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Living the Gita

Swami Pranavtirtha

The Special Point

The forte of Hindu philosophy is its emphasis on compassion, as it is of all civilised religions; but with a difference. It is not a question of treating a neighbour as if he were myself. In Hinduism, which is much more a way of life than a formulated religious system, my neighbour, in the final values, is me, my very own self. Not only that; he and I are the essentially one and the same undifferentiated Brahman (Godhead) Itself.

“I am Brahman”, “Thou art That”, “All this (the universe) is verily Brahman” and “Being conscious is Brahman” are the four resounding rallying points of Vedic philosophy in which all this-and-that is one big I, with no “other” whatever. Therefore, I oblige or disoblige no one but my own self by my behaviour and attitudes vis-à-vis all living creatures, in fact.

The fact must be clearly borne in mind here that behaviour can have two aspects; unintelligently sentimental therefore fallacious, and rationally balanced therefore fruitful.

And, the principle of action and reaction being equal and opposite, of which the belief in the soul’s rebirths is a logical corollary, provides a powerful incentive to homo sapiens for living humanistically, since man is a free agent and fashions his own “fate” all by himself, which God dispenses to him in due course. Thus all credit is due to God for being utterly just and fair in his dispensations, and thanks for seeing you safely through all this and back home; but no blame is due to him for your having to lie on the bed you made for yourself.

It is therefore up to every sensible human to mind his own step, now; else...

But how?

That is telling. And the Gita tells it, on a plane which cuts across all religious and man-made differences, transcends them, and deals with human values as such. It provides not only religious but social, meta-physical and practically useful grass-roots guidelines in respect of every

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conceivable aspect of life to all thinking human beings, here, as well as there; mostly here, and now.

This is, therefore, not meant to be merely conned up or intellectually speculated about, but to be lived, with both head and heart.

That's the point.

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Introduction

The Mahabharata has given us the Gita which is a constituent thereof, one amongst the hundreds of its chapters. It epitomises the Hindu way of life, and its philosophy as adumbrated in that tome of a hundred thousand verses. The life-values expounded in them stand as true, and reflect the life of the people of India as faithfully in their essentials, as they did four thousand and odd years ago, when the incidents narrated therein must reasonably have happened. The small chapter which is so familiar to us as the Gita has been skilfully fashioned by its author to be able to stand by itself, independent of the book. It uses the dramatic imagery of the great war story only as its background, a scenario, by way of a parable, a convenient peg on which to hang the spiritual core of the epic's diffused message in a compact compendium form. That way, the Gita becomes a unique introductory text-book of Indian spiritual philosophy with its transcendental theme. It carries one right to the threshold of the Vedanta books called the Upanishads.

In fact the Gita is a sure-fire guide for open-minded intelligent people to a sort of mental and moral hygiene that ensures the soul's wellbeing. It also acts as a prophylaxis against the stupidity and its inevitable reflex, sorrow; provided of course, its curriculum is followed in the proper spirit. Its principles and their down-to-earth effectiveness are so universal in their applicability, that it not only transcends all formulated religions, but makes them purer, and free of irrational apocryphal accretions, and instils more intelligent zest in their essential observation by their adherents. Its message is so unfettered, broad and basic that it cuts across theological differences and becomes itself a welcome and desirable aid to proper and fruitful understanding of Truth which all theologies seek to expound, each in its own way. Let no one fall into the error of thinking the Gita to be just a Hindu religious tract. For, far from having a sectarian bias, it carries a message of unquestionable spiritual verities which should be, and in fact are, basic to all reasonable religious systems. Its acquaintance can only make the great theologies more intelligently meaningful.

The Gita, originally of course in Sanskrit, has been so popular all



over the world and for so long, that it has been translated into all civilised languages by the hundred and into Indian dialects by the thousand. Many of the translations, particularly Indian, bear traces of a more or less pronounced twist of some kind, i.e. attempts, conscious or otherwise, to mislead the reader in the direction of the translator's own religious beliefs and sectarian nostrums. This has often resulted in idle controversies, making the Gita a bone of bootless contention. By way of the very flexibility and universality of its teachings, the book can be almost all things to all men, a fortunate circumstance which unfortunately makes of it a tool easy to misuse, even for political purposes. This happens where the translator or commentator has an axe to grind particularly in the religious field – a strong and stiff sectarian bias to pander to.

The most authoritative interpretations of and commentaries on the Gita are held to be four, by four of the most learned and respected of its acharya-exponents: Shankara, Ramanuja, Nimbarka and Madhva. Of them only Shankara is free of sectarian religious denomination of any kind. He is a Vedantin Sannyasin, interested solely in the uninhibited search for the Truth. All the other three were founders or zealous preachers of emphatically dogmatic sects wedded to strict ritual related to the worship of Vishnu in one form or another as their ultimate God. That being so, they have deliberately attempted to make the Gita look like an appendage to their favourite beliefs and tenets. Shankara is different. All his teachings are based on pure vedantic principles. Being free from dogma, they are most widely accepted as truly rational and more faithful to their source than others, in India as well as abroad.

The teachings of the Gita are square-based on the Upanishads, from which more than 200 verses (out of the Gita's total 702) are lifted bodily to serve its purpose. They constitute its skeleton. Some of them are adopted as they stand, and some others are so rearranged as to cease to be exclusive property of the learned, and come more within the intellectual ambit of reasonably literate inquirers. This, plus its very worldly-wise and skilful approach which is naturally more palatable to the normally intelligent and spiritually curious man of the world than the advanced students of the Vedanta, makes it especially attractive to the majority of such people. One of its great merits, therefore, is that it



has made the “Science of Moksha” less formidable to the common man, and given him a free entrée to the fort which was so far exclusively held by the scholar-seeker. It has made the spiritual endeavour more “pop” than ever before.

The Gita is meant as an introduction to the study of the transcendental spiritual values, to Brahman Itself, as a college course of study and behaviour, designed to qualify the student for the post-graduate course of the Upanishads. It therefore stops at the latter’s edges, where there is a qualification bar. It is a sort of antechamber to Brahma-vidya. That is why it rarely ventures into the domain of the unqualified Brahman, and mostly deals with its more immediate Ishvara-aspect so as to be within reasonably easy reach of its part-time student, the secularly busy yet inquisitive family man. It often equates one with the other for the same purpose. The Gita is told by a great householder Kshatriya to another similar one, to solve the problems of this life, so as to be qualified in due time for entrée into the realm of the Unqualified. This fact constitutes its limitations, but so only in the eyes of the sannyasin who is all out for the Unlimited; but it is a great and much needed qualification to the householder aspirant, due to his limitations.

Yet Krshna does make occasional inroads into the upanishadic field of the Brahman principle and the soul’s total merger into it. This whets or should whet the appetite for the Upanishads, which almost start from where the Gita stops. The Gita also repeats the fact several times, that one who listens and acts to its standards, has almost automatic access to the wondrous mansions of the Brahman.

Brahman in very brief means that state of the mind and that principle which makes for the soul’s liberation, salvation, moksha, nirvana or whatever you may call it but which unmistakably implies man’s complete freedom from sorrow and permanent establishment in the unqualified happiness which never flags, never wanes. This Brahman or Atman principle is the soul’s very own essential self, and the only way to attain It is to realise this fact, and merge one’s individual self in It.

Historical Background

In ancient times (about 4,500 years ago), there ruled on the banks of the Ganga a king named Shantanu of the Kuru dynasty, in Hastinapur city (modern Delhi). At that time, eight Vasus (a group of divinities) were the victims of a curse: they had to be born into the mortal world. They chose Shantanu to be their father, and requested Ganga to be their mother there. In accordance with the curse, Shantanu had eight sons by Ganga, the first seven of whom died soon after their birth. The last one survived. His name was Deva-vrata, who later became famous as Bhishma. Ganga departed in due course.

Deva-vrata became the heir-apparent to the throne. Soon after that, Shantanu fell in love with the daughter of a fisherman, named Satyawati. She made a condition to the marriage that the king first make sure that only her son would succeed the throne. That meant Deva-vrata signing away, not only his claim to the throne, but that of his progeny's also. But how could anyone vouch for his successors as to how they might behave? So it came to pass that Deva-vrata should not only pledge renouncement of his claim, but should never have a wife. Much against his father's wishes, the boy took a vow of life-long celibacy. In those days that was a hard vow to keep, and that is how he came to be called Bhishma, or the man of a great vow.

The new queen had two sons; the elder one succeeded Shantanu to the throne, but died without a son. His brother followed him, but he too died sonless. Bhishma who was all the time looking after the royal family's interests, refused to accede to the universally expressed request to assume the reins of the state, true to his vow, and the dynasty threatened to come to a close – which was unthinkable. So in accordance with custom in those days in such a crisis, Vyasa Krishna-dwaipayana, a great sage who was Satyawati's own son by a previous marriage, was invited to sleep with the two widow queens for the male issue. The elder of the two had a blind son, named Dhrtarashtra, and the other one, Pandu, a boy of poor health but capable in all other respects.

The former was the older of the two; but he was blind; and as



per custom, while a capable brother was available, a blind prince could not be enthroned. So Pandu was the automatic choice.

Dhrtarashtra had 100 sons and a daughter by his wife, a princess of Gandhara (Kandahar, or modern Afghanistan). Pandu had tuberculosis, so he appointed his blind brother his temporary regent, and lived in a cold spot in the Himalayas, stipulating that in the case of his own death, his eldest son was to succeed the throne and retire the regent.

Pandu had two queens, Kunti and Madri. By the former he had three sons, Yudhishtira, Bhima and Arjuna, and two by the latter, Nakula and Sahadeva. Pandu died first, and his sons went to Hastinapur. Dhrtarashtra clung to the throne, promising that he would hand over to Yudhishtira when he came of age. His son Duryodhana was a vicious character. He made several attempts to do away with Pandu's sons. But they were all foiled by the sagacity of Krishna, who was a close cousin of the Pandavas.

Matters became critical, and under the advice of an elder, the Pandavas left the place to live in another town under the guise of Brahmanas. It happened that the only princess of Drupada, the king of that country, was about to choose her husband from a gathering of invited princes. That is how the Pandavas came to have Draupadi as their polyandric wife.

After that, they asked Dhrtarashtra to vacate. But the latter, instead divided the kingdom into two, and offered the poorer and smaller part Indraprastha to Yudhishtira, which the latter accepted in the interests of peace. (That place is very near Delhi which is built on the site of Hastinapur, and is now one of its well-known suburbs).

The Pandavas ruled so well and wisely that the new state outgrew Hastinapur both in prosperity and power. Duryodhana could not stomach it, and in company with an uncle of his named Shakuni, a well-known scoundrel and an accomplished cheat at the royal game of dice, invited Yudhishtira to a few throws. The latter as a Kshatriya, was honour bound to say yes. Shakuni loaded the dice expertly, and the trustful Yudhishtira lost repeatedly in the series, forfeiting all his



possessions as well as his queen. But Dhrtarashtra insisted on his son restoring all of it to the Pandavas.

But his villain son was not content to let things be. He challenged Yudhishtira to a second round, with the stipulation that this time both parties must abide by the result. History repeated itself, and the Pandavas, under the terms previously agreed upon, had to leave the country along with Draupadi, barehanded, remain in banishment for 12 years and after that for one year incognito. If at the end of the 13th year the incognito remained unpierced, they were to get their kingdom back.

It is an exciting and very long story in the Mahabharata. But, in a nutshell, at the successful termination of the 13th year, Yudhishtira asked the Kaurava ruler to hand over Indraprastha. Duryodhana countered with a challenge – you have to win it on a battlefield, if at all. The Pandavas tried their best to settle peacefully even on the basis of self-sacrifice, but their cousin was adamant. Dhrtarashtra connived at his son’s rascality this time, and the Pandavas had no option but to fight it out.

Dhrtarashtra was eager to be kept in touch with all that was happening on the famous battlefield of Kurukshetra (which has subsequently witnessed several crucial battles that have decided India’s fate from time to time). Vyasa asked Sanjaya, a companion of the king, to sit beside him and describe the incidents that happened, with the help of a gift which enabled him to see and hear everything that occurred and was said on the battlefield.

The armies are ready to start, and Dhrtarashtra asks Sanjaya. “O Sanjaya, tell me...”

About Yoga

You will come across several terms in the Gita which have more than one definite meaning. It is a handicap as well as an excellence of Sanskrit that there are hundreds of words in it which can economically serve several purposes, often quite at variance with one another. In the pre-printing days it made for much saving of energy and time; it also prevented the mere dilettante from meddling with the precious and delicately balanced knowledge of the transcendental and disastrously misusing it. That is why the study of the Vedas was theoretically and traditionally confined to the Brahman and Kshatriya groups who had to be considerably learned, by virtue of their professions, and who had the necessary training to fix a particular meaning of a term in a particular context; the chief amongst such words was yoga, the protean word which serves many purposes, and which is used by us indiscriminately even now. Let us fix it here.

Literally, yoga means joining up, union of one thing or idea or circumstance with another. In the spiritual field its primary meaning is union, or conjunction, or merger of the soul with Brahman-absolute, or qualified as Ishvara (God). Derivatively, it has also come to mean a method by which such consummation can be brought back. The Gita uses the term in several of its nuances, and that is why the book is best learned personally from an adept teacher who has himself been trained in the line of gurus who are known to be steeped in lore. Yet, one can do it by oneself too, to an extent, for its study, however unmethodical, can never go in vain.

The principal use of the term is allied here to Karma-yoga or the method of approach through selfless action in a spirit of pure unmotivated self-sacrifice, in full knowledge and assurance of the goal to which the yoga must lead. The pursuit of this way results in cleansing of the mind of ego, of the I-me-mine-complex. But an ability to concentrate is necessary in the game. That is supplied by Bhakti-yoga, the path or marga of devotion. Both of these fall within the God-Brahman periphery. The combined assault of these two weapons – cleansed heart and concentration – must necessarily result in carrying the citadel of the

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About Yoga



Inana-yoga, the path of pure knowledge, where Karma and Bhakti become almost irrelevant and even hindrances; it is the Upanishad way, leading directly to the great merger. The connotations of Brahman have been hinted at elsewhere in these prefatory notes. Besides this, yoga is a well known term for a disciplinary course of mind and body. It is a useful adjunct to spiritual studies. The full name of this yoga is the Ashtanga (eightfold) Yoga of Patanjali. The spiritual uses of some of its disciplines are often approvingly referred to in the Gita. There is also the Hatha-yoga, the physical exercise part of which has gained a remarkable hold on the western mind; but it is not quite relevant here.

Besides this, every chapter-head in the Gita mentions a particular “yoga” as its particular theme. There it just means “method”, and no more.

Other such terms will be dharmā, Brahman etc. We shall cross these bridges when we come to them in the text itself.

Dramatis Personae

The Gita is a dialogue between Krshna and Arjuna. They are the main characters of the Mahabharata. Here they symbolise the Spirit and the Soul respectively. In fact they together constitute but one unit, the jiva-Atman, or the soul-spirit, or the Man. The human body is a temple in which this twofold divinity dwells, each of its constituents seemingly completely different from the other, yet inseparable as one. The jiva or soul is the traveller, and the Atman is the informing Spirit which enables it to exist and function. The Spirit in its cosmic form is God; and in their essence, the jiva and “Creation” and God himself, are no less than the Spirit or transcendental Brahman, also called parama-Atman or Super-Spirit. The term Atman stands for this Brahman spirit as manifested in the individual as well as in the cosmos, as their very existence, their very consciousness, their very natural pleasure in being alive and existent. These three factors individually and collectively, signify Brahman; the triple unit is designated Sat-Chit-Ananda, without any of which, nothing can be.

Arjuna is the human soul, representing the ordinary human mortal, Krshna is his conscience, his chetana or “being-alive-and-consciousness”, and the soul’s never failing guide-philosopher-friend; in fact, its own true essence, its very own true eternal Self, wherein it, the world, and God dissolve into the singularity called Brahman.

Every person is thus twin-faceted, but no one is aware of the company of his divine partner, except the rare one who really knows what is what and what is not. All the rest of us regard ourselves in our ignorance as earthly and helpless jiva-souls, with God as a separate entity – the autocratic master who holds us in thrall and dwells somewhere in space – the unknown, and unknowable arbiter of our fate. But Indian philosophy puts the soul-spirit in its proper perspective as being the jiva-Atman, sort of Siamese twins, or something more wonderful still, the singular two.

A conscientious man never thinks, acts or speaks, except in consultation with the Krshna-principle, Atman, whom religions can



conceive only as God. This conscientious human or Arjuna always has, or must have, as his constant companions and aides, four principles, without which he cannot function adequately. They are the four “brothers” of every Arjuna, to wit, Yudhishthira, Bhima, Nakula and Sahadeva as already mentioned. These are the five symbolic Pandavas.

Yudhi-shthira: Yudhi (= in the battle or struggle of life), shthira (= steadfast), the principle of steadfastness in all circumstances of life known as dharma, or sense of righteous duty, it is the chief principle which at all times stands a wise man in good stead, and helps keep his head above the stifling waters of grief and the awful feeling of being lost – of not belonging, which so very very often and so grievously haunt us people. It or he is the eldest of the five, and the rest, however restive, impatient and self-willed, must conform to its exacting standards, if the paradise is not to be lost.

Next in importance is Bhima, the principle of strength, vital energy, the breath-principle. If a man’s breathing were to flag, all of him is immediately in the soup, helpless, infructuous, mentally, physically, morally. So the seeker of truth has to be strong and healthy in mind and body. Bereft of this factor, even dharma droops.

The third is Arjuna, the soul-spirit, the monarch who props and supports the above two and the succeeding two also. He, of course, is the central figure, the hero of the drama.

The fourth, Nakula, is principle of beauty, love and likeability. The word literally means “without a special family or clan of his own”, i.e. one who has the whole of humanity for his family, who loves all and is loved by all. And love does rule the roost, doesn’t it though? The seeker of truth cannot be anything but that; else he is not what he may believe himself to be. The principle is called priyatva or “lovableness”. Does this require further comment?

And the last but by no means the least of the inseparable in the divinity-conscious man, is Sahadeva, literally, “one who lives with the gods”, i.e. various human faculties and the principles which govern them, as well as with the various sciences and lores without which



successful life functions become impossible. It means a good working acquaintance with matters affecting one's health and the rightful needs of the body, as also with unseen forces which affect a person in various ways.

This quintuplet does not dwell alone and in peace in the human body. They have an inevitable host of unwelcome but inherited partners, who constitute the other side of the soul. The righteous principles are few, countable on the fingers of one hand, five only; but the unrighteous are a legion, symbolically, a hundred. They are all first cousins, proceeding from the same ancestor, Shantanu, meaning "alrightness" of the bodies, mental and physical. This constitutes the basic desire for happiness, which leads to man's irresistible urge to do. (In Sanskrit it is termed kr, meaning to do, of which the command derivation is kuru.) This being the root of all human activity, the whole of human kind, which is symbolically represented by the kuru clan who are participants in the war. Their motto is Kuru or Thou-shalt-do. But "doing" has two aspects, the righteous and the otherwise. The righteous is governed and disciplined by the four factors named above while the other set of doing tendencies is that of the unprincipled, undisciplined pursuit of bestially selfish ends.

Shantanu had a son, Bhishma, the mighty power of celibacy, wisdom and experience; and by another wife he had two grandsons, Pandu or valour qualified by moral and spiritual considerations, whose sons were the five Pandavas; and Dhrtarashtra (or the tendency of deliberately blind pursuit of selfish ends), its otherwise type. That is why the latter's progeny of 100 sons were just Kurus or Kauravas, while the sons of Pandu, though lineally and traditionally Kuru, were not so designated because of their moral twist, and were therefore popularly known as sons of Pandu or Pandavas, to differentiate them from their cousins, the unscrupulous Kauravas.

These Kauravas, who stand for the flock of evil tendencies, have self-expressive names, the eldest being Duryodhana (Dur means unfair, unrighteous, and yodhana or "in the fight called life") in direct contrast to the eldest Pandava Yudhishtira; and so on for the rest of them. The two cousin sets fight for the kingdom of happiness in the same



battlefield, the human body. It is the eternal war.

Drona was the great teacher who trained both the kingly Kuru branches in the arts of war and peace. He stands for efficiency and mastery. Bhishma the celibate grandsire symbolises eldestness, experience and moral authority. These two, and several other factors extremely effective in life, sided with Duryodhana the usurper either for bread-considerations or out of a mistaken sense of loyalty, as they mostly do in this work-a-day world. But they failed to tick, as in the circumstances they were inevitably on the losing side, for the simple but adequate reason that they had aligned themselves with an unrighteous cause. The moral is, in life, even the greatest virtues possessed by the wrongdoer fail to save him from disaster.

Sanjaya the faithful charioteer of Dhrtarashtra, stands for the true adviser and friend, or the gift of secondary vision, also called the sixth sense, which instinctively presents to the person concerned a true and unbiased picture of every situation which confronts him; or, say for faithful reportage.

Thus, the Gita is in fact the intimate life-struggle of every single man and woman with a conscience.

Chapter I On Arjuna's Grief

Dhrtarashtra

1. On the field of battle, at Kurukshetra where righteousness and worldly values contend (for supremacy) tell me, O Sanjaya, what did my sons and the Pandavas do, locked as they are in combat?

Sanjaya

2. Viewing the Pandava army arrayed in battle-formation, Duryodhana approached the Acharya and spake to him thus:

Duryodhana

3. Behold, O Acharya, the mighty forces of the Pandavas, set to strategic formation by your own clever pupil, the son of Drupada.

The Acharya is, of course, Dronacharya, the great guru, who has chosen to side with the ruling king out of a sense of fidelity, due to patronage. But being quite conscious of the fact that the cause of his party was not right, he was heavy of heart, at what appeared to him to be an obligatory duty. This made him unwilling to talk, and a bit sullen too.

Duryodhana was well aware of the cause of his reticence, and made an effort to thaw his mood by paying him the compliment of taking him into confidence and consulting him at the very outset of the fight, even though the C-in-C was Bhishma. At the same time, he could not resist the temptation of having a sly dig at the fact that Dharshta-dyumna, the Pandava C-in-C, was one of the favourite pupils of the guru in the art of war at the royal college, even though his father, Drupada, was Drona's own sworn enemy.



Finding Drona unresponsive, Duryodhana tried to be more conciliatory:

4. **Here (we see) wielders of the bow in battle like Bhima, Arjuna, Yuyudhana, Virata and Drupada, all of them maharathis.**

An army in those days consisted of padati, or the infantry, rathi, or the chariot-cavalry, maharathi, or the super-chariot cavalry, and ati-rathi, or the chariot-warriors, each of whom was equal to a hundred maharathis. There were of course ranks in between these. The speaker proceeds to enumerate other reputed enemy leaders who could not but be taken note of:

5. **Also Dhrshta-ketu, Chekitana, and the valiant king of Kashi, Kunti-bhoja the Purujit, and Shaibya the lion among men.**
6. **And Yudhamanyu the super-valorous, and the energetic Uttamaujas and Subhadra's son, as well as the (five) sons of Draupadi, all of whom are maharathis.**

Subhadra, Krishna's sister, was wedded to Arjuna. Her son was the celebrated Abhimanyu, the man of terrible wrath and prowess in battle. Duryodhana has named eighteen of the Pandava commanders. The figure of 18 appears to be apocalyptic in ancient literature, for, the Mahabharata has 18 books, the Gita has the same number of chapters and the warriors named on the Pandava side are 18. There are many such eighteens elsewhere also, including the number of factors which constitute human personality: five elements (space, air, heat, fluidity and solidity) plus the five senses of cognition (namely hearing or ears, seeing or eyes, smelling or the nose, tasting or the tongue, and touching or the skin) plus the five organs of action (viz. speaking (the tongue again), grasping-giving (hands), coming-going (feet), sexing and evacuating) plus the inner faculties of (i) thinking or mind (ii) deciding or intelligence, and (iii) ego, totalling 18.

Drona stands silent even at this description of the enemy's formidable



forces. He knew that bullies are inherently cowards, and his party was the bully in this case. In actual fact the Kaurava army had eleven divisions of seasoned and highly reputed commanders, as compared to the Pandava's seven divisions with less famous leaders. This incidentally, makes again for the figure 18, which was the number of all divisions involved in the war. Drona saw that conscience had already started making a coward of Duryodhana, and so all that he apparently chose to do was to shrug his shoulders a little. Duryodhana, whistling as it were to prop his own morale, made then a show of satisfaction at the sight of his own army, and started to name his big guns:

7. **O great Brahmana! We too have heroes in our ranks; just for your token information I shall name to you a few of the outstanding ones, the leaders of my hosts.**
8. **First, you sir, then Bhishma, Karna and Krpa the undefeated in battle of arms (or of words), Ashvathama, Vikarna, as well as Saumadatti.**

But it sounded rather hollow, and he trailed off into silence at the seventh count. Still he had another lame go at it:

9. **Oh, there are many other braves who have signed away their lives for my sake, skilled in the use of various arms, and all of them experts in warfare.**

But even that did not sound reassuring, and he could no longer contain himself. Drona still held his silence, and the speaker made a last attempt to draw his active sympathy by a direct appeal to his heart in the form of a confession of his own discomfiture:

10. **And yet, alas, my armies though commanded by Bhishma, is (to my mind) inadequate, while theirs, though under the protection of Bhima appears to be fully adequate.**

Adequate, of course, to win the war. But even his looking ill did not



prevail, and the “belle dame” Drona stood sans merci, unmoved. Discomfited and chagrined, Duryodhana gave up, and pointedly ignoring him, he turned to attract the eye of Bhishma, who, after all, being his kith and kin, was better calculated to come to the rescue of his uneasy morale.

- 11. Attention, all ye officers of divisions stationed at various strategic points as they should be! All of you, sirs, will concentrate on the personal safety of (the supreme commander) Bhishma on all fronts!**

Jilted by Drona, he let him thereby know that the sun did not rise only on his crowing, and there were people quite capable and dependable to meet the situation. With this somewhat superfluous admonition to his officers, he lapsed into uneasy silence. But Bhishma took the hint:

Sanjaya

- 12. The patriarch amongst the Kurus, and grandsire of the clan, on hearing that, roared out his leonine challenge, and blew hard on his frightful conch, instilling some thrill into him.**

Sanjaya proceeds with his reportage of the events as he saw them talkie-television-wise, with impartial composure:

- 13. On that, conches and horns, drums and bugles etc., suddenly thumped and blared, and the tumultuous din they made was terrific.**
- 14. And then, riding their great chariot to which were yoked pure white steeds, Madhava (Krshna) and (Arjuna) the Pandava blew blasts on their own divine conches.**

The challenge was duly taken up, and counter-challenge was promptly endorsed in a big way. Listen to the frightening list of the great challengers and their reputed conches, each of which had an



individuality and a significant repute of its own:

15. **Hrshiksha on the Pancha-janya, Dhananjaya on the Deva-datta, and Bhima of the doughty deeds and ever-hungry maw on his powerful Paundra, let out their (fierce) conch-blasts.**

Hrshiksha, one of the numerous names by which Krshna is known, means "the master of senses", symbolically the Absolute Ultimate which invests the senses of all the creatures and enables them to function as they do. It would be opportune here to point out a peculiarity of the Gita. Krshna like every other mortal, was the divine Atman principle as his basic Self, and he was totally aware of the fact, as a matter of personal experience, while the rest of us ordinary mortals are not. This complete awareness of the divine in himself made him feel the conscious and natural master that he was – embodied godhood as it were, or, let us say, God Himself. The rest of us, not having spiritually evolved to those heights, dare not even pretend to be such. Krshna the superman is presented as speaking in the Gita under that lofty inspiration. He quite often lapses into normal human idiom, as he should, but wherever the occasion so requires, Godness itself seems to make him its uninhibited vocal vehicle. This is not a unique phenomenon; for down the ages messiahs and masters are known to have quite often lost the consciousness of being just mortal humans, soared into transcendental states of mind, and spoken inspired words that seemed to come straight from "above". This happens even now, and the fact needs no verification. We shall meet with this situation again and again as we go on.

And, Dhananjaya, also one of Arjuna's numerous epithets, means winner of wealth, literally worldly, and symbolically, moral-cum-spiritual. As far as possible we shall henceforth avoid most of such euphemious epithets and confine ourselves to proper names.

About the names of the conches: Pancha-janya means that which represents the voice of five forms of life, i.e. the whole creation, the cosmic voice. Deva-datta means God-given, signifying nearness to God. Paundra is power.



16. **Ananta-vijaya by the son of Kunti, king Yudhishtira, and Sughosha and Mani-pushpaka were sounded by Nakula and Sahadeva.**

Ananta-vijaya means unfailling victory, which dharna has a claim to. Sughosha means pleasant-sounding, and unquestionable characteristic of love; and Mani-pushpaka the mystical, would express the Sahadeva quality.

17. **The super-archer king of Kashi, maharathi Shikhandi, Dhrshta-dyumna, Virata and Satyaki the unconquered;**
18. **Drupada, Draupadi's sons, and the mighty-armed Saubhadra, all of them started sounding their conches from all quarters of the field, O King.**
19. **The roar thereof scared the hearts of the enemy by its thunderous blast which shook the earth and filled the sky.**

This signals the effective entry of the central figures of the dialogue on the stage.

20. **Seeing the army of Dhrtarashtra well set, prepared for the fray and ready to strike, Arjuna addressed Krshna, lifting up his bow purposefully; and –**
21. **as he did so, he addressed Krshna thus –**

Arjuna

O Achyuta, please position my chariot right between the two armies –

22. **While I carefully make out all my kinsmen who have foregathered here, and know for sure alongside of whom I have to wage the forthcoming**



war,

23. – and while I mark out those who have ganged up here spoiling for a fight, eager to please the evil-minded Duryodhana by doing his bidding in battle.

The seed of the dialogue is duly sown here, and suitable background is laid for Arjuna's natural-sounding emotional upsurge, a very normal human effusion which has been made to provide the theme for an incomparable essay into a life-enveloping philosophy.

Sanjaya

24. So instructed by the disciplined Arjuna, O Bharata! Krshna stationed the superb war-chariot between both the armies,
25. – confronting all the princes headed by Bhishma and Drona, and said: "O Son of Prtha, have a good look at the Kurus gathered here."
26. And Arjuna beheld standing there, fathers as well as grandfathers, teachers, maternal uncles, brothers and cousins, sons, grandsons, friends,
27. – as also fathers-in-law, intimate pals encompassing members of both armies. Seeing all these kinsmen thus, the son of Kunti –
28. – overwhelmed by compassion, spoke these distressed words:

Arjuna

Looking at my people gathered here to fight (one another) –

29. My limbs sag, my mouth feels dry, my body



trembles, and my hair stands on end!

We have used the word “compassion” for the (original) Kṛpa, as its literal translation. But compassion can be of two kinds: one, of the Christ-Buddha genre, arising out of an unconditioned feeling of love for all creatures irrespective of associations; and the other, arising out of personal and family considerations. In the latter sense, Kṛpa certainly implies an unworthy narrowness, selfish of motive, the sort of thing which is in direct contradiction to and militates against the soul's evolution into higher echelons of divinity; something that is very much less than an acclaimable virtue. The word is used here in the latter sense as not conforming with Arjuna's Arjuna-hood. The word Arjuna means white, innocent, unblemished; and such a one, of all people, ought to know better. But in unvarnished fact, most of even the best of men fall into this error in similar circumstances, when the Atman part of man is overwhelmed by its close companion, the sordid jiva-tendencies. Let this be an eye-opener to every seeker of truth who really wants to be honest to himself.

30. **The Gandiva slips out of my grip; my skin is searingly hot; I cannot stand steadily, and my mind is in a whirl.**

The morbidly human weakness has struck. What a fall, from the gallant warrior for righteousness to this specimen of self-pitying sordidness! This mood now starts working on his mind, seeking and even inventing excuses to justify itself, which is a very common attitude among unenlightened humans with horizons not reaching beyond I, me, mine. This includes almost all of us. But this must be put right, if paradise is to be won. In the meanwhile the devil in Arjuna starts quoting:

31. **O Keshava (the Blissful)! I see evil omens too; I can see no good flowing to us from killing our people in battle.**

He now forgets that the fight was decided upon on the sporting grounds of justice, fairplay or dharmā, and not out of greed for a kingdom. But he slips from the high to the base motives, as if that was what he was



fighting for and starts protesting against a figment of his own carped imagination:

32. I desire neither victory, nor kingdom, nor various forms of (temporal) happiness. What on earth is the use of a kingdom or of enjoyments, or even of being alive itself?
33. Those for whom kingdom, enjoyment and happiness were desired by us, are standing here on the battlefield, having abandoned their very lives and their wealth too.
34. Teachers, fathers, as well as grandfathers, maternal brothers, fathers-in-law, brothers-in-law, relatives and friends.
35. I would not care to slay them, O Destroyer of the wicked, even if I were slain myself; not even to win an empire over the three worlds, let alone an earthly kingdom.

He warms up to his theme, even to wildish statements that he himself would reject in a mood of balance. But who doesn't when he finds his special ground slipping away from under his mundane feet?

36. O Destroyer of the cycle of births and deaths! What pleasure can one derive from killing these sons of Dhrtarashtra, only sin can overtake us as a result of our slaying them, even though they be oppressive tyrants.
37. Therefore, it is not fit and proper that we kill the Kauravas who are our brothers. How can we be happy in the killing of our own people?
- 38-39. With their minds being clouded by greed, they may be expected not to realize the enormity of the sin



brought about by destruction of the clan and by treachery to friends. Please tell me how is it possible for us, who have a very clear idea of what the crime of tribal slaughter implies, to know how to turn our backs on this sin.

40. Destruction of a clan brings about the cessation of ageless clan-tradition; and destruction of traditional disciplines can result only in unrighteousness taking over.
41. Kṛshna! Upsurge of unrighteousness brings about promiscuity in women, and once women go astray, a crop of bastards is sure to be raised.
42. The bastard is doomed to hell only, and even the manes of the clan-destroyers as well the clan itself, deprived of the ritual of oblation-offerings, suffer the inevitable fall.
43. As a result of these crimes committed by the killers of a clan who are responsible for the production of bastards, the racial characteristics and timeless customs of the tribe get uprooted in all respects.
44. Those thus bereft of the clan's customs and traditions inevitably become denizens of hell – who knows for how long! This is what we have been hearing down the generations (– and it is not a mere figment of my imagination –).

Having delivered himself of this pseudo religious creed-cum-custom oration, the bemused speaker proceeds to the peroration of self-flagellation:

45. *Alas, we have prepared ourselves to commit a great crime in getting ready to kill our own*



kinsmen, out of greed, for the pleasures of owning a kingdom.

46. It would be really a very good thing for me if (instead of my dying fighting) the Kauravas slay me, unretaliating and unarmed in battle!

Sanjaya

47. Having said this on the field of battle, Arjuna, who was then standing in the chariot, was so overcome by grief and distress that he put his bow and arrow aside and flopped down in the seat.

Chapter 11 On Knowledge

Sanjaya

1. To him so overwhelmed by compassion and full of lament with his eyes brimming over with tears, Krshna said:

Krshna

2. How is it that you have fallen into this dirty mood which is so unworthy of a man of culture and which can lead to nothing but grief and infamy, at a most inopportune moment?
3. Do not succumb to cowardice, Arjuna; it does not become you at all; away with this faint-heartedness, and terror as you are to enemies, be up and doing!

Arjuna

4. But how can I in retaliation (even) in combat aim my shafts at worshipful Bhishma and Drona?

He conveniently forgets the fact that all this was carefully weighed and decided upon long before the declaration of war. Sudden onsets of sentiments of the wrong sort befuddle a man's wits grievously. This is just the weakness which Krshna wants all conscientious and intelligent Arjunas to get rid of, as rightful heirs to the state of divinity. The Gita revolves around this theme.

5. It is better to live a beggar's life, not slaying these elders; having slain them out of greed for wealth, we would be enjoying only blood-stained pleasures.



6. *Moreover, we cannot say with certainty what is the best course to follow, whether we shall conquer or be conquered. Again, here stand before us the Kauravas, after killing whom we will not have any zest left for life.*

The secret is out; fear has entered his heart; and the mighty man of action, not wishing to admit the shameful fact, tries to draw the wool over his own as well as Krshna's eyes, by wishy-washy excuses. This is not unusual with most of us, most of the time. But there is one fellow who may be on occasion deliberately side-stepped, but is never really taken in. His name is Krshna the Conscience. Knowing human nature as he did, Krshna maintained silence. He wanted Arjuna to first empty himself. Arjuna felt being let down. But he did realise the confusion his mind had fallen into, and desperately appealed for succour to one who had never failed him before:

7. (I know that) my normal nature has been thrown into disarray by this fit of pettiness; I am in complete confusion about my right duty, and I ask you to come to my rescue. Please tell me exactly what is good for me. I am your disciple seeking refuge in you, command me!
8. Even if I were to win for myself uncontested and unhampered sovereignty of the earth, aye, even the empire of the gods, I see no possibility of finding anything that could allay this, my intense sorrow and mortification of my senses!

Sanjaya

9. Having thus unburdened himself to Krshna, Arjuna the ever-vigilant declared, 'I will not fight', and lapsed into silence.
10. Then Krshna spoke, mockingly as it were, to him (the hero) who was now slobbering, right in the



middle of the two battle-arrayed armies.

What a contretemps! A tough captain of war, crying, where? In the presence of two armies (where all could see him) about to launch into a blood bath! ...Situations inherently of this type do occur often enough in the various fields of human endeavour. But few if any of us have the good fortune, or rather the good sense, to realise that our Krshna is at our elbow too.

The exhortations of the Gita start here, at this point. All the great commentators, taking their cue from Shankara, commence their observations here. Arjuna has now formulated some specific questions which cause painful heart searching in the minds of many thinking humans. The rest of the book answers them. They are (1) having decided upon what one knows to be the right course to follow in life's crises involving one's self-interest in a big measure, is it excusable to recoil from it on mundanely emotional grounds? (2) Is special pleading then justified in respect even of blood-relationships and personal feelings? (3) How far should the dictates of reason and considerations of duty be permitted to prevail over personal and domestic sentiment? (4) What factor diverts a man from the path of righteous duty or dharmā, and creates fundamentally erroneous attitudes and the resultant situations of grief, mortification, bad blood and excessive ups and downs of intense feelings? In very brief (5) How and why has man lost his Paradise, and what should be done to regain it? (6) What part the fiats and dogmas of formulated religions, scriptures and customs, with their notions of heaven, hell, and sin, and God and the devil, and shalls and the shall-nots...may safely be allowed to play, in the thought and conduct of a rational man? (7) And how, and why, and when do these values transcend country, clime, creed and custom?

Krshna

- ii. **You are bemoaning what does not deserve a moan, and spitting out words of wisdom! The true pundit does not permit himself continued grief over the passing away or otherwise of the breath.**



12. **You seem to think that neither I, nor you, nor all these rulers of men present here have been before, and that all of us will not be again.**
13. **Just as the dweller in the body comes by (the cycle of) childhood, youth and dotage (in the present body), so too will he come by another body (after this one has passed away). This matter does not worry the wise man at all.**
14. **Operations of the senses in respect of mundane objects are designed to impart to persons the (dual) feelings of heat and cold, of pleasure and pain; they arise, and depart (– are never reliably constant in their operations –), and are transient. Arjuna, (knowing them as such) tolerate them.**

Heat and cold in the physical sphere, and pleasure and pain in the mental.

15. **The man of wisdom, possessed of sameness in circumstances of both joy and sorrow, whose mind these (ups and downs) fail to distract, has, Arjuna, duly qualified himself for immortality.**
16. **That which is not, can never exist, and that which is, can never not exist. Only the man of spiritual insight can discern the significance of both these situations.**

There is more than meets the eye in this. That thing, or idea or circumstance about which one can never say at any point of time and place: “it is not (or was not, or will not be)”, such as, for instance, can be said of contacts of body-senses with material objects, is, in transcendental values, false. Conversely, that thing the existence of which can never be denied at any point of time, such as one’s sat-chit-ananda Atman, can never not be. The former, the truly non-existent, comprises the whole of this apparent world and its countless constituents, about which the



normal man feels so deeply concerned; and the latter, ever existent, is the only One, It, one's Atman or true self, which, incidentally, is the self of every creature in the world. This cannot be, and is in fact not realised, by almost all of us.

17. **Know That, from which all of this universe has issued forth, to be indestructible. No one can ever put an end to that Immutable.**

On the other hand:

18. **All these (phenomenal appearances) are declared (by the books of knowledge) to be but perishable (material) appearances of the ever-existent and immeasurable One who wears them. Therefore, Arjuna, fight!**

Do your assigned duty for the nonce, by way of a disciplinary exercise, to qualify for the ultimate not doing, the spiritual nature of which will be apparent in due course.

19. **Neither those who believe their Self to be the killer, nor those who regard It as liable to be killed, really know (the truth), that It (– one's Self –) neither kills, nor is ever liable to be killed.**
20. **This One is never born, nor does It ever die; nor does It come into existence and then go out of it; nor will It be born again. This birthless, timeless, eternal, ancient One, cannot be made to die along with (destruction of) the perishable body.**
21. **Tell me, Arjuna, how he (the wise man) who knows this eternal, birthless, immutable One well, can kill whom, or be killed by whom, and how?**

The alleged killer as well as the so-called killed being the same essential stuff of both.



22. Just as a person, casting off a set of old clothes, gets hold of another one, so does the In-dweller of the phenomenal bodies sloughing off the used-up body-frame, proceeds to get into a new one.
23. Weapons can slash It not; fire can scorch It not; water can damp It not; nor can wind ever dry It up.
24. This (Self) is unslashable, unsearable, unwettable as well as undryable; eternal, omnipresent, motionless and immovable, It is timeless.
25. It is held to be incomprehensible (to sense, and unexpressable by them) imponderable (by the mind), and (totally) unamendable. Knowing It to be so, you have no need to make It an object of continual worry.

It is merely human and soul-like to be put out for a while over the death of a near and dear one; but what is less than rational is to continue being so put out. Looking at it from another angle...

26. Even if you feel like regarding It as being always being born and always dying, there is no justification, man of strength as you are, for your grieving so.
27. For, it is inevitable that one who is born, dies, and one who dies be re-born. That being so, it is futile for you to grieve over what cannot be helped.
28. Creatures are unmanifest at first, manifest in the meanwhile and unmanifest again at the end. What is the use of crying over them, when matters stand thus?

So incomprehensible is this immanent Atman-self to the worldly-wise eye, that...



29. **To some It is miraculous, some others speak of It as being most surprising; then there are others who listen to (such talk about) It with great wonder; but even listening thus, no one ever comes to know It.**

The one thing that must be known, so that one may be able to restore to himself the sense of his own divinity which one has somehow mislaid.

30. **In all bodies this eternal Indweller stands unassailable; that is why there is no reason at all for you to be anxious over all (i.e. any) of this.**

Switching over to the mundane outlook in order to buttress the argument and to prove its relevance in all circumstances...

31. **Even considering the (personal) aspect of your (social) duty, you cannot be justified in this turn-about. A Kshatriya can have no objective more worthy of himself than a righteous war.**

For, the scriptures which you had just been slinging at me, have themselves this to say...

32. **The righteous war of this sort which has come to you all of a sudden as an open door to paradise, becomes available only to the luckiest of Kshatriyas!**

Why this emphasis on the Kshatriya-ness throughout the Gita? The primary job of this class of this class of society was to be expert in war and politics. The role of the householder citizen in life is that of constant alertness in his struggle for honourable existence of himself as well as his domestic and social circle. It is an undertaking which calls for great circumspection, strategy, political and economic foresight as well as hindsight, physical and mental fitness, and above all, high morale. And these are exactly the qualities demanded of royal Kshatriya (as Gita itself points out in Chapter XVIII). Every conscientious householder has to fill this bill as well as he can; so he too, whatever he might be said to be vis-



à-vis society, is Kshatriya, in a sense higher than even professional soldier's role in public life. This is the rationale of Vyasa (the author) in deciding upon this particular setting for his masterpiece.

To get the most out of this mundane aspect too, Krshna hits back with Arjuna's own weapons...

33. **And now, if you (fail to live up to this scriptural standard and) fail to engage in this war for righteous ends, you will be only reaping sin, by going back on your duty and demolishing your own glorious reputation.**

That is true sin; not unthinking ahimsa which can smack of cowardice. As Gandhi in our days never tired of pointing out, while applying scriptural standards to life's practical situations, one has to honestly and even painfully think out and decide for himself what constitutes true ahimsa of the brave, and, as opposed to it, the spurious one of cowardice which may even quote garbled scriptures.

34. **Moreover, people will sing your eternal shame. Evil repute is more unpalatable than death itself to a man of acclaim and honour.**
35. **These warlords who now hold you in high esteem will of course think that you fled the field, and humiliation will ride you.**
36. **Your traducers will not tire of tongue-flapping, vilifying your valour with unspeakable epithets. Can anything be more culpable than this?**

Krshna continues to rub it in. He now takes up yet another, scriptural aspect, and deals with the matter of sin and hell and heaven which Arjuna had trotted out with such gusto...

37. **If slain, you will win paradise; if victorious, the world will be at your feet. So, awake and arise,**



Arjuna, opting once and for all for war.

38. **So then Arjuna, equating pain with pleasure, loss with gain and defeat with victory, throw yourself wholeheartedly into this campaign; that way you will not be sinning.**
39. **This I have told you about the wise way, on common-sense and intellectual grounds. Listen now to me on the grounds of the yoga (of Karma, the path of action), armed with which you will be able to demolish the bonds of that very karma.**

The main theme of the Gita is the yoga of “action without attachment”, of the spirit of motiveless performance of duties, called Karma-yoga, and sometimes Buddhi-yoga, flowering into Jnana-yoga or the path of transcendental knowledge.

40. **In this, there is no loss of effort; nor is there any scope here for the blemish (of a possibility of backlash) of actions. Aye, even a small dose of this dharma insures a person against great fear.**

Fear of what? Of “what will happen now!” This is in contrast to the loss of effort, plus the incalculable danger of reactions, and doubtfulness about reaping hoped-for results to which the path of witless conformation to scriptural and customary rites, rituals and regulations is subject. Dharma is, of course, right conduct.

41. **Arjuna, there can only be one right direction. It is the waverer who finds himself facing multi-branched and endless alternatives.**

Now comes a biting and powerful castigation of the ritualistic parts which form the bulk of the Vedas, the parts which have spewed most of India’s numerous sects and particularised faiths, and which prompted powerful protests in the form of Buddhism, Jainism and even Sikhism to some extent. In fact, even these parts of the Vedas are symbolic of the



Verities, but the flow of time caused them to be taken literally. Krishna was one of the earliest reformers who protested this unthinking tendency. It indicates how far back in history this reaction against blind ritualism is rooted.

42-43. Blind, indiscriminating and lustful followers of the mere words of the Vedas tend to believe that there is nothing better for them to do (than follow the path of the ritual). They have their sights fixed on Heaven. They speak with gusto, enticing words which are studded with special rites and ceremonies calculated to bring about (nothing better than a prospect of) prosperities and enjoyments.

Enjoyments, in this life and/or in the next one. This can equally apply to similar parts of all scriptures of all peoples.

44. Such slaves of the pleasures of the flesh and material prosperity, whose minds have been bemused (by the tempting words), can never even dream of coming to the right decision.

45. Arjuna, the Vedas (in their ritualistic aspect) have the three gunas as their theme; you must (soar above and beyond them) be free of them as also of the pairs of opposites, and remain always based on sattva, free of the cares of acquisition and maintenance, steadfast in Atman.

The Samkhya is one of the main six systems of Indian philosophy. Several compounds of this system have been accepted by the Gita and by monistic Vedanta itself as useful for understanding the truly mirage-like nature of the world. The Samkhya view is that the whole universe and its contents are no more than uncountable permutations and combinations of the three gunas, or principles of the behaviour of matter as well as of the mind. The first of these, sattva, stands for peace, steadiness, knowledge and balance.



The first base to be captured by the seeker of Truth in his quest, is this trouble-making trinity. The duals are, of course, the pairs of opposites such as good-bad, pain-pleasure, right-wrong, hot-cold and the like, which govern and tyrannise over the minds of all sentient creatures every moment of their lives. From them stem all our restlessness and imbalance, mostly taking the form of an urge for acquisition and anxiety about the safe-keeping of things already acquired – which this verse asks Arjuna to abjure. There will be much more of this further on. Every Arjuna must shake off these shackles first thing, if the peace implied by firm establishment of the mind in Atman and what it signifies, is to be won.

46. **All the particularised specific purposes served by various types of water reservoirs and courses, can be fully served by the all-embracing flood of waters. Similarly, all purposes served by various sections of the Vedas are completely fulfilled for the knower of Brahman.**

This is so for the simple but adequate reason that such a one has no wants and no desires which can confirm the hold of the gunas and the dualities on his mind and cause imbalance. End of desire is the beginning of peace.

47. **The only control you may claim to be able to exercise can refer only to performance of actions, but none whatsoever over the results thereof. So, (the wise thing to do is to) **never allow yourself to harbour motives** (i.e. expectations) **in respect of the outcome of actions.****

One may possibly perform certain actions as one may wish to. But no one can ever expect to successfully mould the outcomes of such actions to his heart's desire. The sole controller of the outcome is entirely something else. This is one of the key-maxims of this philosophy, the practical realisation of which even to the smallest degree can save a person an infinity of troubles. See the 40th verse.



48. **Therefore do your work with your mind well established in yoga, abandoning mental attachment as well as anxious expectations and regarding win or lose with sameness. Sameness is called yoga.**

Here yoga can mean Karma-yoga, or alternatively, “equating the soul with Atman, which is sameness”. Swami Ramatirtha says: “The desire for success must die in our work before achieving success. Oftentimes the very unrest for future success causes failure.” The term can also mean, linking up of the mind with the notion of sameness, and its simultaneous divorce from the feeling of personal involvement.

49. **Action (by itself) is inferior by far to exercise of intellectual discrimination. Give yourself up to and seek refuge in this sense of discrimination, for, the motive-ridden person stands humiliated.**

Motive constitutes crime. The principle thing about doing something, i.e. one’s duty, is not so much the actual performance of a deed as such, as the discipline and the evolutionary advancement of the soul-spirit towards Perfection, i.e. Atmanhood, which flows from this attitude of detachment. Motivated action is liable to failure, or to its diluted form, dissatisfaction with the outcome for one reason or another, even when it is on the lines of the doer’s wishes. Both situations lead to depression, which is humiliation. This spirit of mental detachment is bound to save the person concerned much ado and heart-burning.

50. **In the course of his present existence, the man of knowledge abandons notions of both goodness and badness in respect of actions. Therefore, apply yourself to the yoga attitude. Yoga means true proficiency in works.**

An action which is a must, in order to bring no or the least possible mental upset in its wake, should be regarded as just a matter of duty, no more or less, to be serenely performed, irrespective of the nature of its outcome, mundanely beneficial or otherwise to its doer. For, that way of



doing things constitutes true proficiency in performance in-as-much-as it (i) contributes materially to success owing to the calmness of performance it ensures, (ii) whatever the outcome, the doer is minimally liable to upset of equanimity. Both these benefits are of course denied to one who feels very personally involved in the outcome of an effort. That way, the Karma-yoga attitude is immensely beneficial even in the material aspects of life.

51. **Men of discernment who renounce all desires in respect of the possible results of effort, thereby earning immunity from the shackles of rebirth, pass on to that state of mind which is proof against distress.**

52. **When your discerning intelligence succeeds in crossing the bogs of moha (will-o'-the-wisps), you will have earned release from the (tyrannies of) "We heard this", "We were told of this", etc.**

Moha means a state of confoundedness which precludes right decision, and which gives rise to confusing ideas about what is duty and what is its opposite; a condition which had so plagued Arjuna, and by way of authority for his misconceptions, he had to resort to such lame subterfuges as speaking of having heard about it from predecessors and what not. This is referred to here. This is the type of mental confusion and illusion to which the normal man is subject in similar circumstances.

53. **You can be firmly established in Karma-yoga only when your mind, so confounded erstwhile by the medley of Vedic texts, becomes steadily fixed in samadhi.**

Samadhi means calm contemplation. Arjuna feels more like himself now, and a new slant begins to replace his despondency. There is something here, he feels, which must be looked into. So he asks an interesting question about what such outlook connotes:



Arjuna

54. Tell me, what sort of idiom a man of wisdom balanced in samadhi is prone to use. How does the wise man behave, rest, walk, talk?

In short, what are the signs to recognise him by?

Krshna

55. A man can be called based in wisdom only when he has completely abandoned all desires that infest the mind, Arjuna, and rests content within his own Self by himself.

“His own Self” here means his own essential sat-chit-ananda Atman-self as distinct from his physical and mental selves, which are but the willy-nilly slaves of Maya (– mental confusions and illusions proceeding from ignorance of one’s true self, and all sorts of consequential wishes and wants and modes and moods which bedevil the mind, mostly making of life a misery). “By himself” means, by his own personal effort.

56. The wise man, unperturbed in situations of grief and free of desire (for more) in those of pleasure, who has banished attachment, fear and anger from his mind, is known as a Muni (i.e. in control of his mind and senses).
57. His wisdom can truly be called well-established, who is free of attachment everywhere, and who is never subject to exultation on something good coming his way, nor to resentment when faced by disagreeabilities.
58. His wisdom can be said to be infallible, who, like the tortoise withdrawing its limbs within itself, has withdrawn his senses from their objects.



i.e., eyes from lust for pleasing sights, ears from craving for pleasant sounds, and the like.

- 59. The object of the senses may and can remain withdrawn from a person who is bent upon abstention; but they leave their taste behind. And this taste also vanishes on realisation of the Ultimate – and in no other way.**

It is this “taste” or addiction which constitutes the crime here. Real withdrawal is not merely physical. It has to be primarily, mental, and well-reasoned. Mere physical activity may not constitute action, in this context, with its inevitable reaction, if the mind has not co-operated with the body there, i.e. if the action be not deliberately and wishfully done or even condoned. And an action, a thought, conceived wishfully by the mind, does not necessarily cease to be an effectively backlashing action just because, from some reason or the other, it fails to be physically implemented. In fact, it is the mental action which always counts as actual action, while there are some types of physical action which do not taint the soul at all. This argument is the foundation of the Gita’s teaching. Karma-yoga is squarely based on its proper understanding. It will dominate the Gita from the next chapter onwards.

- 60. Even a man of discernment in spiritual values trying hard (for Moksha or Release), Arjuna, is likely to have his mind dragged away (into error of incontinence) by the senses which are always intent on sabotaging (the soul’s best interests).**
- 61. Bringing all of them under control, stand firm in yoga, devoted to Me (the Brahman-principle). Only his wits can be called wise who has his senses under control.**

The pronouns I, Me and Mine which will now occur repeatedly, far from being expressions of egoistic conceit, refer to the mood of Divinity to which the Teacher is oftentimes involuntarily exalted when holding forth on transcendental values. This exaltation can be deliberate too on



suitable occasions.

Now comes a set of concluding verses, which along with some other similar passages, have become favourites of Gita-lovers:

62-63. Thinking of sense-objects, a man starts becoming sensitive to their lure; allurements lead to covetousness; covetousness results in anger; anger breeds false illusions; illusions cause lapse of memory (of one's true Self); such forgetfulness results in loss of the discerning faculty, and with discernment gone, the person is doomed (– as a rational being).

How does desire lead to anger? (1) The desired object may not be attained, or if attained, it may fall short of expectation; (2) it is in the nature of things that the most coveted object, once acquired, loses much of its flavour by familiarity. It may also become a source of much botheration; or it may be lost, damaged, stolen, prove to be unfit for use etc. Anger can, and mostly does, play havoc with all sorts of values – mental, moral, social..., and conjures up all kinds of unreasonable attitudes. Once this balance of mind is lost, the person concerned forgets what? What he really is – a human being, a respectable member of society, an inherently divine creature, a son of God, with responsibilities of various kinds etc. This state of mind demolishes what may be left of his faculty of rational discernment (buddhi); and then, the collapse is complete; he becomes bestial. Paradise is lost! And now we have the other side of the medal:

64. But the man of self-control scouring the various fields (of enjoyment) with his senses cleansed of preferences and prejudices (i.e. of likes and dislikes), certainly attains the state of bliss.

He reaches the promised land; who? Not necessarily the man of voluntary or forced physical continence, but certainly the one who behaves normally in respect of dealings of senses with sense-objects, with his sense-urges well under control, indulging in such satisfaction



not under the pressure of passion, but, circumspectly, dealing with situations on their social, moral and spiritual merits.

65. **This blissful condition would exorcise all his (sense of) sorrows; for, the discerning faculty of Reason of the man whose mind is thus seized of blissful composure, soon rests in complete peace.**

i.e., in happy equilibrium, free of emotional stresses and strains:

66. **This faculty of discernment is out of reach of one whose mind is not so composed in yoga; nor has he an inclination for it. Nor can there be peace of mind for one who has no (such) inclination; and how can a person without composure be happy?**

You cannot try sufficiently hard for anything to which your mind is not inclined – particularly to this kind of unfamiliar happiness. What prevents inclination? Uncontrolled urge of senses. By whom? By one who could not care less for the to-him hard-driving discipline of Karma-yoga. Why? Because he has not yet had enough of the life's rough-and-tumble and wants more. On the contrary...

67. **The sapience of a person is carried away out of the course, like a boat on the waters by a gale, if his mind follows the senses in indulgence in their fields of activity.**

For, the mind is the captain in command of the ship of Man's state. If it chooses to succumb to the siren voice of sense-indulgence, the ship is doomed: see verses 62-63.

68. **Therefore, the mind of only such a man can be called well-settled and wise, who has successfully turned his senses away from the (lure of) their respective pastures in all respects.**

69. **The man of self-control is awake at what is night-**



time to all creatures, and what is day-time to all creatures is night-time to the muni.

The man of self-control is vigilant about matters about which the world is or chooses to be ignorant, such as knowledge and realisation of Atman. Conversely the wise man chooses to ignore and pass over matters in which the world is fully awake, i.e. interested, such as the carnal ways of mundane life.

70. **Only he can attain (this) peace of mind in whom all wishes and desires are sublimated (without rippling his poise), in the same way as rivers flow into the sea which, though being continuously replenished, remains ever unmoved and undisturbed. Not so the desire-ridden one.**
71. **Only he attains total peace of mind who, abjuring all desires, goes about wantless, free of me-and-mine, ego-less.**
72. **Arjuna, this is the state of Brahmanhood, acquiring which the aspirant is never confounded, and established in which right upto the end, is qualified for the nirvana of Brahman.**

The Vedanta way is the way to speed up the process. Vedanta is a part of the Vedas, and the word means “the aim and final goal of the Vedas”. Brahman is the state of Perfection to which every soul-spirit inevitably evolves, and moksha or nirvana is total merger in this Brahman, or being It, here and now. This is very different from the post-mortem emancipation or release advocated and promised by all theological constructs called religions, by various names all of which take the form of the soul’s residence after death in a heaven, or svarga, or behishta etc., and of the privilege of God’s eternal servitude there. Vedanta is not a theology, but a rationally worked out darshana i.e., a practical spiritual philosophy of the here and hereafter, to be actually experienced in person. It expresses encouraging sympathy with religious credos, not as man’s final goal, but as a way to it.

Living the Gita
Chapter II: On Knowledge



The second chapter closes on this note, encouraging us, Arjunas, to want to know more, and also to know how to utilise the knowledge in practical life.

Chapter III On Works

Arjuna

1. **If you really believe that buddhi (– reason –) is superior to works, then, why do you insist that I must engage in this horrendous action?**

Cf. Chapter II.49, 50. But Arjuna had still not recovered from his paranoia, and the message of Chapter II.39 onwards, particularly 47 and 48, did not click in his churned-up mind; as often happens to people. Vyasa has made the superman of the Mahabharata a pawn for our instruction here, equating him with us ordinary men of conscience, and correctly shows him as being confused, questioning naively, consoled, reassured...

2. **You, seem to be, as it were, confounding my reason with ambiguous words. Please tell me succinctly and specifically just the one thing which will do me real good.**

He seeks clarification. The confusion is between the two ways referred to in II, viz. the yoga of action, and that of knowledge. He has not yet grasped the idea that they are not airtight compartments, but the first one fades into the other to be worth the name, with a large indeterminate area for the fade-out. In fact, Gita's Karma-yoga is the way of karma not in the sense of just physical effort, but of effort refined to the jnana-degree, with unattachment as its base – the message of Chapter II. But it is an entirely new angle for Arjuna, who has never thought of action that way; so he still continues to equate it with just motivated physical action undertaken for definitely desired ends. The subject being not easy to grasp, Vyasa creates occasions to repeat and rub it in, in various ways. With infinite love and patience in the Upanishadic tradition, the great Guru proceeds to enlighten him, unruffled by what sometimes could appear to be sheer dumbness:



Krshna

3. **O sinless Arjuna, I have already spoken to you about the two kinds of faith prevailing in this world (of spiritual seekers), the faith of the Samkhyas in Jnana-yoga, and of the activists in Karma-yoga.**

Samkhya-yoga as it has been promulgated post-Gita, is materially different from its pre-Gita form. Some of its tenets conformed to the Upanishads so well as to be acceptable to Vedanta: so oftentimes, when convenient, as is the case here, it served to represent the way of Knowledge itself. Its technique of prakrti and the gunas, which is post-upanishadic, has been borrowed wholesale by the Gita. A samkhya here means one to whom the path of transcendental knowledge appeals in preference to the philosophy of behaviour which, according to the Gita, must normally precede the other, by way of ground-work.

The Vedanta way rejects action in the final values as being necessary or even directly useful to the knowledge of Self – as in fact hampering it – and equates realisation with naishkarmya or actionlessness. The Gita is a tract on a type of no-action which is widely misunderstood, or not understood at all as shown here. The situation provides suitable occasion for fact-finding elaboration. It is one real hard nut, as the Gita insists on action as the necessary probationary precursor of knowledge.

4. **The status of actionlessness does not come about by refraining from engaging in an act; nor does a person become possessed of that state just by shunning activity altogether.**

– As you, Arjuna, so pompously propounded a little while ago – in Chapter II.5. He was obviously talking through his hat then, for if that were really the case, all movement would be banned, and one couldn't even exist.

5. **Indeed, no one can even for a moment live in total inaction. The gunas of one's nature compel**



everyone to do works, willy-nilly.

– At least such works as eating, breathing, digesting, excreting, seeing, hearing, walking, giving and taking, etc. The fatuity of Arjuna’s argument is exposed; though most people do make the same sort of mistake in construing such texts.

6. **Those who continue to think of sense-objects while curbing the organs of action externally, are called pretenders.**
7. **But he really excels, who, free of attachment, and with the senses held well in check, carries on Karma-yoga through the organs of action.**
8. **Do your appointed tasks; for action is most certainly superior to (unthinking) abstention from it. You will not be able to even sustain the processes of physical existence by abjuration of action.**

Another angle, worthy of serious consideration is now presented, one by which action acquires a rationale, and bereft of which it remains condemnable:

9. **Life in this world would be held in the bondage of (mere) action if the motive (behind the behaviour) be something other than yajna. That being so, Arjuna, get on with your job, unhampered by attachment.**

“Bondage of action” is compulsory subjection to the backlash of behaviour; and compulsion is always distasteful to a man of some spirit. Yajna means the spirit of self-sacrifice, i.e. acting for the well-being of others as opposed to selfish personal ends. This spirit of sacrifice should be instinctive and effortless, like breathing and living, since the Creator himself has set us the good example, a heritage which must not be sold for any mess of worldly potage, if the divine in the human is to be



sustained and the progress of the yet imperfect soul-spirit is to reach fulfilment. This is how –

10. **The creator, having brought into being the creatures along with the spirit of self-sacrifice, told them thus at the very beginning; “You shall prosper and increase by (living your life in) this (spirit); let this be your wish-granting cow (– fulfiller of desires –)”.**

Implying that any motive in action other than this would be liable to reprisals in the form of counter-action. Wish granting cow: legendary cow of heavenly origin, one of the 14 jewels churned out of the sea.

11. **The devas, pleased by this (– yajna-motivated behaviour of yours –), will react by pleasing you in their turn; thus mutually pleasing each other, you will attain the highest good.**

Devas in an individual mean the powers assigned by Providence to various limbs and senses of a person which make them tick; and in the cosmos they are the inherent powers of the natural elemental forces (which may now be called the laws of physics, chemistry, biology, botany, physiology and the like). These too are sorts of departmental gods, i.e. in-charge managers of the elements, and they, if duly kept satisfied and pleased by oblations and offerings in the form of sensibly regulated supply of food, drink, cleanliness, mental attitude, physical behaviours, ways of intelligent adaptation by us to them and to us by them etc., they will reciprocate by helping us maintain our well-being, as per the maxim: “Do unto others as you would be done by”. This seeming cliché is truly the only way to be happy in all spheres of life – physical, moral, mental as well as spiritual. To behave otherwise is to invite sure trouble, which we do, and then try to blame it on others, since “I” can never be wrong! This has got to be put right quick.

12. **The devas, pleased by such yajna, will surely grant you the objects you desire. He who indulges in their gifts without first offering them back to what**



they came from (by way of yajna) is no less than a thief.

13. **While those who use for themselves only what is left after such yajna, are cleared of all blemishes (arising from actions). Those who cook only for themselves, are sinners eating sin.**

A ponderable statement. Beasts and humans have four things in common: (1) eating (meaning providing physical necessities to the body and its components), (2) rest, (3) fear or sense of self-preservation, and (4) reproduction of the species. The difference between beasts and men is that the former indulge in them unconsciously and instinctively, for themselves only, because they are denied the faculty of reason; while the latter do, or ought to do, it with understanding, i.e. with prior consideration for others; at least those of them (– having already evolved from beast to homo sapiens –) who want to now progress further, to divinity to Brahman. This can happen in direct proportion to the degree of dissolution of one's ego. Conversely, the more selfish and ego-centred a man, the faster he reverts to the beast, though retaining the human form for the time being. The attitude suggested in this verse implies recognition of "others" as "myself", a long step towards achievement of oneness with Brahman. It is the principle of living and doing for others, so that "I" may live happily. Innocence is Brahman, and living without selfishness is innocence.

- 14-15. **Creatures are born out of food; food grows because of rain; rain depends on the spirit of sacrifice; the spirit of sacrifice can only be expressed through actions; actions proceed from the Vedas; and the Vedas are God-inspired, therefore, the all-pervading God-spirit is always inherent in the spirit of self-sacrifice.**

Only he knows how to take, who knows how to give. The whole creation functions on "give first, and take that comes to you as the remainder". Life becomes happier with increasing awareness of this principle.



16. **He, a slave to senses, who does not conform in his life to the cycle thus established, lives a sinful life, Arjuna, he lives in vain.**

The cycle on which the universe is based. Established by whom? By God himself, who set it spinning by creating the world not to serve any purpose of his own – since all self-sufficient God can have no purpose of his own to serve, and one who can have purpose is no God – but in order to provide the jivatmans or soul-spirits with an opportunity to live rightly and evolve unto Brahman, i.e. to Perfection, which is the final release. Since we are chips off the Old Block, we too are expected to follow the leader; else.

Now, in the form of two small verses comes one of the glimpses of the man who has arrived, which the Gita permits us now and then:

17. **But there is nothing to do for the person whose pleasure lies solely in his own Self, and who is content within himself.**

He has transcended the novitiate stage where Karma-yoga was mandatory, and crossed over to the trans-action, the territory of actionlessness: he has arrived. How?

18. **There is no purpose at all for him in doing, as also in not-doing in life; nor has he anything to do with any creature.**

For, wanting, in form or another, is the oil that keeps worldly relations of all kinds lubricated and going. But the arrived man just wants nothing, as per 17 above, not-wanting being the means of transport to the finale.

19. **Therefore, go on doing your (appointed) karma unconcerned (– about their outcome –). A person becomes eligible for the Supreme State only by doing his karma without addiction.**

The Karma-yoga is designed to cleanse the mind of notions of I, me,



mine and the rest of the brood of egoism which sum up to attachment. This is the Gita's main target. All that the notion of Brahman and its realisation connote, must have as its foundation a mind divested of attachment, i.e. of ego. And, that is exactly what the Gita seeks to help happen. The fulfilment of the Gita lies in this accomplishment. At this point Krishna leaves the heights and comes down to practical considerations:

20. **Janaka and the like reached this refinement by means of works done in that spirit. You too should engage in them, at least in the interests of public weal.**

This Janaka, the king of Mithila, is a legendary figure who has been fulfilling much purpose as the king-sage ideal, from Vedic times. In the Brhadaranyaka Upanishad he is the ideal royal disciple of the Master, Yajnavalkya. In the Ramayana (5,000 years or more ago) he is Sita's father. He is the central figure in innumerable allegories and parables as an active idealist monarch, always curious about, as well as accomplished in, spiritual matters, and a model of inaction in action.

21. **It is the nature of people at large to imitate what a great man does** (– not necessarily what he says –), **and follow the standards of behaviour he sets.**

Here the Master cites his own example, as the greatest Indian of his times in all aspects of life, even to the point of divinity – in the spirit of Godhood Itself:

22. **I have nothing to do by way of compulsory duty, in all the three worlds, Arjuna, for there is nothing that I do not already have, nor is there anything that I could possibly want; even so, I engage in works.**

– For the sake of the people, to set them an example, for their betterment, and to uproot unrighteousness and re-establish balance, as we shall see in IV soon, and –



23. **If I fail to be tireless and vigilantly busy in works, Arjuna, people would follow the course I take in all respects.**

He symbolises God Himself here; if God were to relax in his job of maintenance of the universe and keeping it ship-shape –

24. **These worlds would be uprooted from righteousness (and be lost), if I were to refrain from karma; I would then be responsible for the hotch-potch of resultant bastardliness, and I would (rightly) be regarded their destroyer.**

The three worlds: physical being, mental being, and spiritual being, in the individual as well as in the universe-mass.

25. **A man of knowledge, Arjuna, should engage in works in the spirit of detachment, at least with a desire to benefit people, with the same zest with which the ignorant go about their selfish activities.**

A word of warning is due here against preaching actionlessness to people who are not tuned to its wavelength, and thereby bewildering them into the mental state of being neither here nor there:

26. **Conflict should not be created in the minds of people who are wedded to formalistic karma. The wise of yoga should engage them in all sorts of works, and encourage them even by joining with them in their proper execution.**

This refers to the masses who subscribe to doctrinal religion in one form or another, with karma in the form of rites, rituals, ceremonies and behaviours they prescribe. It should be the wise Karma-yogin's job to see them safely through all that so they do it the right way, leading them gently to higher and higher levels of human behaviour. It is the way of gentle persuasion, to let people evolve in their own faith, as opposed to manipulated proselytisation. This is the well known stance of



Hinduism. It also is a warning against spilling wisdom where it can do more harm than good.

27. **All karma comes to be done in all respects by the gunas of Prakrti. But the man whose discernment is dulled and misled by egotism is prone to believe himself as the doer.**

Karma, ritualistic and ceremonial as well as of a secular nature. Gunas, reference to which has been made in Chapter II.45, are three. See the note there, which mentions sattva, the first of the three. The other two are: rajas or the principle of motion, mental as well as physical, which causes the individual as well as the world to function, is the generator of all passions, prejudices, movements, motions...and is the cause of all dealings between creatures. And the third is the ignorance principle, tamas, which stands for base characteristics like dullness, inactivity, sleep, laziness, ignorance, aversion for knowledge – in short, for beastliness. The whole world and all its manifestations are, without exception, mixtures of these three principles, and nothing else. These three constitute what is called nature or Prakrti, in the individual as well as in the cosmos. Human nature is no exception here, and every motion and situation related to man is not only tinted by, but completely consists of, the physical or mental forms which their mixture assumes, as and when called for. So the “doer” is never actually the soul itself volitionally; its movements are moulded by the gunas in accordance with prarabdha* over which he has no control.

28. **But, Arjuna, the one who understands the true nature of the divisions based on the guna and karma knows that it is all a matter of gunas playing with gunas, and so, does not get involved in them.**

* Prarabdha literally means that which was started functioning. Some of the unexpended karma and desires which have had to be carried forward to the present “life” or dissolution and have therefore become part of one’s “destiny”.



That is to say, he has no illusions about being himself the doer of any actions. Divisions of and difference brought about by the gunas; Prakrti, which is also called Maya the deluder is made up of the gunas, as stated above. Every object, thought, action and situation, imaginary or “real”, is nothing but a conglomeration of the gunas in their relevant mixture. The dealings of the 24 components of the jiva or soul vis-à-vis one another, are called karma-divisions, since they relate to actual actions of the body and mind, under stress of the gunas. These 24 are: the 5 elements, the 10 senses (5 of cognition and 5 of action), the 5 objects or pastures of the senses (viz. the eye, the ear, the nose, the skin and the tongue) and the four-fold antah-karana meaning the “inner instrument” or the mind-complex (the four functions of the one and the same antah-karana are, (1) Manas meaning thinking or reflection, (2) Buddhi, i.e. reason, or the deciding and discerning function, (3) Chitta or memory, and (4) Ahankara or ego); 24 in all. The senses which operate in and utilise their fields of satisfaction, as well as the senses themselves, are made up of the gunas, so, every activity of every sense organ is no more than gunas dealing with gunas, under compulsion of the prarabdha. According to the Samkhya philosophy, these 24 are the constituents of “creation”; all of them are the resultants of the three-in-one Prakrti, and are in fact her own manifestations, that is to say merely the various forms it assumes and exhibits in consonance with the demands of prarabdha at any given moment. According to Samkhya, the 25th is the Purusha or the Spirit, Chaitanya, or Atman. Prakrti functions and is enabled to put forth the mixtures of her gunas only by close proximity of this enabling factor, the Purusha Spirit. These are called guna-divisions that seem to occur in the 24.

Karma-yogin here means one who knows this to be the case, and so prefers to remain uninvolved in them as their doer and as claimant to their outcome. Therefore he is at peace with life.

29. **Those whose judgement is dishevelled by gunas of Prakrti, get involved in and attached to these gunas and karmas. The wise man may not disturb (the tendencies of) such ignorant dullards.**

For reasons as per 26 above. Then, what may an Arjuna do to protect



and advance his own true Self-interest?

30. **Dedicate all your karma to Me, Arjuna, and using your buddhi, become unexpectant (of results), desireless and unpossesive; and then fight unconcerned!**
31. **Those who, full of faith and unprejudiced, act upon this advice always will also be released from (bond-constituting) karma.**
32. **Know such prejudiced stupid persons, who being devoid of all (worthwhile) knowledge, reject my opinions, to be (already) ruined.**
33. **Even the man of knowledge behaves only in accordance with the dictates of his own nature. All creatures are bound to succumb to their natures; and what can compulsion avail there?**

Meaning to say, only a realistic and well thought-out approach can expect to deal with the situation successfully. Tendencies, moods and modes are bound to arise in minds in accordance with one's destined prarabdha. There is nothing wrong about that, but the aspirant will do well to be vigilant, and rather than use compulsion, deal with them with faith in the guru's guidance. He will then soon find that instead of the virtis (mind-moods) ruling him, it is he who governs them at will – a case of "The dog it was that died"!

34. **Likes and dislikes of the sense-organs in respect of their objects are well defined. The only thing to do about it is, to not let yourself be seized by them; for they (the likes and dislikes) are the aspirant's arch-enemies.**

And not the objects by themselves. There is nothing either good or bad, per se, in the world; only thinking, i.e. one's approach to them, makes them so.



35. **However distasteful one's own dharma (i.e. rightful duty) might be, it is bound to be more conducive to one's own welfare than that of another (person) however well performed (– attractive –) it may appear to be. It is better to die in observance of one's own dharma; for, another's could be full of danger.**

This is a warning against the aspiring student being dazzled by the accoutrement of some other way of life of behaviour. Each person to his particular set of duties and circumstances. It would be a vote of censure on Providence to covet another's lot in preference to one's own. Comparisons are odious here, as they are in most spheres of life. This matter will come up again in Chapter XVIII. It is with reference to Arjuna's statement in Chapter II.5, where he, though a royal kshatriya, talks of turning into an itinerant beggar as being more desirable for himself than the role of a warrior in the carnage of war.

Here the talk takes another turn. Arjuna is getting interested in his mentor's words, and to that extent, he is now calmer. He asks a very relevant question, which surely has been raised by a million other conscientious men and women with hearts wrung by their own helplessness in respect of what they catch themselves doing, as also in what they find themselves incapable of doing, against their own standards and conscience. Why, why?

Arjuna

36. **Now, please tell me, what is that thing, driven by which, a man behaves sinfully even against his own will, as if compelled to do so?**

And, pat comes the answer –

Krshna

37. **It is Desire, which is the same as anger, spawned by the rajas gunas, which is the arch-villain with**



an insatiable maw; know that to be the enemy here.

Anger is equated with desire, for it is a patent fact that there can be no anger where there is no desire, liquidate one, and the other is not there. As remarked before, in Chapter II.62, 63, these two are but one, inseparable. Further on, another passion will be added, that of greed, to escalate the pair into a trio. All the three Indian ways of life, Vedic, Buddhistic and Jaina, have this basic axiom in common.

Knowledge itself is hardly ever free of this plague; that is to say even the wise man described in II with such gusto, is not always immune to it; and it keeps him company for quite a long way.

- 38. The knowledge (even) of a wise man gets clouded by it, the same as a mirror being covered over by dust, or fire being dimmed by smoke, or the embryo being enveloped by amnion.**

The suggestion here, is that though knowledge may appear to others to be made hazy by desire and its brood, in itself it remains unsullied, clear and effective, just as fire apparently dimmed by smoke is not affected in its inherent nature and capacity to give heat and light, nor does the mirror lose its reflective power just because a layer of dust accumulates on its surface, nor again is the embryo deprived of its potentiality as a man by reason of its fortuitous envelope. Blow the smoke away, wipe off the dust, wash off the envelope and there they are, in their pristine glory. The same is true of the Atman also; disinfect it of desire, and there It is, as clean and shining as a new pin. Thus, this fact of knowledge being overlaid implies, not despondency, but enthusiastic search for the proper remedy. This is spiritual environmental ecology.

- 39. This knowledge (of Truth) is laid over by the eternal enemy of its seekers, to wit, Desire, which, like fire, is hard to satiate by any amount of fuel supply.**

- 40. The senses, the mind and the intellect are known**



to be its repositories. Utilising them as its instruments, Desire bemuses the jiva-atman by hiding its (inherent self) knowledge out of sight.

Like a smokescreen. We now know the snake, and we should be able to draw its teeth.

41. **Therefore, Arjuna, in the first place, get your senses etc. under control, and then demolish this devil of a sin-maker, which is the destroyer of all (mundane) knowledges, as well as of the special (spiritual) knowledge.**
42. **Know the senses to be powerful; still more powerful is the mind; superior stands the buddhi; and that which governs the buddhi is It (Atman).**

And this Atman, Arjuna, is the real you. Thus, despite the apparent invincibility of this arch-enemy, once you have known yourself in your true glory, it becomes wax in your hands. You can then mould your desires as you will, and transform the thief into the constable. How?

43. **Knowing It thus to be beyond the reach even of normal reason (in logic), and fortifying your mind by this knowledge, demolish even this invincible enemy called Desire.**

Here, the dissertation on the nature and uses of the karma-yoga approach concludes. But much remains for Arjuna to know about the antecedents, precedents and consequents of this yoga, about its potentiality to lead the student to the higher spiritual echelons. So we proceed.

Chapter IV On Knowledge – Works Renunciation

A lot of mis- or wrong-understanding appears to prevail among students as to what this Karma-yoga really implies. Various interpretations confuse many students because of their lack of acquaintance with the true and clear connotations of terms like, Karma, yoga, sannyasa, tyaga etc. The Gita equates its Karma-yoga with tyaga (or giving up) as distinct from sannyasa or total renunciation. Arjuna has to repeatedly ask for clarification, and Krishna as often responds patiently; for, the matter is indeed slippery.

Krishna

1. I (first) **taught this eternal** (karma) **yoga to Surya** (the Sun); **he conveyed it to Manu; Manu passed it on to Ikshvaku.**

Surya represents the enlightenment principle, or “knowing”, which was the first manifestation of Brahman by way of “creation”. Its highest manifestation was its “son”, the first man, Manu, which means the creature who thinks. The first king in this surya-vansha (or the line of the enlightened kings) was Ikshvaku. All these were Kshatriyas i.e. fighting units of action and authority. This yoga is the specially conceived yoga of action or works, gradually leading to non-action; and as such it is said to have been originally thought out and passed on to posterity by Kshatriyas, as distinct from the science of pure Self-knowledge which has been the exclusive preserve of the Brahman-oriented brahmanas who are the accredited teacher class. This is all symbolically traditional.

2. **Thus handed down the line of kshatriyas, it was known to king-sages. In due course, Arjuna, it got lost, and has remained so over a long time.**
3. **I have just told you today the very same yoga, for you are devoted to me, and are my close friend.**



Arjuna and Krshna were pretty close cousins, of about the same age, with the latter a little older. But they soon became bosom pals and were always known as the inseparables. In XI Arjuna gives us a glimpse into their relations. As far at least as the Gita is concerned, they symbolise the wonderful pair of jiva-atman. The Atman reveals itself clearly to the jiva, only when the jiva turns to It and appeals for audience. If not, though always there It remains unknown to its companion, “Not knowable, therefore not to be known” as per the Spencerian philosophy, but not so for us; for we insist on knowing It, aye, on being It. But the significance of Krshna’s claim is lost on the extrovert Arjuna, who took his words literally, as we do most messianic utterances.

Arjuna

4. **But, Sir, you were born later, and the sun happened much earlier; how am I to know that it was you who spoke first to him at the beginning of things?**

It is tantamount to the jibe “You’re telling me!” but Krshna replies with quiet composure:

Krshna

5. **Arjuna, you and I have had many births (– physical existences –) which have passed away. You are unaware of them, but I know them all.**

Omniscience with regard to the past, the present and future existences of one’s soul, especially of the past, is one of the psychic powers yogis claim to possess. Krshna was reputed to be one such. Besides, on the principle of rebirth, he could claim, going up the family-tree, to have been in at the beginning also. And this, apart from his transcendental messianic mood at the moment.

6. **Though birthless and imperishable, Atman and the suzerain of all creatures, I give rise to my Prakrti, and make myself manifest, from yuga to**



yuga.

Yuga: according to the Indian concept, creation is cyclic and very similar to the modern Palpitation theory of creation, as distinct from the Big Bang or the Expanding ones. Every certain number of years, running into billions, constituting one day of Brahma or the Creator, the universe runs down to nihil; and after a similar period of nihil or Brahma's night, it re-emerges into "day". And so on and on, again and again. During the nihil period Brahman casts off its role of God the manufacturing energy, and resumes its solitary grandeur of Brahman. Then, God as such is not. This process and period of nihil is called maha-pralaya or the state of total deluge. Both these periods are collectively called a kalpa with reference to the Time-dimension. Each kalpa consists of four yugas, at the end of each of which occurs a sub-deluge such as Noah's, named pralaya, followed by restoration.

Here in this particular context, yuga means every point of time when the necessity arises for the protector and preserver aspect of God, viz. Vishnu, to take avatars, or descend into a physical form, on earth to set matters right again. Avatars do not always come in human form. The form depends on the need of the occasion. There have been ten of them so far, with only two in human form, viz. Ramachandra in the second yuga of the current kalpa, and Krshnachandra at the junction of the third and the fourth, i.e. at the commencement of the current kali-yuga. The rest were other forms such as a fish, a tortoise, a boar, a lion etc. The eleventh and last will come again in human shape round the end of this the fourth and concluding yuga of this kalpa; and after him, the great deluge, and another round. Avatara means a theandric super-superman, of god-like eminence and universal effectiveness. Krshna announces himself here as one such:

7. **Whenever, Arjuna, righteousness is overwhelmed and unrighteousness raises its head, I create my Self.**

8. **That way, I become, from yuga to yuga, in order to rescue the good in every way, demolish the evil, and re-establish righteousness.**



From Being to becoming, from the noumenal to the phenomenal, from energy to matter, from the unmanifest to the manifest.

9. **He who realises the significance of My divine births and works in their essence, rids himself of (the sense of being confined to) mortal coils; he comes not back (to rebirth or to the illusion of being a mortal); instead he attains Me.**

That is to say, he realises that in the essence, he too is the same as Me and regaining such consciousness of his own forgotten Brahmanhood, he is there and then emancipated from the miasmatic delusion of mortality, and experiences the immaculate Atman in his own Self.

What are the credentials for such experience?

10. **Devoid of likes, dislikes and anger, with mind fixed in Me, relying on Me, purified by knowledge and continence, many men of merit have attained Me (i.e. become like unto Me).**
11. **I react to the aspirants in the same spirit in which they resort to Me, Arjuna, men follow only My course, in all respects.**

A man is, what he knows himself to be. Men get what they seek. No man is denied his wish. These are psychologically ponderable statements, and the forepart of this verse says the same thing in different words. The other half of the verses implies that whatever the name of a creed and whatever the words it uses, all roads lead to Me and Me alone. And, what is this “road to Me” by taking which jiva the ridiculous is transformed into Brahman the Sublime?

However, letting transcendental matters alone for the moment and stepping down to the theological notion of a God and a Heaven, let us see how the rule about everybody getting what he seeks and deserves by his efforts in that direction, stands true:



- 12. Longing for fulfilment of karma, and worshipping the (relevant) gods here in life is soon rewarded by appropriate response (from them) in this human world.**

Here karma refers to canonical rituals each of which is designed to win for its performer a specific good, or avert a particular bad.

- 13. The principle of classification into four ways of life has been established by Me on the base of guna and karma. Through its creator, know Me the imperishable, not to be its creator at all.**

These four are, (1) Brahmana or the priest-teacher people, (2) the Kshatriya or war-and-politics class, (3) the Vaishya, whose natural talents and tendencies lean to trade, commerce, agriculture, husbandry and the like, and (4) Shudra or servers by inclination and ability. “I” created this classification, and yet, “I” did not.

When is doing not doing?... The God-spirit creates or does nothing, in the universally known secular sense of the terms. It is the creator or the doer only in a special implied sense, as the inspirer, the conceiver, without whose co-operation and permission nothing can happen: like a king winning a war in which he may never have participated in person; the Great Enabler. Arjuna has to be introduced to that distinction by and by, and the Teacher sets him a riddle here to that end.

- 14. Actions do not touch Me, nor have I any wish in respect of outcomes of actions. He who knows Me in full that way, remains unbound by karma.**

Such a one becomes like Me or rather, he becomes Me. Both I (God) and they, are engaged in karma. But the difference between Me and the others is that, they regard themselves as doers of their karma and wishful consumer of its fruits, and as such get involved in the mess of dualities; while I know better, reject the notion of being the doer-enjoyer, and remain a strict witness of all actions, everywhere, including those of my own secular self. In fact, the perfect man is God, and imperfect God



is man. In the state of disillusionment and complete detachment, human soul-spirits are essentially one and the same.

15. **Knowing so, moksha-seekers of the past kept on doing works. Therefore, Arjuna, it is up to you too, to keep on doing works, as our forefathers did.**

Karma here in the canonical sense of both secular and spiritual natures. In the days of the Gita there was little cause or scope for numerous social and other “good” works with which the society of today is cluttered; for, necessities were few then. There was no craze for raising life-standards in the modern nauseating sense, and ambition was more introvert than extrovert among thinking Indians. Therefore, social or personal activities were mostly of a cultural, religious and spiritual nature, in which the sense of dharma or humanistic righteousness predominated.

16. **Even men of insight and learning get confused here as to what constitutes karma (– doing –) and what a-karma (– not doing –). I shall explain to you that karma, the realisation of which will entirely deliver you from evil.**

When is action not action, and when is inaction action of the deepest dye? Man’s bondage or freedom hinges on the right answer to this. This could, for purposes of today, include all types of doing, secular, canonical as well as spiritual.

17. **You have got to know what is doing, what is wrong-doing, and what is not-doing too. For, indeed, the way of karma is mysterious.**

Put in the terminology of the Books, the problem is, when is pravrtti, nivrtti, and vice-versa? The former means engagement in action, and the latter, disengagement from action. Solve the riddle, and be happy for ever!

18. **One who can detect the lack of doing in doing and doing in inaction, he is the intelligent one among**



**men; he is the karma-yogin; for him, works have
been performed and done with.**

Compare Chapter III.17 and 18. Doing, of course, here implies doing with an eye on the main chance, desirously, and therefore, with concerned attachment to the action as well as to its hoped-for outcome. Not-doing means apparently doing, as a matter of duty, but without any eager expectation of beneficial results and therefore with full effort yet unconcernedly, without attachment, either to the idea of getting something, or of being saved from something. Only the man who knows this secret and acts up to it is the free man. There is nothing that he has to do; for all ordinary doing is the spawn of desire in some shape or another, and therefore, potential for disappointment. But the pressure of motive missing, the sting of the action goes too. No action then can so react as to make him feel distress, because of his lack of personal concern. We have had it all before in Chapter III.17, 18, 27, 28, 37-43, 67 etc.

There are four kinds of desire a man is subject to: (1) To obtain something one likes, (2) to get rid of something one dislikes, (3) not to lose something one likes, and (4) not to be saddled with something one dislikes. That's about it. Desire can take only one or another or a mixture of these forms. Frustration in any of them can cause pain, sorrow, grief, regret, resentment, anger, as per Chapter II.62-63. How wide is the scope for a man who is willing to lay himself open to unhappiness, and how numerous are the forms unhappiness can take, with no cure at all! But, prevention is possible.

**19. All actions are burnt out by the flame of wisdom
for the man who has eliminated the desire-motive
(or concern) from all his actions. Wise men call
him the Pundit.**

Burnt-out: their teeth are drawn; their back-lash is rendered incapable of disturbing his mind with excess of either pain or pleasure. Equilibrium is bliss and peace of mind. Deliberate unconcern is the open-sesame, the preventative panacea for all these ills. Interest, yes, as per Chapter III.20-25, concern, no. Pundit means a man with deep understanding of the



Truth.

20. **Abandoning all anxiety regarding outcomes of works, perpetually content, refusing to be dependent, a man “does” nothing at all, though (seemingly) deeply involved in “doing”.**

Not dependent on anything outside of himself for his pleasures. Dependence comes only from desire. Again, reference to Chapter III.17, 18 is invited.

21. **Thus, devoid of (eager) expectations, with his mind and senses in harness, entirely rid of possessiveness, he remains unaffected even though (apparently) doing.**

As stated before, physical actions in which one’s ego does not participate, does not invite trouble.

22. **Satisfied with what comes to him fortuitously, above and beyond dualities, purged of envy and malice, same in success and failure, he is not bound by works though (to all appearances) doing them.**

Every action must have its due consequence. That eternal law is not transgressable. But they do not affect their unconcerned doer by compelling him to suffer a sense of frustration, which is what causes pain. In this sense, concernedless karma is no karma, and its doer, being no doer, must logically remain free, untouched by it. This is how action can be inaction in effect.

Arjuna is getting an answer to the point he had raised in chapter I about the inevitably dire consequences of killing kinsmen in a righteous war, irrespective of motive. There is an apt Sanskrit couplet: “Only a deed done by the mind constitutes sin; not one done by the body; a daughter is embraced with the same body with which one embraces the wife”. What makes the difference?



23. **By indulging in inactivity out of the yajna-spirit, the whole lot of karma, done by one who has renounced concern and become free, and whose mind is well-rooted in wisdom, is totally demolished.**

Burnt by the flame, the lot goes up in ineffectual smoke. Talking of the yajna-spirit, the speaker now presents us with a remarkable essay on the subject in the ritual sacrifice jargon. Actual physical sacrificial rites in numerous ways had been common to mankind all over the world from times immemorial, and many such ceremonies are obligatory parts of most religious behaviour today too. They ought to be consciously regarded and carried out as mere outer expression of this noble spirit, only in order to secure its firmer establishment in minds and behaviour of men. But familiarity and repetition ad lib have reduced them to senseless rites. Kṛṣṇa the reformer puts the record straight here in yajnik terminology.

24. **The act of oblation is Brahman, the oblation is Brahman, consigned by Brahman to the fire which is Brahman, and he (the consigner, as a consequence) has to go only to Brahman in the form of this Brahmic (i.e. Vedic) karma.**

Wants cud-chewing! The words used here are easily understood. One's actions and even thoughts have to flow down this river all the way if the peace of Brahman is to be achieved for keeps.

Some of the forms this spirit assumes, though hardly ever suspected to be so by us normal "doers", are introduced here as very familiar indeed, yet so strangely unfamiliar. The speaker says that some people do it this way:

25. **Some others, karma-yogins, offer yajna related only to (elemental) gods; some others consign (ceremonial) yajna itself as a yajna in the Brahman fire.**



The first “some others” speaks of men, activists by nature, who believe in applying the principle of karma-yoga to Vedic yajna-rituals to which they are addicted. The other “others” refers to renunciation of superfluous and often misconceived formulae and formalities in the interests of the true spirit thereof, and preferring to make it an active principle of their own life. Now another aspect of the spirit is presented:

- 26. Others offer as oblation their physical senses such as the ears etc. in the flame of self-control; others again oblate the objects such as sound, (touch, smell) etc. to (such controlled) senses.**

This implies allowing the objects to be used only by controlled senses; and not permitting indiscriminate indulgence. This is an aspect of the yajna-spirit. Such men of self-control regard that sort of operations of the senses in their fields as a form of yajna and will therefore not misuse them.

- 27. There are others who oblate all the movements of the senses of cognition and organs of action, energised by the breath-energy, in the flame of the yoga of self-control.**

Regarding every movement of the ten senses as a form of the spirit of self-sacrifice, none of which should go in vain or be put to wrong use. It means that such a yogin consciously regards every movement of mind and body in the light of verse 24 above, as one more forward step in the soul’s evolution to identity with Brahman, and as such, to be taken carefully and deliberately, to prevent wastage or misuse of precious material.

- 28. And there are others again, who perform yajna through material objects, or through karma-yoga; and there are yet others striving for moksha with knife-edged vows whose yajna takes the form of tapasya (– askesis, or alternatively, physical asceticism –), or of hard study, and acquisition of (spiritual) wisdom.**



Tapasya means straining through discipline, usually taken as physical, in the religious or yogic sense; but inherently it means askesis, or mental self-discipline. In the context, the latter seems to be a better fit. The same principle applies to the involuntary progress going on inside the body; there are men of spiritual finesse who do not fail to regard even them as something which should be “for others”.

29-30. Other who are votaries of breath control, oblate prana (outgoing breath) into apana (indrawing breath) and the latter into the former, by controlling both the prana and apana. Others who believe in regulating diet, oblate the senses into senses. All these are adepts in yajna, with their prurient faults removed (each in its particular sphere).

Senses into senses: all the sense-organs derive their prowess to operate from the vital energy generated by breathing and fortified by food. Any disorder of breath makes all of them unhappy and incapable. Breath-control, and diet-control and therefore sense-control, because of their utter dependence on breath, senses themselves are called pranas. Thus these yajnas breathe and “eat” for the maintenance of the body and its senses, not for the escalation of carnal indulgence. This eating applies not only to the food for the mouth, but to all foods, “eaten” by all sense-organs in their respective fields of operation, and to their control.

31. Those who eat the nectar of the left-over of yajna, attain eternal Brahman. Non-yajniks can have no hopes in this world; Arjuna, what, then, to talk of the “other” one?

Left-overs: what may have remained available after giving moral claimants their due in the yajna-spirit. Non-yajniks: not conforming to the yajna spirit. In “this world”: of limited, transient and reaction-ridden pleasures. “The other”: pleasures which might be in store for the well-behaved soul after death.

32. In this way, the Vedas have elaborated yajna in



numerous forms. Know all of them to be dependent on karma; knowing so, you will be absolved.

Action is always full of pitfalls. It is the property of the rajas guna, which involves the doer in all sorts of passions and painful situations leading to unhappiness, and to nothing else. If the aforesaid yajna-forms are given some thought, it will be plain that each of them involves much effort, with its concomitants, the difficulties in the way, possibilities of failure and its distasteful derivatives... This is not our cup of tea. Even the experimenter in karma-yoga must not lose sight of the fact that this is not an end in itself to be enamoured of, but necessary only as the price to pay for the right of entry to the upper floor, and is meant to be mentally discarded, or, destined to drop away as the promotion becomes due. The duties of a clerk, however compulsory and beneficial as a clerk, fall away, must fall away, on promotion to managership, if the incumbent wishes to be a manager as a manager ought to be, and not merely clerk-like.

33. **The yajna of knowledge is superior to one requiring material objects in its discharge. Arjuna, all works are sublimated in self-knowledge.**

Justification of works is in its being contributory to its doer's mental, moral etc. equipment, and to fulfilment of some desire or another. It loses its purpose and becomes a useless burden to the desireless yogin. The desireless has all his desires satisfied free of charge, without involving any waste of his time and energy. The yajna of knowledge is, oblation of one's all into the spirit of one-ness with Brahman.

34. **Acquire that knowledge by obeisance, by frequent questioning, and by service. The men of wisdom, seers of the core of things, will surely teach you wisdom.**

This, if done as it should be, may please the guru, and he may then extend his grace by telling you all. This is the only way to win this knowledge. As the Vedas repeatedly declare, "No other method is



known for attainment”, other than resort to the feet of the guru.

35. **Having known which, Arjuna, you will never again fall into such traps of confusion, and by dint of which you will be able to see all creatures within yourself, and then (all together), in Me.**

All creatures in you: All creatures including their includer, you, in God, and then of course, the creatures, their includer, and the includer too sublimated in Brahman, of whom God is a negotiable aspect. And that is the end of the quest. Not only that –

36. **Even though you be the most sinful of sinner, you will ferry across the sea of your blemishes with this boat of knowledge.**
37. **The flame of knowledge reduces to ashes all karma in toto, just as a well-lighted fire will turn firewood into ashes.**
38. **There is nothing so sacred as knowledge in this world. Once cleansed (of ego and desires) by karma-yoga, one realises this (truth in good time).**
39. **The man of faith, with senses well under control and devoted to knowledge, gets it, and soon reaches the state of peace in all its aspects.**
40. **The ignorant man of doubt, without faith, perishes. There is no peace, no hope for the waverer, either here or there.**
41. **The man of wisdom who has renounced actions by resort to yoga, and all whose doubts and questionings have been laid to rest by knowledge, Arjuna, is never bound by karma.**

This clearly lays down the protocol: first comes karma-yoga, and if its



discipline is successfully gone through, the Inana-yoga surely follows, like the President following the properly organised avaunt-couriers.

42. **Therefore, Arjuna, cut down with the sword of knowledge this doubt, spawned by ignorance which rides your heart, arise, and get hold of the yoga.**

Chapter V On Works and Renunciation

Arjuna

1. Krshna, you at one time praise the sannyasa of (– total abstention from –) karma, and again, karma-yoga. Tell me only that which is better calculated to do me good.

Krshna

2. Karma-yoga and sannyasa, both are conducive to total spiritual welfare. Of these works, the karma-yoga way excels total inactivism (in the guise) of sannyasa.

The very practical Krshna says in effect: “Bother the terms! What’s in a name? A rose smells as sweet by any name. Just get at the substance of my advice, and then carry on with it. Apart from pundit-like definitions, let me put it to you plainly”.

3. Know him only as the sannyasin who has abjured dislikes as well as desires. Arjuna, such a person freed from dualities gets an easy discharge from bondage.
4. It is only the childish who insist on regarding the two as different; not pundits. Well established in one, the aspirer enjoys the benefits of both.

They, being only two stages in one process, with difference only of degree, not of kind. So, give up splitting hairs and go to the point. Yet it is useful to keep in mind this distinction for intelligent appreciation. Cf. Chapter VI.3, 4, 8, 10, 12, 30, etc.

5. The pursuer of karma-yoga arrives at the same



place which the votaries of Samkhya are designed to reach. Only he sees, who sees Samkhya and yoga as one and the same.

Samkhya and yoga mean knowledge and its means. Giving up addiction to fruits of works is common to both. The additional matter of renouncing authorship of works is not relevant to active membership of secular society. They have to merely keep the sannyasa status in mind as an ideal, and get on with the common factor, as practical men of the world.

6. **Arjuna the strong! Know that the stage of sannyasa would be hard to achieve without the prior discipline of karma-yoga. But the man of self-control duly trained in yoga does not take long to arrive there.**

7. **The one who has gone through this yoga-discipline and is cleansed (of ego and desires), and has conquered his mind with his senses under control, (automatically) becomes the Self, which is the very Self of all creatures, and though doing works he is not affected by their aftermath.**

- 8-9. **The candidate who has graduated in karma-yoga, comes to this decision: "I do nothing whatever, even while I continue to see, hear, touch, smell, eat, go about, sleep, breathe, speak, evacuate, hold and open-and-close my eyelids", regarding all this as merely the operating of senses in their respective spheres.**

The karma-yogin has entered the higher stage without being aware of the fact. That is how this one thing leads to the other. Therefore, no time should be wasted in verbal controversy over tweedledum and tweedledee. Arjuna, just do as I say, and it will be alright for you.

10. **He who acts, depositing his works in Brahman**



and giving up all infatuation thereof, is not besmirched by sin, as a lotus leaf is not wetted by water.

Depositing in Brahman: considering all movements to be nothing but manifestations of Brahman, and in that spirit, renouncing all notions of himself being their doer, or the enjoyer of their results. In that mode of mind, he finds no reasons for being addicted to “doing”, and still less to results of what may happen to be done. Sin means the blemish of earning unhappiness by harbouring such attachment which he need not. The only sin in Vedantic thought is a feeling of unhappiness. Here, that which causes sorrow is sin, and that which helps unveil and make manifest the true nature of one’s Atman-Self is merit.

11. Karma-yogins utilise their bodies, minds and senses in works without attachment, merely for the purpose of cleansing the mind (of ego).

To the seeker of the Ultimate, the only purpose to be served by indulging in activity, can be clearance of the mind of the dross of ego and desire which are the only hindrances to the pilgrim’s progress. Such cleansing can come only from the witness view. Any other reason for deliberate performance of actions can and does lead only to something which is the antithesis of peace.

12. Such a yogin, having abjured attachment to outcome of actions, successfully claims peacefulness based on shraddha (– intelligent faith –). The yoga-less, engrossed in desire-generating results of works, earns bondage.

Faith not based merely on authoritarian canonical word or custom but on intelligent conviction of spiritual values.

13. Having mentally repudiated all karma, the self-controlled resident of the body rests in peace in its nine-gated city, not doing anything, nor getting anything done.



This is sannyasa or total abjuration, the mood of actionlessness, repudiating not only results, but also the authorship of karma done by the body as well as by the mind. The way to this mood is self-control, i.e. karma-yoga. The resident is of course the jivatman. The nine gates of the body-city are: the two eyes, the two ears, the two nostrils, the mouth, and the two exits of evacuation.

In this ego-centred selfishness, the normal person is prone to blame either God, or fate (kismet), or other people or circumstances, as leading him on to trouble-causing thoughts and actions and their backlash. This is all nonsense –

- 14. God does not create for the people either the sense of doership or the urge to engage in actions; nor is he responsible for the connection between action and its aftermath. The only thing which prevails here is one's own nature.**

Nature moulded by prarabdha as well as the as-yet unfulfilled wishes and longings which impart to it special twists and directions. Desire led to actions in the past, which constituted the prarabdha, which has got to be worked out in the present life in the light of the motives which promoted actions in the first place. Ignorant people with animalish propensities, having no incentive to reflect upon eternal verities, get involved in distress, and then blame it on others. This is not going to help them in any way. The remedy lies in introspection and self-knowledge; not on appeasement of conveniently imagined fanciful “causes”, material, “divine”, or ESP-wise. Ostrich attitudes can only be suicidal. Only knowledge is the troubleshooting effective power.

- 15-16. God accepts nobody's sins; not their meritorious deeds either. It is only the covering over of knowledge by ignorance which so confounds the souls. But for one whose ignorance is demolished by the advent of the knowledge of Atman, knowledge shines forth like the sun (freed from a bank of clouds).**



So, those who set too much store by formal prayers and penitence should revise their attitudes and angles.

17. **Those persons whose minds are one with It, whose hearts are devoted to It, whose faith is based on It, whose sights are fixed on It, who have had all their blemishes washed away by the knowledge, are exempt from re-birth (– or, relapse into beastly worldliness –).**
18. **(Such) Pundits look with sameness upon a Brahmana of learning and wisdom, a cow, an elephant, a dog and even an eater of dog-flesh.**

The last means a Chandala or a keeper and operator of a crematory ground, whose fare included dog-flesh.

19. **The man whose mind is fixed in sameness, has mastered life. Brahman is innocent and same; therefore, he is well-settled in Brahman.**
20. **The man of Brahman-knowledge, firm in Brahman, of steady mind and unequivocal faith, goes not into ecstasy at the advent of pleasure, nor does he succumb to sorrow on encountering the unpleasant.**
21. **The man of detachment in respect of external sense-enjoyments experiences the happiness which resides within himself. The man who has his self linked up with Brahman realises for himself bliss which never wanes.**

The former is the fruit of karma-yoga; the latter of Inana-yoga. Indian philosophy has it that happiness or pleasure is not a natural property of the objects from which it seems to proceed, but it is a feeling and sensation which rises in the mind, and is ignorantly attributed to the objects. In fact, pleasure, or blissfulness called ananda, is the very nature



of Atman. The mind itself is the “soul”. When the mind is freed of modes, moods and tendencies, it becomes calm and clear. At such moments this ananda of Brahman is seen as clearly reflected in it, as the sun is in calm and clear waters. The sense of sorrow and grief prevails there only when the winds of I-me-mine, desires, preferences, prejudices... churn up the mind and render it incapable of reflecting Atman. The mind itself being the soul, its experience is the soul’s own experience. Chapter VI.23 onwards has a definition of pleasure. Therefore, the key problem is, how to immunise the mind against these winds. How? The Gita says, karma-yoga does it.

22. Pleasures which arise out of the contacts of senses with their objects, can produce nothing but pain. They have a beginning, and an end. Wise see no delight in them.
23. Happy is the man of yoga who is able to absorb the shocks of desire and anger, before the passing of the body. And that state follows practice in this yoga.

There is no need to die in order to attain Heaven which is another word for full happiness. One can have it, though alive.

24. The man whose happiness resides within himself, who is his own internal pleasure-ground, and whose guiding light is only within himself – he is the true yogin, he himself becomes Brahman, and in every possible way he attains the nirvana of Brahman.

Another assurance to the striving soul that this yoga escalades up to Inana, to oneness with Brahman, which is absolute absolutation.

25. Men of self-control with their blemishes melted away, all their doubts cut down, their minds duly disciplined, and interested in the welfare of all creatures, attain this Brahma-nirvana.



26. **Self-controlled sannyasins, freed of desire and rage, and familiar with Atman, are in the midst of Brahma-nirvana in all circumstances.**

In all circumstances: both in death as well as in life. Sannyasins: men of all-out effort. But why talk of becoming free? Such a man is free –

- 27-28. **Banishing from his mind external sense-based experiences, fixing his eyes between the brows, setting the breaths operating inside the nostrils to equality, the muni who has control over his senses, mind and reason, and bereft of desire, fear and anger, who is intent on freedom, stands free.**

Here, reference is made for the first time to the breath-control technique of yoga called pranayama, as an aid to mind-control. It will be elaborated in Chapter VI.

29. **Knowing Me as the consumer of all yajna and tapas, sovereign ruler of all the worlds and intimate friend of all creatures, a man acquires shanti (eternal peace).**

Chapter VI On Self-Control

Krshna

- I. **The aspirer who, unmindful of the results of his actions, goes on doing what must be done, is a sannyasin, as well as a (karma) yogin. One cannot have the right to be called a sannyasin by merely renouncing fire; nor can any one be a yogin by just becoming physically inactive.**

The karma-yogin is a potential sannyasin. A person who has renounced the fruits of actions, would soon lose interest in doing things too; and it cannot be long before he begins to see no point in claiming to be a doer, if he is to be disinterested in the outcome of his effort; this is sannyasa. It is usual in India – it may be so to a certain extent elsewhere too – to consider and say that once a person has set out on the road purposefully, he has as good as reached its end. Which would be highly encouraging to the neophyte. So, the aspirer who has started determinedly on karma-yoga which must lead to the higher stage and to the end, is a sannyasin who has arrived, de facto, even though at the moment he may not have de jure.

One of the cardinal requirements in an Indian wedding is that it must be performed in the presence of a consecrated fire as an emblem of Brahman, by way of the highest possible witness to the vows the wedders take. This in the past, when it was more convenient to do so, was maintained going until the partnership was ended by the death of, or renunciation of, the householder status by either of them. The man who takes the ochre robe has renounced all connections with family life, and so, his nuptial fire stands abjured. Krshna lays down here a sensible standard that not such mere formal abjuration, but only actual practice of the principle of sannyasa can rightly be called that appellation. The rule is equally applicable to karma-yoga and its alleged votary – merely being idle and inactive is not karma-yoga as Arjuna seemed to think.



2. That which wise men designate sannyasa, should be regarded by you as yoga also, Arjuna. For, no one who has not renounced the desires (– as a sannyasin must –) can ever become (even) a yogin.
3. For the muni who wants to scale the heights of (karma) yoga, works will be the way to follow; but once he has reached the summits and planted himself securely there, maintenance of his self-control remains the only “function” for him.

Who, then, can be said to have reached the summit of yoga?

4. As soon as he the traveller, stops feeling strong and abiding concern in the objects of the senses as well as in works, he can rightfully be said to have surmounted yoga.

How, from whom, in what form can the spiritual scout expect help in this tricky climb up? ...From nothing outside of himself, as it is an entirely personal matter –

5. The aspirant must lift himself up by his own self (i.e. mind), and not distress it. One’s own self (mind) is the friend of oneself, and equally, one’s own self can be one’s own foe, and no one else.

There can be no valid reason to blame anyone but oneself, for one’s own stupidity, neglect or deliberate cupidity, for regression in this field.

6. The (personal) self befriends the (soul) self in the case of one who prevails over the former by the latter’s efforts; but the same (personal) self will turn out to be an enemy of the (soul) self in respect of one who fails to subdue the former (– personal self –) by the (efforts of the) latter.

“Personal self” means here the conglomerate of body, mind and senses



we call personality, or soma. Soul-self is one's own soul-spirit, the jivatman, whose evolution-up is our chief concern.

7. **The soul-spirit of the self-controlled person who has attained complete objective equanimity of mind, becomes firmly established in sameness in respect of the hots and colds, or joys and sorrows, as well as of plaudits and insults.**

8. **That yogin, in the sphere of internal peace, has seen through and has had enough of sciences and lores, material, psychic, theological and even spiritual, which, far from clarifying the mind and giving it peace, only clutters it up with useless masses of information, doubts, distresses and chimerical confusion, all of which soon pall on the seeker of life's true values in which to rest in peace. The only panacea for all ills of the mind is this outlook of sameness, which stems from the detached witness-angle.**

9. **The man of sameness excels in his attitude with respect to well-wishers, friends, foes, disinterested persons, mere onlookers, the inimically inclined, relatives and the wicked.**

10. **The student of this yoga (of sameness) should seek out solitude, and, established therein, remain alone, self-possessed, dispelling from his mind all notions of personally owning anything.**

This "solitude" really means a state of mind which can experience the sense of being alone, by one's own self, even in the midst of a crowd and consider it just a peopled desert. It means a carefully trained capacity to withdraw the mind from external situations. Actual physical solitude, is also very necessary for the neophyte in order to get used to loneliness, and see the precious jewel in the toad's head. What is that jewel? An opportunity to practice introversion, to learn for oneself how to be in



tune with the Infinite which is within one's own self.

The yoga technique of asana or posture of the body can come to the aid of the probationer for introspective concentration:

11. **Finding out a clean spot and arranging for oneself a firm seat there, neither too elevated nor too low, consisting of** (three layers, one of) **cloth** (at the top), (another) **a grass mat** (at the bottom), **and** (the third) **an animal skin** (in between).

The rationale: the grass mat can provide insulation against possible damp, cold, roughness, heat etc. of the earth on which it is spread; the thick animal hide has the quality of providing warmth, and it is also an electrically charged organic matter, with an affinity for living flesh, besides keeping out insects which may pass up through the porous mat. The cloth of silk, wool or cotton can make the seat reasonably comfortable for a long sitting-session in a cross-legged asana. This posture is regarded as highly contributive to concentration of mind.

12. **Establishing oneself on such a seat, and fixing the attention into single-pointed concentration, bringing the mind and senses under control** (– making them motionless –), **the student may practice the yoga with a view to cleanse the mind.**

No fanciful, psychic or spiritual value need be attached to this practice of physical yoga, which is just a prophylactic exercise in control of the mind and body.

- 13-14. **Holding the torso, the neck and the head steady and straight up, determinedly fixing the gaze on the tip of his nose** (– i.e. with half-closed eyes –), **becoming quiet, calm and fearless, rooted in the vow of continence, controlling the moods of the mind, the student, devoted to Me and Me alone should remain seated in the practice of this yoga.**



Fixing the gaze...: not allowing the eyes to wander, because the mind usually follows the eye, and the eyes the mind, to balk which, actionlessness of the body is also decreed here. "Me": His own Me, his true self, Atman.

15. **The self-controlled yogin, always engaging himself thus will arrive at the beatitude, the ultimate Release which resides in Me.**
16. **The yoga is not for the over-indulgent, nor for the over-abstainer, nor for the very sleepy, nor again for the over-awake.**

This frankly refers to the inherent invalidity of self-blame and self-mortification such as calling oneself a sinner, and fasting, vigil etc. In short, in the purposeful, calm and balanced pursuit of the Peace, extreme attitudes can do no good and much harm by their imbalance. Fanaticism in any form is a taboo here.

17. **This yoga becomes the releaser from sorrow only to those who are moderate in diet and behaviour, sleep, vigil and actions.**
18. **(Thus practising,) when the neophyte's mind stands fixed in his own self alone, unconcerned in respect of all desires, then only can he be said to have arrived (at the goal of the cleansed mind).**

Mind then stands fixed as the ever-present background never to be lost sight of, to all his mental and physical motions.

19. **Here there is a simile – the disciplined mind of the yogin engaged in the yoga of self stands still, as the flame of a lamp in a windless place.**
- 20-23. **In that state the mind, by the exercise of yoga-practice, rests controlled and (therefore) withdrawn from motion; in this state the yogin,**



seeing Atman within himself, remains fully content; in it he experiences that extreme bliss which is beyond all senses and which can be cognised only by the buddhi (– intuitive intellect –), once established in which, he never really strays from its awareness. Having gained this state, he knows no other gain to excel it; established in which he is never disturbed by inflictions of sorrow of even great dimensions. Know such severance of the mind from its connection with sorrow to that (Bliss), known by the term “yoga” (union with Atman). Arjuna, that must most certainly be won, with unflagging zeal.

- 24-25. Expelling without exception all desires arising from thinking (of objects) and their aspects, the aspirer should gradually withdraw them (from the temptation of indulgence) by the exercise of refined intellect trained in patience, and establishing the mind in Atman, refrain from thinking about anything at all.
26. The mercurial mind should be caught hold of and fetched back from every one of its escapades, and re-consigned to self-control.
27. The Supreme happiness comes of its own accord only to such a blameless yogin who has calmed his mind, quietened his rajas, and thereby, himself become Brahman.
28. The yogin with the mind so completely refined, easily enjoys this summit of happiness which is allied to Brahman.

Allied to Brahman, and most certainly having nothing to do with contacts of any of the ten senses, with any of the things of the world to



which they, because of the past animalish sanskaras, instinctively tend.

29. The man of this Union who sees sameness everyway, beholds himself as being within all creatures, and as all creatures being within himself.
30. He who sees Me everywhere and everything in Me – I never cease to be for him, nor does he cease to be for Me.
31. He who established in undifferentiated oneness (of soul and Spirit) in respect of all creatures, even while operating everywhere is operating in Me (only).

The whole universe and all that it implies, are only this immanent Me appearing in various sensible forms. Man too is one such Me only. Therefore, a man of vision operating in the universe, any how, any where, and any when, knows that “I am operating in Me only”. The worldly-wise do not realise it, but “I” do! Nor is Brahman confined to the phenomenal creatures –

32. Arjuna, he who beholds joy, and sorrow with the sameness everywhere as being no less than Atman, i.e. his own self, is regarded as the yogin-supreme.

Arjuna

33. I cannot conceive of the yoga which you have advocated as sameness, as capable of steady application, because of the fickleness (of man’s mind).
34. Krshna, the mind is indeed fickle, tyrannical and obstinate. In my opinion, it is as difficult to regulate as the wind.



Krshna

35. Without a doubt, Arjuna, the mind is hard to bind, and is unstable; but it can be subjected discipline by repeated effort and application of vairagya.

Vairagya is detachment amounting to distaste for the goods of the world, arising out of contemplation of their transience and their universal ability to cause distress to their addicts. This sense of vairagya, constantly and consciously maintained by repeated contemplation, can flower into a natural outlook which would discourage the mind's tendency to flit from object to object.

36. I am of the opinion that this yoga (of sameness) is hard to achieve for a man devoid of self-control; but it is possible to attain for the man of self-control, who keeps trying.

Arjuna

37. Krshna, suppose a man is full of faith (in this doctrine), but fails to achieve success because of inability for sustained effort, and is thereby dislodged from pursuit. What becomes of him?

This question is very relevant. All men of good intentions are not necessarily endowed with the qualities of tenacity of purpose and abilities sufficient to fulfil the conditions laid down by the Teachers; are such searchers doomed for no fault of theirs, and does their faith in Grace avail them nothing? That would surely not be right.

38. Fallen from both estates (secular and divine), devoid of stability in either, confused and discomfited in the path of Brahman, is he destroyed and dispersed like a disintegrating cloud?
39. Krshna it is up to you to dispel this doubt of mind



in its entirety. I can think of no-one apart from you who can deliver me of this doubt.

Krshna

40. Arjuna, there is certainly no doom for him, either here or there. A man of good deeds, dear friend, never comes to a bad end.
41. Fallen from yoga, he attains to the states which are due to men of meritorious works, and enjoying his desserts there for many years, (– a long time –), he is well reborn in a clean-living prosperous family.
42. Or, (in the alternative), he enters a family of highly talented yogins; and, indeed that kind of birth is far more difficult to come by (than the other kind) in this world.
43. There he is linked up with the trend of the past existences (– picks up the threads from where they dropped –), and thenceforth redoubles his efforts for consummation.
44. He is carried inexorably by the momentum of the efforts of his past life; Arjuna, even a student of the yoga (of sameness) far surpasses a man of Vedic words.

Vedic words: the kind of thing referred to in Chapter II.42-44. The word Brahman is used in two senses, Atman, as well as the Vedas. For one thing, Brahman is the ultimate subject-matter of the Vedas, and secondly, brahman literally means the “greatest”, and the Vedas are the biggest thing ever in the field of knowledge. Both the senses are applicable here in view of the construction of the verse in the original.

45. The votary of karma-yoga, having cleared himself



of blemish and progressing to fulfilment by the efforts he has been putting forth during numerous lives, now steps over to the supreme status.

46. A yogin excels the man of physical austerities; he is superior to the word-wise sciolist; he is better even than an activist (votary of Vedic ritual). Therefore, Arjuna, become a yogin.

Therefore, Arjuna, put your best foot forward!

47. Of all the various types of yogins, I regard him as best who is devoted to Me in full enlightened faith with his mind merged in Me.

The Gita can, in a very general sense, be said to consist of three sections, just like the Vedas themselves, each consisting of six chapters: I to VI are linked with Karma-kanda or the method, of which karma, or works in certain spirit is the main theme designed to purge the mind of ego; VII to XII make the second step in which devotion and self-dedication predominates, called the Upasana-kanda or the path of bhakti, so as to develop concentration in effort, in which the former is sublimated; and XIII to XVIII, the concluding third step is Jnana-kanda, the path of knowledge, in which both the previous stages find their sublimation. And then, the Fourth, fulfilment, the Arrival, which has no expression in word or even in thought. All these divisions are, of course, interlaced, with only a particular aspect of the Effort emphasised a little more than in the others, but only in close link with them.

Chapter VII On Jnana – Vijnana

Jnana and Vijnana are two terms which have a host of meanings each. Jnana literally means just knowledge in the general sense, including the spiritual. But sometimes the term vijnana is used in its stead, or alongside it. There, jnana is specifically restricted to knowledge other than spiritual and transcendental, which the word vijnana will have taken over. Vi = special, extraordinary. Material sciences also are now called vijnanas, when the word is used in that context. Here, jnana means knowledge in general including canonical, and vijnana specifically denotes the science of Moksha, or the super-knowledge.

Chapter II closed on the note of “devotion to Me”. That is the cue for a start here: how to utilise both, to get at “Me”.

- I. **Arjuna, having come close to Me and practised yoga under my direction, learn from Me how you can come to know Me out-and-out, conclusively.**

Knowing the Me of everything the religious way is not full knowledge of Atman; far from it. You can know a thing in all, or most of its aspects by developing intimacy with it – the more the merrier. This Me too can be so known, not by considering God as something awesome, something apart from and beyond oneself, to be saluted and flattered or fussed over sentimentally once in a while from a respectable and safe distance, as an insurance against Its wrath which It is always ready to inflict on you at your slightest supposed misdemeanour. The saints were saints because they had the guts to venture, not merely near, but right into Self-Knowledge. Approach through good works and all that, is an indirect approach, no more than sending presents to a sovereign, without knowing him personally. That won't do now. So, the guru says, Arjuna, let the relations be more meaningful, more knowledgeable, more intimate, as a preliminary to becoming, and then, being It. This section of the Gita takes us by the hand and invites us to get to know our Me better so as to cast ourselves in Its mould.



2. I shall now unfold to you knowledge along with super-knowledge in their entirety, knowing which, nothing whatever will remain still to be known by you.
3. Hardly one person in thousands cares to make an attempt to get (Me); and from amongst such effort-makers, there can hardly be one who succeeds in knowing Me in quintessence.

Most people know this, his own Me, as God, Providence, Creator-Maintainer-Destroyer, Almighty, Merciful Father etc., but not as It really is – one's own essential Atman-self, which this Me which we are discussing indeed is. What prevents this realisation? Ego, with its innumerable brood of thugs. To get rid of them is to clear the decks for real action. One out of thousands of self-called pious persons may try to do so, or even know of any pressing need to so try. Those who do so try, fall into the category of God-fearing do-gooders, attempting to live the yajna-way and thereby sloughing the evils of the ego-snake off the mind. From among many such, there may be an exceptional one who succeeds and then, gathers up courage to develop the acquaintance into intimacy with this mysterious and therefore much feared It. This process of nearer approach is known as bhakti, devotion, upasana which is a full-time job, never for a moment allowing Its awareness to fade out of the bhakta's mind. And one cannot develop that devotion and addiction unless one knows It fully, without a shadow of a doubt as to what It essentially is. We are being led along the way here to the yoga (or method) of upasana, which is now being unfolded to us:

- 4-5. **Earth** (or solidity), **water** (or fluidity), **fire** (or visibility of shape), **sky** (or space, which has the quality of sound), **air** (or touch), **mind** (or thinking including memory), **buddhi** (decision making intellect), **and ego** (or I-me-mineness); - **these are the eight constituents of My** (– God's –) **nature** (– Prakrti –). **This** (octagonal) **Nature is the lower one.** **The other and higher Nature of mine**



expresses itself in the form of jiva (– soul –), by whom this world is upheld.

The set-up of the eight-fold nature is called “Creation”, or the world; it is subordinate to It’s higher Nature, which is the soul, for whose exclusive fulfilment and delectation the world has been so “created”. And the soul-spirit remains concernedly cognisant thereof so long as its soulness has the upper-hand; its wishes are pandered to by Providence until it is cloyed and satiated, and would have no more of it. It is then that the soul’s Partner reveals Its presence and influence, as the twain’s real Me. Thus, man’s nature is an ingredient of man. And man along with his nature is ingredient of God’s Nature; Nature is an ingredient of God, and God along with its nature and its “Me” are but an appearance of the Me – which is the Me of this hierarchy and all its countless factors. There would be no need of “creation”, if there is no soul-jiva, and it disappears for all practical purposes as soon as the “Spirit” part of the soul-spirit, predominates and snuffs out its sordid beast-half.

6. Know for sure that all creatures have this (Prakrti) as their origin. I am the source (– cause –) of “this”, as well as its end.

All this, i.e. everything that can be pointed out, spoken of and thought of as “this”, arises out of Me at the behest of the ever-wanting souls, and with its mission fulfilled, reverts to Me again, merges in Me, who is the one and only true “is” of all these transient is’ and am’s.

7. Arjuna, there is nothing above Me. All these are linked in Me, as beads of a rosary are strung in its thread.

Above Me: which can be regarded as My cause.

8-9. I am the fluidity (– the rasa principle –) of all waters; I am the effulgence (– light principle –) in the sun and the moon; I am the Pranava in all the Vedas, the sound-principle in space, the man-ness in man, the pleasant odour in the earth, the heat in



fire, aye, the very principle of living in all creatures, and the tapas (– faculty of contemplation –) in aspiring humans.

That is to say the “ness” of everything and every creature. Pranava is the well-known Aum pronounced Om, which is the one and only symbol of God (– Ishvara –) expressing all that Godness implies, and therefore the correct name to know him by. The literal meaning of Pranava is “Ever-new though the oldest of olds”. Not only this –

10. Know Me, O Son of Prtha, to be the eternal seed of all created things; I am the intelligence of the intelligent, and the lustre of the lustrous.

The seed is eternal. One is familiar with semi-jocular queries like who came first, the egg or the chicken? The seed or the tree? The wisest of scientists cannot dub them rhetorical and fruitless, meaningless. But that attitude shows up just ignorance, or a circumscribed mind which either refuses or cannot imagine the possibility of there being a Beyond the beyond, since their minds are inhibited by sense-experience as the only criterion in scientific search and research, which have to come to the end of the blind alley of artifacts of all-too human imagination; and real Vedanta starts where they end. That is why it is called meta-physics, transcendental or the realm of intuition. The answer to the query of queries viz. where does all “this” emanate from, is hinted at here, and yet more forcefully in the Upanishads. You can have it, provided you can cross the barrier of senses and sensibilities, to which science is so firmly wedded. Yet, there are signs of the barrier loosening up the least little bit to the light of the Beyond of all beyonds, visible to the Third Eye alone, which Krishna in his God-mood refers to as his – for that matter, every blessed creature’s very own I.

11. I am the power of the strong unconnected with longings and addiction. I am that yearning in all creatures, Arjuna, which is not opposed to righteousness.

Power of mind and body is usually accompanied by conceit and an



ambitious will, which rob it of its inherent purity and innocence as a principle. The same is true of strong desire which comes to be linked with unrighteous motives which are undivine accretions of the soul with which the mind comes to be associated in the body.

12. **Moreover, know all feelings and moods, sattvika, rajasa, or tamasa, to be proceeding from Me only. Know them to be in Me, but not I in them.**

The container must need to be bigger than its content, and entirely different from it. All moods are in Me as their very source and existence, their is-ness. But “I” exist independent of them, when they “are”, and even when they “are not”. Thus, they are in Me; not I in them. They are in, but not of Me i.e. a part of Me, who is but their disinterested observer, as a lamp is of what may be and what may not be in the orbit.

13. **The world, fascinated by various objects consisting of three gunas really knows me not truly as I am – the Changeless, above and beyond them all.**
14. **This, my divine guna-bound Maya, is indeed hard to transgress. It can (however) be crossed only by one who takes refuge in Me.**

Maya, Prakrti, Nature, Avidya, Primal Ignorance etc. are near synonyms with fine nuances which can be decided by the context in which terms happen to be used. It is the presence of Maya which turns the non-functioning Brahman into functioning God. The “creation” or the world, of the “soul”, and even the Godness of God are such, because of the associates of protean Maya in appropriate forms. Protean Maya is protean ignorance, which spawns every illusion, “from Brahma to a blade of grass”, as the Books often put it. Ignorance of what? Of one’s own true Self, on which all else has somehow come to be super-imposed. Brahman has deliberately chosen to lay aside Its Brahmanness and become God as the First Yajna or Karma, for the sake of “others”. But the jiva feels itself held in its grip helplessly like a fox in a python’s coils.



This self-assumed ignorance in Brahman is called Maya which It uses as an instrument with which to make and keep the jiva ignorant. For if man were to be aware of his true Self, he would cease to co-operate in the discharge of his prarabdha, as a result of which he would be neither here nor there. So, the ignorance or forgetfulness is, as it were, imposed on him in his own interests. The option, however, is his, if he cares to exercise it. And that is why, of all animals, man is the only one who has been allotted the faculty of reason, so that he can, if he wills, wriggle out of the coils. In the meanwhile, while he is not yet fed up to the gills, and in desperate need of succour, he retains the fascination of the mirage; and bemused by Maya, it is very hard for him even to wish to shed the stupor, and regain memory. If he had only to resort to the ruse of emptying himself of his constricted human ego and merging it along with its amnesia into the God– or Cosmic–ego, and then into Atman. We have been told how in Chapter VI.29 and 30. Having become God the master of Maya, he can dismiss the latter simply by so willing; and then, the prodigal will have returned.

This Maya of Mine expresses herself for the little jiva-me as the eight-pronged Prakrti to create the illusion of a world in order to help “me” out of “my” misery by over-satiation.

15. **Men of evil conduct, fools, scum among men whose reason has been stultified by Maya and who are stuck with evil tendencies, do not choose to take recourse to Me.**

16. **Arjuna, men of righteous behaviour and works, who worship Me with self-dedication, are of four types: (1) The earnest man under stress of afflictions (– or one who pines for Me –), (2) the seeker of knowledge, (3) the man of wants, and (4) the jnani.**

All of them are found only among persons of God-oriented innocence.

17. **Of them, the jnani who keeps Me (inseparable) company and whose devotion is single-pointed,**



excels the rest. I am extremely dear to the jnani, and he, too, is dear to Me.

18. All of them are men of wide outlook; but I regard the jnani as Atman itself. Such a man of union (with Me) stands established in no less than the Supreme state beyond which there is no other, i.e. in Me and Me alone.

The same as the wise man described in II, he has arrived, though alive. And does the soul-spirit arrive so, all of a sudden and with ease? –

19. The man of jnana attains My refuge (only) at the end of numerous (effortful) existences, having by then come to the conclusion: "All this is Vasudeva". Such a mahatma is rare to meet.

Vasudeva means the deva or light which dwells (i.e. is immanent) in, everything, namely Atman or Brahman. It is also an epithet of Krishna as an avatara.

Apart from such a mahatma or highly evolved soul, and speaking of men of mediocrity who spend themselves in worship and sycophancy of God or a god, or a number of gods and godlings, urged by cravings and hopes born of Avidya, you, Arjuna, should know that they, the deities so solicited, are simply My own emanations, and therefore, indirectly yet ultimately, are Me alone.

- 20-21. Their inherent awareness of their Atman-self having been submerged by all sorts of longings, and in consonance with the rules pertaining to them, driven by their own nature, they seek shelter in other deities. Each of such devotees wants to worship a particular deity-form with shraddha; to each one of them, it is only I who endows his particular form of steadfast shraddha.

22. Fortified by that shraddha, he goes about paying



homage and tribute to his chosen deity, and succeeds in his objectives, which too are provided by Me, and none else.

23. But, the fruits sought for and obtained by those petty-minded people prove to be short-lived. Worshippers of deities come by the deities, and My bhaktas to Me.

My bhaktas: here, of course, means the jnani.

24. Witless people, ignorant of My essential, highest, immutable significance (i.e. true nature of Being) take Me the formless, to have assumed an individuality of form.

There is clear repudiation of the idea of unintelligently regarding any visible shape or form as being God. Brahman is just an all-embracing, innocent, uplifting Sat-Chit-Ananda concept, wedded to which the soul rises from the ridiculous to the sublime. How then, does it transpire that men fall into the error?

25. Hidden well out of sight by my yoga-maya (– deliberate delusions –), I am not apparent to all people. (That is why) men of stupidity fail to adequately know Me as the birthless and imperishable.

i.e. as being beyond and above all limitations of all kinds.

26. Arjuna, I know all creatures who have been in the past, who will be in future and who are in the present; but not one of them knows Me.
27. At the very outset of their creation, all creatures are bemused by the lure of dualities arising from likes and dislikes.



That sense of attachment is in fact the motive power which sets the cycle of transmigration in motion for them. Bereft of it, the motiveless circle collapses.

28. **But persons of meritorious works whose sin (of ignorance) has come to an end, are freed from the lure of dualities; and then they take recourse to Me with firm resolve.**

They have made up their minds as to what is good for them without waiting to be told. They resolutely set about getting It straightaway. They do not waver or wobble like you do.

This is the answer to the unasked query: “When is a man enabled to be introvert?” The answer in effect is: “When he has washed away his karma by righteous conduct and detachment.”

Maya having lost the *raison d’être* of its presence, relaxes her grip on him and leaves his intellect to function freely.

29. **Those who put forth due efforts to achieve freedom from dotage and death under My auspices, are in possession of the knowledge of Brahman in its entirety, or adhyatma, as well as karma in its totality.**

Having no more insistent prarabdha left to engage and distort his view, his buddhi freed from the hobble and instinctively nostalgic, turns its face inward, looks at what dwells in and informs the body and senses, decodes its message, decides upon the way that leads back Home, and resolutely puts its best food forward with full faith in Me.

This is how he becomes fully cognisant of what Brahman means, since he himself is It. He reinforces his discovery by reflecting on the adhyatma which is an enquiry inside his own body, learns the true import of its constituents and their functioning – an enquiry which reveals to him Atman as the Thing behind it all. He has by then unearthed the secret of the principle of action-reaction with all its trickeries.



30. **Once having (thus) known Me in My material, divine and yajna aspects, he is united with Me, and this realisation of Me does not desert him even in death.**

The terms in the original are: (1) Adhibhoota or the material, relating to the mixtures of the elements or bhootas; which means all matter; which too is nothing but Brahman in that form of Its self-manifestation. (2) Adhidaiva: everything relating to daivi forces called divine or heavenly because invisible and incalculable, which means all energy, such as the forces of nature, and what makes them exist, (3) Adhiyajna or the spirit behind the yajna-principle as propounded in previous pages here, and what it all amounts to in the final analyses.

Chapter VIII On Indestructible Brahman

Arjuna

- 1-2. What is that Brahman? What is adhyatma? Again, O Supreme Purusha! What is karma? And what is that which is known as adhibhoota? Again, what do you call adhidaiva? What is that thing you call adhi-yajna, and how does it happen to be on this body? Moreover how can you be remembered and recognised by men of self-control at the time of departure?

Purusha: Literally, the resident, one who resides in the 'city'. It has three connotations: the jivatman is purusha as residing in the nine-gated city called the body. God is the purusha, resident in and owner of the world city; and Brahman is the Purusha-Supreme as residing in all of them – and a bit more.

Krshna

3. Brahman is the supreme Infrangible. One's nature is called adhyatma; the act of creation which brings about the existence of creatures is known as karma.

Terse questions, more tersely answered. Man's "nature" or prakrti includes the physical and mental components that constitute his personality and is his adhyatma. One's actions along with their reactions are responsible for his birth, and for certain of the world as a means for the liquidation of his karmic prarabdha. So, in effect, karma is creation, or cause of creation of the material objects which in their totality is called the world.

4. The adhibhoota is the mortalness-idea (which all material creation implies), and the jivatman



purusha is a man's adhidaivata (– the unseen mysterious entity, the ability to live and act, which inhabits him –); and, Arjuna! I am here the adhi-yajna itself in the body.

As already stated, life was “created” along with the spirit of yajna. That spirit is embodied as a human being; and that is what makes the world-mare go, really. To the man of realisation all is in him, he is in all, and both are in Brahman, which is the ultimate of the yajna-spirit, thus equating that spirit with Brahman or Atman Itself. The man who does not have that spirit is a beast in mere human form.

5. **And the soul which, at the time of death, passes out of the body thinking only of Me, attains Me-ness. There is no doubt about it.**

At the time of passing away, only that person is able to keep all mundane thoughts out of his mind and remain aware only of Brahman and nothing else, who has formed such a habit over a long period of his life. That is why time and again the Gita has emphasised continuity and single-mindedness of effort as the sine-qua-non of realisation. But, the question is, what is the point in keeping Its memory green at the supreme moment? –

6. **A man becomes like unto only that thing which he would be thinking of at the time of his demise, as it would then have taken permanent hold of him.**

Taken hold of him: seized his mind, i.e. his soul, to the exclusion of all other thoughts. The soul carries forward to the next existence with special power that notion with which it transmigrates, and that impression predominates the new life it launches on.

7. **That is why, keep Me in your mind continually all the time, and fight, with your thoughts and intellect thus moulded in Me; you will then without a shadow of a doubt, come unto Me, and Me only.**



8. **One who keeps thinking of the divine Supreme Purusha continuously, with his mind embedded in repetitive study and trained in not straying, himself becomes It.**
- 9-10. **It is the Omniscient, the unborn Oldest of the old, the Ruler-supreme, smaller than the smallest (– ungraspable –), Provider and Sustainer of all, of inconceivable form and resplendent as the sun, beyond the darkness (of ignorance, or of Prakṛti), and ever-present. One who with his whole mind strengthened by the power of yoga, ceaselessly contemplates It with his “breath” properly fixed between the eyebrows, goes unto that divine Purusha.**

Breath is used in the sense of sight. As remarked before, breath makes vital energy or prana of the body, and all senses operate only by its favour, so, derivatively, they are themselves called pranas or breath-power, or vital energies. That Purusha is the I and Me of Krishna.

- II. **I shall now briefly mention for your information that immortal entity which Vedic scholars habitually utter, unto which sannyasins (or those whose one endeavour is Realisation) go, and wishing which people observe continence.**
- 12-13. **He attains the Supreme State who abandons the body and departs, with all exits (of senses) closed, mind confined within itself (– unstraying –), fixed in concentration with his prana centred in the top of his head, uttering in its three aspects the one-lettered Brahman Aum, with Me in his thoughts all the time.**

This refers to pranayama technique of Patanjali Yoga. The term used for Brahman as well as for the letter Aum or Om is akshara or



undestroyable. The first letter of all Indian alphabets is a, without the aid of which no letter can be pronounced or written; that is why it is a-kshara, a property akin to Brahman vis-à-vis the world and all that it contains. This word AUM, is three-sounds-in-one, and is written in one letter ॐ, so it is One-letter-Brahman, just as Brahman with its innumerable facets, is but one single word.

Of this AUM, A stands for the visible and viable world of senses, U is all mental operations, and thoughts, including dream, day-dreaming etc., and M represents the absence or just the potential state of all these, the state of unconsciousness, such as sleep.

Constant practice is the key-word here –

14. **Arjuna, I am easy of access to the yogin (of karma-yoga) who is permanently linked with Me, and who contemplates me daily and continuously with unstraying mind.**

Which means, who sublimates all his thoughts and actions in Me, to whom every thought and action is an act of My worship, dedicated to Me.

15. **Mahatmas with minds thus attuned to the supreme attainment, having once had Me, are never again subject to rebirth which is a house-of-sorrow, and even as such, is also transient.**

Rebirth, i.e. reversion during the current life from witnessing to the state of susceptibility to the whiplashes of dualities; or, infliction of another birth.

16. **Arjuna, all the worlds right from Brahma-loka down are subject to recurrence. But having come unto Me, rebirth is simply ruled out.**

There are seven upper and seven nether lokas or worlds, metaphorically signifying states of spiritual elevation of the mind, and those of



degradation, respectively. The brahma-loka is tops in the first category when the mind is attuned to the blissfulness of Me.

And now, a popular belief rooted in Indian theology to which passing reference has already been made, is going to be dealt with and its underlying significance is to be brought out:

17. **The day of Brahma lasts for a thousand Yugas; his night also terminates after a similar period of time. Those who know them** (– their spiritual significance –) **are the true knowers of “day” and “night”.**
18. **All manifested individual forms come into manifestation at the dawn of “day”, and at “nightfall” they merge into that very state called the unmanifest** (from which they emerged).
19. **Helplessly, this world of matter, of creatures in toto, thus repeatedly appears, and, at the advent of the night disappears, reappearing at “day-break”.**
20. **However, there is an Unmanifest indestructible Existence over and above the** (aforesaid) **unmanifest, which is not destroyed even when all else is.**

The idea is: There is the First-ever-existent Existence Brahman-principle. It assumes Maya or the Will to create; the functionless Brahman having assumed a function, is the energy-principle termed God or Ishvara by us in Its role as creator. Brahma is Its name as the cosmic soul-spirit. From it proceed the various aspects of “creation” with their presiding or informing powers called devas or gods, followed by the visible phenomena of the world with its myriad contents. From God downwards, all this is just Maya or natural (praktik) appearance in Brahman. This Maya or the First Will remained potential and unmanifest in Brahman prior to being strung out as “creation”, which is but this Unmanifest manifested. The last two verses, 18 and 19, describe how this unmanifest Maya becomes manifest under the aegis of its



presiding power, Brahma. Let not Arjuna think that this unmanifest, then, is the last word here. The Guru informed him that: (1) over and above “this” manifest is the unmanifest Maya or God’s Will, and (2) beyond that is the Unmanifest, the Light that makes unmanifest Maya be, and then become. When It so wills, the whole contraption from Brahma to unmanifest Maya to the manifest universe – all phenomenal existence – ceases to be. But the Willer of it all, does not cease to Be.

21. **This Unmanifest Eternal is known to be the supreme goal (of the soul), having attained which the traveler returneth not. And that is My Supreme State.**

22. **That Supreme Purusha in which all creatures live and have their being, and whose extension all this is, can be attained only by means of exclusive devotion.**

Exclusive is the keyword. No divided attention or wavering in fidelity even by thought can make it. The word in the original is “un-anya”, not-another.

Krshna knows that Arjuna is out of his depth here; so he comes down to his level of up-take, and reverts to the cosmics of theology. It is laid down there that souls passing out of the body during certain periods of time must return to earthly existence; and there are other periods, passing out when the soul is absolved from rebirth. The former periods are called dark, or night, and the other set is named light or white, or day. To understand the significance of these terms we should turn to Chapter II.69. Passing away at “night-time” means, the soul’s departure in a state of ignorance of the Truth. Apply the rule laid down in 6 of this chapter, and there we are. Departing in light-time i.e. in full knowledge, the soul goes the way of its preceding verse. That is the symbolism here. The wide awake reformer Krshna warns Arjuna against stupidly accepting the metaphorical words of the Vedas in their letter, ignoring its spirit, as most men do in respect of their particular theological faiths.

23. **I shall now tell you about the periods of time for**



departure when dying, a devotee's soul becomes subject to rebirth, and when not.

- 24-25. **Flame of the (funeral pyre's) fire, light, daytime, the light-half of a month, and the six months of the Uttarayana-half of a year are the periods, passing away in which enlightened souls attain Brahman (– i.e., the point of no return –). And smoke, the night-half of a day, the dark half of a month and the six months of the Dakshinayana-half of a year are the periods, by expiring in which the yogi goes the way of the moon and must return to physical existence.**

This is the paraphrase of some passages in the Upanishads. In India, the bright half of a year is from December 23 to June 22, when the sun turns its face i.e. ayana to the north or uttara, the period which is dominated by a pleasant sun, a general sense of well-being, and an atmosphere of enthusiasm, sprightly activity and cheerfulness conducive to an uplifted mind. The rest of the year is hot, damp, rainy, cloudy, muddy...with depressing atmosphere engendering gloom, melancholy moods, irascibility, lassitude etc., when the sun faces the south or dakshina. Cheerfulness (d'allegro) typifies knowledge, and gloom is the characteristic of ignorance (il penseroso).

The moon in Indian theology is the world of fanciful pleasures, the zenith of which is the Heaven or the place where the soul is supposed to proceed for enjoying the fancied fruits of its good works on earth, and from which, the period of permit expiring, it must be ejected and made to go right back to a suitable body that he might then have come to deserve. The moon has no light of its own, and is by itself dark matter – a symbol of ignorance, and it shines only by a borrowed light which is illusive in its nature.

The “yogi” here means “one who has applied his mind to a goal”; in the first case, the yoga or union of the mind is with Light, and in the other, with a Heaven, or God or angels or deities, all of whom are chips off the same block – Ignorance.



26. **These two are believed to be the paths of the world's destiny for ever. One leads the soul to the place from which there is no return, and the other to places from which it must come back.**
27. **But the yogi who knows this travel-story, is never in a doubt (about its message). Therefore, Arjuna, engage yourself in this karma-yoga all the time.**

For, then, it will be “daylight” for you all down the river of life. This is cheerful news!

28. **The rewards of merit which are shown to follow the Vedic way, ritual yajnas, physical austerities, as well as charities (of various types), are all transcended by the yogin when he comes to know his (secret), and he wins for himself the original Supreme State.**

Whatever the time of the day, month or year of his emergence from the physical body.

The plot, as it were, thickens; and seeing Arjuna's eyes light up, the Master launches on another remarkable sermon in the next chapter.

Chapter IX On Knowledge and Special Knowledge

Krshna

1. **To you who are free of malice (– and because of it –), I shall reveal this most secret of all knowledges along with its special knowledge knowing which you will never come to harm.**

Malice here stands for all evil thoughts which foul the mind. Knowledge is one thing and its conscious experience is quite another thing. Krishna promises to convey to Arjuna not only the theoretical knowledge of this yoga, but the special knowledge of the method by which the theory may be intimately experienced in person. But only a clean mind can make it.

2. **It is the lore of all lores; it is the secret of all secrets, sacred, superbly capable of being directly experienced, of the nature of righteous duty, easy to practise, and everlasting.**

Easy to practise, since it involves no physical “doing”, and requires no external objects nor help.

3. **But men lacking faith in this dharmā, Arjuna, reach Me not, and (have to) come back.**
4. **All this has been brought about by Me the formless All. All creatures have their being within Me, but I am not within them.**

This fact, that this everybody’s Me has no shape, form or body, is repeatedly emphasised by the speaker; for Brahman is a principle, and a principle is a notion which can have no visible shape of its own; It can only be manifested through the medium of something else beside itself which has a form of its own. A principle borrows that form only for practical purposes. Thus the existence of the world is the token by which



you pinpoint the Principle of Existence, and experience it within yourself too. The images which Hindus worship are conceived in that spirit – worshipping the formless through the medium of forms. It is the formless notions and ideas and principles and knowledges or lores that really rule life, physical forms and objects being only their pawns through which they work themselves out. Moreover this special knowledge of pure Consciousness is the One master-knowledge that governs and makes possible all knowledges. It is the most secret yet most apparent of them all, which the reflective intelligence of man can easily discern everywhere all the time, and discreetly experience within itself too, as its own being. All phenomenal existences exist in Existence which is Consciousness, and are confined within It; nothing can exist outside Existence. But Existence is not confined within anything; It can and does exist outside all existences, where alleged existence is but a pale shadow of that by which they exist.

5. **And creatures too, in fact, are not situated within Me. See my uniquely divine yoga (– method –). My Atman is the maintainer of all creatures and their very being, yet It is not confined to them.**

Atman is a principle which is joined with everything; but not in the sense familiar to us, as one thing joined to or mixed with or chemically combined with another thing which cannot at the same time be outside of it also. But this One is inside everything, yet is not so; all things are inside It, yet they are not. As wood is inside a wooden toy, yet it is not, and the toy is inside wood, and yet is not. A conundrum that wants some reflection.

6. **Understand it this way: all creatures are within Me in the sense in which the winds however great, eternal and limitless in their scope, reside in the sky, yet both are contactless with respect to each other.**

There are two kinds of causes of things. One is upadana or material; the stuff of which a thing is made, such as marble in respect of a statue. The status bereft of its marble, simply cannot be. Other causes are nimitta or



instrumental, the chief of which, in our analogy, is the sculptor, who uses as sub-instrumentals the chisels, measuring instruments etc. In respect of the universe, Atman is its material as well as its instrumental cause. This is a miracle vis-à-vis phenomenal objects with their twin causes which can never unite into one.

7. **Arjuna, all creatures merge in My Prakṛti at the conclusion of a kalpa; I completely resurrect them at the dawn of the (next) kalpa.**

“Let there be a universe, and there was a universe...Let there be no universe, and there was none.” – That is how we in India conceive “creation”, and establish two-in-oneness of its “cause”.

8. **Wielding My own Prakṛti thus, I create this helpless mass of creatures again and again in its entirety, simply because such is My nature.**

Brahman when It wills to create, is God. So, God is “will to create”, and as such, creating and recreating is God’s very nature, bereft of which God ceases to be God. The assumption of this “nature” is voluntary, but while it lasts, it is compulsory.

9. **And (the uniqueness here is that) this karma, Arjuna, does not bind Me, as My attitude in respect of them is of an unconcerned witness, with no personal involvement in its doing.**
10. **My nature conceives and delivers the whole of the quick-cum-inert creation under My auspices. And that is the reason why the world comes about again and again.**

That reason is the principle of karma, i.e. of action and its inevitable reaction, which makes for transmigration of souls and the repeated advent of creation which provides them with the means for working out and getting rid of their karma.



- 11. Stupid people, not knowing My supreme principle which is the great ruler of all creatures, think of Me wrongly as having taken human form.**

A well-deserved slap to those who worship a shape or a form, even a human one, as God, not having the intelligence to know that God is a principle, and that the I and Me of all as also of God himself is the Principle even of that God-principle which would cease to be a principle as soon as a shape is assigned to It; for, a shape inevitably connotes having (1) a beginning and an end, and (2) limits. None of these characteristics can be assigned to God, much less to Brahman. Compare Chapter VII.24.

- 12. They hope in vain; their actions (of worship etc.) go in vain; all their learning is in vain; their minds are perverted; they remain slaves of (their own) demoniac, stultifying and infatuating nature.**

“Nature” refers to the avidya or ignorance of the eternal verities, which is natural to the soul and is the author of all ills to which flesh is said to be heir. On the other hand –

- 13. But, Arjuna, highly evolved mahatmas seeking shelter in Divine Nature, (– My Will –), and knowing Me as the immutable source and fountain-head of all creatures, worship (i.e. pour themselves into) Me with exclusive attention.**

Exclusive attention: upasana. There are a number of ways in which “I” can be resorted to –

- 14. They offer Me incessantly devoted upasana by way of constant singing of My praises, of ceaseless effort (in yoga-discipline) with unflinching determination, and of offering Me their obeisance in the spirit of dedication.**
- 15. While others dedicate themselves to Me by way of**



jnana-yajna, some in the spirit of Oneness (soul and Atman), some with a sense of separateness (between the soul and the Spirit), and yet others (thinking of Me) in multifarious forms.

How? Because I am everything that they choose to believe Me to be, being immanent in all.

16. I am determination; I am yajna (– action which follows determination –); I am svadha; I am the food-grains; I am the formula (chanted all the time); I am the ghee; I am the fire, and I am the oblation (itself).

Again the idiom of sacrificial ritual is used, since ritual was in wide-spread fashion among the intelligentsia of the Gita-days. Svadha is the word used in offering oblation to the manes. Food-grain: offered in sacrifices or fed to the fire and/or to the people. The same of ghee or clarified butter.

- 17-18. I am the father, mother, support and grandsire, the sacred word AUM which is the only thing worth knowing, the Rk-, Sama- and Yajur-Vedas, the destination, provider, God, witness, abode, refuge, friend, origin, end, situation, shelter and the eternally existent seed of the universe.
19. I am heat, I restrain and let-forth the rains, I am immortality as well mortality, and, Arjuna, I am existence as well as non-existence.

As to the ritualist –

20. The votaries of the Three Lozes, the drinkers of soma who are cleansed of sin (of ego), dedicate themselves to Me through Vedic sacrificial ceremonies and pray for a place in Heaven. They earn the reward for their karmic merit, ascend to



the state of divine abode of Indra the Sovereign of gods, and enjoy angelic delights in Heaven.

The Three Lores: the three Vedas, or those parts of the Vedas which advocate numerous forms of rituals for attainment of the numerous objects of endless desires to which the ambitions of unenlightened jivatmans are limited. The Vedas are in fact divided into four sections, but the fourth is mostly regarded as included in the Three, and so only three are mentioned here. Soma is the refreshing juice of a certain creeper. It was imbibed by priests in a formal way as a part of yajna rituals which took heavy toll of their energy. Soma-juice kept them going through the very long and strenuous time of vigil and no-rest. Drinkers of soma, therefore, means vigilant performers of Vedic rituals. The abode of devas is the court of the deva-king Indra the presiding spirit of strength and reins. His court has a hard and fast hierarchy and protocol. These devas are the nationals of svarga, the new arrival enters the svarga as a tourist or an expatriate under the authority of a passport limited to a period of sojourn earned as per the strength of the traveller's merits. Dedicated to Me: it has already been stated that all worships ultimately reach Me and Me only, in the light of Chapter VII.20-23 as well as 23 below.

Such aspirants to the court of Indra are supposed to have overcome their ego by dedicating their actions to the Vedic God and his archangels, and to that extent, cleansed their minds of "sin". Transplantation of the "I" from the physical body and mind to the Godness earns them the privilege of participation in super-mortal heavenly delights, by which their ambitions are limited.

21. **Having had their allotted fill of the vast heavenly fare, and as soon as the period of grace expires, they have to return to the world (- status -) of mortals (- to which they belong by option -). In that manner, wedded to the dharma of the Three and therefore harbouring desires (of prakrtik nature), these Veda-votaries earn (only) the right of going and returning (ad infinitum).**



“By option”, because they have deliberately opted for the path of Desire, i.e. the way of action and its due reward, which is exclusively confined to the world and its grades, relatively called immortal or angelic, etc., all which are subject to the rule of Maya or self ignorance. The alternative path which they reject is that of cutting this circle of birth-death-birth by transferring one’s allegiance from Maya to the Magician.

22. **I look after the yoga-kshema interests of those jivatmans whose minds are constantly yoked to Me, who think of Me with “none-else” fixation and who worships Me fulltime.**

Yoga here means obtaining what one has not yet got, and kshema, protecting that which one has already come by in course of one’s prarabdha. Such a bhakta (– dedicated one –) need not worry about such matters; he can serenely keep his mind applied to the search for the Grail. I shall see to it that that which is ordained to happen, does happen as it should. By so leaving things to Me, the yogin will (1) save himself unavailing worry in respect of what he cannot help, and (2) get more time for doing that in which he can help.

23. **Even those who pledge allegiance to other deities with deep faith, Arjuna, are (in effect) worshipping Me only, though indirectly.**
24. **I am the recipient of as well as the president of all (forms of) yajna. Those who do not (so) fully know Me in My true quintessence, are bound to suffer set-backs (in their evolution).**

That is to say, instead of progressing in their march to immortal Brahmanhood, they must relapse into rebirths, which implies continued suffering and sorrow.

25. **Addicts of deities attain the deities; sciotheists attain manhood; those devoted to elemental forces (– or to material excellence –) attain (the world of) matter; and (by the same token) those**



who aspire to Me, attain Me!

26. **I am a leaf, a flower, a fruit or even water that may be devotionally offered to Me by men of cleansed minds.**

That is the rub, cleansed minds. Where the mind is not such, even the costliest offerings have no acceptance value. But in the case of a karma-yogin of clean, meaning ego-free mind, the most insignificant of offerings can carry the highest reward – Me.

27. **Therefore, Arjuna, dedicate to Me all that you can do, eat, oblate, give or (even) contemplate.**
28. **That way you will escape the bonds of karma in the form of returns, pleasant as well as unpleasant; and, with your mind conjoined with the yoga of renunciation, absolved, you will come very close to Me.**
29. **I am same with respect to all creatures, to Me, no one is either dear or disliked. Those who take shelter unto Me with devotion, are in Me; they are in Me, I am in them.**

“I” and “You”, unite into one I.

- 30-31. **If a man be an evildoer of the deepest dye but has dedicated himself in the none-else spirit to Me, he should be regarded as a man of righteousness; for, then, he would certainly be worthily engaged. He at once becomes a man of right conduct, and attains eternal peace. Arjuna, know hereby, that My devotee never perishes.**

There is no such thing as sin and inevitable damnation. The sin-complex is ill-conceived. Sin or sense of guilt cannot ever stick, once mentally abjured and replaced by resignation unto God. No man, now going

straight, should therefore, be traduced on the score of his past, the past having passed beyond recall. It is the present that matters here.

32. **Verily, Arjuna even those, born in sin, whether they be women, traders or the lowest of the low, can and do attain the highest status (of Brahmanhood) by taking complete refuge unto Me.**

Here, the three kinds of people mentioned refer to the general characteristics of the particular groups, as evidenced everywhere. Women here stand as the symbol of dyed-in-the-wool worldliness. The sex of the person concerned is of no consequence. A man with that mentality is a “woman” in this sense. The term trader implies greed, cupidity, grasping instinct of exploitation and unscrupulousness in general, manifesting themselves in persons of any group-denomination. The term “shudra” signifies servility. The idea is that Brahmanhood cuts across all social strata, and every soul is a potential president.

33. **What, then, remains to be said about virtuous brahmanas, devout men and saintly kings? Having arrived in this transient sorrow-ridden world, (all you can do to be happy is to) devote yourself to Me.**
34. **Make your mind Mine; become My votary; let all your karma be as yajna unto Me; salute Me. Thus, finding sublimation in Me and facing Me in that spirit, you will become Me and nothing else.**

Chapter X On Divine Manifestation

The last chapter spoke of Me being omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent, and immanent too, as the material-cum-instrumental cause of everything. We have now a few specified instances of this immanence.

Krshna

1. Yet again, mighty-armed Arjuna, listen to my words of supreme import which I speak unto you as your well-wisher; for, you please me.
2. The heavenly hosts did not witness my advent; nor did the great Sages. (For), in every way, I have been prior to all the gods as well as to the great rshis.

The great Sages referred to here are the same original principles of wisdom which were first conceived by the "Creator", and from which numerous sub-principles of cause-effect stemmed, culminating in the visible universe we experience with our senses and minds.

"I", the very principle of Existence and Consciousness, was already there before them. How can an effect know how its cause came about?

3. Those who know Me the originless and unborn sovereign of the universe, are the enlightened among mortals, and they stand absolved from all guilt whatsoever.

Guilty of ego, desire, attachment.

- 4-5. Buddhi, knowledge, freedom from illusion and delusion, forbearance, truth, sense-control, pleasure, pain, appearance and absence, fear and



**fearlessness, non-violence, sameness,
contentment, austerities, charity, fame and infamy
– these various moods of creatures arise from Me
only.**

They exist and prevail only by My will and consent, irrespective of the qualities of goodness and evilness which the jivas assign to them out of their own predilections all of which are but the play of Self-ignorance called Maya.

6. **The seven great Sages, before them the Four, as also the Manus of whom all these (creatures) in the world are the progeny, are the mental conceptions of My (creative) moods.**

Brahman chose to be in the mood to be manifest as energy, (prana) and to “create”, i.e. become “creator”. He first conceived four bases of creation called Sanaka, Sanat, Sanatana and Sanadana. They are the symbols of eternity, bliss etc. They were followed by the seven Sages, and Manu the first man. And then was set in motion the endless aetiological chain we call the world. This is but one of the many Vedic cosmologies.

7. **He who knows in its spiritual message this effulgence and yoga of Mine, becomes planted in unshakable union. Let there be no doubt about it.**
8. **I am the origin of all, all existences issue from Me. Believing such to be the case, wiser men devote themselves to Me with deep feeling.**
9. **With minds invested in Me, their very breath (– or all of their ten senses –) dedicated to Me, telling the good news to one another and always dwelling on Me, they remain contented and happy.**
10. **To those people thus constantly united with and devoted to Me in love, I grant that yoga of Jnana,**



by means of which they come closer to Me.

11. Out of compassion for them only, and because I have the feeling of being their very Self, I remove the darkness (in them) born of ignorance, by means of the shining lamp of Self-knowledge.

Arjuna

- 12-13. You, Sir, are Supreme Brahman, the ultimate refuge, and most sacred. All the sages, such as the godly saint Narada, as also Asita, Devala and Vyasa, have spoken of you as the eternal Purusha, the First Effulgence, birthless and omnipresent. Moreover, you too have been saying so.
14. Bliss incarnate! I take what you tell me as absolute truth; neither the gods nor the titans have been able to recognise your manifestations.
15. O Supreme Purusha, it is only You, the very existence of all creatures, their sovereign, God of gods, master of the world, who know Your Self by Yourself.

The source necessarily knows what proceeds from itself, but the proceeds cannot know of their source, which is sourceless, self-existent.

16. You should very kindly tell me in complete detail your divine manifest effulgences with which You stand, enveloping these worlds.

Worlds: manifest, semi-manifest and potential.

17. Thinking of You in all your aspects as I am, how am I to visualise You? How am I to know in what concepts You should be contemplated by me (to my best advantage)?



Like most people, Arjuna finds it difficult to think of and concentrate on something that is entirely intangible and gives no hold to the mind. The mind must have something to bite on, something graspable by the senses; or at least by the mind, in the form of clear-cut concept with definite attributes.

- 18. So, Janardana, please tell me about your yoga (– method of my union with your Me –) and extensions of your manifested effulgences, again and again in detail. I can never have too much of hearing what is ambrosia (to my ears).**

Chapter Chapter IX.15-19, and the foregoing verses in this have whetted his appetite. Like Oliver Twist, he wants more! Very well:

The universe has three “worlds” or aspects: (1) Adhidaiva or the non-sensory world of “divinities” such as karma, air and other intangible mysterious factors affecting life; (2) Adhibhoota or the world of sensory perception, the myriad of visible and material forms which are mixtures of the elemental prakrti in its manifestations outside of ourselves, and (3) Adhyatma or the visceral world which dwells inside our body, the senses, limbs, mind, moods, etc., the study of the significance of which alone can lead to realisation of Atman. Krishna will now proceed to give a sampling of each of the three “worlds”, to give us an idea of how and by which token his Me, which is every blessed creature’s Me as well, can be recognised and experienced everywhere. All the three worlds are nothing but an expression of My Expression: the first expression of Me or Atman is in the form of cosmic energy of Prana-Atman we call God, which is the first qualified concept of the unqualified Me, followed by the visible universe which is the material expression of God the Prana-Atman. Here Krishna is going to make it clear that both the Cosmic energy (God) and the phenomenal universe, are entirely conceptual existences which live and have their being (or appearance) only in Me, i.e. they are only Me, appearing to ignorantly concerned eyes and minds in Me, as a thief appears in the stump of a tree to the already frightened eyes of a traveller in semi-darkness; or mirage in dry sand in the heat of noon. That way, all is Me and Me alone – visible and invisible manifestations of My Will.



Krshna

19. **Very well, Arjuna, I shall relate to you some of the outstanding manifested effulgences of Mine; for there are no limits to My extension and scope.**
20. **I am Atman-core residing in the very being of all creatures; I am the beginning (– source –), the middle (– duration –) as well as the end (– conclusion –) of creatures.**

Now some groups of beings belonging to each of the three worlds will be mentioned as representative samples. Each of them signifies a certain set of values, of which, its basic Me will be shown to be the very heart and essence, its material-cum-instrumental cause.

21. **I am Vishnu among Adityas, the sun among brightnesses, Marichi among the winds, and the moon among the celestial bodies.**

Adityas: the light-heat-energy in various forms, the presiding principle of which is termed Vishnu, the Maintainer.

22. **I am the Sama-Veda among the Vedas, Vasus among the celestials, mind among the senses, and sentience in creatures.**

Sama-Veda is the part of the Vedas set to music, the systematic musical composition on earth.

23. **Among the Rudras (temperaments) I am Shankara (– or peaceful calm –), Kubera (– the spirit of wealth –) among semi-divine beings, fire among the Vasus (– the heat principle in the body –), and Meru (– Himalayan peak –) among mountains.**
24. **Among teachers, know Me to be Brhaspati (– the advisor to the gods, i.e. the spirit of learning –); I am**



- Skanda** (–the C-in-C of the divine hosts –) **among army leaders, and ocean among reservoirs.**
25. **Among the great** (Seven) **sages** (of yore) **I am Bhrgu; in speech I am the One Letter** (– Aum –); **japa-yajna** (– repetition of God’s name, or contemplation –) **among yajnas, and the Himalayas among inert masses –**
26. **The pipal among trees, Narada among divine sages, Chitraratha among Gandharvas** (– spirits of the fine arts, chiefly music –), **and Kapila among seers.**
27. **Among horses know Me to be Uchchaishravas** (– the ideal horse churned out of the ocean –) **who is a companion of Amrta** (– or ambrosia –); **Airavata among tuskers, and king among objects of the male gender.**
28. **I am Vajra** (– thunderbolt –) **among weapons, Kamadudha** (– wish-wielder –) **among milkers, cupid among births, and Vasuki among serpents.**
29. **Among cobras** (– signifying Time –) **I am Ananta** (– eternity –), **Varuna** (– fluidity –) **among fluids, Aryama among manes and Yama** (– death –) **among controllers.**
30. **Among titans I am Prahlada** (– the titan saint –), **Tine of Astrologers, lion among animals and eagle among birds.**
31. **Among blowers I am the Wind, Rama among men of arms, shark among fish, and the Ganga among rivers.**



32. Of creation, Arjuna, I am the beginning, the middle as well as the end; spiritual knowledge among learnings; the conjunction of grammarians, aye, I am the indestructible Time-dimension, and universal governor.
33. I am the letter a of the alphabet, and the duality of those who revel in compounds. I alone am endless Time and I am the creation – comprising support and substance.

The a of AUM also, the primal sound, the very foundation of speech, and therefore of all activity which is the very quintessence of the world. Compound words are embellishments of literary creation, a figure of speech which is common to word-weaving, particularly in Sanskrit.

34. And I am Death who spirits away everything and the future birth of things to come, among the objects of the female gender I am fame, prosperity, speech, memory, quickness of understanding, forbearance and faith.

The Sanskrit equivalents of these are all of the female gender.

35. Among the (music-set) Sama compositions, I am Brhat-Sama; among prosody-forms I am the Gayatri, among months I am Margashirsha and Spring among seasons.

At the time of Krishna, circa 3000 BC, this month falling in November-December, was the first, i.e. the leading month of the calendar, as astrologically, the vernal equinox came about then in those days.

36. I am the game of dice among cheaters, lustre of the lustrous, victory, decision, and the peace of the peaceful.
37. Vasudeva among the Vrshnis, Arjuna of the



**Pandavas, Vyasa among the Munis, and Ushanas
among men of vision.**

Vasudeva is an epithet for Krshna. Vrshni was a sect of the Yadava clan of Krshna.

38. I am the punishment-principle of punishers; policy of success-seekers, silence of secrets, and the knowledge of knowers.
39. Indeed, I am that which is the seed of all creatures, Arjuna. Among all things, sentient as well as insentient, there is nothing whatever that is not Me.
40. But, Arjuna, there is absolutely no limit to My divine effulgences. I have only described its extent in very brief (sample-wise).
41. Know every single existence of excellence, lustrous or elevated, to be nothing but an outcome of a tyche of My glory.
42. But what will it avail you to know this in greater detail? I stand enveloping the whole universe with but one-fourth on My Being.

Brahman has four conceivable aspects. One is material universe, another the phenomenal space, the third the world of devas, and the fourth, noumenal Existence. These four constitute Brahman in its entirety.

Chapter XI On Cosmic Vision

This fascinating story of the mighty Me's pervasiveness inside and outside everything, and the picture of all and everything being Me, aroused in Arjuna, as it would in all Arjunas even today, a strong desire for visual demonstration. God is not and cannot be an object of the senses, or even the mind. The Upanishads as well as common-sense say as much; if he were, he would be anything but God. But if Krshna could conjure up in Arjuna's mind such an impressive picture, why not ask him? People ask more only of those who can and do give; not the have-not or the niggardly. Where then was the harm in asking Krshna, who was neither? Arjuna knew what Krshna indeed was. He had no doubt this miracle of a man could manage miracles. Past master in psychic lore and its practice, naturally clairvoyant, ESP was child's play to him; and what we call hypnotism, being only a part of the yogic art of exploring other people's minds came to him easily. If the power of suggestion and the subject's willingness were to be helpful factors, well, the latter was there in abundance, and the former had already been accomplished in Chapter X. So –

Arjuna

1. **The secret lore called adhyatma which you have revealed to me as a special favour has relieved me of infatuation.**
2. **I have also heard in detail, O lovely-eyed Krshna, the story of advent and exit of creatures as being from and into You, as well as of Your immortal glory.**

Advent: physical appearance; and exit: physical disappearance.

3. **Now, supreme Purusha that you are, I wish to behold You as you have described your Self to me to be.**



That is, as cosmos or God the Energy. The macrocosm in its entirety dwells in the microcosm, since both are in essence the same Brahman-stuff, like an ocean and a drop of its water. Realisation of this fact to the point of personal experience raises the ridiculous notion of jivaness to the sublime sense of Self-Brahmanhood, and changes the whole aspect as well as the prospects of human life.

4. **If you think it is possible for me to see it, my Lord, then, master of yoga that you are, do make your inviolable Self visible to me.**

Krshna

5. **(Very well) Arjuna, behold My forms by the hundred, aye, by the thousand, of numerous kinds, celestial (as well as earthly), of various hues and diverse shapes.**

Now that Arjuna the subject is ready and willing, suggestions on the lines on which the Master wants him to think and “see”, in addition to those conveyed to his mind in Chapter X and before that also, are presented and pointed out by him. The Master has no need to make a show of preliminary passes and what-not, for “Barkis is willin’!” The suggestions of course go along the line of Vedic descriptions of divine and celestial existences of which Arjuna who had read and heard plenty, and he could therefore readily identify them mentally; for, after all, they are adaptable conceptual forms, not formally visible objects.

6. **See the Adityas, Vasus, Rudras, Ashvins, Maruts (- wind-spirits -), as well as, Arjuna, very many things wondrous to behold which you could never have seen before.**
7. **Vigilant Arjuna, behold concentrated at one place in My body the whole world in its entirety, sentient and otherwise as also anything else that you might want to see.**



This last phrase, as it were, blows the gaff on these superficial philosophies based on surface appearance which think of the world as a set piece with fixed values and determinate interpretations. The vision of the cosmos as vouchsafed to Arjuna was the result of the seizure of his mind by Krshna who had willed that Arjuna should see the world as it exactly is – a fluctuating undefinable conglomeration of kaleidoscopic contents, best described as a magic-box, consisting of what is reported and suggested to a jivatman, plus anything else – all else – that it could have been imagined to consist of. All this is of course apart from what the soul basically is, something intangible, and therefore, ignored. That is the danger spot.

That is exactly the nature of a jivatman's, any jivatman's world; Maya, i.e. what you have been told, plus what you in your ignorance imagine things to be on your own under the promptings of your own samskaras or trends and tendencies built up during many past lives and which act as thrust-points in the current life too. Therefore, the world is what you unconsciously want it to be in your own light; in fact, nonest, a flurry of fancy, a Wonderland in the Looking Glass accepted by us too literally, with disastrous results as we shall see. Krshna here shows himself to be a master psychologist and secret-buster. He has probed the nature of the phenomenal world and evaluated it correctly, for, the world, like a man, is at best a plastic mixture of a flexible mind and uncertain matter. The world of each individual jiva is different from that of every other individual jiva, shaped and characterised by individual fancy, likes, dislikes, prejudices, preferences and viewpoints of the individual, except for a very neutral broad background. Vedantists call the latter "Gods' creation", or guileless Maya, and the former, "jiva-creation", or guileful avidya, primal ignorance, which, in practice, overwhelms and veils the other.

8. **But you will not be able to see it by these your own (physical) optics. I am therefore granting you divining eyes; behold the grandeur of my yoga!**

Sanjaya

9. **O King! Having spoken thus, the super yoga-**



maestro Hari displayed to Arjuna's gaze a supreme vision of cosmic-God-ness –

10. – with its numerous marvellous sights, countless celestial adornments, bristling with many divine weapons threateningly raised –
11. – wearing garlands of celestial beauty, smeared with divinely fragrant pastes...a celestial Being full of all kinds of wonders, limitless, facing everywhere.

All faces are the faces of cosmos-God. All eyes are his eyes...endlessly; while its constituents come, stay awhile, disappear, reappear...it, the conglomerate of God's wish, the whole, ever is.

12. If a thousand suns were to rise simultaneously in the sky, their collective brightness might give an idea of what the lustre of that mahatma was like.
13. Then the Pandava beheld there, centred in one spot, the entire universe in its multiple dimensions, in the body of the Lord of divinities.
14. And then the astonished and flustered Arjuna, with hair standing on end, bending his head in deep bow, spake thus with folded hands:

Arjuna

15. O Lord! I behold in your body all the divine beings, as also masses of various particularised species of creatures: Brahma, Mahadeva, Vishnu, sages, as well as all the legendary celestial serpents.
16. I behold You, with numberless arms, bellies, mouths and eyes, with all-comprehensive, endless



forms. O Cosmos-appearance! Lord of the Universe, I can see neither your beginning, nor middle nor your end.

That which has no beginning, can have neither of the latter either. Had the assumption of energy-form called Godness ever begun? This assumption is also a guess, inevitably based on the intuitive revelations arising out of deep contemplation of the nature of cosmos by sages, and this is a subject which supersedes both the mayik dimensions, time and space.

17. **I see You with the crown, the mace and the disc; a mass of brilliance flashing forth from all sides, completely impossible to set eyes on like a veritable conflagration or (blinding) sun-rays, immeasurable in every possible way.**

The first three are the characteristic adornments of God's Vishnu-aspect, and the Flame can stand for Shiva.

18. **You are the Akshara (– the immutable OM –) the most important thing to know, You are the finest of the final resting places of this universe. You are the invisible, the eternal protector of dharma. I believe You to be the Eternal Purusha.**
19. **(I believe You to be the) Beginningless, middleless, endless, boundless power, with uncountable arms, with the moon and the sun as your (cosmic) eyes, flashing flame-like mouths, lighting up this universe with your effulgence.**
20. **This space between the earth and heaven, as well as the directions, are enveloped by only one, You! Witnessing this marvellous frightful form of yours, O Mahatma! All the three worlds are intensely agitated.**



21. **Look, right now, the hordes of divinities are surely entering you! Some of them, frightened, are folding their hands in supplication; parties of great sages and men of super powers pray to you in many hymns.**

22. **Rudras, Adityas, Vasus, and the semi-divine entities who are on the way to realise You, all the Ashvinis, Maruts as also the manes, crowds of Gandharvas, Yakshas and titans stare at you , all of them amazed.**

All of these, various energy-aspects of the one Ishvara, presented picturesquely as separate divinities, angels, archangels-symbols, which men of piety but unenlightened, accept literally, but which men of wisdom and insight interpret in their proper perspective.

So flustered, so agitated, so overcome by amazement and so terrified Arjuna was at this apocalyptic vision, that incoherently, floundering for words, he repeats himself over and over again, helplessly out of his depth. The mood is brought out here with poetically artistic reality.

23. **Indeed, all the worlds, and myself too, are mightily perturbed at seeing this awful form of yours with its countless faces, eyes, arms, thighs, feet, stomachs, and frightful with many teeth.**

24. **Beholding your glistening form reaching the skies, multihued, with wide-stretched jaws and great big glistening eyes, my mind is terribly distressed. I lose my fortitude and am ill-at-ease, O Vishnu!**

Vishnu, among many other things, signifies the wide, all enveloping blue space.

25. **Your mouths are frightful with fangs like death-dealing flames! Seeing them I lose my sense of**



direction, and I stand aghast. Bear with me, please, the Lord of divinities and ultimate refuge of the world that You are!

- 26-27. (I see) All the sons of Dhrtarashtra along with all the kings and their hosts, and Bhishma, Drona and that Karna, as well as the principle warriors of our troops too, hastening to plunge into your terrible jaws (studded) with frightful fangs. Some of them dangling between the interstices of the teeth, appear with their heads all chewed up.
28. As the voluminous torrents of river-waters, rushing onwards, are heading for the sea alone, so these brave leaders of the people are plunging into your flaming jaws.
29. Like moths speeding headlong to their destruction in a well alight flame, so indeed these hastening worlds are rushing only to their doom in your mouths.
30. Vishnu! Grabbing all the worlds in your glistening jaws, You are licking them up (with tongues of flame) from all sides. Your lustre shines scorchingly, filling the whole world with its glare.
31. Tell me, Sir, who You of this awful presence really are. I bow down to You, supreme deity! Do be pleased! I want to know You better, Sir, You, who are the beginning of things; for, I have no idea of how You function.

You appear terrible. Does it mean that it is your job to frighten and destroy the world? But you, in your Vishnu aspect are reputed to have been assigned the task of nourishing and protecting us against harm. I would like to know the truth. Are Brahma of productivity, or Vishnu of maintenance, or Rudra of demolition? ... The answer, of course, is, in



effect: “I am the Energy-God himself, with all three aspects built in; but at the moment, and fundamentally –

Krshna

32. **I am Time the Destroyer himself, growing and expanding. I am here (at the moment, on this battlefield) engaged in dealing death to people. Even if you had not been here, all the warriors in each division of the armies would not be left alive.**

Krshna cuts him down to size here: You need not run away with the inflated idea that if you were to be away from here, they would remain alive, and that it is only you the mighty warrior you think you are that can kill them or let them live at your sweet will! You simply don't have the option. So stop hedging and over-valuing yourself. Behave like what you are – a cog in the wheel and no more, and quietly do your job like the good cog you are –

33. **Therefore, arise; win the laurels (which are due to you), vanquish your foes and enjoy a prosperous kingdom. All these people have already been killed (– doomed to death –) by Me. So, ambidextrous Arjuna, all you have to do is to be (merely) an instrument (of my Will), which, please be!**

Win the laurels: as already stated before, in Chapter II.37. By Me alone: by destiny laid down in accordance with their karma. Ambidextrous: Arjuna could work the bow with equal ease with either hand.

34. **Kill Drona and Bhishma, and Jayadratha, and Karna as also the other warlords who already stand killed by Me. Do not distress yourself. Fight your enemies. You already stand the winner.**



Sanjaya

35. Hearing these words from Keshava, frightened and trembling Arjuna bowing low, spoke again with folded hands to Krshna in faltering tones:

Arjuna

36. Hrshiksha! It is but fit and proper that world should be thrilled with joy, and continue to be thrilled, by singing your glory; that the forces of evil should scamper away in all directions, and that all groups of saintly men of realisation should bow down to you.

The world is thrilled, and continues to be thrilled more than ever, in talking of, seeking refuge in and appealing in distress to something that mostly eludes the reach of the human mind, yet which is most emphatically felt every minute of a thinking person's life. Man may give it any name, think about it any-old way; but all of them inevitably point but One way and One way alone – Its way. The Hindu conception of It has already been explained vide Chapter IX.23, that any homage or worship or offering, rendered to any god, deity or divinity in any shape of form, is worship rendered to It and It alone, though, may be, indirectly and in ignorance. And evil thoughts and motives do fly from It's sincere and pure-hearted refuge. Good men in any language will always try to press nearer and nearer to It. That is as it should be, for, it is just simple, natural nostalgia; It is every soul's home of homes, nay, every soul is It in its essence, even against its own conscious wishes, every jiva instinctively gravitates to It.

37. Limitless, holy of all holies, refuge of creation, the first-ever creator of even the Vedas, O Mahatman, there is no reason whatever why men should not pay homage to You, since You alone are both the manifest and the unmanifest, as well as the Eternal Truth which rises beyond and above both.



Manifest and unmanifest visible existences as well as the invisible or potential ones: all existences stem from You, all are You, since You are the Me of all, in which alone all of them “live” and have their being.

38. **You are the very first effulgence, the Ancient Purusha, the final repository of the entire universe, the knower as well as the object of all knowing, the supreme goal. O assumer of endless forms, it is You who have projected the universe (from your Self alone).**

Krshna the speaker has expressed distress in several places that foolish people take his physical body to be his real Me, i.e. God or even Atman Itself, not knowing the essential Me which in fact is everybody's Me, including God's. Here Arjuna has an inkling of what Krshna meant; yet, conditioned as he was all his life, he equates the Energy-God of religions with It, of which “almighty God” too is an expression. And Krshna most of the time lets it be so, as being a very big step leading us Arjunas from our little ego to the Ego-supreme, from which It is but a small step away.

39. **You are Vayu, Yama, Varuna, the moon, Prajapati, the Great-grand sire of all. I salute You; I offer salutes by the thousand; and yet again I salute You, again and again I salute You!**

Vayu: Air; Yama: The Controller; Varuna: Fluidity; the moon: Mind; Prajapati: Production; Grand sire: The First Cause. Going up the aetiological ladder, everything ends up in You only at the top, the sire raised to the nth degree. Arjuna is now warming up –

40. **I salute You from every angle in all ways – You of limitless energy and unsurpassed accomplishments. You contain all within You, which all is only Your own extension.**

- 41-42. **I beg your forgiveness for such epithets that I may have thoughtlessly used in addressing You in ignorance of your immeasurable greatness,**



regarding You as (just) a friend, such as Krishna pal, Yadava etc., out of irresponsibility or affection; also I beg of You to forgive me any slight I may have offered you or fun I might have poked at you in course of our camaraderie, at rest, at meals, sitting, or travelling, alone or in the presence of others.

43. Incomparable in power that You are, You are the venerable progenitor of the whole sentient-cum-insentient world, and its worshipful teacher and elder. There is none that can compare with You: how then can there be even a question of anyone exceeding you? There is none in the three worlds who can rival Your prowess.
44. Therefore, bowing to You, prostrating my body, I seek to please You, worshipful-worthy God! I beseech You to tolerate me as a father would a son, a friend his comrade, a lover his sweetheart.
45. I am all shaken up by seeing what I never saw before; my mind is reeling with fright; show me now only that form of yours. God of gods! The world's sanctuary that You are, do be pleased!

That form means the human one to which Arjuna had been so lovingly accustomed to all his life, and which sat so well on his eyes.

46. You now appear attired in the crown, with the mace and the disc in your hands. But I beseech You, thousand-armed image of universe to resume that very form which is so dear to the Four.

Four: the four types of devotees, see Chapter VII.16-17.



Krshna

47. Arjuna, I have revealed to you, by means of my Self-yoga, this supreme form of mine, lustrous, cosmic, endless, primal, which has never been seen before by anyone except you, just because I am pleased.

Yoga of Self: special ability to show, not merely an external appearance, which anybody can do, but the inner Self of Me, the macrocosm minisculed in the individual to the point of near-invisibility. You: meaning of your calibre, with your affection, dedication, and particularly, faith in Me.

48. Not by the Vedas, nor by rituals, nor by study, nor by charities, nor by ceremonies and rites, nor even by severe tapas am I possible to be seen in the world in the form in which you now behold Me.
49. Be not so grievously agitated, do not remain bewildered any longer on account of your having seen this terror-striking form of Mine. Banish fear, regain your cheerful self, and look now at that form of Mine: here it is.

Sanjaya

50. Thus addressing Arjuna, Mahatma Vasudeva appeared to him again in his own natural (human) shape, and reassuring him by resuming his original form.

Arjuna

51. Janardana, beholding You in this pleasant human body, I have now regained my composure and am at ease, back to my normal disposition.



Krshna

52. Even the deva hosts have always been eager to have a look at that form on Mine, which is very very hard to get a vision of but which you have just seen.
53. I am not so easy to see the way you saw me, even by means of the Vedas, nor by tapas, nor by dama, nor by sacrificial yajna:
54. But by single-pointed dedication (– in the none-else-but-You spirit –) can I possibly be seen in such a manner – seen, known, experienced, and Arjuna, become one with in essence.
55. He who cultivates the mentality of regarding every moment of his life belonging to me, with Me as his supreme goal, wrapped up in Me, free of attachment, and inimical to no creature – he, Pandava, realises Me.

Chapter XII On Devotion

Devotion or bhakti as far as the Gita is concerned – and it takes one to the very threshold of the Jnana-yoga – is para-bhakti or unconditional dedication to “Me”. One more step attempted, and over you go, right into It. It is fundamentally different from religious ceremonial worship through karma, when an unbridgeable gap is sought to be maintained between the soul and the Beloved. The gap is prevented from being bridged by the still existent identity which must not be endangered on any account. The Gita, true to Vedantic traditional spirit which it seeks to uphold, works to the make soul ready, through karma-yoga, for the great self-immolating merger, where me itself becomes Me. We are presented in a tolerant gesture with several alternative forms, to make it suit some graded needs of the not-yet-quite-ready soul-spirits.

There are two distinct types of bhaktas: (1) of the religion-oriented worshippers through meritorious works, i.e. those who offer their worship to a God-form as servant to master, son to father, lover to beloved etc., with necessary reservations keeping at a respectful distance from him, though with the intensity described in Chapter XI.55; in the heart, but not of it; and (2) those who, with the same intensity but in the spirit of their I being consumed by being It! Like food becoming its eater’s body itself, thereby justifying its sacrifice. This is where works have a secondary role to play in the soul’s march up. Arjuna is not yet quite sure which of the two can be taken as the better one, worship or oneness; whether Krshna’s “Me” means he in his physical person, or the formless man that he is in his essence.

Arjuna

- i. **Which of the two types: those who unceasingly worship are intensely devoted to You (– as an entity with certain definite attributes –), and those (who equally devoted) have as their objective You as the unmanifest changeless Brahman, should be regarded the better adepts in yoga?**



Arjuna, at this stage of understanding cannot be told outright that the true goal is “I, Brahman” and the like, that would shake his faith in the half-way house called formal religious devotion, while on the other hand, he has not yet acquired the qualifications to achieve the Merger; he would then be neither here nor there; and, the waverer perisheth, vide Chapter IV.40. So, Krishna approached the situation diplomatically; of course, the other is the worthwhile goal, but at Arjuna’s present state of unreadiness, the first alternative is superior to the other, since without first seeing Karma-yoga through, and seeing through it also, the second would remain unapproachable. So the latter must now wait, though he must never lose sight of it as the final achievement, even while wholeheartedly working out Karma-yoga.

Krishna

2. **I regard as being more in me those who offer full time devotion steeped in the higher type of faith with minds invested in Me.**

Higher type: faith has two grades: one which is allied to obtaining something for oneself, and the other of the karma-yoga brand, based in the yajna-spirit, i.e. desireless and selfless works. The first is apara or the lesser one, and the other, para or superior.

- 3-4. **But those whose minds are oriented to sameness, in control of the sense-group, and who, looking on everything everywhere with sameness, entirely devote themselves to the all-pervading (Brahman) which is aloof witness-wise, incapable of being pinned down by the mind, changeless, eternal, unpointable and unmanifest, attain Me only, because they are compassionate to all creatures (as being their own Atman).**

This is but a summarised paraphrase of much of II, particularly 54 to 58 and numerous other passages which extol such “worship” as the final goal, see Chapter VI.18 to 32. The verse under comment can have a meaning only in this context. So, at the present moment, Arjuna, carry



on with the bhakti of the karma-yoga type, as all householder-cum-seeker Arjunas should. But Why? And How? –

5. **But those** (neophytes) **who** (even while they have not yet achieved self-control etc.) **apply their minds to the ultimate Unmanifest, would find the task much harder to achieve; for, that Unmanifest is a goal which can be realised with difficulty by those who are still obsessed with consciousness of their physical being.**

- 6-7. **Those who deposit their selves in Me for aye, abandoning all their actions and centring their attention in Me, contemplating Me with the yoga (i.e. method) of none-else fixation, I soon become their liberator from the ocean of worldly life which is but a synonym of Death.**

Death stands in the spiritual literature of Hindus for fear: man dies every time he fears “what will happen now!”...and the like. Fear is death; fearlessness is immortality. Death of the body is no real death, vide Chapter II.22. Realisation is fearlessness, and the other way about too. We shall come to this quite often, particularly in Chapters XV and XVI.

8. **Merge your mind in Me only; surrender your reason and judgment to Me. There need not be even the shadow of a doubt that from then onwards, you will be living only in Me.**

9. **If you find yourself unable to keep your mind so fixedly centred in Me, then, Arjuna, try to attain Me by means of deep and repeated study.**

10. **If you cannot do that, try regarding all your activities as being service rendered to Me. Doing works for My sake also will lead to you success.**

Success in forswearing the troublesome, and being utterly happy.



11. In case you find yourself incapable even of this, then develop the self-control of my yoga, and abandon fruits of all actions.
12. Jnana (– theoretical word-knowledge –) is better than repetition; contemplation is better than knowledge; renunciation of fruits of actions is superior to contemplation; and from renunciation stems uninterrupted peace of mind.

Repetition: mechanical chantings.

- 13-14. Well-wishers of all creatures, friendly, compassionate, unpossessive, egoless, same in (circumstances of) joy and grief, continuously contented; self-controlled, determined, mind and reason dedicated to Me – such a devotee of mine is dear to Me.
15. He whom people do not fear and who does not fear people, free of (upsurges of) pleasure, resentment, fear and sorrow, is the one whom I love.
16. Unexpected, clean of mind, adept in discrimination, uninvolved, and unagitated bhakta who has completely given up (new) ventures – such a bhakta is loved by Me.

One who readily and cheerfully accepts those tasks which happen to befall him and engages in them without selfish involvement, but is averse to starting new botherations on his own.

17. The man of devotion who rejoices not, resents not, and grieves not and desires not; who has abandoned the idea of gains and losses (in respect of tasks that befall him) is dear to Me.
- 18-19. Same to enemy and friend, to respect and insult;



without attachment; treating praise and calumny with equal disregard; in control of his senses; satisfied with what comes his way casually; with no home he would care to call his own; steady and of a devotional bent of mind – that is the sort of man I love.

20. Those to whom I am their be-all and end-all, who full of faith, dedicate themselves to this ambrosial righteousness, are the devotees who are exceedingly dear to Me.

Here end the six chapters in which the notions of bhakti and upasana are discussed in relation to their helpfulness in striving for the ideally happy frame of mind. And now, for the operative sextet of chapters in which directions for the practice of what has been preached so far are dispensed in terse and definitive terms.

Chapter XIII On Fields and Their Knowers

Krshna

1. Son of Kunti, this body is called Kshetra (or the Field), by the wise, he who is familiar with it is called Knower by experts.

The Field of the human frame is embodied Prakrti in one of its variable aspects. The Knower is the jivatman or ego-self or mind which considers itself the doer-enjoyer owner thereof.

2. And Bharata, know Me to be the Knower in respect of all Fields. Right knowledge of the Field and its Knower is, in my opinion, true knowledge.

Knowledge in the sense of realisation of true ultimate values.

3. Now listen to what I have to say concisely about that Field, its identity, its nature, how it is subject to variations and why, and the powers it wields.

Brevity amply proves to be the soul of wit in this and the following chapters, cryptic in expression but not missing a single important point.

4. This matter has been sung by sages in many ways, in diverse metrical compositions, as also through the definitely purposeful phrases of the Brahmasutras.

- 5-6. The five main elements: ahankara (- ego -), reason, unmanifest nature, the senses and the mind, the ten fields of their operations, desires, resentment, pleasure, sorrow, the total body, aliveness and maintenance – that is a brief description of the Field and its variabilities.



That is, Prakrti manifested in regard to the jivatman. So these constitute the “Field” with and in which the jivatman has to operate, work out its present destiny as well as build up another for the future, or wash its hands of all this bother and depart in peace, free. This is called adhyatma, the discerning knowledge of which alone can lead to bliss vouched in Chapter VI.20-23. Now about right and discerning knowledge of the Field referred to in 2 above.

- 7-II. **Absence of the sense of self-importance as well as of hypocrisy in respect to it; non-violence; cool poise; straightforwardness; respect for the guru; cleanliness; sparse speech; self restraint; lack of involvement in sense-objects; egolessness; propensity to think of the taints which infest worldly life such as birth, death, old age, disease and sorrows; detachment; lack of attachment for wife, children, property etc.; continuous sameness of outlook in respect of what befalls one, desirable as well as otherwise, and unprostituted devotion to Me in the no-other-than-thou spirit; preference for solitude; aversion to crowds; constant engagement in spiritual knowledge; clear awareness of the true import of philosophical knowledge: this is essential knowledge; and that which is otherwise, is ignorance.**

Indian philosophy equates knowledge with actual personal experience; that which is otherwise, is otherwise than knowledge, mere useless formal information. This applies to all spheres of life...Very well: but what is the object of this inquiry, to be known by means of this knowledge, in respect of the Field?

12. **I shall now present to you the to-be-known, It is beginningless ultimate Brahman, which cannot be said to be either is or is not, yet knowing which, one experiences immortality.**

It can be inferred thus: It is, because It is the one thing without which



the world including us simply cannot be; but the world is; therefore, it stands to reason that It must be – in fact is. And, it is not, because It cannot be seen, and that which cannot be seen or heard must be taken as non-existent for all practical purposes. Therefore It is, It is not, and therefore It is something above and beyond both, yet –

13. **It has hands and feet and heads and faces and ears, all round; and it stands enveloping all.**
14. **It appears to have all the qualities of all the senses, yet is completely devoid of all of them; It is detached; It sustains all things; It has no gunas, yet It experiences the gunas.**

Since they arise from and operate in It only.

15. **It pervades all creatures internally as well as externally (– mind and body –) and is sentient as well as insentient; It is far away as well as in the closest proximity, and is not comprehensible because of its super-fineness.**

How hard the speaker tries to convey to the listener a hint of what this so utterly indescribable It, which is the I of all things great and small is like!

16. **It is the Indivisible, whole, yet It is apparently divided in creatures. That supporter, maintainer and withdrawer of them all, must be known.**

Because of the extremely close contact of body and mind with my Me, Brahman, what happens to them is normally believed as happening to Me, on the analogy of the clean transparent goblet and the redness of the wine it contains. An undiscerning observer is likely to attribute the wine's redness to the goblet because of their close proximity. This illusion must be blown sky-high by this knowledge in the interests of happiness.

17. **It is called the Light of lights, beyond darkness (–**



of ignorance –). **It is the Knowledge, the to-be-known, and also that which can be known by Knowledge; It is lodged in the hearts of all (creatures).**

Cf. Chapter XV.12-15. Hearts of course is mind, of which sentiment is a constituent.

18. **I have now briefly related to you what the Field, the Knowledge and the to-be-known are. When my devotees know this, they experience the feeling of being Me.**
19. **Know both Prakrti and Purusha to be timeless, and the variations and the gunas to be offsprings of Prakrti.**

The gunas emerge in course of the unmanifest nature becoming manifest as forms, shapes and notions, causing the apparent variations which occur in them, as well as the incessant process of change itself.

20. **Prakrti is said to be the cause of karya, karana and kartrtva; and Purusha, that of experience of pleasure and sorrow.**

Karya means effect: Effect of which cause? Prakrti. The elements are earth, water, heat, air and ether, and the five sensibles viz. sound, touch, form, taste and smell. These are karya or the effect-group. Karana means “means” or instrumental cause, by which these effects are achieved, viz. the ten senses and the mind. Kartrtva is the doerness, the I-am-the-doer complex or the ego implied in “experiencing”. All these are effects, in three apparent forms, of cosmic nature, which is their cause, and which sets up the endless and limitless chain of cause-effect-cause...called the world. And Purusha or the jivatman or the mind is the entity in which the feelings of pleasure and sorrow occur. Jiva the experiencer is the cause of these feelings, which would have no existence as such without someone to feel. And the sense of being a “jiva”, the feeling of experiencing, and the experiencables, are the play of Prakrti-in-



manifestation, enlivened by the spark of Brahman which makes it exist and enables it to tick.

21. **This Purusha, establishing itself in the (effect-groups of) Prakrti, experiences the gunas arising out of it. The cause of the jivatman's transmigration in good and bad births is its attachment to the effect-group.**

Attachment gone, the "jiva" in jivatman is laid to rest, and along with it, all the pleasure-pain miasma. And that is true bliss and peace, and nirvana. In fact, the ultimate credit for experiences and causeness and effectness goes to..., to whom? To That in which they arise, exist, and relapse.

The same applies to the cosmic body.

22. **In this (individual) body, the Purusha is the ultimate, He is called the Spectator, the Approver, the Supporter, the Experiencer, Maheshvara, (as also) Paramatman.**

Maheshvara means That which is Beyond Ishvara and because of whom Ishvara also is. Paramatman: Parama or the ultimate, Atman: corpus, e.g. Jivatman. It is pointedly called Paramatman i.e. the total Atman or Brahman when spoken of in the cosmic context. But the word Atman is used in both senses, since the Thing is the same in both cases.

23. **He who knows Purusha, as also Prakrti with its gunas, even while behaving normally in all respects, is not born again (– or does not relapse into jivaness –).**
24. **Some persons behold their Self within themselves by their own efforts; others by Samkhya (Jnana) yoga, and others again by karma-yoga.**

The first category is of direct intuitive perception; the second is that of



studied effort in the Jnana technique, i.e. realisation after a lapse of time, and the third, is that of indirect knowledge arrived at by renunciation of fruits of action, leading to rejection of the sense of doership, culminating in Jnana. Direct perception of Brahman happens in two stages: (1) indirect perception by inference, that Brahman must be, on the lines of the first part of the comment on 12 above; and (2) the same translated into personal experience. The first of the three alternatives above refers to the direct experience and the next two to the indirect.

25. **But others, not knowing It that way, listen to others and offer upasana with full faith in the Upanishadic word; they also transcend death.**
26. **Know, Arjuna, that whatever emerges into existence, quick or inert, does so as a result of the union of the field with the Knower.**

The Knower: the fact of being alive and conscious. Inert Prakrti is impregnated with quickness by the Master-Knower Brahman; in the individual, a man's nature starts spewing, being set in motion by the spark, the Atman principle which informs it.

27. **He only sees truly who makes out this ultimate God permeating all creatures equally – the One imperishable in the midst of perishables.**
28. **Beholding with sameness this governing principle abiding equally everywhere, he does not thwart his Atman by his mind; and that way he attains the Eventual state.**

Thwart: misjudge his Me as being mere me – denigrate the sublime Atman into a sordid jiva, thereby doing his own self an unforgivable injustice, a crime for which he must suffer indefinite imprisonment with hard labour.

29. **All one's actions are, in all respects, being carried out only by one's nature. He who sees things that**



way, recognises his Atman Self as the not-doer.

30. As soon as he sees the separate beingnesses centred only in One Being, and the proliferation (in the form of separate identities) also as being its emanations and nothing else, he becomes well-established in Brahman.
31. Because of its timelessness and gunalessness, this Total Atman is imperishable. Even though dwelling in a body, It neither does, nor is It affected (by what appears to be done).

The illusion of Its doing and being subject to rebounds of doing is caused as per the goblet-wine analogy.

32. Atman, though permeating the whole body, is not at all affected, just as the all-pervading sky is not at all affected (by anything that may happen in it), on account of its fineness.
33. Just as this one sun lights up this entire world, so does the Knower lighten up the Field in its entirety.
34. He who thus knows with the (third) eye of knowledge this distinction between the Field and its Knower, as well as between creatures, Prakrti and moksha, attains the Ultimate.

Chapter XIV On Triple Guna Division

Krshna

1. I shall yet again relate to you the ultimate knowledge which is the superlative among knowledges, knowing which all men of wisdom have reached the final achievement here.

The achievement is that mentioned in Chapter XIII.27, 28.

2. Having acquired My dharmā (– characteristics –) by resorting to this knowledge, they need neither to be reborn at creation, nor do they suffer death pangs.

Death: the process of decay and expiration.

3. My impregnating medium is Mahat, in which I deposit the seed, Arjuna, all beings are born therefrom.

Mahat: the term which the Samkhya branch of Indian philosophy applies to the original potential Prakṛti. It is inert, and is activated by contact with Puruṣa or the quickness-principle, which stirs, and motion is born; and then the fun starts.

4. Son of Kuntī, the original (– cause –) of all origins from which various forms issue, is Mahat, and I am the seed-planter Father.

Thus, Prakṛti is the cause from which the endless succession of phenomenal causes starts. Of course the Cause of this cause-of-all-causes is transcendental, to which we inevitably arrive on tracing any object whatever to its origin – even Prakṛti itself.



5. The three offspring of Prakrti are sattva, rajas and tamas; they, Arjuna, apparently bind the Immutable body-dweller to the body.

With body-consciousness, the delusion that the body and my real I.

6. There, sattva, because of its chaste purity, is blameless enlightener, and it binds the soul with addiction to the sense of pleasure and to knowledge.

Enlightener: the chief characteristic of sattva is wanting to know, give-and-take of knowledge. Books and teaching and learning become a passion which ride the minds of the sattvikas (– men of sattvika nature –) for, these give them a calm sensation of pleasure to which they become addicts. Even sattvika attachment hinders the soul’s evolution to complete detachment. Virtue too can bind, if it becomes an obsession.

7. Know rajas to be of the very nature of addiction, it arises out of the mind’s contact with longings. Arjuna, it binds the body-dweller to a passion for “doing”.
8. And know tamas to be the spawn of ignorance deluding all body-conscious persons, and it binds the jivatman to indifference, laziness and somnolence.

All born of self-ignorance. To sum up –

9. Sattva creates a craving for the sensation of pleasure; rajas incites urge to action, and tamas, veiling knowledge prompts the jivatman to inertia and inexactitude.
10. Sattva prevails by overriding rajas and tamas; rajas by overriding sattva and tamas, and tamas by overshadowing sattva and rajas.



The first type is then known as sattvika (– with sattva –), the second as rajasa (– with rajas –) and the third as tamasa (– with tamas –), at the time of the preponderance of that particular guna in a mixture which contains the other two also in some measure.

11. When the light of knowledge emanates from all the instruments of expression in the body, know that to be a sign of increased sattva.

Just knowing, knowledge, awareness, is in itself perfectly innocent. It is always a pleasure to know.

12. Arjuna, when rajas is on the rise, greediness, an itch to start activities, uncontrolled feelings, and a rush of desires transpire.
13. The tamas on the ascendant breeds lack of light, repugnance to work, heedlessness, and stupidity.
14. When the jivatman passes away while the sattva-mood prevails, it is entitled to a blameless state of excellence and enlightenment (in the next birth).
15. Departing in the rajasa-mood, it gets placed among addicts of activity; and demise in tamasa-mood earns for it the world of stupidity.
16. The fruits of good works, say the authorities, are pleasantly peaceful and innocent, those of rajas (– activism –), painful, and ignorance is spawned by tamas.
17. Sattva breeds knowledge, rajas cupidity, and tamas heedlessness, stupidity and, of course, destitution of knowledge.
18. Those ingrained with sattva go up, those of rajasa temperament stand in the middle, and those with



ignoble tendencies sink deep down.

19. When the Witness constantly does not know anything but the gunas to be the “doers”, and knows well That which is beyond the reach of the gunas, he completely acquires for himself My-ness (– that which I am –).

Witness: the karma-yogin with a detached and unconcernedly watching mind. An occasional flash of truth followed by relapse cannot do much good. The awareness must be sustained and steady, to earn the prize.

20. Transcending these three gunas which are responsible for transmigrations, the body-wearer, liberated from birth, death, dotage and distress, enjoys immortality.

Arjuna

21. What are the signs by which one can be said to have transcended these three gunas, my Lord? How would he behave, and how is transcendence over these three gunas to be achieved?

Krshna

22. Such a one does not care to resent either the prevalence of light (– state of glad awareness –) or activity, or even stupidity (as and when any of these accrues), nor does he wish any of them to re-happen when it retires.
23. He who, remaining aloof and unconcerned-like, is not moved (from his serenity) by (the player) gunas, seeing that (in all that happens) it is only the gunas which are operating, stays calm, and makes no move.



Move, either to resent or invite or grieve over or be glad about any mood that might have over-taken the mind at a given moment.

24. **Equal-minded in respect of joy and sorrow, self-possessed, regarding a clod of earth, a stone and an ingot of gold with the eye of sameness, same in likes and dislikes, wise, and regarding cavil and flattery as the same.**
25. **He who is same in respect of honour and insult and same towards the allies and the enemies, who has completely given up all idea of starting things, is spoken of (by wise men) as having transcended the gunas.**

Idea of: craze for.

26. **Also, those who serve Me with the unswerving yoga of devotion having transcended these gunas, are regarded as having become Brahman.**
27. **I am the base of Brahman, as also of the immortal One-without-a-second, of eternal dharma and of unmixed bliss.**

Brahman here means the Books of Wisdom, the Vedas. Dharma: the righteous way. Unmixed bliss: the one mentioned in Chapter VI. 21-23, Ananda.

With this, the analysis of gunas as such comes to an end, now we shall be told about their application and uses. But before coming to that, we have a paean of "I" in continuation of the last verse here, the Gita-lover's delight, which most of them have by heart.

Chapter XV On the Supreme Purusha

Here we have an imagery: the world is an ever-spreading pipal tree, the speciality of which is the wide spread of its roots extending sometimes to a furlong in all directions. This world-tree has its origin-root “above”, i.e. in the unmanifest and therefore unseen Prakrti of the Supreme Purusha; its leaves are the countless verses of the Vedas. Its branches bend downwards as well as upwards and are fed and spread by the gunas, its roots are the karma...

Krshna

1. **Authorities have described this pipal tree as being timeless and endless with its Root (– origin –) up above, its main branch stooping (to the earth), and the verses of the Vedas being its leaves. He who knows it, knows the Vedas.**

A tree though physically imbedded in the earth below, draws its very life and sustenance from the energy-centre Prakrti, God-nature situated “up above”. Trees imbibe their nourishment via their leaves, which in the case of the world are the Veda-verses which carry to people the “rays” of knowledge and sustaining wisdom, material as well as spiritual. This tree is the subject-matter of the Vedas whose message is, how to save the soul-spirit from its blandishments (which they apparently advocate), and go right up, above Prakrti or energy itself from which it springs, and transcending the invisible source of the energy, reach Brahman to which energy itself owes its existence and power. He who understands this Tree in that light, has read the Vedas correctly. The analogy proceeds –

2. **Its branches, fed and spread by the gunas, and carrying (pretty) sprouts of sense-objects, are spread upwards, as well as downwards; and its roots in the form of karma, fixing the tree more and more firmly to this world of mortals, extend their hold continuously under (the surface where their**



fatal spread goes unnoticed).

- 3-4. **Its true form is not to be seen in this world; nor its origin, nor its foundation (in Brahman). You may look for the way to That status having entered which the soul knows no return, only after cutting this tree at its very roots with the strong weapon of detachment, thinking: "I surrender myself to that First Purusha from whom this ancient activity has proceeded".**

Who may do so? Those who have by due disciplines arrived at a certain stage of qualification. What would they be like?

5. **Only those disillusioned seekers reach that distressless state, who are free from arrogance and illusion; who have erased the taint of attachment from their minds; who are all the time steeped in the Spirit; whose desires have completely retired, and who are well-rid of the dualities symbolised by the pleasure-pain complex.**
6. **That state, after attainment of which there is no relapse, is not illumined by the sun, nor by the moon, nor by fire. That is My Supreme Splendour.**

What happened to the jiva after it flew the body? What really is jiva in its essence? In the first place –

7. **An eternal fraction of Myself and nothing else, assuming jiva-ness, indents for the (five) senses along with the sixth (– mind –) upon Prakrti in which they dwell, (and carries them with itself) to the world of jivas.**

So that is what jiva is, and eternal bit of the Eternal Me, and, therefore, itself Me and nothing less. That Me-bit somehow acquires earthly I-me-



mineness, and becoming a victim of its own hallucination, has come to regard itself as mere jiva. It is like an emperor's son abducted by gypsies, and reared by them, coming to believe himself to be no more than a mere gypsy. All that has to be done to disillusion the child and make him realise his pristine royalty is to somehow relieve him of his ignorance; and presto! he is emperor-in-embryo again! Nothing has to be done there, except presenting facts. That is how, no action, no ceremony, no physical effort is of any avail in restoring to jiva its Atmanhood. This karma-yoga is the first stage of the "somehow", this illusion-busting process, the Upanishads being the second and final one. And then, the deed is done.

This is how "the Eternal bit" acquired the trappings of jivahood. And the trappings stuck to It, like the little lamb to Mary, following It wherever It went. When its present carriage (- body -) is abandoned, It seeks another, along with Its new little lamb.

8. **This God, thus puts on a body, and takes it off too. In both cases, It carries with Itself these acquisitions in Its transits, like wind carrying with it (from place to place) the fragrance from flowers.**

This God: the Chip off the Old Block being the Old Block itself in its essence. What is that wind? The buffeting desires and karma-effects and what have you - which in fact is jiva-ness, and which flits from body to body, not resting, nor permitting to rest. This jivatman-gypsy is unaware of its inherent powers of almightiness. What a pity!

9. **Presiding over the powers of hearing, seeing, touching, tasting, smelling and minding, It experiences sense-objects.**
10. **Persons with lecherous minds do not recognise It in Its essential truth either when It departs, or during Its stay (in the body), or while It is sensing objects, or yet while It is apparently steeped in the gunas. It is recognised (only) by the eye of knowledge.**



That is to say, while the Atman trailed by the soulness is functioning in the body or even in the body's death when it departs. Its true Atman-nature is not made out by ordinary people, for Atman "does" none of these things, but its trailer does, and its "doings" are taken to be the Atman's because of their close proximity to each other.

11. **Vigilantly striving yogins see It as well established in their own selves. But those unintelligent people who have not yet cleansed their minds, do not (so) see It, however hard they may try.**

Their undiscovering eyes being held by the doings of the jivaness.

12. **That lustre in the sun which lights up the whole world, as well as that which shines in the moon as also in fire – know these lights to be Mine.**

The Vedas say: "That is the light of Atman-consciousness which makes objects appear and be visualised", not excepting secular lights.

13. **By this light of Mine I envelop the world and maintain creatures, and assuming moon-form, I nourish all food grains.**

It is believed that the moon has the effect of nourishing the sap in vegetation.

14. **Becoming Vaishvanara, I reside in the bodies of creatures, and linking Myself with vitality in the form of entering and exiting breaths, I digest food in its four varieties.**

Vaishvanara: the heat which is the very life-energy and inhabits all creatures. The four food types are: those which are chewed, drunk, sucked and licked.

15. **And I have entered and settled down in the mind-cave of all creatures; memory and knowledge as**



well as their departure happen on account of Me. I am the One to be known through all the Vedas; I am the author of Vedanta as well as its knower.

All these processes happen only by My consent, connivance and enablement.

16. **There are two Purusha entities in this world, Kshara or destructible and Akshara or indestructible. All creatures are destructible, and the Kutastha (– the Witness Atman –) is called “Indestructible” by wise men.**
17. **But the Uttama (Supreme) Purusha is quite another – inexhaustible Ishvara who pervades the three worlds and maintains them, and who is also known as Paramatman.**

Ishvara: inexhaustible energy which rules creation, called God here, for practical purposes, and to avoid confounding ordinary Arjunas with the nice distinction-without-difference that seems to exist between “Me” as the Absolute and the same Me functioning as God, the speaker equates here the one with the other. Prakrti or God-energy, is also an indestructible in relation to the world.

18. **Because I am beyond the destructibles as well as the indestructibles, and therefore Uttama, I am called Purushottama by the Vedas and by the world.**

Nature or Maya is indestructible only relatively to physical beings, not absolutely, like the Me of all which is the finest of all entities.

19. **One who, relieved of ignorance (or Maya), knows Me thus as Purushottama, O Arjuna, is the all-knowing one, and he devotes himself to Me as being all-in-all (or, with all his heart).**



All knowing: one who has known the cause, has in effect known everything. As one who knows gold has known all gold-ornaments in their essence so one who knows It has known all things in their true import, and confining himself to the gold-It, he does not worry about this and that of ornaments.

20. **I have, O sinless one, unfolded to you this most secret science. Knowing this, Arjuna, one becomes (truly) wise, and all his "to-be-done" becomes "already done".**

Chapter XVI On Division into Traits, Divine and Devilish

Krshna

- 1-3. Fearlessness, a clean mind, stability in Jnana-yoga, charity, sense-control, yajna, studiousness, restraint, straightforwardness, non-violence, truth in speech, no anger, peace, no malignance, compassion for all creatures, no cupidity, gentleness, modesty, steadfastness, lustre, forgiveness, forbearance, non-enmity and absence of conceit: Arjuna, these are divine traits in a well-born person.
4. For the well-born, Arjuna, hypocrisy, arrogance, abrasiveness and ignorance are devilish traits.
5. Divine traits lead to deliverance, and evil ones to bondage. But, Arjuna, you need not worry. You are well-born in divine characteristics.
6. In this world there are two creation categories: divine and devilish. The divine has been dwelt on at length. Now hear me on the evil ones.

At length: in numerous books and talks.

7. Evil-minded persons do not realise what constitutes activity and what does not. They know nothing of cleanliness, nor of behaviour, nor have they even an inkling of the Truth.

Cleanliness: not only physical but mental, i.e. freedom from ego, attachment, greed etc. "Behaviour" conducive to progress. Truth: uprightness.

8. **They declare: “this world is a lie, it has no basis (i.e. it is irrational), it has no ruler and no homogeneity”. What else? “It has no rationale whatever except lust and its fulfilment”.**

i.e. it has no basis in any high-falutin’ principle as some religions and philosophies would have us believe. It has no ruling principle called God; it is a heterogeneous hotch-potch of unrelated chance constituents. It is just meant for pandering to passion – this is how evil-minded people babble.

9. **Taking their stand on this outlook these senseless lost souls become pernicious, engage themselves in foul pursuits and work for society’s destruction.**
10. **Victims of insatiable lust, full of hypocrisy, conceit and pride, subject to nefarious fixations, such persons go about with evil intentions.**
11. **They remain involved in immeasurable anxieties right up to the end, addicted to lusts and their fulfilment, having decided: “This is all there is to it!”**
12. **Bound by expectations by the hundred, willing addicts to lust and anger, they long for ill-gotten gains so as to indulge their passions.**
- 13-17. **“Today I got this: these ambitions, I shall now proceed to fulfil: this I have; this too will become my property: I have killed that enemy of mine: I shall destroy others too; I am the Master, I am the enjoyer: I am successful, powerful and happy: I am the boss, I come of an illustrious family. Who is comparable to me? I shall perform sacrifices, give donations, rejoice” – thus, utterly bedevilled by ignorance, with minds reeking in delusions, packed tight in the net of illusion, addicted to**



lustful enjoyment, they go to foul hell.

18. Full of overweening self-esteem, stupefied, vainglorious, chockfull of pride of self and honours, they insincerely perform yajnas in mere name, unmethodically.

Unmethodically: without regard to the spirit thereof, thereby vitiating their very purpose. Here, yajna can imply all public-oriented functions and religious or superstitious behaviour.

19. I propel such hatred-ridden foul cruel scum among people into evil births only.

Not only after their death; apart from the hereafter, even in life they become subjected to tortures of hell.

20. Falling into evil rebirths, these fools, missing Me from birth to birth, at last, Arjuna, devolve to the lowest forms of existence.
21. Lust, anger and greed – this is the triple-gated entrance to hell which lays the jivatman low. Therefore, these three must be shunned.
22. The Purusha, by escaping these three ignorance-gates, works for his own welfare, and so, attains the highest good.

Purusha: jivatman.

23. He who disregarding the scientific method (of Vedantic scriptures), behaves with wilful irresponsibility, never attains success, nor satisfaction, nor final beatitude.

This applies in all material spheres of life too. Unmethodical and inexact attempts in any field of effort can never come to a happy end. Vedanta is



strong on rational thought and systematic behaviour.

24. **Therefore, in making a decision as to what ought to be done and what not, go by the standard of scientifically conceived method.**

Here Arjuna is rebuked for the display of irrational attitude in respect of his duty in Chapter 1 by rejecting the canons and axioms of evolution of the soul to Perfection.

Chapter XVII On Division of Shraddha into Three

Arjuna

1. How would you name the nishtha (reliance) of those who worship with shraddha (but) unmindful of canonical formulae? Sattva, rajas or tamas?

Nishtha: Complete trust in a person or a method as being the right guide to success. Shraddha: Faith in the word of such a person or scripture.

Krshna

2. The faith of all body-dwellers (jivatmans) is three-fold. It is the offspring of one's own temperament: sattvika, rajasa and tamasa.

Sattvika: enlightened; rajasa: activist; tamasa: dull or stupid. We shall use these English equivalents henceforth. Offspring of one's temperament: a person's nature is fashioned and conditioned by his own prakrti, which is a conglomerate of desires, prarabdha, past inheritance of impression-tendencies etc.

3. The faith of people takes the shape and direction of their minds. Arjuna, this soul-spirit is just made up of faith. He is, what his faith is.
4. The enlightened pay homage to divinations; activists to demi-divines, and the rest, stupid people worship departed spirits (or elemental forces).

The words in the concluding phrase in the original are "Pretas" and the crowd of "bhootas". Pretas are spirits of dead persons, call them manes or what you will; and bhootas means spectres, spooks etc. of the unclean

kind, as well as the maha-bhootas or the five original elements and their powers, both in their so-called beneficent and maleficent manifestations.

- 5-6. Those witless persons who practice extreme austerity under the urge of hypocrisy and vanity, and are obsessed with desires and addictions causing distress to the group of elements situated in the body, and to Me also residing in the body – know them to be of the asura bent.

Asura: beastly, stupid.

7. Again, diets of all people are of three types of liking: peaceful, activist and stupid. So also are their holy works, thought-styles and charities. Listen to the distinctions thereof here:
8. The types of diet which nourishes life, mind, energy, health, wellbeing and pleasure, and are tasteful, are preferred by the enlightened.
9. Bitter, sour, salt, very hot, too peppery, abrasive and scalding, such tend to cause pain, displeasure and ill-health – these are the types of diet activist minds have a special liking for.
10. Cold (– or under-done –) food, also that which has lost its flavour or is odorous, or has been left overnight, or discarded (as unwanted), as also that which nice people should not eat (– or which is unfit for use as an oblation –), are the sorts of foods which please stupid temperaments.

Now for the guna-dyed actions:

- II. Yajnas carried out in accordance with accredited scriptural formulae, by those who have renounced



wishfulness in respect of their return and are performed as just a must with contented mind, are enlightened.

Yajnas: canonical in particular and all sorts of works in general.

12. But that, the performance of which is linked with some selfish end, or is insincere, Arjuna, should be regarded as being activist.
13. A yajna which is unsystematic or the articles of food meant to be offered therein are not properly prepared, in which rewards (to the priests) are meagre, and faith is lacking, is to be regarded as stupid.

Now about tapas or austerities and high thinking:

14. Rendering due respect to deities, to the priest class, to teachers, and to men of wisdom; cleanliness (of body and mind); rectitude, continence and non-violence – all this is physical tapas.

Tapas: (1) way of thinking, and (2) control.

15. A non-abrasive, truth-talking, sweet and helpful way of speaking, study and teaching – this is tapas of the tongue.
16. Cheerful mind, gentility, sparseness of speech, self-control, and clean thinking are the characteristics of mental tapas.

Mental tapas: askesis.

17. This three-aspected tapas practised by persons who worry not about results, and who are well set



in karma yoga, is of the enlightened type.

18. This (tapas) practised here with an eye on winning welcome honours and worshipful admiration, is not only distress causing, but fickle and transient (in its effects).
19. Tapas undertaken under stupid obsessions involving travail to one's self, or intended to bring about someone else's fall, is known to be stupid.

And now the fourth of the quartet: (1) diet, (2) works, (3) tapas, and (4) charity, is being typified in its distinctions.

20. Dana given just because it should be given, with no expectations even of thanks in return, to right sort of persons (or causes) at right times and right places, are termed enlightened by scriptural texts.
21. But that which is given by way of conferment of favour, or in expectation of getting something out of it, or with mental reservations, is said by the scriptures to be activist.
22. Charities to wrong sort of persons or causes, at the wrong time and place, disrespectfully or with disdain, is called stupid.

The background of all this should be Brahman. This sums up the subject matter of this chapter.

23. There are three ways in which Brahman is referred to: (1) Om, (2) Tat, and (3) Sat. All the Brahmanas, Vedas and Yajnas have been duly formulated and inspired by It.

The last three refer to several sections of the Vedas each of which more or less deals with either actions, or theology or formulae.

24. That is why activities relating to methodical performances of yajna, tapas and dana by votaries of Vedas, invariably commence with a chant of Om.

This is about the out-and-out formalists. Another group is that of karma-yogins.

25. Those who seek moksha, enter upon the various activities relating to yajna, and tapas and dana without a thought of reward, with Tat as their background.
26. Situations involving good and benevolent thought and feeling are referred to as Sat. So also, actions connected with them are spoken of in conjunction with the word Sat.

Sat connotes not only the fact of being, or Existence; it also stands for good, divine, truth, saintliness etc., e.g. noble intent is called sad-bhava, good action, sat-karma, etc.

27. Engagement in yajna, tapas and dana is adjectived by sat, and activities relating to them are also spoken of with the same prefix.

Good engagement is sadachara; and good activity is sat-karya. Thus, it is Brahman in one or another of its appellations that pervades all good thought-intention-behaviour. That is the outcome of people's faith in It.

28. Anything that is oblated in a sacrifice, donated by way of charity, observed as tapas, or carried out as activity without faith is not good, not true. Arjuna, it does no one any good, either "here" or "there".

Chapter XVIII On Moksha and Sannyasa

Arjuna

1. I wish to know separately the true import of sannyasa as well as of tyaga.

Arjuna now wants to know once and for all the difference between Karma-yoga and the Jnana-yoga at the fag-end of the dialogue. Krishna has been speaking of the two sometimes as different from each other, and again, as being one and the same. He is now of the opinion that, at this stage of the dialogue, clarity would not confound but really clarify and put the two in their proper perspective, as one, "jnana", invariably following the other, i.e. unattached works as per the Gita.

Krishna

2. Renunciation of wishful karma is spoken of by seers as sannyasa; and renunciation of all fruits of karma is called tyaga by men of vision.

Which latter is the special contribution of the Gita to the science of moksha, in the name of karma-yoga.

3. Some wise men say that all works should be rejected like a blemish; while some others say: "action in the form of righteous works, charity and self-control should not be given up".

This definition of sannyasa is a bit short. Sannyasa is renunciation of all claim of being the doer of any karma as has been laid down by the speaker himself several times in previous chapters. Accordingly, the first group evidently means: to those who have renounced the world and its ways and have no worldly interest left, the very idea of being the agent or doer of actions should be anathema. In that case, the question of their fruits should not and does not arise. There is another rendering



of “renunciation of karma”, the one which Arjuna had in mind: stupid inactivity, physical and mental inertia. There are very many among us who so misinterpret sannyasa deliberately and prejudicially or out of sheer ignorance, and Kṛṣṇa has been at pains to disabuse Arjuna of the idea and put the record straight. Here he is trying again and for the last time. In defining sannyasa, he correctly speaks of its past definers as “seers” in the context of world-renouncers. The world-acceptors are a very different tribe indeed. They simply cannot carry on with their domestic and social life without the three musts of the Gita. The tyaga notion has to be their mainstay for the nonce. It is a flower that may bring up the fruit called sannyasa if the spirit of renunciation is allowed to develop into its full-blown form – vairagya or disinterest in respect of all worldliness not excluding yajna-dana-tapas, which automatically stand done in Brahman for them, vide the last verse of Chapter XV. But why venture farther if this is found good enough? Kṛṣṇa the family-man, must necessarily advise his audience – another devoted family-man, as he now proceeds to do.

4. **In this matter of tyaga (which is what I advocate here) hear my definite pronouncement: tyaga is comprehensively described as being of three kinds.**

Sannyasa is out of the question for the likes of us; so let us talk of tyaga which is but a diluted form of sannyasa. So he lays down the law for the neophyte karma-yogin.

5. **Holy works, charity and self-control must not be outlawed; they must most certainly be done. (For), holy works, charity and self-control are purificatory to men of reason.**
6. **Arjuna, it is my decided and best-ever opinion that these forms of action must be carried out, on the stipulation that addiction for them and their rewards are first abjured.**

That is the householder’s renunciation at its very best.



7. **Total renunciation of actions which have been duly scripturally ordained does not accrue. Their rejection through foolishness is called stupid.**

All this talk about karma refers only to scriptural rites and rituals, which have little relevance, if any, on the modern context, for, as it is today, they have quietly disappeared. So this has been merely dialectics so far. The reader should keep the fact in mind that karma in the Gita usually means this; but it can and most certainly does have an extremely wide and important relevance in the modern fields of behaviour, e.g. the yajna-spirit.

8. **Any karma which is given up because it would be physically inconvenient would be an activist giving up, and the person gets no good out of such (pseudo-) renunciation.**
9. **Work which is done per prescription just because it ought to be done, without addiction for it and its reward, falls into the enlightened category.**
10. **The light-saturated, intelligent, unwavering man of abjuration does not resent works which do not benefit him, nor does he long for beneficial type of works.**
11. **It is not possible for embodied souls to renounce karma totally; but one who has given up (expecting) rewards of karma deserves the epithet tyagi.**

Tyagi: man with the spirit of renunciation.

12. **Fruits of action fall into three categories: unpleasant, pleasant and mixed. They are so to men devoid of the tyaga spirit; never to sannyasins.**



Here “sannyasins” appears to stand for the spirit of giving up, partly or in full. For the latter, of course, the whole question is hors de propos.

13. **According to the Samkhya** (– way of knowledge –), **there are five factors which operate for success in all works. Hear them from me.**
14. **Place** (to do it in or on), **doer, means** (– wherewithal –) **of various kinds, various motions, and the fifth here is daiva** (Destiny).

Destiny, as per prarabdha.

15. **Any action the soul-spirit undertakes to do, through the means of the body, speech or mind, legitimate or perverse, have these five as its (inevitable) factors for success.**
16. **Such being the case, a person of perverted mind and uncleansed reason who sees himself as being the performer of an action, does not see at all.**
17. **That man, having slain even the whole mankind, slays not, not is ever slain, who has no ego (“I do” fixation) at all, and whose reason is never stultified.**

Vedanta is a “whodunit” science. You the sleuth have to discover for yourself the doer, who, even you have been bamboozled into believing, is yourself. But you have now come to suspect: this wants looking into!

18. **Knowledge, the Thing-to-be-known and the Knower – these three constitute the urge to act. Means, the act and its doer is the triad which makes for acquisition of karma.**

If any of the three factors in the first triad is absent, action cannot result. The doer-I in the second triad makes actions “mine” and collects karma



with enforced backlash which is the cause of all distress.

19. Knowledge, action, and doer have been described in the Samkhya system in detail as being guna-created differences, each of them being three-folded in its turn. I shall tell you exactly how.

The three guna-tainted knowledge values:

20. Know that knowledge to enlightened, which sees in all creatures but one inexhaustible Existence – the one Indivisible in the midst of divisibles.
21. Know that knowledge to be activism which sees separate existences in creatures.
22. But that knowledge which is obsessed entirely with one (type of) behaviour, which has no objective (worth the name), is not aware of any inner significances, and is meagre, know it to be stupidity.

Analysis of behaviour in guna-categories:

23. Devoid of desire for reward, prescribed work which is done irrespective of likes and dislikes, is called enlightened.
24. But that work must be designated as merely activist which is done with desire-motive, or, egoistically, and with much effort.

A sense of having over-exerted oneself implies that the work concerned has been a burden. This cannot be the case with work cheerfully and unconcernedly done.

25. Work that is started out of foolish illusions, without taking into consideration its after-effects,



the harm it may cause, the violence it may involve, as also the limits of one's capacity – such activity is named stupid.

26. The doer who has no addiction and egotism, who is full of forbearance and enthusiasm and invariable in success and failure, is called an enlightened doer.
27. The addicted doer, greedy of reward of karma, avaricious, violent in temper and unclean, who is subject to rejoicing and grieving, is called an activist doer.
28. One who does not apply himself to the task, and is temperamental, dull, roguish, slack and shoddy in execution, fretful and tardy, is called a stupid doer.
29. Now listen to the three-wise divisions on intellect and dhrti (– patient forbearance –) also, on the lines of the gunas. I shall tell you about them fully and in their marked distinctions.

The word dhrti has no exact equivalent in English, but this can approximate. Descriptions of its functions can however give an idea of its nuances. We shall therefore retain the word as it is.

30. Intellect which knows what is engagement and what is disengagement in action, what ought to be done and what not, what is fear and what is fearlessness, what is bondage and what is freedom, is an enlightened intellect.
31. That kind of understanding which cannot correctly judge the right from wrong, worthy of doing from the unworthy, and fear from fearlessness, is known as an activist intellect.



32. That understanding which, being enveloped in utter ignorance, thinks wrong to be right and has a perverted outlook on all things, is said to be stupid.
33. That unwavering dhrti by means of which operations of the mind, energy and the senses are sustained, is enlightened.

Dhrti – mental outlook.

34. Arjuna, that by which duty, desire and property are sustained and which on occasion does wish for reward of actions, is activist dhrti (i.e. utilitarian outlook).
35. That dhrti by means of which people of unclean minds do not rid themselves of fanciful daydreams, fear, grieving, anxiety and prides, Arjuna, is stupid dhrti.

Unintelligent mentality.

36. Now listen to me telling you about the sense of happiness in its three aspects. It is a feeling in which the soul-spirit habitually delights and by means of which it overcomes the sense of grief.
37. That happiness which in its beginning tastes bitter as a poison, but eventually becomes comparable to nectar, is the sort which comes of spiritual-mindedness, and is called enlightened.
38. That which, because of the contact of senses with their objects, feels comparable to nectar at the start, but eventually turns out to be poisonous, is authoritatively called stupid type of happiness.



39. And the sense of pleasure arising from languor, laziness and stupefaction throughout, beguiling the mind, is properly designated the stupid type of happiness.
40. There is not a single object on earth, in space or even in godland, which can be said to be free of these three Prakrti-spawned gunas.

Godland: wishful thinking, or Heaven.

41. And, Arjuna, the karma of the Brahmana, the Kshatriya, the Vaishya and the Shudra are separately determined by gunas emerging from their very natures.

The priests, the warrior/politician, the trader and the server.

42. Mind-control, sense-control, contemplative purposeful thinking, forbearance, rectitude, knowledges, spiritual knowledges and belief in the Spirit are naturally characteristic Brahmanik karma.
43. Bravery, lustre, perseverance, cleverness, no retreat in battle, munificence and masterfulness is the natural Kshatriya-type karma.
44. Agriculture, husbandry and trade are the natural Vaishya karma, and servitude is the natural Shudra-karma.

These can overlap one another and form numerous types, as they actually do.

45. A man reaches full success by applying himself with diligence, each to his own particular karma.



46. I shall now tell you how he becomes successful by diligent application to his own line of karma.
47. A man becomes successful by offering worship in the form of his works to That from which all activities of creatures proceed and of whom all this is an extension.

i.e. by dedicating all action to That which is every creature's true Me. Then, there can be no question of failure. Any result is a success for him, in that it would not affect such an agent's equanimity, since he would be looking with sameness on all sorts of results. "This" is It, the tat of Chapter XVII.24, Brahman.

48. However poor in quality, one's own dharma may be, it is better by far than that of another, however well carried out. It is better to die in one's dharma, for another's dharma is a source of danger. A man does not come to harm if he behaves in the way best suited to his natural aptitudes.

Dharma: characteristic way of life. Arjuna again gets a clear answer to his pleas about abandoning his kshatriya nature and seeking what he thought to be the free and easy life of a mendicant. There is a parable: once upon a time a crow saw a stork standing in muddy waters, picking up fish, frogs, etc. peacefully and effortlessly. Thinking the stork's way of life, so smoothly lived, to be better than its own, it waded into the mud to emulate the stork; but soon getting out of its depth, it turned turtle, with head buried in the mud and feet sticking straight up! This is a repeat of Chapter III.35.

49. One should not forsake one's natural karma even though it may have drawbacks, Arjuna, the start of all undertakings is bound to be clouded, like all fires being wrapped in smoke at the start.
50. But a man of detached outlook in all matters, with is self under control and bereft of desires, attains



the goal of actionlessness in full by sannyasa.

Vide Chapter III.4, 5 and 7.

51. Hark unto Me as I tell you in brief how the man of such attainment acquires Brahman, which is the zenith attainment of Jnana.

The speaker has, once and for all, to acknowledge here the supremacy of full sannyasa in securing final beatitude:

- 52-53. With completely purified intellect, controlling himself with dhrti (– patient fortitude –) abandoning sense-objects such as sound etc., uprooting likes and dislikes, preferring solitude, eating sparsely, with tongue, body and mind well in hand, given to the way of contemplation, always secure in vairagya, and sloughing off egotism, violence, arrogance, lust, anger and the sense of possession, such an actionless man, free of me-mineness, and at peace, is fit to be regarded as having become Brahman.

Sound etc.: the five sense-pastures: sound, touch, shape, taste and smell.

Vairagya: lack of pressing interest in worldly matters.

54. The Brahmanised Atman of good cheer neither grieves nor longs. Same towards all creatures, he accomplishes for himself my highest devotion.

Grieves: not for pleasure gone, and “longs” not for its return.

55. By his dedicated devotion he comes to know who and what I am in My essence, and thus knowing Me in essence, he merges within It.
56. Though engaged in all karma all the time with me overhead, he gets the eternal imperishable status,



by My grace.

57. Mentally dedicating unto Me all karma, and centring yourself in Me, establish yourself in Buddhi-yoga, and unite your mind with mine for aye.

Buddhi-yoga is Inana-yoga, the way of refined intellect into which karma-yoga should culminate.

58. Having so united your mind with Mine, you will bypass all your difficulties. But if under the influence of your ego you fail to listen to Me, you are lost!

Difficulties, in the sense of hassles, such as you have been bemoaning in Chapter I. Attention, all Arjunas!

59. In case you decide "I will not fight", under the influence of your ego, it would be a futile resolve; your nature is sure to compel you to it.

See Chapter II.9. Arjuna is quoted verbatim. This puts the lid on the last tantrum of Arjuna. To drive the point home –

60. Arjuna, bound by your karma arising out of your own nature, you will do willy-nilly that which in your fond obsession you would rather not do.
61. Arjuna, Ishvara stands in the heart of all creatures, compelling all of them, mounted as they are on the whirligig (of karma), to go around and around, through his Maya.

The whirligig of transmigration; Maya: ignorance of one's Self. To the Vedanta philosophy, that is the original and only sin.

62. Arjuna, seek His shelter whole-heartedly (– or,



alternatively, with the feeling of you being in all, all being in yourself). **You will by this means attain supreme peace, and attain the eternal abode.**

Chapter VI.29 – 31, about being “all”.

- 63. Thus have I unfolded to you the most secret of all secret knowledges. Ponder it fully, and then, so as you please.**

No compulsion, no do’s and don’ts in this business of loving persuasion; and no hard feelings even on refusal or recantation. Secret, because, if told to one not yet ready for it, this “I am Brahman” notion would do more harm than good. That is why it is not to be told to all and sundry. To repeat for good measure –

- 64. Once again listen to my most exalted word. I like you very much, and that is why I am telling you what is in your interests.**
- 65. Make your mind Mine; by My devotee; worship Me; pay homage to Me. I assure you, truly, you are dear to Me.**

Being one and the same, how can Atman help being fond of Itself? It is those who foolishly stray and miss the wavelength who miss the love-message.

- 66. Abandon all dharmas and seek My one-and-only shelter. Worry not, I shall deliver you from all sin.**

Dharmas: so-called duties conceived in ignorance of the Truth. Being unhappy and grieving is the only “sin” that Vedanta recognises; for, Brahman is absolute bliss, and for a votary of Brahman, it would be the sin of sins to treacherously deny his own Self, for, it would be self-cheating of the deepest dye.

- 67. Never tell this to an unthinking person, nor to one**



**who is not dedicated, nor again to him who is not a
seeker by service, and surely not to anyone who is
prejudiced against Me.**

Religiosity, constricted outlook, hide-bound beliefs, and prejudice against the concept of a human soul itself being the Supreme Thing are some of the traits which have only a deaf ear for this knowledge. They would even resent it and start bad feelings, which is totally foreign to the “I am in all, all are in Me...” resolve. For the “seeker by service”, see Chapter IV.34.

68. But anyone who passes on this supreme secret to my devotees will thereby be offering his own devotion unto Me, and most certainly he will attain Me only.
69. That is why, among people, there is no one who pleases Me more than such a one, nor is anyone dearer on earth now, nor will there ever be any dearer to Me.
70. I am sure that I shall be dear to anyone who studies this righteous dialogue of ours in the spirit of Jnana-yajna.
71. Even a person with faith and without prejudice, who merely hears this, will be rescued, and realise for himself those happy states of mind which are the rewards for meritorious works.
72. Tell me, Arjuna, have you listened to me with an attentive mind? Have your ignorance-bred mistaken beliefs been removed?

Arjuna

73. O Achyuta, my confusion is gone, and my memory is restored to me by your grace. I stand free of



doubt; I shall do thy bidding.

Sanjaya

74. Thus have I heard this wonderful thrilling dialogue between Vasudeva and high-souled Arjuna.
75. By favour of Vyasa, I have been enabled to hear this very private and supreme yoga from no less a person than Kṛṣṇa the master of yoga himself, from his own lips.
76. Again and again remembering this marvellous and holy dialogue, I rejoice every moment.
77. Turning over in my memory that miraculous form of Kṛṣṇa, O King, there is no end to my astonishment, and I rejoice again and again.
78. It is my belief that lustre, victory, power and eternal ethics are sure to be where the master-yogin Kṛṣṇa and the bow-wielder Arjuna are present.

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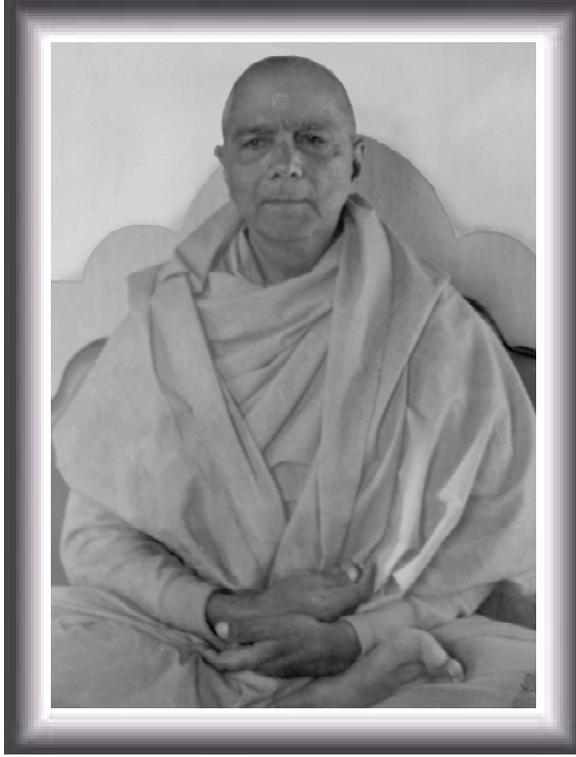
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Living the Gita

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Brahmaleen Paramhansa
Swami Pranavtirtha
January 14, 1898 – October 6, 1974

Swami Pranavtirtha was born Rameshnath Rangnath Gautam in Dwarka, Gujarat, to a family distinguished in politics. He spent his childhood near Rajkot, Saurashtra, where his father was the diwan¹. Rameshnath grew up in an educated, comfortable, spiritual environment. He married, had two daughters, followed a successful career as a journalist and worked closely with Pandit Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi during the struggle for the Independence in India.

Swami Pranavtirtha had developed spiritual disciplines

¹ Minister



throughout his life before being initiated into sannyasa² in 1949 in the guru-lineage of Swami Swayamjyotitirtha, a disciple of Swami Narayantirtha, who was the direct disciple of Swami Ramatirtha. He spent a few years at his Guru's ashram³ in Ajol, Gujarat and then travelled extensively across India, including an arduous journey on foot to the sacred Mount Kailas.

During the mid 1960's Swamiji was invited numerous times to Africa for lectures and discourses, inspiring many in their spiritual development. Finally, after 1968 he spent most of his time in Zambia, Africa at the request of his disciples there who lovingly called him Bapuji⁴. He authored more than forty books on the philosophy of Vedanta, Upanishads, Gita, religion and mysticism with in depth commentaries, discourses and journals. *Living the Gita* was first published in 1973.

In explaining the universal and absolute truths of the Vedanta, Bapuji provided unique clarity and insights on the real essence of scriptures. He taught the scriptures at multiple levels: from the literal meaning to the subtle indicative meaning to the sublime essence of the ultimate realization of one's Self. The teachings that remain in his books and tapes continue this invaluable guidance to those who aspire to their greatest spiritual goals.

Bapuji brought the ancient wisdom of the Vedic scriptures into modern times, with full import, relevance and practical living. He particularly emphasized the latter, the application of this wisdom into day to day living: the scriptures are "not meant to be merely conned up or intellectually speculated about, but to be lived, with both head and heart". And Bapuji lived his teachings, as a sannyasa, a jnana-yogin⁵, with warmth, humour and compassion.

² Renunciation of the world and material affairs

³ Sacred sanctuary

⁴ A respectful, affectionate way of addressing elder gurus; literal translation is "father"

⁵ One who has mastered himself through the path of pure knowledge



Swami Pranavtirtha became brahmaleen⁶ on October 6, 1974 in Zambia. After his passing, in the true spirit of renunciation and according to his explicit directions, no physical memorial was established of his samadhi⁷. Yet the mark he left on countless lives through his divine spirit is a testament to the ashrams he created within each individual. Bapuji's words through his books continue this very real guru-prasad⁸.

⁶ At one with the Absolute Brahman (God)

⁷ Burial site

⁸ Divine grace of a spiritual master