest Self and in the spirit of self-surrender and in service to the Lord. Such actions lead, not only to the development of the self, but of the society as a whole.

**Yagna is explained in detail in the following, Chapter 4.*



Chapter 4

Wisdom in Action: Renunciation of Action in Knowledge

“Revelation is never closed. So long as the human heart has qualities of devotion and friendship, God will disclose His secrets to them.” (Radhakrishnan, 1948, p. 152)

Lord Krishna explains to his friend and devotee, Arjuna, the Incarnations of the Divine and the paths of liberation from rebirths. *“Even though almost completely buried during the material age, the Science of Yoga can never be annihilated, for it is linked to the Reality within man. Whenever he questions the phenomena of life and awakens spiritually, through God’s grace he encounters a true guru who acquaints him with the art of divine union.”* (Yogananda, 2005, p. 412)

The verses of the Bhagavad Gita establish the historical antiquity of Raja Yoga, the eternal science of union with God. All things, all beings and matter in the Universe emanate from, are sustained by and return into the Cosmic Consciousness. Just as the intelligent, creative Cosmic Energy unfolds into individualized consciousness, the same way we are called back, when this consciousness enfolds, the senses withdraw, dissolving the *“consciousness of matter into life force, life force into mind, mind into soul and soul into Spirit.”* (Yogananda, 2005, p. 424) The manifestation of Cosmic Consciousness into human consciousness is beautifully elucidated by Paramahansa Yogananda. (p. 427-430)

Whenever righteousness wanes, and unrighteousness increases, the Lord incarnates Himself. *“When all-pervasive materialism invades the hearts of human souls, to preserve the equilibrium, an answering manifestation of wisdom and righteousness is essential. The Supreme, though unborn and undying, becomes manifest in human embodiment to overthrow the forces of ignorance and selfishness.”* (From Vishnu Purana, quoted by Radhakrishnan, 1948, p. 154) The Sanskrit word Avatara means descent of the Divine into the human world. Lord Vishnu as the preserver of the Universe incarnates Himself as an Avatar. The Divinity comes to the earthly plane to re-establish dharma, virtuousness and righteousness. By offering *“Himself to be a channel of grace, He invites souls to trust and love Him. He promises to lead them to the knowledge of the Absolute. The Avatara helps us to become what we potentially are.”* (p. 156) *“The ascent of man into Godhead is also the purpose of the descent of God into humanity.”* (p. 157)

Lord Sri Krishna explains to Arjuna ***the path to liberation from the cycle of rebirth.*** The Lord says, *“You and I have passed through many births, I remember them all. My true being is unborn and changeless. I am the Lord who dwells in every creature. Through the power of my own maya, I manifest myself in a finite form.”* (Verse 4:5-6) (Easwaran, 1985, p. 85) *“He who knows me as his own divine Self breaks through the belief that he is the body, and, is not reborn again. He comes to Me. Delivered from selfish attachments, fear and anger, finding their refuge in me, sanctified by the fire of My Being, many have reached the state of Unity in Me.”* (Verse 4: 9-10) (p. 86)

In what spirit shall we act?

a) By Relinquishing attachment to the fruits of work, always contented and equanimous to the results of the action

Krishna says, *“Actions do not cling to me as I am not attached to their results.”* (Verse 4:14) One must carry out each act of theirs with an inner composure, with no attachment to the fruits of

their action. Swami Chinmayananda writes that the desire for results dissipates our energies. It does not mean that we do not plan and work towards a desired result. It means that while we are at it, we have to refrain from being preoccupied about the results and let the anticipation or fear of the outcome affect the task at hand. Live in the present moment. The activities that are performed in the service of many, with no longing for results, those activities get purified by the flame of inherent Divine Wisdom. Such a person, “*even when he is engaged in action, remains poised in the tranquility of the Atman.*” (Swami Prabhavananda, Isherwood, 1995, p.25)

The Gita, thus, instructs us to act efficiently and achieve our potential and live in freedom.

b) Selfless Action in the spirit of Yagna

When the attachments are surrendered, the mind finds wisdom, each act then performed is an offering to God. The Vedic fire ritual of sacrifice or *Yajna* is interpreted in its spiritual symbolism. Each act in life can become a Yagna or an offering to the Brahman. Each incoming breath of *prana* is a sacrifice to the outgoing breath of *apana*, just as each outgoing breath is an offering to the incoming breath. Lord Krishna describes various yagnas that are followed by the devotees. Some devotees offer as oblations, material possessions or their austerities. Some offer their vital force into the fire of Yoga. Others offer self-discipline and their learning and knowledge. Some devotees offer the power of their senses to the fire of restraint. Some sacrifice their self into the higher Self. The offering of wisdom is better than any material offering.

In all this, the process of offering as well as the offering itself is Brahman. The fire is Brahman too. The one who makes the oblation is Brahman as well. Each act is performed being absorbed in the Brahman. Those who realize this, attain Brahman.

In the ritual of fire sacrifice, the leftover in the pot from which the offerings are made into the sacred fire are called ‘sacred remnants’. They are considered divinely potent remnants from the Lord’s own plate and is eaten by the devotees with great reverence, as Prasaada. Metaphorically, performing the *yagnas* (desireless, selfless activities), with a spirit of true dedication, leaves behind a purer version of oneself. The result of the Yagna is greater self-control and an integrated personality that is poised in the Self. (Swami Chinmayananda, 2010, p.67)

Self-restraint, the essence of all *Yagna* where lower impulses are sacrificed in the purifying flames, is a means to spiritual growth. All action is consummated in spiritual wisdom.

How do we attain the Knowledge by which all actions find fulfillment?

By surrendering oneself to the guru, by reverent inquiry (into the teaching as well as one’s own perceptions) and by serving devotedly as a disciple, one would be imparted this wisdom by the guru.

Parmahansa Yogananda writes that the word “*guru*” means “dispeller of darkness” (*gu*, ‘darkness’ and *ru*, ‘that which dispels’). Though the word *guru* commonly refers to a teacher, a true *guru* is Self-realized. He is thus uniquely qualified to guide the spiritual aspirants on their journey towards attaining liberation and enlightenment. The disciple may be attuned to the teachings of his reverent *guru*, even without his *guru*’s physical presence. (2008, p. 86)

Receiving this wisdom from a true guru, having experienced the Eternal Nature, the seeker will not fall into delusion again. He thus sees all beings in his Self and in the Lord. The sense of a separate self perishes, along with it the ignorance that leads to bondage.

By the raft of wisdom alone, can one go, across the ocean of sins. (Verse 4:37) This Knowledge of the Self exhausts the results of all *karma* (action).

Faith is essential for attaining wisdom. “*Faith is the aspiration of the soul to gain wisdom. It is the reflection in the empirical self of the wisdom that dwells in the deepest levels of our being.*” (Radhakrishnan, 1948, p. 171-172)

The devoted seeker, having controlled his senses and having obtained wisdom through realization, reaches the state of complete Bliss.

Lord Krishna, thus urges Arjuna, to take up the path of Yoga and slash with the sword of spiritual wisdom, the doubt about the Self that arises out of ignorance. True knowledge is the greatest purifier of the Soul. (Easwaran, 1985, p. 89-90)

Acting in the spirit of Yagna, by attaining inner purity through self-discipline, one realizes the Ultimate Truth which is the “*final fulfillment of evolution.*” (Swami Chinmayananda, 2010, Ch. IV, p. 92)

Each act illumined with spiritual wisdom and performed in the spirit of selflessness, brings about not only, the conscious evolution of the self, but also the evolution of the entire world. The wisdom in action releases one from the bondage of action.



Chapter 5

Renunciation and Action are One

Arjuna asks Lord Krishna: ***Which is better, the path of Selfless Action (Karma Yoga) or the path of Renunciation of Action (Karma Sanyasa Yoga)?***

Arjuna’s question expresses the query of every spiritual aspirant as to which path is better to reach the higher Consciousness; serving in the world selflessly, or seeking wisdom through renunciation of actions?

Krishna’s answer to Arjuna’s query is:

“*Action rightly renounced brings freedom. Action rightly performed brings freedom.*” (Prabhavananda, Isherwood, 1995, p. 35) “*Following either path faithfully will lead to complete spiritual vision.*” (Easwaran, 1985, p. 92) Of the two, the Yoga of Action is superior to the Yoga of Renunciation of Action. (Verse 5:2)

For Arjuna leading his army to fight for the establishment of dharma, the path of performance of dutiful action without the desire for their fruits will give him an opportunity to work out his karma. Performance of Selfless action was thus prescribed to Arjuna as that was the essential course of action for a Kshatriya (warrior) to alleviate the suffering of his people and to re-establish virtues and values that sustain and nourish dharma.

According to the Gita, the true sannyasi (renunciant) is one, who has risen above the dualities of life, no matter what his place or duty in life is. Just as the lotus flower grows in the water, yet is not wetted by it, similarly, the karma yogi performs all actions without being attached to its results and surrenders all actions to the Infinite. He is not entangled by the senses and knows that he is just an instrument of the action and not the doer. *“The true worker (karma yogi) is also the true renouncer (nitya sannyasi), for he works in a detached spirit.”* (Radhakrishnan, 1948, pg. 175)

Swami Chinmayananda writes that an ordinary act can be transformed into “a divine action of dedication and worship” either by the renunciation of the sense of agency that “I am the doer” in every action or by not being preoccupied with the anxieties regarding the results of one’s actions. Persevering on either path, the seeker shall reach the same Eternal Goal. (2011, Ch. V, pg. 14)

The Renunciation of Action in Knowledge follows performance of Selfless Action. The mind is first purified with right action. The God uniting actions brings about the realization that we are just instruments of action. This leads to the renunciation of action in Knowledge, the Knowledge of the Self.

A true Sannyasi works selflessly for all as he sees the same Self in all. A Karma Yogi works selflessly for the welfare of all, sublimating his ego in the process and attains the Absolute.

The Gita thus, requires us, not to shun action but to act without *“attachment to the finite ego and its like and dislikes”*, surrendering one’s actions to the Divine, and performing all action for the Self which is in all of us. (Radhakrishnan, 1948, pg. 178)

No karmic involvement touches the sanctified man of action engaged in divine communion, who is victorious over his senses and who sees the same Self in all beings. (Verse 5:7)(Yogananda, 2008, pg. 89)

When the spiritual aspirant surrenders to the will of the Supreme, he *“partakes in some measure the undifferentiated timeless consciousness of that which he desires to apprehend.”* (Radhakrishnan, 1948, p. 189)

Thus this embodied soul lives in the body, which is described as the house with nine gates and yet no action clings to him. Liberated from all entanglements, a yogi rises above all the dualities of life. He is beyond the sway of joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain and treats friend and foe alike, as he sees the Divine Self in all. His actions are for the welfare of all (lok-seva). The yogi is not attracted to the sensory world; fixing his gaze inwards at the root of the eyebrows, neutralizing the inhaling and the exhaling breath streams, controlling the senses, mind and the intellect, he is free from the primal emotions of fear, anger and desire. He is truly free and lives in a state of perfect bliss as he is one with the inner Light. He then knows ultimate Peace. This is the state of Samadhi.

When the soul is situated in this peace and equipoise, the yogi finds true happiness and light within. This wisdom is the source of love and compassion that permeates all existence. Overcoming the world does not make one other-worldly, but makes one fully aware of how we are all connected.

The Gita emphasizes that when an individual spiritually evolves, it sends out the ripple effects in all directions. When each individual acts to uphold *dharma* (the root word '*dhr*' means to uphold, or to sustain), the power of the collective action becomes a force to reckon with. Understanding one's *dharma* and how it sustains and upholds the family, the community, the world and the entire earth, with all life forms will usher in the much needed ecological awareness.

God, our Higher Self, the Divine Consciousness within, is an intimate friend and guide. When one opens oneself to being guided by the innate wisdom within, the feeling of love and oneness arises. That is what guides, sustains, upholds and integrates all.



Chapter 6

The Path of Meditation

The Gita offers lessons of spiritual unfoldment in increasing degree of intricacy. Lord Krishna instructs mankind through disciple Arjuna, in Karma Yoga, the active life of service. The student is taken on the path of evolution of consciousness through various steps. Complete focus on the necessary action without an inner striving just for the reward is emphasized. The verses of the Gita keep reminding us of how synergetic, interdependent and interwoven our relationship is with Nature and all the beings. When the realization that we have all emerged from this Cosmic Consciousness comes, the ego-centric activities transform into Selfless acts, with love and compassion for all. "*Renunciation refers, not to the act itself but to the frame of mind behind the act.*" (Radhakrishnan, 1948, p. 68) Each act then, becomes a yagna, an offering, a spontaneous self-giving.

When the mind has attained self-control and equipoise one can rise above the dualities of life, established in peace, the aspirant then treats pleasure and pain, joys and sorrows with an evenness of the mind. Then the Lord initiates his disciple into the subtler, inner disciplines of spiritual life. "Karma Yoga is the path for those who wish to climb the mountain of Self-Realization; for those who have reached the summit, the path is contemplation." (Easwaran, 1985, p.100) As one nears the top of the summit, contemplation, focus and stillness become indispensable skills.

The Divine Consciousness, the innate wisdom within, exhorts man to lift himself by himself; for the Self alone is the friend of the self and the Self alone is the enemy of the self. The import here is not that the Universal Self is antagonistic to the personal self. The state of Supreme bliss is

within all of us. If our personal self, offers itself to the Universal or the Higher Self, the latter becomes our guide and teacher. Radhakrishnan quotes the Dhammapada, saying *“the Self is the goal of the self.”* (Radhakrishnan, 1948, p. 189)

“By developing our inner spiritual nature, we gain a new kind of relatedness to the world and grow into the freedom, where the integrity of the self is not compromised. We then become aware of ourselves as active creative individuals, living, not by the discipline of external authority but by the inward rule of free devotion to truth.” (Radhakrishnan, 1948, p. 44)

Lord Krishna illuminates the path to reach the Self, saying that *“Those who aspire to the state of Yoga should seek the Self in inner solitude through meditation.”* (Easwaran, 1985, p. 105) The word yoga is also used as a synonym for Raja Yoga as taught in the Patanjali Yoga Sutras, as the practice of meditation for becoming integrated, united with one’s truest, deepest Self. (p. 100)

How does one become accomplished in Yoga, attain the state of being truly integrated inside?

The Gita very simply answers this question: By making the mind one pointed through constant practice of meditation.

Krishna tells Arjuna that he must seek the Self in solitude, by mentally withdrawing from the external world and summoning all his energies to a single point. To retire to a quiet place in the mind, a mind that is self-controlled and free from all desires and longing for material possessions. Radhakrishnan, here, uses a precise term, *“Recollection”* and defines it as a *“gathering of one’s self together, a retreat into one’s soul.”* (Radhakrishnan, 1948, p. 194)

One must find a suitable place to meditate, which is neither too high nor too low. Once seated, one must strive to still one’s thoughts, hold one’s spine, head and neck in one line, and focus one’s gaze at the tip of the nose. With serenity and fearlessness, the mind controlled, with thoughts centered on the Supreme Self, a yogi must meditate, with the Supreme Self as the final goal. *“Engaging one’s soul in ceaseless meditative union with the Spirit, the self-governed yogi attains the peace of His Being; the final Nirvana (deliverance).”* (Yogananda, 2008, p. 95)

The Gita gives practical advice on meditation, saying one must be temperate in eating, sleeping, work and relaxation. Radhakrishnan compares this to the middle path of the Buddhists or the Golden Mean of Aristotle. (p. 199) Constant practice of self-restraint in action results in a disciplined mind that is established in the Self. The ego self that is established in this transcendent Consciousness is like an unflickering flame in a windless spot. In this state of complete tranquility attained by meditation, the self perceives itself as the Self and rejoices in the Self.

This state of sense transcendent immeasurable bliss is treasure, beyond all other treasures and makes the yogi immune to the mightiest grief. (Yogananda, 2008, p.96) The Yoga of Meditation severs all pain and suffering. The spiritual seeker is advised to practice meditation with determination and perseverance. With patience and constant practice, the mind will become established in the Self. When the mind wanders, lead it within to rest in the Self.

The yogi who has calmed his mind and has freed himself from all dualities, ceaselessly engaging in yoga, the divine union, attains the continuous mergence in the Spirit. He sees the Cosmic Light in every being and every being as emanation of that Light. Thus he feels the

afflictions and joys of all beings as his own and helps others to realize God and to rise above the pain and pleasures arising out of one's finite separate self. The yogi thus stays forever anchored in this Divine Unity. (Yogananda, 2005, p. 632-637)

The experience of the profound unity of all beings in One, is the equal vision or *Samdarshana* that the yogi develops. Being one with the Divine Spirit, is becoming one with the whole stream of life. Desiring good for all beings, not harming anyone, the yogi "*embraces all, in the equality of the vision of the Self.*" (Radhakrishnan, 1948, p. 205) That is the highest state of spiritual union.

How can the mind that is so turbulent, difficult to subdue, strong and unyielding, find lasting peace?

Arjuna's question to Sri Krishna is the question that arises in the mind of each aspirer. Perfect equanimity in all challenges and circumstances of life seems admirable, yet difficult to attain given the actualities of life. The question here comes from a true seeker who is honestly trying to understand how to attain the one-pointed concentration.

The Divine Consciousness, Lord Sri Krishna answers: Undoubtedly, the mind is restless and difficult to control. But it can be restrained by constant practice and non-attachment. With self-control and earnest striving, one can attain the goal.

Arjuna asks Sri Krishna: ***What happens to those who have faith, yet are not disciplined enough to attain perfection in Yoga?***

One who strives to be good, neither in this world, nor in the next, ever comes to grief. The Lord assures man through his disciple Arjuna that all his persevering children shall finally be rescued. Yogis who have not attained final perfection live on various astral planes and then are reborn on earth in a pure and prosperous home. Or they may reincarnate in a family of enlightened yogis, where the wisdom acquired in previous lives is reawakened and they strive again for perfection. Paramahansa Yogananda says, "*All seeds of good karma are lodged in the cerebrum of the astral body; when they are watered by remembrances and by vibrations of a good environment in a new life, they sprout forth and grow into the infinite tree of liberation.*" (Yogananda, 2005, p. 650) The spiritual aspirants perfect themselves through constant efforts over many lifetimes and attain the highest goal.



Chapter 7

Wisdom from Realization

We are in constant search for eternal happiness. We seek this happiness in people, in objects, in places and keep waiting for a future, in which we would be totally happy. Things/activities/relationships give us happiness and we experience it momentarily, but the

search still does not end. Swami Tejomayananda in his commentary on Tattva-Bodhah by Sri Adi Shankaracharya explains how we can conduct an enquiry into each factor outside of us to see if happiness that we seek is the nature of that object/person/place/time. *“If happiness is not the nature of any object, then by the law of the remainder, it should be the nature of the subject. Therefore, I am the source of happiness. In fact, I am infinite Bliss. I am what I seek. This is the essence of the Vedas, the revelations of the great rsis.”* (2009, p. 4) These eternal Truths as revealed to the sages in meditation form the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita and the other sacred texts.

We are all seeking answers to the fundamental questions of life. Who am I? What is the purpose of my life? Each one of us have to find the answers, within our own selves, in the Knowledge of the Self.

How does a limited mind understand and embrace that which is unlimited?

The Divine Consciousness answers: *“With the mind intent on Me, following the path of Yoga and taking refuge in Me, you shall realize Me, know Me with all My attributes, and be united with Me.”* (Verse 7:1)

Lord Krishna promises to give Arjuna, the Jnana (wisdom) and the Vijnana (knowledge by knowing) (3), the knowledge of the Transcendent Reality and the wisdom which can be known only be Intuitive Realization. The Lord says that among thousands of spiritual seekers, scarcely one strives for perfection and of those who strive and succeed; scarcely one knows the true Cosmic Consciousness.

The Gita enumerates the twenty four principles of creation as elucidated in the Sankhya Philosophy. Yogananda compares this to the Book of Revelation in the Christian Bible describing these principles as the twenty four elders. *“Inherent in the **Mula-Prakriti**, the unmanifested or undifferentiated Nature, are the potentials of manifested subjective consciousness: Chitta (feeling), Ahamkara (ego), Buddhi (discriminative intellect) and Manas (Sense Mind). From them arise the potentials of objective manifestation: the Mahatattvas (five subtle vibratory elements of earth, water, fire, air and ether) and Indriyas (five instruments of perception and five of action). The five Pranas (life force along with the five subtle vibratory elements) under the influence of the three Gunas, sattva, rajas and tamas produce the five objects of the senses. The objective manifestation is first in the subtle form and then as gross matter.”* (Yogananda, 2005, p. 864)

“The Spirit dreamed Itself into God beyond Creation, God in Creation and God as the Cosmic Nature with a Cosmic Body. On the macrocosmic scale, the Krishna or the Christ Consciousness is the intelligence of God immanent in all creation as the unchanged and unchanging pure reflection of God- the “Soul” of the universe. On the microcosmic scale, the soul in man is the ever unchanged and ever unchanging image of God.” (Yogananda, 2005, p. 672-673) The Spirit beyond Creation as God and the Spirit in Creation as Krishna or Christ consciousness or the Universal Intelligence are both called **Purusha**. (Yogananda, 2005, p. 864) **Prakriti** (Cosmic Nature) is the manifested Nature of God. When the transcendental God first manifested the Intelligent Cosmic Nature, it was in the unseen pure astral and causal forms imbued with the 24 subtle qualities with the essential potentials of manifestation. This is the Pure Cosmic Nature or **Para-Prakriti**, a conscious intelligent force, the Consort or the creative aspect of God. When

this Consort of God, through the action of **Maya**, (Cosmic Delusion) becomes materialized and engrossed in the **Gunas** (triple modes of Nature), it hides the underlying Spirit, the pure manifestation of Spirit's blissful Nature and is called the Impure Cosmic Nature or **Apara-Prakriti**. (Yogananda, 2005, p. 867)

The union of **Prakriti**, the principle of mind and matter and **Purusha**, the principle of pure spirit, underlies all creation. This dual Nature of the Divine is the womb of all creation. *“God, by His inner spiritual Cosmic Nature, creates causal and astral universes and their beings; by His outer physical Cosmic Nature, creates the physical cosmos and its material beings. The Lord is the originator of the Cosmic Nature and of the cosmic-dream universe. By dissolving Cosmic Nature in Himself, He can thus dissolve the cosmic-dream universe. He is the Progenitor and the Dissolver of the entire cosmos.”* (Yogananda, 2005, p. 674-675)

The existences of the world are held together by the Supreme Spirit as a row of gems on a string, the Divine Consciousness being that string. (Verse 7:7)

There is nothing that exists separate from the Spirit. This Divine Consciousness is the fluidity of waters (the creative vibratory motion of the five elements in the spinal centers), the light of the sun and the moon (positive and negative forces in creation/duality), the sound in the ether (the cosmic Aum *“immanent in the ubiquitous ether”*, the Aum in all the Vedas (the sound of Aum as *“vibrating in the spinal centers”*) and the courage of all human beings (*“the soul and its attributes”*). (Yogananda, 2005, pg. 679)

The Divine Lord says, *“I am the fragrance of the earth, the luminescence in the fire, life in all beings, the striving of the spiritual aspirant, the eternal seed of all creatures, the understanding of the keen, and the radiance of vital beings. Among the powerful, I am the power that is free from longing and attachments. I am desire itself, if that desire is in harmony with the purpose of life, the dharma. All manifestations of the Sattva Guna (purity, goodness), Rajas (activity) and Tamas (evil, obstructing) emanate from me. I am not in them.”*

The three gunas, triple modes of Nature make up the veil of Maya or Cosmic delusion and people do not see the Supreme, the Imperishable, the Unborn, and the Eternal beyond it. *“We see the changing forms and not the Eternal Being of which these forms are the manifestations.”* It is like Plato's cave dwellers that see the shadows on the wall but not the Light from which these shadows emanate. (Radhakrishnan, 1948, p. 217)

The Lord says that those who take refuge in Him can see beyond the veil of Maya, the cosmic delusion of plurality. As long as we are seekers, we live in the world of duality. There is “not two” once the veil is lifted and the wisdom attained. Liberated from delusion, with unconditional love in their hearts for the Lord, they see the One Self in all.

To awaken oneself from the identification with this body and to realize one's True Nature, the Divinity within is the highest evolution for mankind. Being sense-indulgent and identifying oneself as only the body, mind and senses is devolutionary. Evolution is a constantly happening process. Thus it is essential to constantly strive to control the sense impulses, the energizing, activating, ambitious rajasic and dulling, slothful and numbing tamasic tendencies with the pure and harmonizing sattva. Radhakrishnan writes that we must first turn ethical before we turn

spiritual. (1948, p. 218) When we spiritually evolve, we realize that this body is but an instrument of the Divine Light in all of us. We then, are in harmony with all Creation.

The Power of Prayer

We pray to God to relieve us from pain, affliction and distress. We pray for wealth, power and fulfillment of material desires. We also pray to seek knowledge and wisdom. *“Prayer is the effort of man to reach God. It assumes that there is an answering Presence in the world. If we ask, it shall be given to us.”* Praying kindles a light in our consciousness. Praying is transforming. Though, it might start with asking for wishes to be granted, in time, praying to God is to constantly feel His Love and Light and Divine guidance. (Radhakrishnan, 1948, p. 220) Feeling God’s constant all-pervading presence and realizing that one is an instrument of God’s will, is the integral wisdom that awakens man to the evolutionary path of Divine Reality. We are all thus, W-I-P (Work In Progress).

Which “God” should be worshipped?

The Transcendent God, the Absolute, the Supreme Spirit cannot be easily worshipped. We thus resort to worshipping various aspects of this Divine Consciousness. All forms are the forms of the Supreme; all worship is the worship of the Supreme. When the seeker realizes that the Absolute transcends all forms, he attains to the highest state, *“integral in being, perfect in knowledge, absolute in love and complete in will.”* (Radhakrishnan, 1948, p. 222)

The human mind imposes forms and descriptions on the Formless, Changeless, Immutable, the Unmanifest Eternal Reality because of our own limitations and our desire to comprehend and explain. *“God is not one among many. He is the One behind the ever changing many, who stands behind all forms, the immutable centre of endless mobility.”* (Radhakrishnan, 1948, p. 223)

He stays veiled behind His own Creative aspect. The evolution is thus, knowing Him beyond the veil of Maya.

Those who take refuge in the Divine Consciousness strive for liberation from old age and death, come to know that the Self is Brahman*, the Supreme Spirit and It pervades all beings, all sacrifices, all deities and all karma.

* *The Concept of Brahman builds up in this chapter and is also explained at length in the following, Chapter 8.*

How is the Self revealed at the time of death to the spiritual-minded?

The Blessed Lord answers, that whoever remembers Him at the time of their death, comes into His Being. (Verse 8:5)

The thoughts in the mind at the time of death, directs the soul in its journey into the next life. Each person should strive to lead a righteous life; and by practicing non-attachment, a yogi dissolves all his desires and longings. A spiritual aspirant who practices meditation throughout life perceives the presence of God in his physical, astral and causal bodies and can commune with God at any time. When death arrives, the yogi with his steady mind fixed on the bliss of the

Spirit, remains in “*continuous ecstasy with the Aum vibration*” (Yogananda, 2005, p. 721). This Cosmic Aum ushers him into the transcendental spheres of God.

Lord Sri Krishna explains how a yogi with a steady mind, devotion to the Supreme Spirit and the strength of Yoga, can direct his consciousness, his life force to the seat of the spiritual eye between the eyebrows. He fixes his mind unwaveringly on the Omniscient, the Ancient, the Ruler and the Nourisher of the whole world, who beyond all delusions of darkness, shines like the sun, the One whose form is unimaginable and subtler than the finest atom.

The Yogi closes the nine gates (4) of his body. The mind is withdrawn from the three lower spinal centers and lifted to the heart chakra. With the attention focused at the point between the eyebrows, and the withheld life force concentrated there and in the cerebrum, the spiritual eye, the divine gateway to the Infinite is illuminated. (Yogananda, 2005, p. 729) The Yogi hears the Cosmic Sound of Aum, and merging in the Aum vibration, enters the spiritual eye and releases his soul from the physical, astral and causal bodies. “*Experiencing the Aum vibration, he merges in the Universal Intelligence, to the Cosmic Consciousness and then to the transcendental Absolute beyond vibratory manifestation.*” (p. 729)

The Lord urges Arjuna to continually focus his mind on Him so that he can reach the Highest Perfection and incur no further rebirths. From the realm of *Brahma* (union with God in Samadhi) downwards, all worlds are subject to return to rebirth. But when one reaches the Absolute, he is freed from rebirth.

Brahma, the creator in the Hindu trinity, is the aspect of Divinity that brings forth the cosmos, at the will of Vishnu. Just as the night follows the day in an eternal cycle, the entire Universe goes through the cycle of creation, dissolution and new birth. The Day of Brahma is the time of manifested Creation. At the coming of the Night of Brahma, the manifested Creation is dissolved and is held as seeds or potential in the Mula-Prakriti (unmanifested Nature); as a dream in the mind of Vishnu. These cycles of the Day of Cosmic Manifestation and Night of Unmanifestation are recurrent and of equal duration. Beyond the Cosmic Process is the Supreme Unmanifested Brahman. This is the Supreme Goal of all human beings, the abode of Krishna. By complete devotion (bhakti), one can enter this haven of immortal bliss, never to return to separate existence.

The Bhagavad Gita takes its seekers step by step and teaches us how to live and act in the world and then takes us into the realm of contemplation and meditation so that we reach the acme of one’s conscious evolution with the Knowledge of Union with the Divine. With selfless action, intuitive wisdom and love, compassion and devotion, one realizes his true Self and his relationship with the rest of the Universe. God-realization/ Self-realization is beyond the faculties of the mind, intellect and the sense organs. Brahman (Absolute) is not a concept that can be grasped by the intellect; It is not an object of study before us. A disciple in Kenopanishad says, ‘He understands It, who conceives It not; he understands It not, who conceives It.’ The Gita teaches the common man to purify one’s mind and intellect, so that his instrument becomes worthy to hold the intuitive Wisdom of the Absolute.



Chapter 8

The Immanent and Transcendent God

The Divine Consciousness, through disciple Arjuna, bestows upon humanity the royal knowledge of the sublime mystery of the immanent and transcendent nature of Spirit, the Raja Yoga. This is the most profound and sovereign Knowledge, in the light of which All knowledge is known. The intuitive realization of this wisdom is the greatest purifier and the essence of Dharma. It is the direct perception of Truth where the reality of God is felt in the depths of one's soul. This imperishable enlightenment is attained through ways of yoga, through developed and purified intuition and supreme devotion, by seekers who have faith in dharma, the supreme law of life.

What is Brahman? What is Sat (God the Father), Tat (Son of God) and Aum (The Holy Ghost)?

The Transcendental Supreme Spirit, immanent in vibratory Creation as well as beyond the vibratory Cosmos is **Brahman**. Brahman, the Unmanifested One is **Sat** or Eternal Being, Existence Itself, God the Father in the Christian Bible, the Para-Brahman of the Bhagavad Gita and Vedanta philosophy, *Paramatman* of the Yogis, Para-Purusha, the Unchangeable, the Imperishable and the Absolute. *“In this state, Spirit is without thoughts or vibrations- It Is Existence, Consciousness and Bliss merged as one single perception.”* (Yogananda, 2005, p. 713)

This ever-existent, undifferentiated and unmanifested Supreme Spirit reflects Its Consciousness into a vibratory realm, which is spoken of as the **Cosmic Aum**, the Holy Ghost, Prakriti, the Cosmic Sound or the Cosmic Light or the Mahatattva (the great Vibratory elements). It is in this creative Aum vibration that Undifferentiated Intelligence becomes differentiated and active. (p. 713)

The pure reflected Intelligence of the Transcendental God, in Creation is **Tat**, the Cosmic Consciousness, the Universal Intelligence, “the only begotten son of God.” (p. 714)

Yogananda writes that “the Unmanifested Spirit in the creative state becomes *the Trinity- Aum-Tat-Sat; Holy Ghost, Son and Father; or the objective Cosmic Dream.*” (p. 714)

The Unmanifested, the Brahman pervades the whole universe. All beings owe their existence to Him, yet they cannot contain or adequately express Him. The Supreme is the source of all creation, and yet untouched by it. He alone is their Creator and Preserver. The Gita does “*not deny the world.*” It says that everything subsists in God; this world is “*a living manifestation of God*”, but not a “*complete manifestation of the Absolute.*” (Radhakrishnan, 1948, p. 239-240)

Just as the air moves freely in the etheric space (Akasha) and has its being in the Akasha, yet it is not the *Akasha* (space). “All beings have their being in Me, but they are not Me.” At the end of each kalpa (cycle), all beings return to the unmanifested state of the Cosmic Nature (Mula-

Prakriti) and at the beginning of each kalpa, by the impregnating presence of the Unmanifested Divine, Mother Nature or *Prakriti* gives birth to animate and the inanimate. The Supreme Brahman is the unseen Origin of all, creating and dissolving the worlds in alternating cycles through *Prakriti*. Yet, the Supreme is not involved in the act. He is above all cosmic events. He pervades all creation and yet, is above all creation. The ignorant are oblivious of the Transcendental Nature of the Supreme but the truly great souls seek His Divine Nature and offer their unwavering devotion to the Imperishable Source of all life.

Lord Krishna reveals his Divine Nature to Arjuna and says that He is the true Self in the heart of every being, the beginning, the middle and the end of their existence. He is the Ultimate Reality that transcends all the relativities and the dualistic principles of delusion.

“Discrimination, wisdom, lack of delusion, forgiveness, truth, control of the senses, peace of mind, joy and sorrow, birth and death, fear and courage, harmlessness, equanimity, contentment, self-discipline, charity, fame and infamy – these diverse states of beings spring from Me alone as modifications of My nature.” (Yogananda, 2005 p. 771) (Easwaran, 1985, p. 141)

The Divine Consciousness says “I am the rite, the sacrifice, the offering, the medicinal herb, the holy chant, the melted butter and also the sacred hymn. I am the fire and I am the offering.” “I am the Father, the Mother, the Ancestor, the Preserver, the Object of Knowledge, the Supreme Sanctifier, the Syllable OM and the Vedas. I am the Ultimate Goal, the Upholder, the Witness, the Supreme Abode, the Refuge and the Friend. I am the Origin and the Dissolution, the Foundation, the Cosmic Storehouse, the Womb and the Eternal Seed. I bestow heat and give or withhold rain. I am Immortality and I am Death. I am Sat (Being when Manifested) and Asat (Non-Being when Unmanifested). (Translated from the audio source, Gita in Hindi)

“Contradictory predicates are attributed to the Supreme to indicate the inapplicability of empirical determinations. These predicates bring out the two-fold nature of the Supreme as being and becoming. HE is para or transcendent and apara or immanent, both inside and outside the world.” (S. Radhakrishnan, 1948, p. 22)

What is the Right Method of Worship?

The Lord accepts any offering, be it a leaf, a flower, or fruit or water, if it is offered to the Lord with reverent devotion and pure intention. Those who worship Him and meditate on him and seek only Him, without any other thought or desire, those devotees come to Him. The Lord tells Arjuna to perform all actions as an offering to Him and dedicate them to Him. That will free him of all the bonds of karma and its results, both pleasant and painful. With the self, anchored steadfast in Him through Yoga and Renunciation of all action, he can attain Him. When the devotee focuses his mind completely on God and with love, devotion and true worship surrenders his ego-centered consciousness to the Divine Self, the Lord, out of compassion, dispels the darkness and ignorance and lights the lamp of wisdom. The Divine Consciousness alone can bestow awakening.

Those who realize that the Supreme is the Source of everything, from Him emerges all creation; that mortal becomes jivanmukta (freed while living). They know the Supreme Brahman as unborn, eternal, without a beginning and all pervading; and are thus delivered from all delusion.

The realized Yogi sees God as both beyond creation (Sat) and in creation (Tat) and unites with Him.

“This world is a living whole, a vast interconnectedness, a cosmic harmony inspired and sustained by the One Supreme” (Radhakrishnan, 1948, p. 262)

This profound Knowledge emanates from intuitive wisdom and takes the evolving souls to complete bliss and true happiness, beyond all ephemeral pleasures of life.



Chapter 9

Bhakti Yoga: Union through Devotion

Who is a better seeker, the one who with love and devotion, surrenders himself completely to the Divine Manifest, or the devotee who worships and meditates upon the Unmanifested Supreme? Which devotee is better versed in Yoga, the union with the Divine?

The Divine Consciousness within answers: The devotees who, completely attuned to their Divine Manifest, ever absorbed in God, worship Him with supreme faith and devotion and are steadfast in their love for the Lord, are perfect knowers of Yoga.

Those who worship the Indestructible, the Undefinable, the Unmanifested, the All-Pervading, the Incomprehensible, the Immutable, the Immovable, the Eternal, having restrained their senses, practice even-mindedness in all circumstances and devote themselves to the welfare of all beings. They too, attain the supreme Goal, Union with the Supreme Self. It is arduous for the embodied souls to meditate on the formless conception of the Unmanifested Supreme.

Those who worship Him with their hearts and minds set on Him, renounce all their actions to the Lord and meditate upon Him with single-mindedness, dwell immortally in Him.

The Gita lays down various steps for spiritual self unfoldment and self-realization, by suggesting various ways to the Divine pursuit.

- a) If the devotee is unable to keep his mind completely and steadily on the Divine form, Yoga of Constant Practice (Abhyasa Yoga) will gradually establish one's consciousness in God.
- b) If the seeker is not able to practice Abhyasa Yoga (regular practice of meditation), performing all actions for the sake of the Lord, in the service of the Lord, the seeker *“gains the equipoise to contemplate steadily upon the Truth”* (Chinmayananda, 2011, Ch. 12, p. 25) and ultimately realize God.
- c) If the aspirant is unable to engage in selfless service, he should seek refuge in the Lord, with unconditional love and devotion; relinquishing the fruits of one's action brings,

surrendering the attachment to the results brings immediate peace. Trusting in God's grace and compassion purifies the aspirant's heart.

Some spiritual aspirants realize the Self within them through the practice of Meditation, Dhyana Yoga; some by following the path of wisdom, Jnana Yoga and some others by following Karma Yoga, the path of selfless action. The feeling that the Lord is mine and I am His, there is nothing except the Lord releases oneself from the clutches of the ego, sensory attachments, greed and anger, thus freeing the seeker. Bhakti, supreme devotion and the attitude of complete surrender to the Lord, makes the devotee complete. Bhakti brings together the light of knowledge, Jnana, and the goodness of selfless action, Karma, in its fold.

What are the qualities of a devotee that endears him to God?

A true devotee is compassionate to all beings as he sees the same Spirit in all. Steadfast in his practice of Yoga, the union with the Divine, he develops self-restraint and rises above the feelings of 'me' and 'mine'. He develops equanimity and stays contented in his ardent pursuit of the Divine. He who is pure in his heart, whose happiness does not depend on material objects, rises above the dualities and treats pleasure and pain, praise and blame, friend and foe alike. With complete faith in the Divine and union with the Divine Consciousness as their Supreme Goal, the aspirants who come to Him with love and true devotion, they endear themselves to God.

Bhakti, the path of Supreme Love and Complete Surrender:

The Brahman, the Paramatman existed before this Creation came into being. This entire Creation emanates from Him and goes back in Him. There is nothing else, other than Paramatman. He is in the renderings of clay that He puts forth, He is the clay and the Potter as well. To see Him in all Creation is Knowledge, Jnana, and to love Him in all, is *Bhakti*. When one is just aware of one's body, the awareness of the Self, the Atman is not possible. When the sensory perceptions and mind are restrained, one experiences the realm of pure awareness, beyond which the Pure Divine Consciousness resides. When the sea of awareness is extended, the self merges with the Ocean of Supreme Bliss. In the path of Knowledge, one tries to find the Paramatman, the Self in one self. In the path of *Bhakti*, one submerges oneself in devotion and absolute love for the Divine. (Translated from Hindi audio source on Gita)



Chapter 10

The Field and the Knower of the Field

What constitutes true wisdom?

The body is the **field (kshetra)** where Cosmic Nature operates, in which all activity takes place, all growth, decay and death. The seeds of all karma are sown and reaped in this field. The soul, the pure reflection of God, that which cognizes the field, is the **knower of the field**

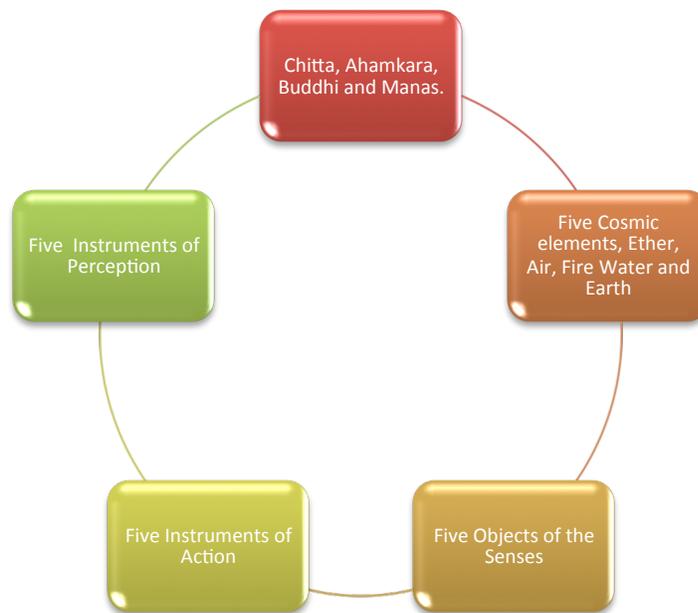
(kshetrajna). The Cosmic Consciousness, the ground of all existence, the witness of all activity, is the **Kshetrajna** in all the fields. The knowledge of ‘the Field and the Knower of the Field’ constitutes **true wisdom**.

What are the attributes of the Field and the powers of the Knower of the Field?

The Field and its Attributes:

The Unmanifested (Mula-Prakriti, undifferentiated Nature), the five cosmic elements (earth, water, fire, air and ether), ten senses and one sense mind, Buddhi (discriminative intellect), Ahamkara (ego) and the five objects of the sense constitute the Kshetra or the Field. In this Field arise, desire and aversion, pleasure and pain, the aggregate (the organism), consciousness and persistence. *“The macrocosmic Kshetra, is the Cosmic body of the God through which His Consciousness operates. The microcosmic kshetra, the human body, is the operating vehicle of the soul. The only reality is God and His reflection, the human soul: the two Kshetrajnans, the subjective principle in the Cosmos and in man.”* (Yogananada, 2005, p. 881)

The 24 principles of Creation as expounded in the Sankhya Philosophy:



Five Instruments of Action:	Five Instruments of Perception	Five Objects of the Senses
• Vibratory Power	• Visual	• Eyes
• Grasping Motion	• Auditory	• Ears
• Forward Motion	• Olfactory	• Nose

• Creative Power	• Gustatory	• Tongue
• Eliminative Power	• Tactual	• Skin

The Body is called the “aggregate” as it is composed of the 24 elements and the qualities that arise from them. The body is thus a battle field with armies of myriad tendencies; the only changeless component that can be totally depended on and completely trusted is the soul.

The Knower of the Field:

The Supreme Spirit, Brahman is beginningless. He is above all oppositions of existence (Sat) and nonexistence (Asat). Birth and death does not touch Him for He is eternal. He dwells in the world and envelopes all. The Supreme Spirit is “*shining in all the sense faculties, yet transcending the senses; unattached to creation, yet the Mainstay of all; free from the gunas (modes of Nature), yet the Enjoyer of them.*” (Yogananda, 2005, p. 887) He is within and without all that exists, the animate and the inanimate. He is far, yet near and imperceptible because of His subtlety. He is Indivisible, yet He appears as all the beings; He is the Creator, Preserver and Destroyer; the Light of All Lights, beyond darkness. He is the Object and Goal of all knowledge and Knowledge Itself. He is seated in the hearts of all. (Verses 13: 12-17)

The Knowledge about the Supreme Spirit bestows immortality. The devotee, who understands thus, enters His being.

Every being, every object, animate or inanimate is born from the Union of Kshetra and Kshetrajna, the Field and the Knower of the Field, Nature and Spirit.

Purusha and Prakriti:

Purusha, the *Kshetrajna* or Witness is the Lord’s transcendent presence in Creation as the Universal Intelligence and the Individualized soul. *Prakriti* is the immanent kinetic aspect of the Lord as the Creator of the Universe and all its beings. Just as the God is eternal and without a beginning, so are His aspects. (Yogananda, 2005, p. 889) All the modifications and gunas are born of *Prakriti* and the individualized soul (*Jiva*), conditioned by them, cannot perceive the Infinite with his limited self. The *jiva*, identified with the body, due to the entanglements with the gunas, born out of *Prakriti*, thinks of itself as the ego, and experiences pleasure and pain, joys and sorrows. Though, in reality, it is the changeless image of God.

The Supreme Spirit, transcendent and existing in this body, is the Witness, the Consenter, the Sustainer, the Experiencer, the Great Lord and the Supreme Self. (Verse 13:22)

What are the qualities of an individual that characterizes wisdom and lead to spiritual awakening?

The sage who has divine wisdom is humble, not egoistic, unpretentious and gentle. He is forgiving, upright, pure in thoughts and intentions, devoted to their guru, and have qualities like steadfastness and self-control. He is indifferent to sense objects and free from attachments. He is

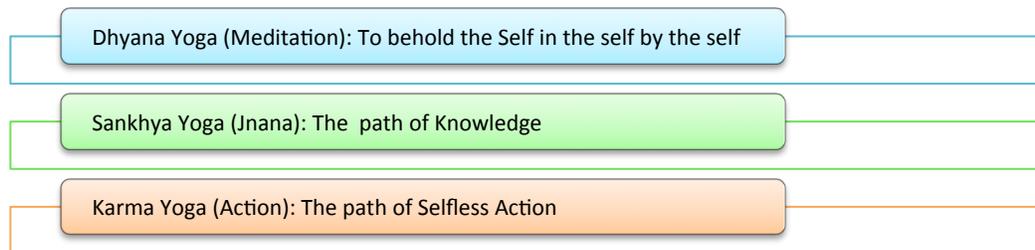
even minded in desirable and undesirable circumstances. His devotion to the Supreme is unwavering. The sage knows that realization of the True Self is the only true, absolute knowledge and to seek anything else is ignorance.

What is Liberation?

By truly understanding the difference between Kshetra, the Field (Nature and Matter) and Kshetrajna, the Knower of the Field (Spirit and soul), and by comprehending that every being, every object, animate or inanimate is born from their union, the devotee frees himself from all confusion. Those who see the Supreme Lord in all beings, the Imperishable amidst the perishing attain the Supreme Goal. *“The Purusha, resting in Prakriti, witnesses the play of the gunas born of Prakriti.”* (Easwaran, 1987, p. 171) Those who realize the true nature of Purusha, as the witness, of all actions performed by Prakriti, beholds the truth. When through Samadhi, the yogi awakens to the truth that all creation is rooted in, and grows out of One Unity, he merges with the Brahman.

The Self is Eternal, without a beginning and free from attributes. Like all pervading ether, the Self, though seated in the body, is untainted and untouched by action. The Self dwells in the field and illumines it. Those who perceive the distinction of the Field and the Knower of the Field, and the method of liberation of beings from Prakriti, are freed from cosmic delusion and attain the Supreme Goal.

Three approaches to Self-Realization:



Yet others, ignorant of these three approaches, listening carefully to their guru, regarding the ancient teachings as the Highest Refuge, following the path of worship, also attain immortality.

The Divine Consciousness is the Ground of all Being. All forms of Life emanates from It. Those who see the Universal, Supreme Spirit in all, realize that all beings are centered in the One. The Supreme Self, the Unchanging and Beginningless, is free from all attributes. Just like the all-pervading ether, the Supreme Self, though dwelling in the body, is untainted and without any frailties. Just as the Sun illumines the whole world, the Divine Consciousness, the Knower illumines this entire Field. Those who realize this with their intuitive wisdom, they attain the Supreme. Inner Awakening is thus the invite required to enter the Abode of the Lord.

Our body is a battle field, where the war is between wisdom and ignorance, between self-control and sense indulgence, between the mind, controlled by the senses and, the buddhi, the discriminative intelligence. The mind and the ego wish to indulge in the sense pleasures. The Soul strives to attain union with the Divine. The main theme of the Gita is *“the renunciation by*

the soul of its incarnate prodigal wanderings,” and being one with the Spirit. (Yogananda, 2005, p. 863)



Chapter 11

Transcending the Gunas

The Divine Consciousness, the Absolute, the Spirit is the womb of all becoming. The Divine impregnates the Prakriti with the seed of Universal Intelligence, Purusha and thus emanates from the *“formless Infinitude, the endless finite waves of creation.”* (Yogananda, 2005, p. 906)

Prakriti (Cosmic Nature) is composed of three gunas or qualities: Sattva, purity; Rajas, passion, and Tamas, inertia. The word 'Guna' literally means 'a strand of cord or rope' through which Prakriti holds in bondage all embodied beings. (Yogananda, 2005, p. 907)

Sattva is pure, luminous, harmony and balance, yet binds the ego to happiness and knowledge. *“Bliss and Wisdom belong to the soul. Through delusion, the ego connects them with bodily enjoyments and intellectual knowledge.”* (Yogananda, 2005, p. 908)

Rajas is energy, passion and ambition; it expresses itself as desires and attachment and binds the Self to ceaseless activity.

Tamas combines ignorance, inertia, slumber and darkness and binds the Self to delusion.

When the soul identifies itself with these three modes of Prakriti, it forgets its eternal splendor and remains in bondage. An illumined soul sees all activities as the play of gunas and rises above the confines of Prakriti, above all relativities. He is thus delivered from the transitory stages of life, birth, old age and death to Immortality.

How do the three gunas reflect in the human beings?

The three gunas are present in human beings in different degrees. When Sattva is predominant the light of wisdom shines through all sense gates of the body. When Rajas prevails, one is engaged in ego centric activities, fuelled by greed and uncontrolled desire. Being result-driven, the individual turns restless. When Tamas rules the human being, he overindulges his senses and loses his discrimination of right and wrong. He thus lives in a state of torpor and delusion.

Those who die infused with Sattva guna, attain the pure worlds of the wise. When Rajas prevails at the time of death, the person is reborn among those who engage themselves in desire driven activity. He, who dies Tamasic, is born to a deluded state of existence.

The fruit of Sattvic actions is purity and harmony. Rajasic actions lead to suffering and Tamas leads to ignorance. From Sattva arises wisdom; from Rajas springs greed and from Tamas emerges misconceptions.

How does the soul evolve through the three gunas?

Sensory overindulgence causes a state of inertia where there is no stimulus to improve oneself. The person in whom tamas predominates loses discrimination to see right from wrong and keeps pursuing activities that add to his misery. Even from the darkest depths of evil and misery, one can extricate himself with his innate power of self-control. The self evolves from dull inertia (tamas) to worldly pursuits that satisfy material desires (rajas). Even with all the power and possession, happiness is elusive. Then the self, strives to attain knowledge and happiness. With knowledge and happiness comes the quest for ultimate happiness and to find one's true purpose in life. That guides one to the spiritual path, the path of self-realization. The evolution is thus from tamas to rajas and then to sattva. Even Sattva binds the self, to knowledge (Jnana), which relates to buddhi, an aspect of Prakriti. The Atman is pure consciousness and above buddhi. One, who transcends the sattva, becomes aware of the play of the gunas and establishes himself in his true identity, the eternal Spirit.

What characterizes the Jivanmukta, one who has risen above the gunas?

One who does not feel any attachment or aversion to the harmony of the Sattva, the activity of the Rajas and the ignorance of the Tamas; he is established in his own Divine nature and is not affected by the play of the gunas. He observes them unperturbed. One who is equanimous and treats pleasure and pain, joys and sorrows, praise and blame, abundance and dearth alike, knows it is only the modes that act. Treating friend and foe alike, abandoning the sense of "I am the Doer", those, who are completely devoted to God rise above the triple modes of Nature and experience endless Beatitude, the Infinite Bliss.



Chapter 12

The Cosmic Tree of Life

The Eternal, Enduring Tree of Life, the Entire field of Manifested Consciousness is metaphorically represented by the **Ashvattha Tree** (Pipal or holy fig tree). This Cosmic Tree originates from the ground of Divine Consciousness and is hence inverted, with roots, at the top and the spread of branches, leaves and flowers extending into this Creation. This whole Creation is a living organism with roots in the Divine. The journey of self-realization begins from the flowers and moves towards the root. The root thus, is established in Yoga, the Union with the Divine.

The human being is one of the units of this entire Creation. The patterns and properties of the Whole are also present in a single unit. Just as the Cosmic Tree of Life is inverted, so is the tree of life of a being. The human body thus has his roots in the crown of his head, **Brahmarandhra**, the core of one's life. His arms and legs are the branches and his body the trunk of the tree. Through the *Brahmarandhra*, he connects to the Brahman, the Divine Consciousness and receives the cosmic energy.

The leaves of this Tree are the Vedic hymns. Paramahansa Yogananda explains that the leaves are *“the receptors through which the indwelling soul receives knowledge (“Vedic hymns”) of phenomenal creation: sensations, life force and thought perceptions.”* (2005, p. 929) Those who understand that this mysterious Tree of Life has its source in the Divine Consciousness are the ‘knowers of the Vedas’, knowers of all knowledge. The life and consciousness flowing through the branches, which extend upward (to the higher realms of being and consciousness) and downward (to the sentient physical body and material plane), are nurtured by the triple modes of Nature, the gunas. The buds on the branches are the sense objects, the potentials of sensory experience that bind us to the actions in the world. (p. 933)

What contributes to the Perpetuity of this Tree of Life?

According to the sage Shankara, the Ashvattha tree, known for its spread, endurance and life span is chosen to represent the entire Cosmos because of its derivative meaning. The word “ashvattha” means “that which does not remain tomorrow (or, ‘in the future’).” It thus refers to the ephemeral, ever changing, transitory world and its beings. (Swami Chinmayananda, 2011, Ch. 15, p. 4) The creative principles behind the ever changing, *“the life and seed of the ashvattha tree”*, though, *“are eternal.”* (Yogananda, 2005, p. 927)

“God is the Originator of all, but it is man who perpetuates his own existence.” (Yogananda, 2005, p. 934) *“Man’s samskaras and vasanas from the past lives and his new desires resulting from the gunas in the present life, impels him to take innumerable rebirths to fulfill his longings.”* (p. 934) This nurtures and contributes to the perpetuity of the Tree of Life. The humans thus move through this incessant cycle of birth and death, bound by their desires. The Ashvattha Tree is thus also the Tree of Worldly Illusions.

“Samskaras are impressions on the consciousness of past actions that create strong tendencies to repeat themselves and their progeny Vasanas (latent desire or desire seed), are impressions of desires left on the consciousness and carried over into the next incarnation or succeeding rebirths.” (Yogananda, 2005, p. 933-934)

How does one attain freedom from the cyclic wheel of reincarnation?

The worldly man living under the dense foliage of sensory pleasures and egotism does not clearly see the *“skies of liberating Cosmic Consciousness.”* A sincere aspirer, with self-restraint, discrimination and the persevering practice of Yoga and meditation, can cut across the deep-rooted yearning for material desires and inclinations based on impressions of the past lives, with the powerful axe of non-attachment. When the tree of material delusion falls, the man sees that the Divine Consciousness is the Originator, Preserver and Dissolver of all Creation. He seeks refuge in the **Primeval Purusha** and is freed from the cycle of birth, death and rebirth.

(Yogananda, 2005, p. 935) Where no sun or moon or fire shines, that is My Supreme Abode. Having reached there, men are never reborn. (Verse 15:6)

Paramahansa Yogananda very beautifully explains how a yogi, while in the body, “attains the Samadhi-union with Spirit, by lifting his consciousness beyond the “fire” of the bodily life energy, the “moon” or reflected creative light in the spinal centers, and the “sun” of the astral thousand-petaled lotus.” (Yogananda, 2005, p. 941) He thus enters Lord’s Supreme Abode.



Chapter 13

Purushottama, the Supreme Spirit: The Uttermost Being

“I (the Lord) am beyond the perishable (Prakriti) and am also higher than the imperishable (Universal Intelligence). Therefore in the worlds and in the Veda (the intuitive perception of undeluded souls) I am proclaimed Purushottama, the Uttermost Being. Whosoever, freed from delusion, knows Me thus as the Supreme Spirit, knows all, O descendent of Bharata (Arjuna). He worships Me with his whole being.”

(Verse 15: 18-19) (Yogananda, 2005, p. 951)

The omnipresent Light of the Supreme Spirit illuminates the entire Creation. **Ojas**, the vital Energy, “the manifest splendor of Lord’s Creative Power and Cosmic Life Force,” creates, permeates and nourishes all existence. (Yogananda, 2005, p. 942) This Cosmic Light is present as the fire of life in all beings. The splendor of the sun and the moon are His radiance. From the Divine Consciousness, seated in the heart of all beings comes memory, perception and knowledge, as well as their loss. The Lord is the Essence of All Knowledge. Studying the Vedas is an attempt to know Him. He is the Source of all the Wisdom in the Vedas. He is the Knower of the Veda and the Author of the Vedanta (Upanishads). The Infinite Omniscient is aware of all perceptions and vibrations.

The Perishable (Ksara) and the Imperishable (Aksara)

Prakriti, the ever changing Cosmic Nature with all the beings, all mind and matter is perishable (Ksara). The Universal Intelligence that informs this Universe is Imperishable (Aksara). Beyond the perishable and the imperishable, is the Abode of the Unmanifest, a realm free from all vibrations and the limitations of the mutable and the immutable. This Unmanifested Realm of the Supreme Spirit, the Unconditioned Reality, the Infinite, the Absolute, is experienced as Lord’s Omnipresent Bliss. From This emanates all Creation and all Manifestations. This Supreme Reality is beyond the Transcendent and the Immanent. **Ishvara**, the Personal God, “combines in Himself the timeless existence (Aksara) and the temporal beginning (Ksara).” (Radhakrishnan, 1948, p. 332)

How does the Spirit manifest as the Soul? How does the Soul know the Spirit?

An eternal part of the Infinite becomes manifested as a living soul or jiva (individualized soul) in the world of beings, when It dons the garment of Prakriti with five senses and the mind. When the divine Self enters and leaves the body, It takes the sense faculties and the mind along as the wind takes the fragrance of the flowers. The self experiencing the sensory world, deluded by the gunas, does not comprehend that it is the Self that dwells in the body, it is the Self that experiences the gunas and it is the Self that departs the body. The yogis striving resolutely on the path of yoga see the Self within.

The Supreme Spirit can be known only through intuitive wisdom of Divine Realization. Those who are liberated from the state of delusion, see the Supreme in all. They perform selfless service as acts of supreme devotion to the Lord. To them is revealed the mysterious immanent workings of the Transcendent Spirit. (Yogananda, 2005, p. 952) To know the Lord as **Purushottama**, the Uttermost Being, the Supreme Being, the yogi experiences Supreme Bliss. His life is thus fulfilled.

Thus, in all beings, the body is the mutable (Ksara) aspect and the Jivatma is the immutable (Aksara) aspect. Jivatama is an eternal part or reflection of the Paramatman; just as a drop of water has the same qualities as the ocean, yet it is not the ocean. The drop of water can be contained in the ocean, but the ocean cannot be contained within the drop of water. “Tat Tvam Asi”, “You are That” but That is not You. (Translated from the Hindi Audio source)



Chapter 14

Two Paths: Two Prime Tendencies

The Divine Consciousness, within, helps the disciple in Arjuna, to see that the human nature has two kinds of tendencies. The Divine tendencies lead to the evolution of the soul, and eventually to liberation. The downward tendency that leads to suffering and the bondage of the self is called demonic. Paramahansa Yogananda, quoting his own work, *Autobiography of a Yogi*, talks about humanity being seen by a master as divided into two classes: the ignorant who are not seeking God and the wise, who are. (Yogananda, 2005, p. 972)

What are the essential qualities that lead aspiring devotees to Self-Realization?

Fearlessness, purity of heart, perseverance in acquiring wisdom and in practicing Yoga, charity, self-control, study of the scriptures, self-discipline, straight forwardness, non-violence, truthfulness, freedom from anger, renunciation, tranquility, compassion for all living beings, gentleness, non-covetousness, modesty, steadfastness, radiance of character, forgiveness, fortitude, purity, freedom from malice and excessive pride, are the divine attributes that bestow liberation.

What are the qualities that lead to bondage?

Ostentation, arrogance, conceit, anger, harshness and ignorance are the qualities that lead to evil tendencies and are called the demonic qualities. Lacking sense of uprightness, purity and truth, the “*deluded, egocentric individuals*” with “*false convictions and self-serving ambitions*”, engage in actions to attain power, possessions and sense gratification. Some are perpetrators of evil and thus enemies of the world. Deluded birth after birth, they descend into the lowest depths. Lust, greed and anger lead to the ruin of the soul. (Yogananda, 2005, p. 975)

People exhibiting this downward tendency can neither see the right path of action, nor do they know when to refrain themselves from action. They cannot perceive God as the ground of all existence. For them, emergence of life is only a biological process propelled by desire. Believing that fulfillment of desires is the prime goal of life and this world is all there is, they remain engaged in sense-gratifying activities till the end of their lives.

Yogananda writes that the soul is an eternal emanation of God and therefore, cannot forever be kept apart from Him. The soul’s inherent good qualities may be veiled by the effects of the past karmas and the play of certain tendencies, more predominant than others. By constant practice of energetic rajasic actions, guided by the goodness of *Sattva*, one will begin to unearth the inherent goodness within. (Yogananda, 2005, p. 977)

Even the greatest sinner, can be redeemed if he abandons the demonic qualities and turns to God. Freeing oneself from the threefold, lust, anger and greed, with the knowledge of right action, following the prescribed social codes, one must develop an intuitive understanding and compassion for all beings and act according to one’s dharma.

The prime goal of our existence is to find our true Self and be established in the Supreme Bliss. A yogi with his pure intuitive ability, transcending the limited faculties of the mind and the senses, experiences the Divine Truth. While a person identified by his physical body, being pulled by forces of desires and temptations, experiences fleeting pleasures and stays bereft of the inner bliss. His ascension begins when he aligns his actions with the spiritual wisdom, deepens his intuitive understanding and reverently practices the Yoga of Divine Communion. Paramahansa Yogananda, talks about the **Kriya Yoga** meditation, by which the flow of energy and consciousness descending into the body and its senses are reversed and the yogi ascends to states of soul realization. (Yogananda, 2005, p. 978)



Chapter 15

The Three Kinds of Faith

What are the three kinds of Faith?

The faith of the embodied is threefold - Sattvic (pure), Rajasic (passionate) and Tamasic (dull, dark), in accordance with one's nature. Sri Krishna says, "*Whatever a man's faith is, that, verily is he.*" (Verse 17:3) "A person is his faith." (Easwaran, 1985, p.196)

The Three Kinds of Faith

Those who are sattvic, worship the "**Devas** (divinities), *embodiments of spiritual qualities.*" (Yogananda, 2005, p. 989)

The Rajasic worship the **Yakshas** ("guardian spirits of wealth") and the **Rakshasas** ("*astral-world demons and giants of power and aggression*") (p. 989).

The Tamasic worship the spirits of the dead. They perform severe penances, torturing their bodies and offending the Self within.

The three kinds of faith, in accordance with one's inherent nature also expresses outwardly in the distinctions in three kinds of food preference, the disciplines, the sacrifices and the acts of giving.

What are the three kinds of Food?

The body and the mind are affected by the quality of the food that we consume. This is how taste affects the temperament:

The Three Kinds of Food

The pure minded Sattvics, like food that promotes longevity, vitality, endurance, health, and joy; the food that is savory, mild, substantial and agreeable to the body.

Foods that are bitter, sour, with excessive salt, spicy hot, pungent, harsh are preferred by the Rajasic; these strongly flavored foods though stimulating, produce discomfort, sorrow and disease.

The Tamasic prefer the food that is without any nutritional value; is insipid, stale, putrid and impure.

What are the three kinds of Yagna (Sacrifice or Performance of Duty)?

The activities undertaken by the individuals depend on their temperament.

The Three Kinds of Sacrifice

Sacrifice performed in all righteousness; in accordance with the Scriptures, with no desire for rewards is of Sattvic nature.

The sacrifice performed in the hopes of a reward or in an ostentatious spirit, is Rajasic in nature.

The sacrifice, not in conformity with the Scriptures, without devotion to God is by nature, Tamasic.

Radhakrishnan points out that the Yagna of the Gita is different from the ceremonial rituals and sacrifices of the Vedas. The Sacrifice here indicates performance of action undertaken in the spirit of selflessness. (Radhakrishnan, 1948, p. 346)

What are the three kinds of Penance (austerities or disciplines)?

“Tapas, austerity, is the conscientious practice of the disciplines that bring one’s whole into harmony with the true Self, or soul-nature. Such discipline is the foundation of spiritual unfoldment.” (Yogananda, 2005, p. 999)

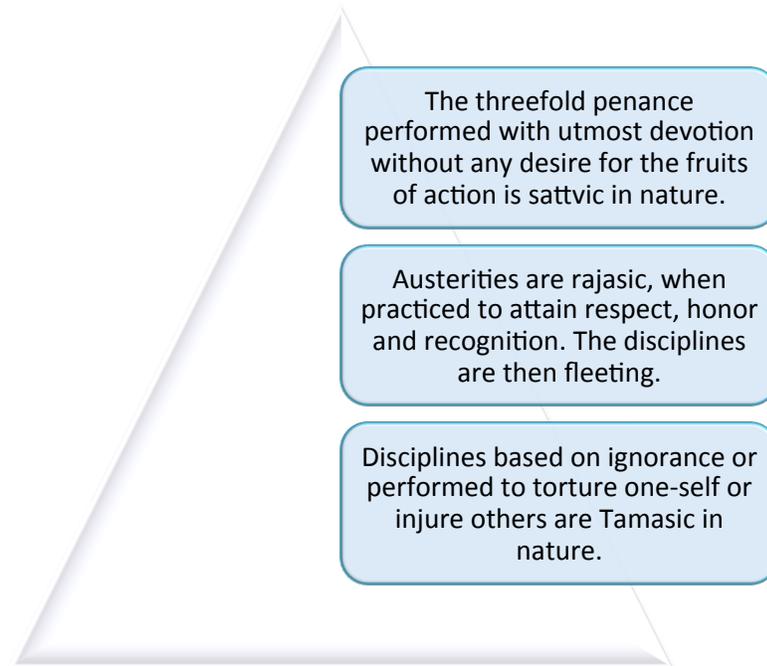
The Threefold Penance/ Austerity

To worship God, to honor the gurus and the wise, to exalt the good, the pure and the upright, to practice honesty, self-restraint and non-violence is considered the austerity or penance of the body.

Speaking words that are truthful and wise, words that are pleasant and spread peace, happiness and understanding, words constantly repeating the Scriptures leading to meditative communion with one’s inner Self, are the austerities or disciplines of the speech.

Serenity of mind, gentleness, silence, self-control and purity of one’s nature is the penance of the mind.

The Three Kinds of Penance/ Austerity



What are the three kinds of Giving?

The Three Kinds of Giving

A gift that is presented to a worthy person at a proper time and place, regarding it as one's duty and without expecting anything in return, is Sattvic giving.

Gifts offered with reluctance and with an expectation for a favor in return, is Rajasic giving.

Anything given to an unworthy person at the wrong time and place, with malice or contempt is Tamasic.

Aum-Tat-Sat, the three fold nature of Reality, the threefold symbol of Brahman.

“*Aum* expresses the absolute supremacy, *Tat* the universality and *Sat* the reality of Brahman.” (Radhakrishnan, 1948, p. 349)

Sat is Existence, the ‘isness’ of this Creation, the substratum of the entire Universe, the nameless, formless, changeless, timeless, attributeless, of the nature of pure Being. God as Sat is the Father of Creation, though he exists beyond it.

God as Tat is the Universal Intelligence that pervades the Universe.

God as Om is the Creative Vibration that upholds the worlds through Prakriti.



Chapter 16

The Roadmap to Conscious Evolution

The Bhagavad Gita provides a step by step guide to act in the world with selflessness and nonattachment. “*The Gita insists not on renunciation of action, but on action with renunciation of desire. This is true Sanyasa.*” (Radhakrishnan, 1948, p. 351)

The two aspects of Renunciation are **Sannyasa** and **Tyaga**. Sannyasa signifies the renunciation of desires and selfish motives of action; Tyaga is relinquishing the fruits of the action. Action is inevitable for all beings. But action performed in the spirit of “I am not the doer”, without any selfish motives and without any attachments to the results, becomes nishkama karma (desireless action) and frees the spiritual aspirant from the bonds of karma. Acts of Yagna (sacrifice), Dana (philanthropy) and Tapas (penance/self-discipline) are not to be relinquished, as they are acts that purify/liberate the wise. All activities, even these, are to be performed, anchored in the Divine, with the realization that all the acts are the workings of the Divine Intelligence, and by abandoning all identification with the results of the action and the desire for rewards.

The abandonment of obligatory actions through ignorance and delusion is a Tamasic act. Relinquishing action because of difficulty or physical discomfort is Rajasic renunciation; this does not result in salvation from karmic bonds. One who performs his prescribed duties, renouncing all attachment to the act and to the fruits of the action, that renunciation is Sattvic in nature. The renunciant, absorbed in *sattva* guna, with a serene understanding, free from all doubts, performs all action, with equanimity. It is not possible for an embodied being to abandon actions entirely, but he who relinquishes the fruit of action is called a tyagi (renunciant) (Verse 18: 11). The fruits of action, good, bad or mixed accrue to the non-renunciants after they die, but not to the renunciants as they are true yogis, free from the results of karma.

Understanding what stimulates action and the knowledge of how various intrinsic characteristics in each individual, according to his guna, leads to certain kinds of action, provides the roadmap to navigate the paths of life and lead to self-development. Man’s action then is in harmony with the cosmic purpose.

What are the five constituent parts that stimulate all action?

The Seat of action (the physical body), the individual self, the manifold instruments of perception (senses, mind and intelligence), the functions of organs of action and providence are the root causes of all human activities. (Verse 18:14). All actions, good or bad, right or wrong, performed through the body, speech and mind, evolve from these five determining causes. (Verse 18:15)

The individual self or the ego thinks “I am the doer” and thinks of himself as the sole cause. Swami Chinmayananda says that, “*the sense of agency of the self is an illusion.*” (Chap. 18, pg. 34) One, who frees himself from this body identified ego, realizes his true Self and sees all activities being guided by the Spirit.

The knower, the knowledge and the known form the threefold impulse that propels action; the instrument (the body with all its physical and mental faculties), the action and the agent (ego or the individual self) are the threefold basis of action. (Verse 18:18)

Three kinds of Knowledge, Action and Agent according to the Sankhya Philosophy:

The nature of Knowledge, Action and the Agent or individual self is determined by the three inherent gunas, Sattva, Rajas and Tamas.

The Three Kinds of Knowledge

Sattvic Knowledge

The Knowledge by which one sees the Supreme in all beings, undivided in the multiplicity of Creation is Sattvic.

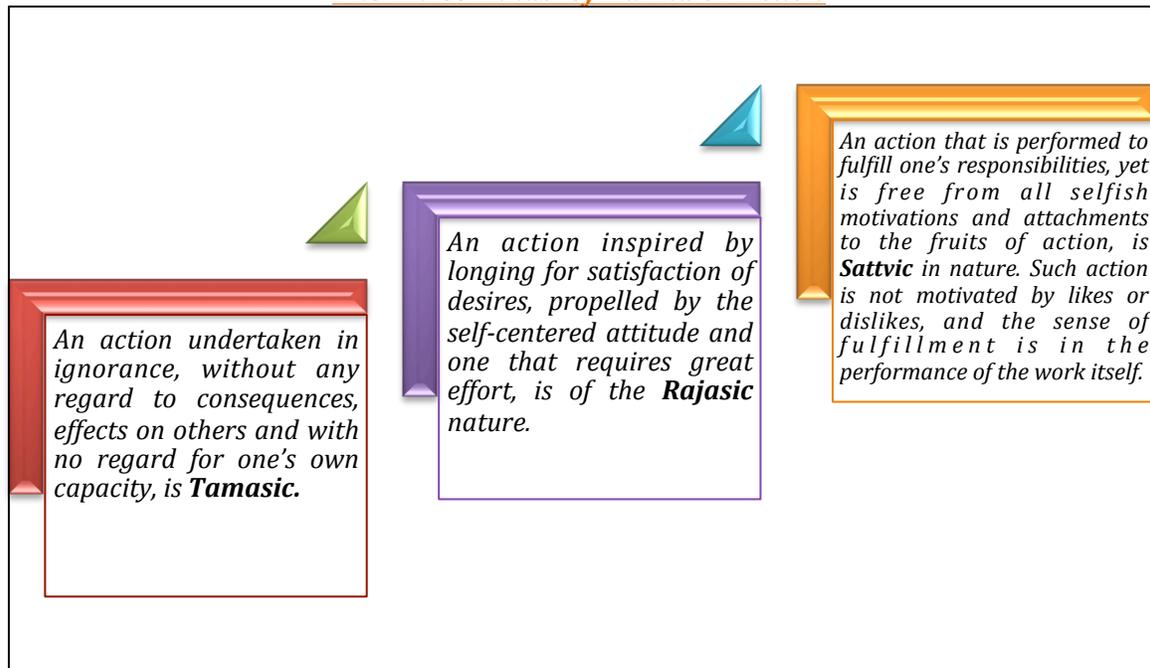
Rajasic Knowledge

The knowledge that sees all living entities distinct from one another, that knowledge is Rajasic.

Tamasic Knowledge

The knowledge that perceives a single effect, as the whole, without truly understanding the reality, is Tamasic.

The Three Kinds of Karma or Action

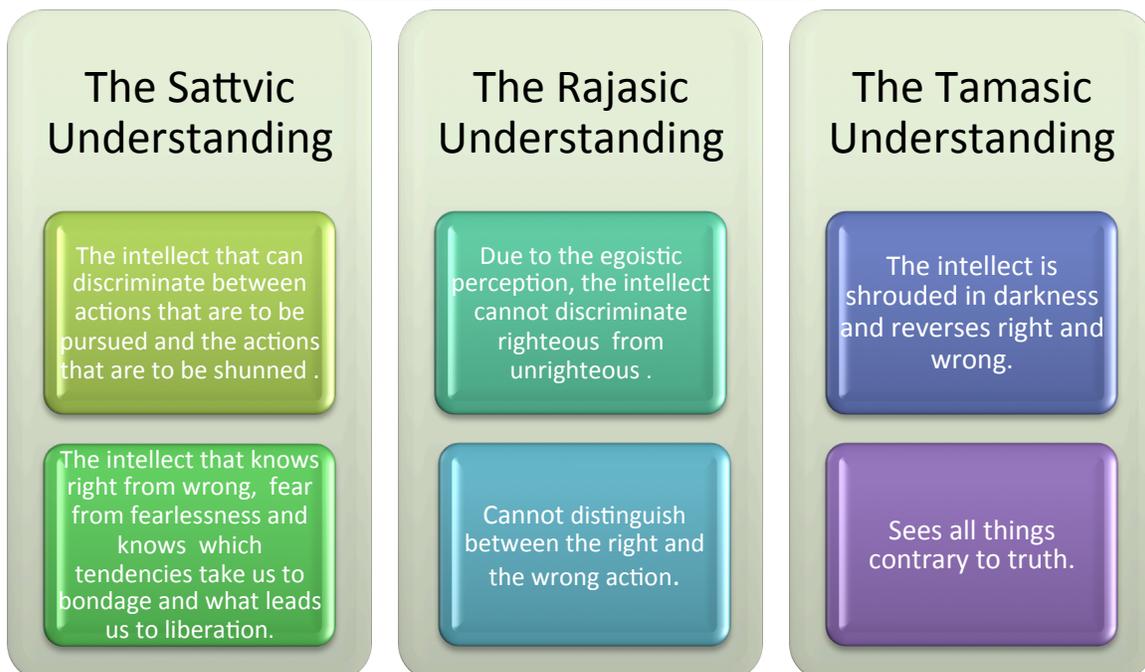


The Three Kinds of Doers or Agents of Action

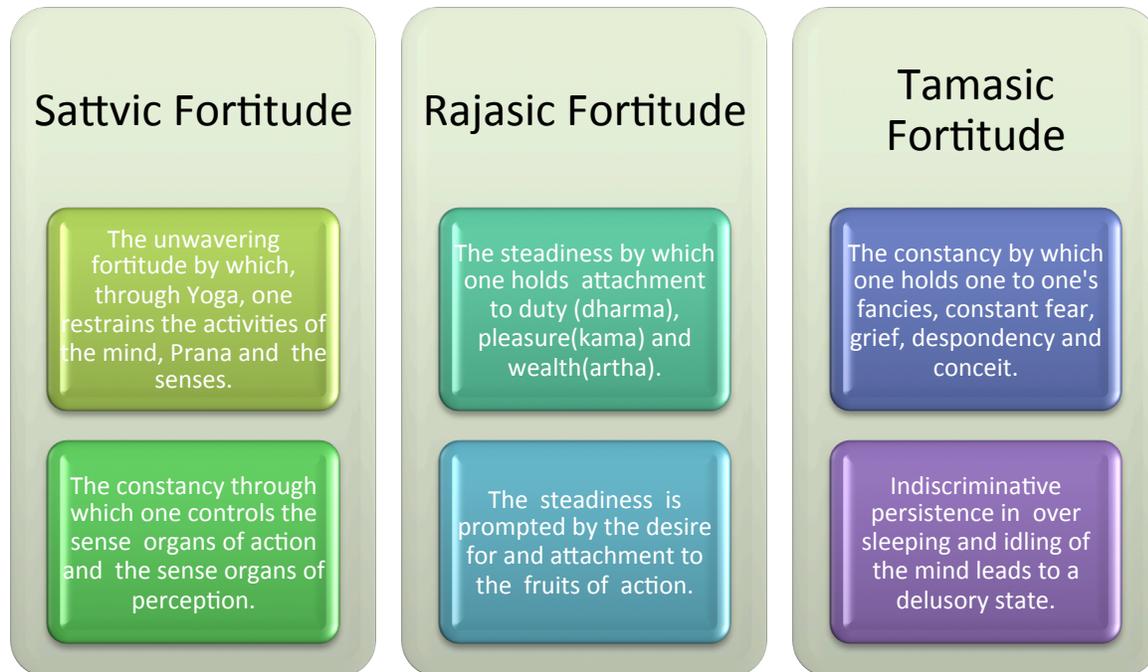


When the doer of action, guided by knowledge, acts in the world, work is manifested. 'Understanding' (Buddhi) and 'Fortitude' (Dhrti) are the two determining factors that sustain all endeavors.

The Three Kinds of Understanding



The Three Types of Fortitude



(Chinmayananda, 2010, Ch. 18, p. 76)

The Doer of Action, guided by Knowledge, sustained by Understanding and Fortitude, works towards attaining Happiness and a sense of fulfillment. Happiness is also three fold according to the predominant guna (mode) in the individual. Since all the constituents of action are of three different types, Happiness desired and attained also varies in texture, perfection and completeness. (Chinmayananda, 2010, Ch. 18, p. 84)

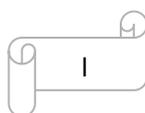
Thus with a thorough understanding of how each one of us act, work, think and feel based on our predominant temperament, one can take a step back and view one's life situation macroscopically. This can certainly help one re-evaluate one's bearings in life. Through sustained effort, one's sorrows can be alleviated or ended.

What is Sattvic Happiness?

The Happiness that arises out of arduous, constant effort yields a greater sense of fulfillment. Yogananda says, when a yogi through a constant practice of Yoga, ultimately experiences the Divine bliss, all his sorrows end. The initial stages might be filled with struggle and discontent, but if the Yogi unwaveringly continues the practice of meditation, his mind disengages from the senses and is united with his true Self. He then experiences the divine nectar (amrit) of the blessedness of the soul. (Yogananda, 2005, p. 1049) Emerging from the purity of one's own mind, as a result of the spiritual practices, the unending, **Sattvic** joy of Self-Realization is true 'Prasada'.

What is Rajasic Happiness?

The Happiness that arises when the sense organs come in contact with the sense objects is **Rajasic** in nature. The sense gratifying happiness is like nectar at first but soon turns into poison because of the impermanence of the sensory pleasures. This pleasure comes tainted with the



anxiety over loss of these objects. The *Rajasic* individuals continue seeking materialistic pleasures without ever knowing the true Self, and experiencing the blessedness and joy attained by meditation.

What is Tamasic Happiness?

*“The elusive happiness which originates and ends in self-delusion, stemming from over-sleep, slothfulness and miscomprehension, is called **Tamasic**.”* (Yogananda, 2005, p. 1051) This happiness deludes the individual and imparts incorrect values and false ideals in their personality. In pursuing and luxuriating in this happiness, the True Goal of life is relegated far away by the sense gratifications. The intemperate living, indolence and listlessness, bad habits and evil pursuits render him inert and heedless to the voice of the Higher Self within him. Thus the Tamasic happiness deludes the soul both at the beginning and at the end. (Chinmayananda, 2010, Ch. 18, p. 88-89)

Thus, if Tamas is one’s inherent temperament, idleness and apathy prevail. If Rajas dominates our nature, wealth, power and eminence gives one, happiness. True happiness cannot be dependent on extraneous factors. It resides within the eternal serenity and bliss of becoming one with the Higher Self and with all beings. (Radhakrishnan, 1948, p. 363-364)

How does one discern one’s divinely ordained duty in life?

There is no being on earth and among the Gods in heaven, who is free from the influence of the gunas, born of Prakriti (Cosmic Nature) (Verse 18:40). Each individual has his inborn nature, **Svabhava**, which is a result of the influence of triune modes of nature or gunas and his past karma. According to Yogananda, this still is the individual’s second nature and buried under this acquired second nature is one’s real soul nature, a true image of God. (Yogananda, 2005, p. 1054) An individual’s action, his ego, the knowledge he possesses, his understanding and constancy of purpose, happiness he seeks, determines his **varna** (social living/classification).

In the divine dialogue of the Gita, the four natural kind of social living along with the duties and responsibilities of each, are described. When an individual’s predominant temperament is sattvic and he keeps the activating rajas, inertia producing tamas and his past bad karma under control, he is a God-knowing **Brahmin**. (Yogananda, 2005, p. 1054) e.g. the creative, spiritual, independent, courageous thinkers; the teachers and the priests. Serenity, self-restraint, austerity, purity, forgiveness, honesty, knowledge, wisdom and faith are the duties of the Brahmin, born of his nature. (Verse 18:42)

When activating Rajas, though predominant, is guided by the goodness of Sattva, with the Tamas and the past bad karma in check, the individual is said to be a sense-fighter or **Kshatriya**. (Yogananda, 2005, p. 1055) e.g. the guardians, leaders, rulers, soldiers, the upholders of righteousness. Valor, radiance, resolute endurance, dexterity, firm resolve to never flee from battle, generosity and leadership are the natural duties of the Kshatriya. (Verse 18:43)

When an individual manifests activating Rajas, merged with a slight obstructing quality of Tamas, with the effects of the past bad karma, and an iota of Sattva, hidden within, he is **Vaishya**, the wisdom cultivator, in continual intellectual efforts to develop his inner self. (Yogananda, 2005, p. 1054) e.g. an organizer, provider, one engaged in trade and commerce, in agriculture or in tending to animals are some examples.

When one's temperament is essentially Tamasic, of evil or obstructing quality and one is strongly influenced by his past bad karma, the sattva quality is completely suppressed. Such an individual is the body-identified **Shudra**, who just believes in material existence. The sudras provide service to others and engage themselves in manual labor. (Yogananda, 2005, p. 1054)

Thus, the four kinds of social living are the natural expressions according to the gunas born of one's own nature. "Man's outward life must express his inward being" (Radhakrishnan, 1948, p. 364). His vocation must reflect his nature, his inherent skills and inclination. Each individual with his own Svabhava can find fulfillment in his natural field of interest/activity. Thus performing one's duties ordained by one's nature (Svabhava) and in congruence to one's station in life (**Svadharm**a), to the best of ability, one can attain a higher desired state from being body-identified to wisdom cultivator, to being a sense-fighter and then by deep meditation to strive to attain the highest goal of one's life, knowing the Divine Consciousness within.

When each individual gives his best, to the work that truly reflects and suits his inherent nature and functions in a cohesive society, he contributes towards the efficient and smooth workings of this entire organic system. "All men are not equal in their capacities but all men are equally necessary for society, and their contributions from their different stations are of equal value." (Radhakrishnan, 1948, p. 366) Radhakrishnan (on p. 367), quotes from Gerald Heard's book, Man the Master (1942), "...there have always been present in human community four types or strata of consciousness...", "the first being the "eyes or antennae, the emergent seers", below them the "two mental classes, the politician and the technician", and then the "basic, unspecialized, unquestioning class or mass, the coherers." It turns out that Heard was inspired by the fourfold structure of the society based on "Aryan-Sanskrit sociological thought."

How does an individual consciously evolve?

One's past karmic influences determines the good, activating and evil propensities an individual is born with and the circumstances of his life. When one performs his duties according to his nature and his station of life, he continues to exhaust his vasanas or past life impressions engrained from repeated actions and reactions. The past karma lays out the landscape in which an individual functions. What we make of this life depends on our conscious will to act in the present, carrying out each dutiful task earnestly, in the spirit of self-surrender to the Divine. Working selflessly, dedicating all actions as offerings to God and striving continuously to establish oneself in one's pure soul nature through meditation, one can consciously evolve.

How does one attain the Absolute state of Freedom from Action?

By performing all dutiful actions with no likes or dislikes, by renouncing the fruits of all actions, and renouncing the sense of agency that 'I am the Doer', the Supreme state of Freedom from Action or the state that transcends all karma (Naiskarmya-Siddhi) is attained. The renunciation in the Gita means the renunciation of the ego.

How does one attain the state of Absolute Perfection, the Brahman?

The yogi, who attains the state of Freedom from Action, frees himself from his vasanas, the effects of the gunas and the effects of his past karma. When his buddhi (discriminative intellect) is freed from all sense entanglements, he is said to be endowed with pure understanding. A true seeker stays centered on the Self with resolute constancy. Being free from likes and dislikes,

observing the Sattvic discipline of the austerity of body, speech and mind, being ever absorbed in divine meditation and Yoga, being at peace, casting aside the sense of doer ship, power, arrogance, anger, desire and the notion of ‘me’ and ‘mine’, the seeker becomes worthy of attaining the Supreme Consummation of Wisdom. Being engrossed in the Absolute Truth and Reality of the Brahman, the yogi is unperturbed and tranquil; he neither desires, nor grieves. He experiences the bliss of Brahman, with his distinct individual consciousness. He sees God within every being and his heart is filled with Supreme Devotion. With this Supreme Devotion, the yogi realizes God, His True Essence. Having known Him, the yogi’s sense of separateness is absorbed into the Infinite and he awakens to the Brahman, God-consciousness or Krishna Consciousness. Performing all actions by *“removing the sovereignty of the ego”* (Yogananda, 1948, p. 1075), taking refuge in God and His Grace, dedicating all actions to the Divine Lord, one dwells eternally in the bliss of the Divine Consciousness. Thus all paths, Jnana (self-knowledge and self-wisdom), Bhakti (supreme devotion) and Karma (selfless action) come together towards attaining the Supreme Goal.

Verse 18: 59:-

If, clinging to the ego, you say, “I will not battle”, fruitless is your resolution! Prakriti, your inborn Nature, will force you to fight.

This verse brings us full circle from where we started...from the body as a battle field, from the war to establish righteousness, the war of good over evil and the war between forces that take the soul towards sense perceptions and the forces that take the soul towards liberation, to the natural urgings of the soul to be homeward bound.

The war of righteousness must be fought to establish a peace and a just society. Dharma must be established. A soldier will always be compelled by his inherent nature of activating Rajas, to fight for a just cause.

Each individual is imbued with inherent goodness and the divine qualities within; as that is one’s true nature. The Truth, Beauty, Courage and Love that resides within each one of us can be unfolded when the army of discrimination, self-control, calmness, goodness, righteousness, peace, one pointed concentration, trained by the practice of soul-uniting Yoga and Meditation comes under the guidance of the Inner Light, the Divine Consciousness. Fight you must, with the evil and the base tendencies.

Though the devotee experiences an inner spiritual struggle due to the temporary identification with the ego, Union with the Divine, is the soul’s first nature. The soul is born with an inherent will to battle all sensory passions and attain its natural state of Supreme Bliss, of being One with the Divine. One’s sympathy towards sense-inclinations further enslaves him to higher demands for sense-gratification. As long as one considers the ego-identified senses to be a source of happiness, one continues to stay bereft of the Supreme Bliss.

One does overcome one’s lower nature, guided by the inner Divine Light; that is the natural course of progression. Complete submission to the Lord, the Divinity within will take man towards the Greater Truth of his Being.

How does one realize the Truth in the Scriptures? What is the right way to understand the Eternal teachings of the Scriptures?

The Song of the Lord, the voice of Divine Consciousness, is the vibration of Truth in the devotee's soul. Lord Sri Krishna, through Arjuna's "receptive consciousness", bestows upon humankind the "full perception of truth" of the universal science of Yoga and God-Realization. This secret wisdom of understanding how to attain liberation can only be completely grasped by intuitive realization. Otherwise it stays hidden...God and His Wisdom, beautifully explained in the Scriptures by seers, sages and spiritual teachers, remain hidden to the ego-identified soul and sense-identified intellect. (Yogananda, 2005, p. 1082-1083) Yogananda beautifully elucidates that an ordinary person hearing the Scriptures would understand them in the framework of the limitations of his senses. An individual with spiritual acuity tries to understand the meaning of the Scriptures with developed intuition. Further still, when a spiritual aspirant, with awakened intuition, tries to understand the truth under the guidance of a realized guru, and then meditates upon that revelation, he makes the wisdom his own. The Truth lifts the veil over the mysteries, through devotee's self-realization. The understanding then, is not through the intellect but through, the direct experience of the soul. (Yogananda, 2005, p. 1084) With the gift of free will, the choice is ultimately ours, to surrender our ego or "I-maker" to the Divine Love. When all identifications with the body, mind and intellect are renounced, one attains the Truth, the plane of Pure, Divine Consciousness.

The Divine Promise

Remember the Divine Consciousness as immanent in all Creation as well as beyond all Creation. The Lord is in the heart of all beings and He energizes all. In the Presence of this Pure Eternal Consciousness, "*all matter-envelopments get vitalized, and act.*" (Swami Chinmayananda, 2010, Ch. 18, p. 145)

Surrender your ego and the sense of separateness totally; with complete devotion and eagerness, give yourselves to Him and with His grace, find Supreme Peace and Eternal shelter in Him. (Verse 18:62)

Paramahansa Yogananda beautifully elucidates the deeper meaning of "bowing down to the God." The act of bowing down in reverence involves placing the hands, palms pressed together, over the heart, and touching the fingertips to the forehead. The "*hands symbolize activity, the heart symbolizes loves and the head symbolizes, wisdom.*" Thus bowing down in devotion expresses, "My activity, my love and my mind" are devoted to You. (Yogananda, 2005, p. 1088)

Lord Krishna advises Arjuna to rise above all dualities, to battle with the senses, that keep the soul bound to matter and to perform the Supreme Dharma of attaining liberation from all sensory bondage. (Yogananda, 2005, p. 1092)

The Lord's love shines equally on all beings. The Lord promises that by completely absorbing one's mind in Him, by loving Him unconditionally with utter devotion and by realizing that God is All Pervasive and in each being, one can understand one's true Self, find Him, in himself, "So'ham", "He I am".

How does one attune oneself to receive the divine wisdom of this sacred text?

One must seek this knowledge of spiritual truth with inherent intuitive wisdom, with reverence and with complete devotion. By practicing selflessness, austerity, discipline and steadfastness, when one faithfully follows the path as guided by the Guru and the Sacred text, one attains single

pointedness of the mind. Only with complete dedication, by dwelling upon the knowledge in a spirit of prayer and meditation, reflection and practice, can one become attuned to receiving the divine wisdom of spiritual unfoldment. Only when one dives deeper, does he discover the pearls of rich understanding of the Scriptural text and become absorbed in the Self.

A yogi who has attained self-realization and who, shares this wisdom and finds joy in guiding other seekers to attain this Supreme Bliss, is eternally blessed and endears himself to the Lord.

Studying and intuitively understanding this sacred dialogue between Arjuna (representing an ardent disciple) and Sri Krishna, the Supreme Guru, is a dedicated act of worship, Jnana Yagna, the divine sacrifice through wisdom. The study and contemplation of the Scriptures kindles the 'Fire of Knowledge'. In that sacred fire, the spiritual seeker offers his ignorance and his egocentric tendencies as oblation. (Swami Chinmayananda, 2010, Ch. 18, p. 177) At the end of the fire ritual, leftovers from the offering are considered, sacred remnants, Prasaada. What is left of this inner sacrificial rite is a better version of us. The knowledge of the Gita chastens the seekers of liberation; the negative tendencies and inclinations, the false ego, are consumed by the true Knowledge (Jnana) (p.178).

This sacred dialogue is between the soul and the Spirit, the Divine Consciousness. One, "*who meditates and dwells upon it with intuitive perception will feel his consciousness dissolving in the fire of My Cosmic Consciousness.*" (Yogananda, 2005, p. 1096)

Even without the intuitive realization, listening to the Gita with faith and reverence, brings inner tranquility, peace and joy.

Lord Sri Krishna now enquires of Arjuna, the Divine Consciousness now asks the soul:

Have you listened to this wisdom with single pointed mind? *Has your soul intuition absorbed the Spirit wisdom imparted to you?* (Yogananda, 2005, p. 1097) O mighty conqueror, has your distraction of thought, caused by ignorance, been dispelled? *Has the body-identified, ego-born delusion of ignorance been dispelled?* (p. 1097) (Verse 18:72)

Arjuna replies, the soul answers:

My delusion is gone! I have regained memory (of my soul) through your Grace. I am firmly established; my doubts have been dispelled. I will act according to Your word. (Verse 18:73)

Arjuna acknowledges that he has regained memory of the blessed Self. His doubts about the omnipresence of the Divine Consciousness, arising due to the body-identified ego, have been dispelled. (Yogananda, 2005, p. 1098) He will now be guided by the Divine Presence within. "*Arjuna thus turns to his appointed action, not with an egoistic mind, but with self-knowledge.*" "*This evolution means a great shedding of all pretenses and evasions, a stripping of all sheaths, the self-naughting of the soul.*" (Radhakrishnan, 1948, p. 381)

The five closing verses beautifully connect this wondrous discourse of blissful divine revelation to the continuing story of the epic, Mahabharata. Sanjaya, the minister of blind king Dhritirashtra, had been blessed by Vyasa with the divine sight to see and hear the events in the battle field and narrate this sacred dialogue to the blind king.

I must quote Paramahansa Yogananda's interpretation of verse 18:75 where Sanjaya (standing for the intuitive insight of impartial introspection) expresses his awe and supreme joy and bliss, having experienced this divine revelation, and says that through the grace of Vyasa, this supreme secret Yoga has been bestowed upon him, manifested in his consciousness directly, by the Lord of Yoga, Sri Krishna Himself!

"The devotee whose interiorized, introspective divine sight (Sanjaya) receives the blessing of support of a spiritualized state of consciousness manifesting the soul's pure discriminative perception (Vyasa), thereby realizes the divine communion of soul and Spirit, and becomes fully possessed of all wisdom inherent in that blissful union." (Yogananda, 2005, p. 1099)

The awakened intuition of impartial introspection (Sanjaya) rejoices as it relives the divine experience. Recalling the memory of the wondrous intuitive divine revelations, the vision of the God's Cosmic form, etched in the devotee's mind continues to give him renewed, unending joy.

One sees the fulfillment of the Divine promise in the ultimate enlightenment that the Lord bestows upon Arjuna. When a sincere devotee, like Arjuna, wields his bow of self-control and lays the sensory bondages to rest, under the guidance of the Divine Consciousness, he attains liberation, victory over the sense soldiers of the blind Mind. He thus attains wisdom, unending love and supreme joy in Oneness with the Divine.





The Cosmic Vision

Conclusion:

The Bhagavad Gita affirms that the paths can be many, there may be varied beliefs and practices. The spiritual realization, to which these are the means, is one.

The Gita lights the path that the soul must take in its journey to its True Self. To wake man up from the state of inertia or tamas, the Divine Consciousness prescribes Karma. Activities at this stage of development are motivated by man's ego-centric desires. Tamas is thus invigorated into dynamic activity, Rajas. This state is then transcended by non-ego-centric activities undertaken for the welfare of all. The selfless acts are performed in the spirit of Yagna or the oblation to Brahman. In this process of inner sublimation, what remains of the self is sacred. This state of peace, purity and joy is Sattva. Poised in the sattva, one, following the path of union with the Divine, through meditation, can cross the boundaries of the finite, and reach Infinite Bliss. The self thus consciously moves on the path of self-perfection through stages of desire prompted activities, to desire-less activities, to renouncing the fruits of all action to the Lord and then finally to Yoga through Meditation. (Swami Chinmayananda, Chapter 5, pg. 3) When a flower matures into a fruit, the essence of the flower finds fulfillment in the fruit. The unnecessary aspects of the flower wither away and the essential in the flower grows to the fruit (p. 4). Similarly, as the self matures towards the higher Self, the non-essential withers away and only the essence of the Self finds fulfillment.

Thus the Gita transforms at all levels:

- physical, through selfless and dutiful actions (Karma);
- intellectual, through knowledge and wisdom, Yoga and Meditation (Jnana); and
- emotional, through complete surrendering of the ego, love and supreme devotion to the Divine Consciousness (Bhakti)

Swami Tejomayananda in his book, *The Vision of Bhagavad Gita* writes that 'dharma' is the essential nature of a thing, without which it ceases to be. (The root word 'dhr' means to uphold, to sustain and to integrate). Non-violence or non-injury (ahimsa) is the supreme dharma and it should be practiced at all levels, physical, mental, intellectual. For an individual, dharma at the physical level means nourishing and supporting one's health. Adharma is the action that harms the body. At the emotional level, being happy and having a positive attitude is dharma and thinking negatively about our own selves and others is an act of adharma. At the intellectual level, true knowledge frees us from various dependencies, fear, grief, sorrow and delusion. Thus knowledge upholds, nourishes and sustains our being and is dharma, ignorance is adharma. (2011, p. 23-24)

Swami Chinmayananda writes about the fascinating aspect of how the Sanskrit literary works are organized. The opening stanza generally indicates the entire theme of the text and the last verse summarizes the conclusions. The Gita begins with the word "*Dharma*" and after 701 verses bound in the 18 chapters, concludes with the word, "*Mama*" that means, "Mine". The contents of the Gita, therefore represents "*Mama Dharma*", My Dharma. (2011, Chapters I & II, p. 60)

When each being follows his own dharma, it would usher in a beautiful, cohesive, ecologically self-sustaining community, a community that will integrate, uphold and sustain.

Swami Krishnananda, a master of Raja Yoga, writes that Lord Krishna is Grace, while Arjuna is the effort; Krishna is the Goal, Arjuna is the means; Krishna is the Absolute, Arjuna is relative. The Gita teaches mankind how to bring about the union of the two. It illuminates the path of dutiful, selfless action, of non-attachment, of love and compassion and of meditation for the realization of the Ultimate Truth.

The Ultimate Truth, the Supreme, the Divine Consciousness, the Brahman is to be intuitively realized. The Inconceivable cannot be conceived by the human mind.

In search of the higher truth, man has honed his rationality to such an extent that he has begun doubting the innate wisdom that he was always endowed with. Radhakrishnan in his commentary aptly quotes Henry Adams, “*After all, man knows mighty little, and may someday learn enough of his own ignorance to fall down and pray.*” (1948, p 181)

The Sanskrit phrase Vidyavinaysampann means great learning brings great humility. What we know is practically nothing compared to what we don’t know. We are all students in this gurukulum (school) of life, ever learning, and being guided by the innate, inner wisdom that the Divine Consciousness has bestowed upon us. May we all be vidyavinaysampann (humble with our learning) like the branches of trees that bend with the weight of the fruit, samadarshinah (see with an equal eye), with equal regard for all beings, seeing The Eternal in all.

He, who sees the Divine in all Creation, helps others find their true nature and attain true happiness. “*The Soul that has acquired wisdom and peace within is also the soul of love and compassion.*” Thus, “*he who finds his happiness within, his joy within and his light within*”, attains nirvana! (Radhakrishnan, 1948, p.184)

The Bhagavad Gita, the Song of the Spirit, is the “*divine communion of truth realization between man and his Creator, the teachings of the Spirit through the soul that should be sung unceasingly...*” (Yogananda, 2008, p. 3)



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Glossary

Abhyasa: Practice

Abhyasa Yoga: The Yoga of Constant Practice.

Acharya: Scholar, traditional teacher, head of school of religious thought.

Adharma: ('a', "not"; 'dharma', "the essential nature of a being") Non conformity to one's essential nature. Term used in the sense of unrighteousness, impiety or non-performance of duty.

Advaita: ('a', "not"; 'dvaita', "duality") Non-duality; a system of thought that was consolidated by the 8th century Indian philosopher and sage, Adi Shankaracharya.

Aham: Embodied self, soul, the sense of 'I'.

Ahamkara: The 'I' maker, the ego-self, egoism.

Ahimsa: ('a', "not"; 'himsa', "violence") Non-violence, non-injury.

Ajna Chakra: The Spiritual eye.

Ajnana: ('a', "not"; 'jnana', "knowledge") Ignorance

Akasha: Ether, space.

Aksara: Imperishable.

Amrit: The Divine Nectar, ambrosia, elixir.

Ananda: Bliss, Absolute Happiness, Supreme Joy

Apana: the life-force that goes down.

Apara (Prakriti): Lower Nature, immanent.

Arjuna: The third Pandava brother. The word literally means 'bright' or 'silver', pure in nature.

Asat: Non-Being/ Non Existent. (The Supreme Being is described as *Sat* and *Asat*, 'Being' when Manifested and 'Non-Being' when Unmanifested.)

Ashvattha Tree: Pipal or holy fig tree, the tree of Life. Metaphorically, the entire field of Manifested Creation is represented by the Ashvattha tree.

Asuri: Demonic

Atman, Atmanam, Atma: The innermost essence, the soul in every being that is divine.

Aum: (Om): The omnipresent, all-pervading Cosmic Vibration, Cosmic sound in ether.

Avataran: Descent of Divine into the human world; Avatara: One who has thus descended, incarnation of God.

Avidya: ('a', "not"; 'Vidya', "wisdom") Individual delusion that creates ego consciousness, ignorance of one's true nature.

Avyakta: Unmanifest

Bhagavad Gita: Song Celestial, Song of the Spirit.

Bhakti: Worship, Devotion, Love of God

Bhakti Yoga: The Way of Love

Bhima: The second of the Pandava brothers, symbolic of great strength.

Bodha/ Bodhah: Knowledge

Brahma: God as Creator in the Hindu Trinity; Other two in the trinity being, Vishnu, the Preserver and Shiva, the Destroyer. Brahma is NOT Brahman.

Brahman: (from the Sanskrit root '*brih*', "to expand") The irreducible ground of Existence, the Reality, the Truth. It is of the nature of Existence, Consciousness and Bliss (Sat-Chit-Ananda). It

is timeless, changeless, eternal and infinite. It is formless, and attributeless. It cannot be defined or expressed.

Brahmarandhra: Frontal fontanelle. The crown of one's head; It is the core of life, through which one connects to the Divine Consciousness and receives cosmic energy.

Brahmin: Teachers and priests. The first of the four in the caste/social class system;

Brahmsthiti: Established in Brahman. The state where the yogi's soul expands into the Spirit in an everlasting communion with the Spirit, yet the yogi retains his individuality.

Brahmanirvana: The Divine state of Oneness with Brahman, attained by extinguishing the ego and all desires that compel a soul to reincarnate.

Brahmavidya: The Study of 'Consciousness'. It is referred to as "the supreme science" or "the science of the Supreme."

Buddhi: The Pure Discriminative Intellect.

Chakra(s): Subtle center(s) of energy in the cerebrospinal axis of the body.

Chinmaya: Embodiment of knowledge or Consciousness

Chitta: Feeling.

Dana: Philanthropy.

Deva: Celestial being.

Dharma: Literally means mode of being, *"the essential nature of a being that determines its mode of behavior. As long as our "conduct is in conformity with our essential nature, we are acting in the right way."* (Radhakrishnan, 1948, p. 155)

Dharma Kshetra: The Field of Righteousness. Symbolically, it is the spiritual field of self-development within.

Dhriti: Fortitude.

Dhyana: Meditation, contemplation

Dhyana Yoga: The Yoga of practice of meditation.

Gita: Song

Guna(s): The three attributes, fundamental qualities, tendencies or modes of expression, born of Prakriti (Cosmic Nature). 'Guna' literally means 'a strand of cord or rope' through which Prakriti holds in bondage all embodied beings. (Yogananda, 2005, p. 907)

Guru: Teacher. The word means ‘dispeller of darkness’; (‘gu’, darkness and ‘ru’, ‘that which dispels’).

Gurukulum: School, academy of learning.

Indriya(s): Senses, instruments of action and instruments of perception.

Ishvara: Personal God, the Supreme Being in His aspect of the Lord of the worlds.

Jada: Insentient

Jiva, Jivatman: Individualized soul

Jivanmukta: Freed while living; one who is liberated;

Jnana: Knowledge

Jnana Yoga: Realizing the Absolute through Knowledge.

Kalpa: Cycle of time.

Karma: Action, work, deed. Derived from the Sanskrit root word ‘kr’, which means , ‘to do’ or ‘to make’.

Karma Phala/Phalam: Fruits of Action, the results of action.

Karma Yoga: The path of selfless action.

Kosha: Sheath

Ksara: Perishable

Kshatriya: Warrior Class of the Caste System

Kshetra: The Field, Cosmic physical Nature(macrocosm)and human body(microcosm).

Kshetrajna: The Knower/the Conscious principle/ the Absolute witness of the Field (the soul, the Universal Self).

Loka Seva: Actions for the welfare of all.

Mahatma: Lofty soul, highly spiritual person.

Mahatattva(s): The five subtle vibratory elements of earth, water, fire, air and ether.

Mahavakya(s): The four main sentences, one from each Veda, proclaiming the Truth of Brahman.

Manas: Mind, Sense Consciousness

Manipura: The lumbar chakra

Maya: Cosmic Delusion

Muladhara: The coccygeal chakra

Mula-Prakriti: The unmanifested or undifferentiated Nature.

Muni: Sage.

Naiskarmya-Siddhi: A state that transcends all karma.

Nirvana: Liberation. It signifies the *“final extinction, by destruction of all re-birth making unfulfilled desires, of the karmic causes that compel a soul to reincarnate.”* (Yogananda, 2005, p. 621)

Nishkama Karma: Action performed in the spirit of “I am not the doer”, without any selfish motives and without any attachments to the results, becomes nishkama karma (desireless action) and frees the spiritual aspirant from the bonds of karma.

Ojas: The vital energy, Cosmic life force.

Pandit: Learned man, man of wisdom, scholar.

Para (Prakriti): Higher Nature, Transcendent.

Paramatman/ Para Brahman/ Parabraham/ Para-Purusha: The Supreme Spirit, Absolute, Universal Self.

Paramahansa: A sannyasi who has attained Self-Realization.

Phala: Fruit.

Prajna Purani: Ancient Wisdom

Prakriti: Cosmic Nature, the principle of mind and matter.

Prana: Life-force, breath, vital-air.

Pranava: The holy sound of Om; (Pranava Mantra: Om Mantra).

Pranayama: Breath Control.

Prasada: Divine blessing, food offered to God and then distributed to the devotees.

Purusha: The principle of Pure Spirit. The union of Prakriti, the principle of mind and matter and Purusha, the principle of pure spirit, underlies all creation.

Purushottama: The Supreme Divine Being, the Supreme Spirit.

Raja Yoga: The Royal Path of Union with the Divine, that integrates Jnana Yoga, Karma Yoga and Bhakti Yoga as expounded in the Patanjali Yoga Sutras.

Rajas: The activating quality, one of the three modes of Cosmic Nature (Prakriti).

Sahasrara: The astral brain.

Samadarshinah: To see with an equal eye.

Samkalpa: Thought, intention.

Samsara: The realm of relativity, transience and illusion;

Samskara(s): They “*are impressions on the consciousness of past actions that create strong tendencies to repeat themselves.*” (Yogananda, 2005, p. 933-934)

Sanatana: Eternal.

Sanjaya: Completely Victorious (literally); Impartial Introspection (symbolically).

Sankhya: One of the six ancient systems of Indian Philosophy, attributed to Sage Kapila. The word means calculation, enumeration, analysis, and categorization. The philosophy is thus called as it enumerates and analyses reality into a fixed number of basic elements. (Source: <http://www.sanskrit.org/www/Sanskrit/sanskritterms.htm>)

Sannyasa: Renunciation. It signifies the renunciation of desires and selfish motives of action.

Sat: Existence, Being, the Absolute Reality. (The Supreme Being is described as *Sat* and *Asat*, ‘Being’ when Manifested and ‘Non-Being’ when Unmanifested.)

Sat-Chit-Ananda: Being-Consciousness-Bliss.

Sattva: One of the three modes of Nature, representing goodness, light and purity.

Sattvic: Pure.

Shastra/Sastra: Scriptural injunction, sacred writings, any field of knowledge, an order, command, rule.

Shudra: The working class, the fourth varna (class) in the caste system.

Shiva: The Destroyer of Delusion.

So’ham: I am He (Brahman).

Sruti/Shruti: That which was heard by the sages and seers in their transcendental state of meditation and passed on to the disciples by word of mouth; the sacred texts, the Vedas.

Sthita prajna: One established in Wisdom.

Sushumna: The astral cerebrospinal axis.

Sutra(s): Treatise(s), literally means ‘thread’.

Svabhava: The inborn nature of an individual, which is a result of the influence of triune modes of nature or gunas and his past karma.

Svadharna: One’s station in life.

Svadhishthana: Sacral chakra.

Swami: Yogi, mystic, one who is in control of himself, one’s own master.

Tamas: Inertia, darkness, ignorance; one of the three attributes/modes of Prakriti.

Tapas: Austerity, Self-Discipline. It is the *“conscientious practice of the disciplines that bring one’s whole into harmony with the true Self, or soul-nature. Such discipline is the foundation of spiritual unfoldment.”* (Yogananda, 2005, p. 999)

Tat: The Consciousness immanent in all vibratory creation that springs from Sat, the Immutable God beyond all vibratory creation. (Yogananda, 2005, p. 369)

Tat Tvam Asi: ‘That thou art’. One of the four Mahavakyas; that establishes the identity between-one’s innermost essence, Atman, and Brahman.

Tattva: Essence, Reality.

Tattva Bodha/Bodhah: Knowledge of the Reality/Essence.

Tejas: Effulgence

Tejomaya: Consisting of or filled with Light, radiant.

Tyaga: Renunciation. It signifies relinquishing the fruits of the action.

Tyagi: Renunciant.

Upanishad: Philosophical writings forming part of the Vedas, knowledge portion of the Vedas.

Vaishya: The traditional mercantile or business class. The third varna(class) in the social class/caste system.

Vasana(s): *“Latent Desire or Desire Seed.”* They *“are impressions of desires left on the consciousness and carried over into the next incarnation or succeeding rebirths.”* (Yogananda, 2005, p. 933-934)

Veda(s): Sacred Lore, Scriptures revealed through the Rishis. The four Vedas are Rig, Sama, Yajur and Atharva Vedas.

Vedanta: The end or consummation of the Vedas. Absolute Truth as established by the Upanishads, Brahma Sutras and Bhagavad Gita as revealed and expressed by seer Veda Vyasa.

Vidya: Knowledge

Vidyavinaysampann: The phrase means 'great learning brings great humility'.

Vijnana: Personal experience of Jnana, knowledge.

Vishuddha: Cervical Chakra

Vishnu: God as Preserver.

Yagna: The Vedic fire ritual of sacrifice. Symbolically, it is a means of self-control and discipline where lower impulses are surrendered, thus making the act, a sacrifice.

Yoga: means to yoke; union of the individual consciousness or soul with the Universal Consciousness or Spirit.

Yogarudha: Mounted on Yoga, one who has attained Yoga, state of perfect equilibrium in Spirit.

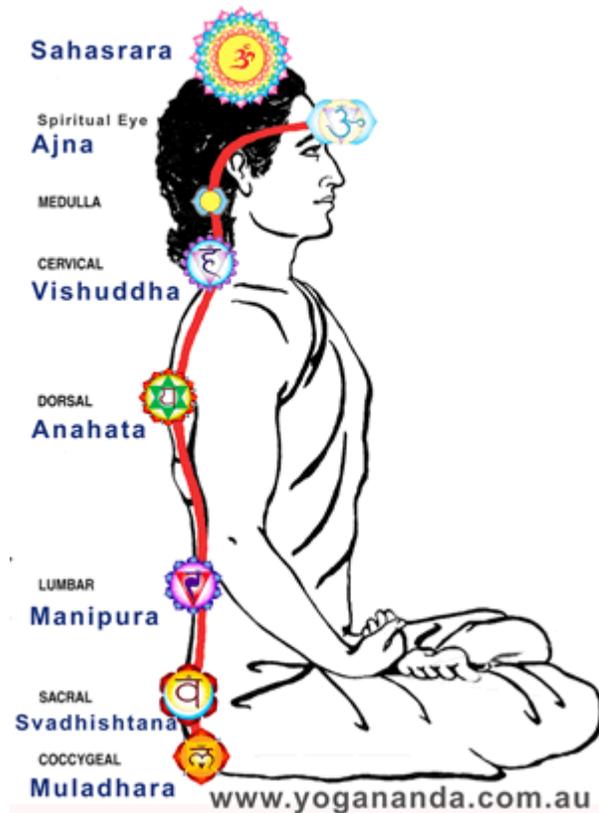
Yogi: Spiritual aspirant on the path of Yoga, Union with the Divine.

Yudhisthira: The eldest Pandava brother. The word means 'steady in war'.



Appendix

The Chakras in the Cerebrospinal Axis



The Patanjali Yoga Sutras identifies the seven centers of life and consciousness as the astral brain (Sahasrara), the “thousand-petaled lotus” at the top of the cerebrum and the astral cerebrospinal axis (Sushumna) containing the six subtle centers or chakras. The five Pandava brothers represent the five subtle centers of the spine.

- Sahadeva signifies restraint and the power to stay away from evil, represented by the vibratory earth element in the coccyx center or Muladhara chakra.
- Nakula signifies adherence and the power to obey rules, represented by the vibrating water element in the sacral center or Svadhishtana Chakra.
- Arjuna signifies self-control and the vibratory fire element in the lumbar center, the Manipura.
- Bhima represents the power of vitality and the vibratory air element in the dorsal center, the Anahata Chakra.
- Yudhisthira represents divine calmness and the creative vibratory ether element in the cervical center or Vishuddha Chakra.
- The spiritual eye, located between the eyebrows, directly connected by polarity with the medulla oblongata is the Ajna Chakra.
- The Sahasrara Chakra, at the top of the cerebrum is the throne of the soul.

(Yogananda, 2008, p. 21, 26-27)

Yogananda describes the seven centers as “divinely planned exits or trap doors”, through which the soul descends into the body and through which it must re-ascend by meditation. (2008, p. 21) Draupadi, the wife of the five Pandava brothers represents Kundalini, the coiled life force at the base of the spine that awakens the spiritual powers in the five spinal chakras.

