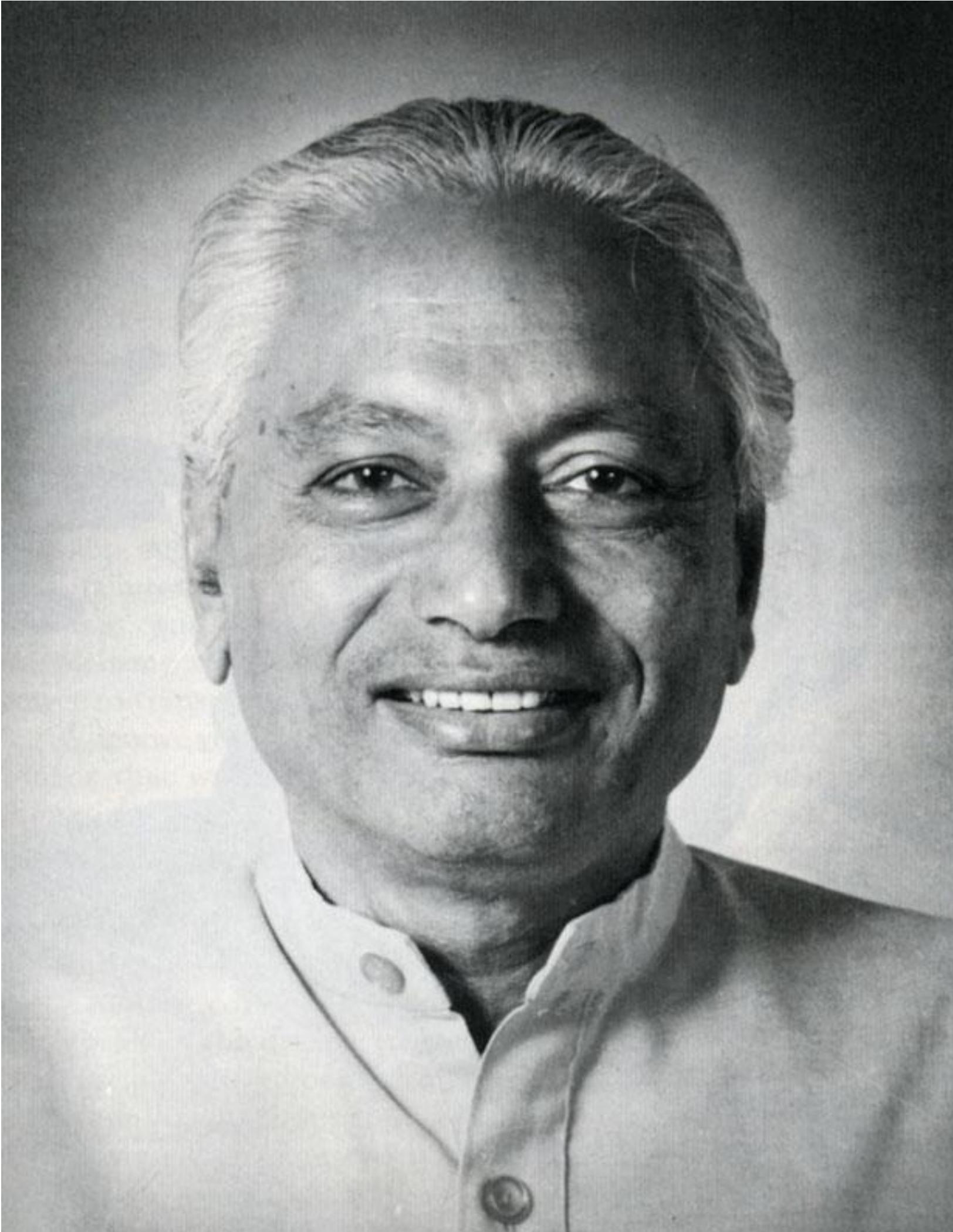


The Song of God

Swami Venkatesananda

daily readings

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WORSHIPFUL OFFERING

At the feet of

GURUDEV SWAMI SIVANANDA

It has always bordered on the miraculous. Gurudev blessed me and sent me overseas in 1961 and I have been asked to speak, speak and speak to all sorts of audiences in several countries. Before I stand up on the platform and after I get down from it, I have always been sceptical of my worthiness to be there. But I have always experienced an inner transformation the moment I offer the prayer to the guru: Gurudev took over. It was he who spoke and I have always been the first listener.

I am nothing. It is Gurudev who has carried on his own mission: that it has been through this particular instrument is a blessing upon it. In the process, the instrument itself has been chastened, purified and in spite of its unworthiness, glorified. But, no one should ever forget that all glory, all praise, should be offered to Gurudev. May his light shine forever in our hearts.

Swami Venkatesananda

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GĪTĀ DHYĀNAM **MEDITATION ON THE GĪTĀ**

(To be recited at the commencement of the Gītā study)

Om pārthāya pratibodhitām bhagavatā nārāyaṇena svayaṁ
vyāsenā grathitām purāṇa muninā madhye mahābhārataṁ
advaitā 'mṛta varṣiṇīm bhagavatīm aṣṭādaśā 'dhyāyinīm
am̐ba tvāṁ anusaṁdadhāmi bhagavad gīte bhava dveṣiṇīm

1. Om. O Bhagavad Gītā, with which Pārtha (Arjuna) was illumined by lord Nārāyaṇa himself and which was composed within the Mahābhārata by the ancient sage Vyāsa, O divine mother, the destroyer of rebirth, the showerer of the nectar of advaita (oneness), and consisting of eighteen chapters – upon Thee, O Bhagavad Gītā, O affectionate mother, I meditate!

namo 'stu te vyāsa viśhāla buddhe
phullā 'ravindā 'yata patra netra
yena tvayā bhārata taila pūrṇaḥ
prajvālito jñānamayaḥ pradīpaḥ

2. Salutations unto Thee, O Vyāsa, of broad intellect, and with eyes like the petals of fullblown lotuses, by whom the lamp of knowledge, filled with the oil of the Mahābhārata, has been lighted!

prapanna pārijātāya tottravetrāi 'ka pāṇaye
jñāna mudrāya kṛṣṇāya gītā 'mṛta duhe namaḥ

3. Salutations to Kṛṣṇa, the pārijātā or the bestower of all desires for those who take refuge in him, the holder of the whip in one hand, the holder of the symbol of knowledge and the milker of the divine nectar of the Bhagavad Gītā.

sarvo 'paniṣado gāvo dogdhā gopāla nandanaḥ
pārtho vatsaḥ sudhīr bhoktā dugdhaṁ gītā'mṛtaṁ mahat

4. All the upaniṣad are the cows, the milker is Kṛṣṇa the cowherd boy, Arjuna is the calf, men of purified intellect are the drinkers, the milk is the great nectar of the Gītā.
vasudeva sutarṁ devarṁ kaṁsa cāṇūra mardanaṁ
devakī paramā 'nandaṁ kṛṣṇaṁ vande jagad gururṁ

5. I salute lord Kṛṣṇa, the world teacher, the son of Vasudeva, the destroyer of Kaṁsa and Cāṇūra, the supreme bliss of Devakī.

bhīṣma droṇa taṭṭā jayadratha jalā gāndhāra nīlotpalā
śalya grāhavatī kṛpeṇa vahanī karṇena velākulā
aśvatthāma vikarṇa ghora makarā duryodhanā 'vartini
so 'ttirṇā khalu pāṇḍavai raṇa nadī kaivartakaḥ keśavaḥ

6. *With Kṛṣṇa as the helmsman, verily, was crossed by the Pāṇḍavā the battle-river* whose banks were Bhīṣma and Droṇa, whose water was Jayadratha, whose blue lotus was the king of Gāndhāra, whose crocodile was Śalya, whose current was Kṛpa, whose billow was Karṇa, whose terrible alligators were Aśvatthāma and Vikarṇa, whose whirlpool was Duryodhana.

pārāśarya vacaḥ sarojam amalaṁ gītārtha gandhotkaṭaṁ
nānākhyā 'nakakesaraṁ hari kathā sambodhanā 'bodhitam
loke sajjana ṣaṭpadair ahar ahaḥ pepīyamānaṁ mudā
bhūyād bhārata paṅkajaṁ kali mala pradhvaṁsi naḥ śreyase

7. May this lotus of the Mahābhārata, born in the lake of the words of Vyāsa, sweet with the fragrance of the meaning of the Gītā, with many stories as its stamens, fully opened by the discourses on Hari, the destroyer of the sins of Kali, and drunk joyously by the bees of good men in the world, day by day, become the bestower of good on us.

mūkaṁ karoti vācālaṁ paṅguṁ laṅghayate girim
yat kṛpā tam ahaṁ vande paramā 'nanda mādhavaṁ

8. I salute that Kṛṣṇa, the source of supreme bliss, whose grace makes the dumb eloquent and the cripple cross mountains!

yaṁ brahmā varuṇe 'ndra rudra marutaḥ
stunvanti divyaiḥ stavair
vedaiḥ sāṅga pada kramo 'paniṣadair
gāyanti yaṁ sāmagāḥ
dhyānā 'vasthita tad gatena manasā
paśyanti yaṁ yogino
yasyā 'ntaṁ na viduḥ surā 'sura gaṇā
devāya tasmai namaḥ

9. Salutations to that God whom Brahmā, Varuṇa, Indra, Rudra and the Marut praise with divine hymns, of whom the Sāma-chanters sing by the vedā and their aṅgā, (in the pada and krama methods), and by the upaniṣad, whom the yogī see with their minds absorbed in him through meditation, and whose ends the hosts of the devā and asurā know not.

OM
OM NAMO BHAGAVATE VĀSUDEVĀYA
OM NAMAḤ ŚIVĀNANDĀYA
OM NAMO VEṅKATEŚĀYA
OM TAT SAT

Preface

Is it possible in the modern world to live a life of peace and joy, free from tension, anxiety, fear and frustration? Yes! The Bhagavad Gītā illumines that possibility.

This is not a commentary on the Bhagavad Gītā, but it can serve as a supplement to the standard commentaries! It is meant as a spiritual stimulant, to help you understand the scripture better.

The best way to use it is to study a page a day, and then meditate on the verses themselves. By the grace of God and guru, you will receive more light from within, and greater, and ever greater, understanding of the spiritual truth revealed in the scripture.

This is the sole object with which this labour of love is offered at the feet of the Lord present in your heart.

Here is the story of the Mahābhārata, in brief:

Two brothers, Dhṛtarāṣṭra, who was born blind, and Pāṇḍu, who was born anaemic - white, had a hundred wicked sons and five pious sons respectively. The wicked sons of the former were keen to 'take over' their cousins' share of the kingdom and tried all means, fair and foul, to achieve their ambition. God's grace, however, rescued the sons of Pāṇḍu from peril after peril.

The wicked hundred contrived to banish the pious five from the kingdom for a period of thirteen years, and when they returned after successfully completing the period of exile, the wicked ones flatly refused to give them their rightful share of the kingdom.

Lord Kṛṣṇa, who was a friend of the pious five, made a last-minute attempt to avert the armed conflict which, however, became inevitable.

The impartial lord Kṛṣṇa offered to help both the parties: they could choose either himself or his vast army. The wicked hundred chose the army, and the pious five were happy that they could have God incarnate on their side. Kṛṣṇa served as the charioteer of Arjuna, one of the pious five.

Dhṛtarāṣṭra, the blind king, was complacent that his sons' superior might, the numerical superiority of their army and the presence on their side of Bhīṣma of unparalleled valour – who could not be slain against his own will – would ensure their victory. However, on the tenth day of the battle, Bhīṣma fell. The blind king's faith was shaken and he called upon his intuitive minister, Sañjaya, to narrate the events of the war to him.

Now read on. . .

1. The Yoga of the Despondency of Arjuna

Krishna's gospel will not suffer in the least if the first chapter of the Bhagavad Gita is ignored. But, the blind man will continue to be blind and unseeing, the hero will continue to fool himself, and refuse to look at his 'friends' and his 'enemies' in the correct perspective.

The following is not intended to suggest that the Bhagavad Gita or the Mahabharata itself is an allegory. Yet one cannot but be struck by the lesson it provides.

The scripture opens with the blind king's question expressing his concern and his eagerness to 'know'. The spiritually blind man, secure in his false sense of material security, must awaken, must begin to question, must want to know. When he does, Sanjaya enters the picture. Sanjaya is self-conquest, discipline - which is disciple misspelt. Without discipline, if one goes to the guru, one would be treated as a guest! And one would derive no greater benefit.

Even after one awakes and becomes a discipline one needs a guru. Or else one may make a mistake and consider that error to be the truth, clinging to it and mistaking that for faith, love, devotion, etc. It is when the disciple surrenders himself to the guru and serves him, that his heart is purified and becomes transparent, so that the guru's light shines through him without any effort on the part of either.

Similarly we learn vital lessons from Arjuna's conduct. He asks Krishna to place the chariot between the two armies, so that he can take a good look at his enemies. We enter life determined to fight our enemies. Krishna himself says that these enemies are within! We blow the conch, beat our drums, and jump into the battle. Proudly we ask or pray to God to lead us, to guide us - to where we can see the enemies. Often he places the chariot of our life right in front of the most delicate relationships - Bhishma, the grandfather and Drona, the teacher. Mysteriously, he reveals to us that we are bound by our self-esteem, by our blind attachment to our family traditions, our culture and our ancestry (symbolized by Bhishma the grandfather) and our philosophy, doctrine, dogma, our cult and religious tradition (represented by Drona the teacher). We begin to reclassify these - the inner enemies - into kith and kin! We are ready and eager to renounce some relations - often unimportant trifles, but we cling to the dreadful chains that bind us. We give up father, mother, property, home and wealth, but we cling to a caste, a cult, a religious tradition, a spiritual leader, etc. The latter do not seem to be 'enemies'. Without realizing that all 'my' is eneMY, we endeavour to find scriptural sanction for these new attachments, and impotently refuse to fight the battle of our spiritual life.

The spiritual hero ought to see the inner enemies for himself. It will not do to take them for granted on the testimony of others. This does not mean that one should subject oneself to temptations or walk into the snare of sensuality. But one must see evil as evil for oneself, and not just believe it is evil because somebody else said so!

I:1 - Dhrtarastra asked: Tell me, what did the sons of Pandu and my sons do when they had assembled on the field of righteousness, eager to fight, O Sanjaya?

I:2 - Sanjaya replied: After looking over the army gathered by the sons of Pandu, King Duryodhana went to his teacher Drona and said:

Dhrtarastra was the blind father of Duryodhana and his brothers. He was blind in his affection for his sons, blind to dharma - righteousness or duty, and had a blind faith that physical might would triumph. Bhishma's fall on the tenth day of the battle reminded him of the unalterable law: dharma or truth alone triumphs.

Sanjaya discreetly refers to Duryodhana as the king. It is the mark of a wise man that he does not wound anyone's feelings and sentiments under any circumstance. He does not take undue advantage of even an opponents faults. He is full of sympathy even for the wicked in their physical and mental sufferings.

The Mahabharata paints Duryodhana as the villain. There was no great sin which he had not committed. He had no respect for the elders. He had great faith in the strength of the mighty and little in the goodness of the holy. Yet, at this eventful juncture, when he is embarking on a war that could well mean life or death for him, the first person he thinks of is not his evil advisers nor even the great generalissimo, but his preceptor, Drona. Without the preceptor's grace and blessing no worldly undertaking or spiritual practice can ever bear fruit. This conviction was so deeply ingrained in the ancient Indian that even the wicked Duryodhana was full of it.

I:3 - O teacher, behold this mighty army of the Pandavas, arrayed by the son of Drupada, your wise disciple.

I:4 - In that army there are heroes, mighty bowmen, equal in fighting to Bhima and Arjuna; there are also great fighters like Yuyudhana, Virata and Drupada of the great car.

I:5 - Dhristaketu, Chekitana and the valiant king of Kashi, Purujit, Kuntibhoja and Shaibya, the best warriors.

I:6 - The strong Yudhamanyu and the brave Uttamauja, the sons of Subhadra and of Draupadi, who are all great heroes.

No man is perfect. The good man has his faults. The evil one has to his credit sublime thoughts and chivalrous actions, however rare they may be. Both of them are subject to temptations. But the good man shakes off evil after a brief encounter. The wicked man similarly shies away from goodness just as fast!

Having approached the teacher, Duryodhana does not fall at the Guru's Feet and ask for blessings. Nor does he wait upon Him for guidance or direction. His aggressive and arrogant nature immediately overpowers even Guru-bhakti (devotion to the preceptor). The result? Taunting words and commands! Look at this powerful army of our enemy; it is arrayed by one whom you taught!

The wicked man's heart trembles in fear and the Pandava army, though numerically weaker, appears to be a 'mighty army'. The will quakes before a sense of guilt and the vision is blurred.

I:7 - Know also, O best among brahmana, the names of our most distinguished leaders. I recount them for you.

I:8 - Thyself, and Bhishma, Karna, Kripa, Asvatthama, Vakarna and also Jayadratha, the son of Somadatta, who ever win in war.

I:9 - And also many other heroes, who have given up their lives for my sake, armed with various weapons, all well skilled in battle.

I:10 - This army of ours, marshalled by Bhishma, is insufficient, whereas that army of theirs, marshalled by Bhima, is sufficient.

What impudence! Does the teacher need to be told all this? Also, Duryodhana fears that 'my army is insufficient'. The singular and unmistakable characteristic of the wicked man is vanity and belligerence which seeks more and more destructive power.

Yet the ominous truth escapes his lips. These great warriors 'have given up their lives for my sake'! Anxiety fills the evil heart. He sees the enemy army in the true light. It is both formidable and sufficient, whereas his own army is insufficient. The two vital factors that ensure victory are on the Pandava side. They are, in the words of the Holy Bible, God and His Righteousness. Minus these, might and numbers are mere liabilities.

Perhaps in a flash of momentary intuition, Duryodhana realized the unrighteousness of his cause. Such moments are granted even to evil-doers. The courageous one shakes the evil off, without a false sense of dignity or vain desire overcoming him. We need err only once if we have a little wisdom left in us.

I:11 - Therefore, do ye all, stationed in your respective positions, protect Bhishma.

I:12 - Bhishma, the oldest of the Kaurava, in order to cheer Duryodhana, now roared like a lion, and blew his conch.

I:13 - Then, conches and kettledrums, tabors, drums and cow-horns blared forth quite suddenly and the sound was tremendous.

Forgetting to whom he is talking, Duryodhana instructs the venerable teacher: Protect the commander-in-chief. The righteous impulse of turning to the teacher at the crucial hour is smothered by accumulated evil tendencies strengthened by frequent repetitions and reinforced by insatiable lust for power. Even in the hour of danger the wicked man's haughty head refuses to bow, and his heart refuses to pray. Adversity often turns a man away from the evil path, but that is true only of one who is on the borderline between good and evil. We have seen that the same calamity which compels one to abandon the evil path and to strive to become a saint, goads another into the darker mazes of vice. Only deliberate cultivation of good habits and tendencies can effect a healthy conditioning of our heart which, even if it is not naturally bent God-ward, will turn to him the moment it is given shock.

Duryodhana speaks to Drona. The latter does not reply! The insulting and impudent behaviour of the wicked deserves only one treatment - indifference. The commander-in-chief, however, steps in, and, without a word, signals the commencement of the battle.

I:14 - Krishna and Arjuna, seated in their magnificent chariot, yoked with white horses, also blew their divine conches.
I:15 - Krishna blew the Pancajanya, Arjuna blew the Pevadatta and Bhima blew the conch Paundra.
I:16 - Yudhisthira blew the Anantavijaya, Nakula and Sahadeva blew the Sughosa and Manipuspaka.
I:17 - The King of Kasi, Sikhandin, Dhirstadyuma, Virata and Satyaki also.
I:18 - Drupada and the sons of Draupadi, they all blew their respective conches.
I:19 - The sounding through sky and earth caused an uproar that tore the hearts of the sons of Dhritarastra.

The Lord's conch is called pancajanya, the matrix of the five elements or tanmatra. The sound that issues from his conch is the supreme Om-kara, the vibration which is the origin of all creation.

Arjuna's chariot has the Lord himself as the charioteer. The Kathopanishad likens the senses to horses and the intelligence to the charioteer. When the Lord himself is the charioteer, it is no wonder that the steeds are white, a colour symbolizing purity. If we hand the reins of our mind over to the Lord, then it is certain that our senses will be purified and all their functions will be pure and sinless.

The end of the night and the dawn of the day are unwelcome events to thieves and prostitutes. Even the auspicious sound of the conches of the Lord and his devotees pierce the hearts of the wicked. Fear is not outside but within them.

I:20 - Then, seeing all the people of Dhritarashtra's party standing arrayed and the discharge of weapons about to begin, Arjuna, the son of Pandu, took up his bow.

I:21 - Arjuna said: Krishna, place my chariot in the middle of the two armies,

I:22 - So that I may behold those who stand here desirous to fight, and know with whom I must fight.

I:23 - For I desire to observe those who are assembled here to fight, wishing to please the evil-minded Duryodhana.

Arjuna is the son of Pandu, the 'white' king. White is symbolic of purity. The offsprings of purity are virtuous qualities. In the Bhagavad Gita, Arjuna is the disciple, the seeker. He represents the good man who, as yet, is not steady in his wisdom - alluded to by the restless monkey ensign! Only by the Grace of God is it possible to curb this restless tendency of the mind. Otherwise, like Arjuna, who at this juncture is enthusiastic about the righteous war, but later changes his mind, we, too, will swing constantly between zeal and despair in our spiritual life.

The Lord is ever ready to save His devotee. In fact, He rejoices to be the devotee's servant! The Lord of the universe condescends to become Arjuna's charioteer. What humility! What Love! God's Love of the devotee is immeasurably greater than even the greatest devotee's love of God. Countless stories are current in India to show that the Lord is ever ready to serve the devotee in every way.

I:24 - Sanjaya said: Thus addressed by Arjuna, Krishna, stationed the best of chariots in the middle of the two armies.

I:25 - In front of Bhishma, Drona and all the rulers of the earth, Krishna said: Arjuna, behold now all these Kurus gathered together!

I:26 - Then Arjuna saw his fathers and grandfathers, teachers, maternal uncles, brothers, sons, grandsons and companions,

I:27 - and friends also in both armies. When the son of Kunti, seeing all these kinsmen standing arrayed, spoke thus sorrowfully.

The greatest of all moments in the history of the world, the moment when the yoga of the was revealed, arrived. Arjuna was the chosen channel. The Lord was maneuvering Arjuna into the position in which the ideal stage would be set up. Hence, He places the chariot right in front of the two people for whom Arjuna had the greatest respect and love - Bhishma and Drona. Not only that, the Lord miraculously brings about a change in Arjuna's vision.

Arjuna, who but a moment before was thinking of the Kaurava army as the 'enemy', 'evil-minded', etc., suddenly beholds all the warriors in a different light - as kinsmen and friends. Enthusiasm for war yields place to sorrow and confusion.

The external situations or circumstances have but a neutral intrinsic value. It is one's own mind that attributes pleasure and pain, good and evil to them. As we shall see, this is the very core of the yoga of the Bhagavad Gita; and, lord Krishna creates the most suitable climate for His teaching by bringing out the contrast in the two attitudes of Arjuna.

I:28 - Arjuna spoke : Seeing these, my kinsmen, O Krishna, arrayed and eager to fight,
I:29 - My limbs fail and my mouth is parched up, my body trembles. The bow slips from my hand. My skin burns.
I:30 - I am unable even to stand. My mind is reeling, I cannot hold myself steady.
I:31 - I do not see any good in killing my kinsmen in this battle.

The seed of all our miseries is beautifully exposed to our view. 'Suffering' does not move us to pity. We are not at all 'grieved' over death. We do not shed tears when we read of earthquakes and air-crashes. Only identification of our own self with the persons involved gives rise to grief. 'A boy drowned in the sea' is news; 'My son was drowned' is a heart-breaking tragedy! Both boys were living beings, born of parents, but the latter was 'my son', and that makes all the difference.

Delusion is a mental state, but it has a devastating effect on even our physical being. Psychosomatic medicine is discovering the truth that our health depends not so much on health foods and tonics, on strong muscles and sturdy limbs, but on the state of our mind which is ultimately dependent on a correct attitude to life. The Bhagavad Gita gives us this correct attitude.

The 'adverse omens' - did Arjuna actually see any? We should not forget the Pandava were victorious. The omens could have portended the destruction of their own children. Or perhaps the fear and the confusion which overwhelmed Arjuna made him 'see things'.

I:32 - For I desire not victory, nor kingdom, nor pleasures; of what avail is dominion to us, or pleasures or even life?

I:33 - Those for whose sake we desire kingdom, enjoyments and pleasures, stand in front of us in battle, having renounced life and wealth.

Vasistha, Krishna and Buddha have all acclaimed with one voice that desire alone is the root-cause of all miseries and of transmigration. Here we have Arjuna voicing the same thoughts and the same wisdom, yet he was wrong!

To all outward appearances the sage might behave like a madman, but a madman is not a sage! Between escapism and renunciation there is this vital difference - the inner attitude. Krishna does not advocate escapism. He revives in us the true spirit of renunciation.

'I do not want victory or pleasure, so I will not fight', says Arjuna.

'You should not run after victory or pleasure, not even the pleasure of abstaining from the battle; therefore you should fight', says Krishna.

The argument is the same, but the conclusions are different because the inner approach is different. Hence, we should not blindly trust our intellect, but should seek wise counsel in order that the inner intelligence may be awakened.

Again, 'It is for our relatives' sake that we seek kingdom, etc., and I won't fight since they may be killed in war', says Arjuna. 'No, not for their sake, but for God's sake, for the sake of your duty or God's Will, you shall fight', replies the Lord.

The path of duty is often unpleasant to the pleasure-seeking mind or ego-centered personality. It demands unwinking vigilance to prevent insincerity and unwisdom from veiling true insight.

I:34 - Teachers, fathers, sons and also grandfathers, maternal uncles, fathers-in-law, grandsons, brothers-in-law and other relatives.

I:35 - These I do not wish to kill, though they kill me, even for the sake of dominion over the three worlds, leave alone killing them for the sake of the earth.

I:36 - Only sin will accrue by killing these felons. What joy can we get by killing our relatives?

I:37 - Therefore, we should not kill the sons of Dhritarashtra, our relatives.

Verse 35 is reminiscent of the words of the great spiritual hero of the Kathopanisad, viz., Naciketas. There, the Guru (Yama) is pleased. But, here, the Guru - Krishna - does not applaud Arjuna's dispassionate words. Mere aversion to worldly pleasures is valueless without devotion to God. It can only lead us to self-imposed misery and poverty-stricken life. As Gurudev used to say: We should 'detach the mind from the objects and attach it to the Lord'.

The Lord, as the indweller, knew that Arjuna's heart was enshrouded by spiritual ignorance. In order to remove it, he gave it an opportunity to manifest itself, by placing the chariot in front of Bhishma and Drona. Arjuna's cleverness weaves a web of logic to hide his ignorance and faintheartedness. He forgets that it is the duty of rulers to punish felons, and suggests that even that is fraught with sin! Why? 'Because they are our relations'. All animate and inanimate creatures in the world are God's creations; but relationship is our creation and the source of grief.

I:38 - Though they, with intelligence overpowered by greed, see no evil in the destruction of families, and no sin in hostility to friends.

I:39 - Why should not we, who clearly see evil in the destruction of a family, learn to turn away from this sin?

It is easier to perceive fault in others than within oneself. The Kaurava were greedy. They would do anything to retain sovereignty of the usurped kingdom. 'So they do not see the sin in killing kinsmen; we are wiser and so should desist from it' - is Arjuna's argument. One man's vanity shields another's transgression with a seemingly lofty rationalization. No wise man will ever justify war. But wise men have from time immemorial indulged in what they regarded as righteous war. War itself is evil, but when it is the only remedy for a greater evil - to dethrone evil which has usurped the place of dharma - war is a necessity. Then, and only then, to fight is dharma - righteousness or duty. To run away from it is adharma! Just as an unruffled mind and a loving heart guide the surgeon's skilled hand to remove a malignant growth, the wise and chivalrous ruler must be guided by a clear vision of dharma and by a deep love for all his people in order to deal firmly with wickedness. Arjuna was wrong in saying that as they were his kinsmen, he should not kill them, nor is it right to say that since they were his enemies, Krishna asked him to kill them. It was only because they were the perpetrators of adharma that it was Arjuna's duty, as a prince, to exterminate them. If dharma was on the Kaurava side, even if they were his enemies, Krishna would have asked Arjuna to look within himself and destroy his real enemy, adharma - unrighteousness.

I:40 - In the destruction of a family, the immemorial rites of that family perish - the destruction of spirituality.

I:41 - When unrighteousness dominates the family, the women of the family become corrupt, and when the women become corrupt, unwanted progeny comes.

I:42 - Confusion of castes leads to hell the slayers of the family, for their forefathers fall down to hell, deprived of the offerings of rice-ball and water.

This is an argument of sterling value and unassailable logic, though not in this context. As Aldous Huxley points out in his 'Perennial Philosophy', the chaos in the world of today is partly attributable to the collapse of the caste system. No one seems to know what is each one's duty, which is one's function in society, and when an inner conflict arises, different theorists, leaders and philosophers pull him in different directions. The poor man himself goes to the hospital with 'tension' and nervous breakdown.

When knowledgeable persons in a society are either killed in war or lured away to other countries or avocations, the 'spirit' of the customs, traditions and rites is lost, leaving the dead carcass of a ritual to which she masses cling. When the spirit is lost, piety or righteousness is lost. The custodians of piety, our womenfolk, become corrupt and there is confusion of castes. No one has a clear idea of his duty, and consequently there is chaos. Though all are equal socially, politically, economically, and in the eyes of God, this does not mean that interracial or inter-caste marriage is the only or even the best way in which to demonstrate this equality. The history of mankind is the story of such inter-racial fusion, though its primary result may be confusion of duties and neglect of the cultures of both the parties. However, it leads to a re-awakening of the spirit, a re-assessment of cultural values and a new civilization. But, this natural process of blending should not be forced prematurely.

I:43 - By these evil deeds of the destroyers of the family, which cause confusion of castes, the eternal religious rites of the caste and the family are destroyed.

I:44 - We have heard that inevitable is the dwelling for an unknown period in hell for those men in whose families the religious practices have been destroyed.

The hell referred to need not be elsewhere, but here itself! Every war leaves a long, tragic and horrendous trail of widows, orphans, illegitimate children, social misfits and outcasts. All this happens even without war, in a rootless or uprooted community. When the motive is physical attraction or material consideration, marriage between people of different cultural backgrounds, intellectual equipment and spiritual values or even tastes and temperaments, sooner or later leads to unhappiness. If some of these families appear to be happy, it is only because they have no idea at all of real domestic harmony.

Of course, this does not apply where the parties to the marriage belong to different cultural groups, but their intellectual and spiritual equipment is similar or complementary, and they are therefore prepared to and capable of making the necessary adjustments.

With regard to the social structure, Aldous Huxley says in his 'Perennial Philosophy':

'Contemporary history is the hideous record of what happens when political bosses, businessmen or class-conscious proletarians assume the Brahman's function of formulating a philosophy of life; when usurers dictate policy and debate the issues of war and peace; and when the warrior's caste duty is imposed on all and sundry, regardless of psycho-physical make-up and vocation.'

Such a world in which this sort of chaos prevails is hell. Whereas in ancient times, even the events in a war were predictable, today our daily life even in peace-time is unpredictable. The result is continuous anxiety and tension.

I:45 - Alas, we are resolved to commit very sinful acts, ready to slay our kinsmen to satisfy our greed for the pleasure of a kingdom.

I:46 - If the sons of Dhrtarastra with weapons in hand should slay me in battle, unresisting and unarmed, that would be better for me.

I:47 - Sanjaya said: Having thus spoken in the midst of the battlefield, Arjuna, casting away his bow and arrow, sat down on the seat of the chariot, his mind overwhelmed with sorrow.

If the motive of the war was 'greed for the pleasures of a kingdom', that war was undoubtedly unrighteous. But here the noble heart of Arjuna was merely reflecting the wrong attitude of the Kaurava! 'They are greedy and they are ready to fight; we are ready to fight and so we are also greedy' - is the simple equation in his mind. Krishna will point out that his attitude, the Divine Will, was different; and hence Arjuna had to fight. 'Resist not evil' should never be misconstrued to mean 'encourage evil'. There is an orderly, democratic if you like, way of dealing with evil which does not involve the disturbance of the mental equilibrium of anyone. 'Great sin' is not this action or that action, but according to Krishna, kama - desire and krodha - hatred are the fountains of the greatest sins. Selfish motive is the greatest sin. Lust, anger and greed disturb one's inner equilibrium, and hence they are the 'gates to hell', according to the Bhagavad Gita. They are 'of insatiable hunger', says Krishna. They consume our peace of mind, our happiness, our vitality and the tranquility of our inner being, which is one of the fundamental characteristics of yoga. Thus are we led to the threshold of this yoga.

2. Sankhya Yoga

II:1 - Sanjaya said: Seeing Arjuna overwhelmed with eyes full of tears of sorrow, Krishna, full of compassion, said :

II:2 - Arjuna, from where comes such lowness of spirit? It is unbecoming to an Aryan, it is not honorable, and an obstacle to attaining heaven; not befitting at all.

II:3 - Yield not to impotence, Arjuna! It does not befit you. Cast off this mean weakness of the heart. Stand up, scorcher of foes!

Lord Krishna proves to be a superb diagnostician here. What afflicted Arjuna was not compassion or a sense of righteousness. It was 'weakness of the heart', unworthy of a great warrior. It was disgraceful; and what was most important, since it was against dharma - the Will of God, it would close the gate of heaven upon Arjuna! It was sheer impotence.

Yoga or religion is intended to break down the ego which is the prison of the soul. It demands unwinking vigilance to ensure that the sadhana or a virtuous life itself does not become a prison-house, reinforcing the ego! Virtue, created and maintained by a wrong motive or egoistical attitude, is prison. This does not mean that we ever sanction vice; if a seeker exposes himself to sin, he will never be able to reach the goal.

What is needed is virtue as a fortress. But the difference is this: the key of the fortress is in your keeping, the key of the prison-house is in another's. The spiritual hero dares to be virtuous. The coward is scared to err, though he would very much like to! The hero can go beyond the walls of the fortress, but remains within it because the glitter of the external world does not delude him. The impotent man imagines he is free in his dark prison-cell.

II:4 - Arjuna said: How shall I fight with weapons in battle against Bhishma and Drona, who are fit to be worshipped?

II:5 - Better it is, indeed, in this world to accept alms than to slay the most noble teachers. But if I kill them, even in this world all my enjoyments will be stained with blood.

II:6 - We do not know which would be better - conquering them or being conquered by them. After slaying them, we should not wish to live.

Up to this point in the Bhagavad Gita, Arjuna is the guru, the wise man, who could discriminate between right and wrong. Now, the vehement assertion of knowledge of dharma has yielded to a confusion - perhaps brought on by the gentle chiding administered by Krishna.

These are inevitable stages through which everyone passes. The fool thinks he is the wisest man in the world and has a solution to all problems that face mankind. He is sure that God exists or does not exist. He is, paradoxically enough, convinced of his own and everyone else's duty. There is no confusion in him; in his case 'ignorance is bliss'. He has not sufficiently evolved to enter into the state of confusion that lies between the lower orders of human beings and the true - i.e. enlightened human being. The unenlightened human being almost constantly finds himself on the horns of a dilemma. Often he is ridiculed by the fool: I told you, give up all this philosophizing and be happy as I am. It is good to know that confusion is a stage higher than ignorance. It lasts till we find a Guru or preceptor who opens the gates of wisdom for us to enter - Guru in the sense of 'light that dispels darkness'. Such a Guru may be personal or impersonal.

II:7 - My heart is overpowered by the taint of pity. My mind is confused as to duty. I ask thee, tell me decisively what is good for me. I am thy disciple. Instruct me, who has taken refuge in thee.

This is one of the greatest verses in the scripture. It is the spark that ignites the magazine of wisdom. Much of the perversion that our philosophy has been subjected to of late can be directly attributed to the tragic fact that we have ignored an ancient wise injunction, 'Do not proffer advice unless you are asked to'.

If spiritual knowledge is treated as a commodity, the seller goes on his knees pleading with the prospective buyer! The latter feels that he, and therefore his own ignorance, is superior to the former's 'wares'. He might condescend to buy, but remodels it to suit his taste, affixes his own label to it and remarkets it. The result is evident in any book-shop.

The Guru waits not only for the disciple to ask, but to get into the proper attitude of receptivity. If the disciple has made no effort to deal with his problem or as his own solution to it, he is not receptive. If he has reached the end of his own resources, he does not doubt the Guru! Unless the disciple completely surrenders or empties himself, he cannot benefit by instruction from even God Himself! The disciple has to discard his own 'knowledge' (ignorance) at the door when he enters the Guru's abode. And, of course, he will leave the abode through the gate of true wisdom, thus leaving ignorance behind.

One who thus surrenders himself to the Guru should wish for 'sreyas', i.e., his ultimate, enduring and supreme good which is God-realization. Arjuna, the ideal aspirant, thrice insisted upon Sreyas (I:31; II:5 and 7). The Katho Upanisad makes a clear distinction between sreyas which is sought by the wise, and preyas (pleasure) sought by the fool.

II:8 - I do not see that it would remove this sorrow that burns up my senses, even if I should attain prosperous and unrivalled dominion on earth, or becoming lord over the gods in heaven.

Of course not! Nothing in this world, or in heaven - both of which are distasteful to Arjuna now - or in hell - which he decidedly wishes to avoid - contains the secret 'alchemical' substance that can end sorrow. So, a wise man should renounce 'the three worlds'. Logic ends there. If it does not, it leads us astray. The next step might be 'since I have renounced the three worlds, I should have nothing to do with them' or 'since I have renounced the three worlds, why should I be afraid to fight or act in this world?'

We should know the right and wrong application of logic. It is true that the body is unreal. But, so long as it lasts, it has to be fed. Even the condemned prisoner has to be given his last meal. To neglect it is adharmā.

Arjuna is grieved over the prospect of his having to kill his own kith and kin, though he knows that they are the worst sinners (Atatayin). 'Resist not evil' is a dictum that should be cautiously applied here. Society cannot run on utopian ideals. But that should not permit everyone to fight evil and thus generate evil in themselves. Hence, the caste system allocated this task to the Ksatriya (the ruler or administrator). The others shall not resist evil, but hand it over to the Ksatriya whose duty it becomes. For him to shirk it is adharmā! But if he does it as his duty, impartially and impersonally, he is not inwardly disturbed, and he does not incur sin. Law and order are maintained without disordering anyone's mind! The duty has to be discharged, not for the sake of heaven or of earth, nor for the fear of hell, but because it is God's Will. The Lord says that He incarnates in order to subdue evil (IV:8).

II:9 - Sanjaya said: Having said, 'I will not fight', Arjuna became silent.
II:10 - Krishna, as if smiling to the grief-stricken, spoke these words.

It is strange what ignorance and delusion can do to man. Arjuna was 'the destroyer of foes'. He could fight with Lord Shiva Himself! He was afraid of none - men, angels or demons. Yet, here he is, despondent and effeminately weeping right in the middle of the two armies, just in that situation where a warrior loves to be and is born to be - in the very situation that is ideal for him to demonstrate his valour and his chivalry - right at his post of sacred duty.

We often complain of lack of opportunities. We blame our fate and curse our neighbours. We are displeased with everyone else, men and gods! But we fail to realize that not they but our own spiritual ignorance and delusion are our real enemies.

So long as this delusion is not removed and the ignorance overcome, we shall refuse to utilize the opportunity even if the Lord Himself offers it to us. We will bluntly tell Him, as Arjuna said: I will not fight the inner foes. In the darkness of self-imposed ignorance the foes seem to be friends, the closed eyes refuse to see the inner light and we continue to be the slaves of the tyrant known as egoism, weeping and wailing, unwilling to give up the sources of our sorrows and unable to endure their torment.

If we have the right attitude of surrender to God, and if we prayerfully approach Him, He will, without the least delay and in a pleasant way, impart the highest wisdom to us, dispelling ignorance and delusion once and for all. He is the Light within each one of us.

II:11 - The blessed Lord said: While speaking learned words, you are mourning for what is not worthy of grief. Those who are wise lament neither for the living nor the dead.

This is the key-note of the Gita: grieve not. This verse can be used as a Mantra or a talisman. When worry knocks at the door, when grief threatens to overwhelm us, we should visualize Sri Krishna standing in front of us and telling us: You are grieving or worrying unnecessarily.

When we are consumed with remorse over the dead past and with sorrow concerning the unborn future, let us visualize Him saying to us: You are worrying unnecessarily. When a man dies, his body is cremated. Otherwise it would decompose and stink. When an event is past, do not keep it and cherish it in your mind. Cremate it and forget it: otherwise it will decompose in the mind and stink. Do not worry about the future, for tomorrow will bring its own problem and the problem will have its own solution, just as yesterday's and today's problems have had.

Many only talk like wise men! How very different is their action from their words! To harmonize thought, word and deed is the first principle of Yoga.

The truly wise do not grieve for 'the dead, nor for those whose life-breath has not yet ceased', knowing that all created things are subject to change and dissolution.

There is a distinction between thinking and worrying. Thinking is essential; worrying is unnecessary - it actually prevents thinking. Constructive thought is the first step to contemplation and eventual cessation of divisible thinking. It is made possible only when the inner awareness is freed from past - which exists but as memory, and future - which exists but as worry, a mixture of fear and hope. Only the present is - it is a present (gift) from God!

II:12 - Never was there a time when I didn't exist, nor you, nor all these rulers of men; nor in the future shall any of us cease to be.

II:13 - Just as in this body the embodied one passes into childhood, youth and old age, so also does he pass into another body. The hero does not grieve thereat.

The grief is only for one who confuses the Self and the changing body. The Self - which is the 'I am' within us all - is immortal and eternal. The individual Soul is like the immortal cell in the eternal body of the infinite Lord. It is undying. Only the body dies.

The changes we call childhood, youth and old age do not affect the 'I'. 'Even so the change called 'death' does not affect it. 'I' does not really die; 'I' creates another body.

The realization of this immortal nature of the soul will liberate us from grief and delusion in regard to birth and death. We must always realize our nature. It is inevitable therefore that we should seek to realize God, our substratum. If you hold me down in a lake, I struggle to come up because I am life and I struggle to release myself from death. Even the eventual natural death is only release from a dying body. Even so, throughout our life, we are endeavouring to overcome this prison-house of finitude and to realize that 'I am that infinite Self'. Hence our ceaseless striving for freedom from slavery and from physical and mental illness, for peace and happiness unending; though we fail to realize that it is absurd to look for these in ever-changing phenomena. Such striving therefore only makes us worse!

When the hairs turn grey, be happy you have hair. When they fall out, be happy you have the head. When death threatens you, be happy your Soul is immortal. There is no death for the Soul. Childhood, youth and old age are commas, whereas the phenomenon of 'death' is a semicolon in the Soul's perennial song.

II:14 - The contacts of the senses with the objects, O Arjuna, which cause heat and cold, pleasure and pain, have a beginning and an end; they are impermanent. Endure them bravely.

II:15 - The person who is not disturbed by happiness and distress, and is steady in both, is certainly eligible for liberation.

The Self that ceases to identify itself with the body and through it with the outside world, is at peace within itself. He who imagines the Self to be the body and the senses, undergoes the varied experiences of heat and cold, pain and pleasure, and so on. He does not enjoy tranquility because these experiences are impermanent, fleeting and momentary. Two distinct stages are described in these two verses. The first is titiksa or endurance. The second is sama or equanimity - balanced state of mind. The first involves psychological effort. The second is effortless and natural.

If you are walking in a forest on a cold morning and a monkey jumps on you and tears your shirt so that the cold wind blows on your bare back, you endure the cold which you feel intensely. This is titiksa. At the same time, the cold wind is also blowing on your face. You are not even aware of it. This is sama or equanimity, in which the external condition fails to affect you in the least. The spiritual aspirant strives to practice endurance. He is a hero who has reached the second stage and to whom pain and pleasure are alike.

'The more you are able to identify yourself with the immortal, all-pervading self, the less will you be affected by the pairs of opposites.' - Swami Sivananda.

II:16 - The unreal has no being; there is no non-being of the real. The truth about both has been seen by the knowers of the truth.

The reality or God alone exists: that which always exists is God. That which is, is eternal and infinite. No-one can bring into being that which is not! It is simple and does not need God to tell us! But God tells us because only He knows the totality, ours is always a point of view. That which intuitively knows this, knows the totality.

Then, what is this world? It is like the appearance of 'a snake in the rope', of a second moon when one suffers from diplopia, of the illusion of a mirage, of ghosts in posts in the dark courtyard, and of a second pill on the palm - when the one that is there, is touched by scissor-crossed index and middle fingers of the other hand. When did the snake die? When did the second moon set? When did the water of the mirage evaporate? Where did the ghosts go? Who took the second pill? They never existed; they were but illusory phenomena, non-existent but experienced!

Life itself is a long dream. We are unable to realize the illusoriness of the external objects because the dream is still on. We resist the awakening influence - like the dreamer of a pleasant dream - and pull the blanket of ignorance over our faces.

When it is said 'the world is unreal', it is not suggested that we are seeing the world where nothing exists. We only mean to say that there is wrong perception. Something exists - the self or God, and we see it as something else - world. To the little boy sitting under the tree, its shadow appears to be a phantom born at midday, growing till sunset and dying then!

The Jivanmukta (liberated Being) is aware of both - viz., the reality and the fact that to the unenlightened the appearance is experienced as real. Hence, He is never deluded, even as we see the shadow come into being, grow and vanish, but we are not deceived by it. He is aware of the appearance - world - and its substratum - the self.

II:17 - Know that, by whom all this is pervaded, to be indestructible. None can cause the destruction of that, the imperishable.

Every being is pervaded by God, inside and outside. A block of ice submerged in water has not only water on all sides, but is itself water, though in solid form.

That all-pervading God is indestructible, and living faith in the all-pervading reality gives us a wonderful sense of security. But identification of the self with the passing phantom gives rise to insecurity and grief. The servant may be healthier and stronger than his master, but there is always a lurking sense of insecurity in him because he does not know when his dismissal will come. Reliance on 'solid' matter generates insecurity; whereas reliance on subtle and invisible God confers security on us. Matter changes; the spirit is unchanging.

Life becomes meaningful and all activities are purposeful only on the basis of faith in the enduring reality.

All scriptures proclaim the truth that God pervades all inside and outside; in short, God alone exists, naught else. Whatever exists in this universe is pervaded by God. - Isavasya Upanishad.

Lord Narayana dwells, pervading everything within and without - all that is heard and all that is seen in the entire universe - Narayana Suktam. All this is indeed Brahman or the Absolute; there is no diversity here. - Upanishad.

Realization of this unity will free us from sorrow. Burn this forest of ignorance with the fire of conviction that I am one and pure consciousness. Be free from sorrow. Be blissful. - Astavakra Gita.

II:18 - These bodies are said to have an end, whereas the embodied Self is eternal, indestructible and immeasurable. Therefore, O Arjuna, fight!

What was the need for all this discourse on the nature of the self to make Arjuna fight? Was it not enough to point out that it was his duty as a prince? No. It would only be putting off the evil day. Arjuna was neither weak nor effeminate. He was Gudakesa and Paramtapa - one who had successfully combated the internal foes sleep and lethargy, and also all his external enemies among whom were Gods! He had full command even over the involuntary functions of his body and could sleep or remain awake as he pleased. He was a wise and learned man, too, yet even he was overcome by grief.

Grief is born of ignorance of the nature of the Self and of maya or illusion, and also born of the false identification (confusion) of the Self with the not-Self, which includes the world, body, mind and senses. Your mind indulges in a peculiar double trick. It looks for reality because it thinks you are different from the truth. Having dissected yourself from reality mentally, suddenly you think 'I am the body'. This is what they call 'maya', illusion born of ignorance. Arjuna's collapse on the battlefield was the best opportunity for Krishna to uproot this tree of ignorance.

This can be applied to our own life, too. We suffer again and again only because we do not go to the root of the problem, but remain satisfied with make-shift solutions. The wise man need suffer only once. His wisdom will seek the root and destroy it there. Thus he will never suffer again.

Do the 'bodies' have an 'end'? Does matter come to an end, annihilation? They are 'said to have an end'! Popular belief can often be illogical or unscientific - and it may be unnecessary, futile and impossible to uproot such belief. Unless the abandonment or the belief is vital to self-knowledge, any controversy concerning it may at best be diversionary waste of effort and psychological distraction.

II:19 - Neither he who takes the self to be the slayer, nor he who thinks the self is slain, knows. One who is in knowledge knows that the self slays, not nor is slain.

II:20 - He is not born nor does he ever die. After having been, he again ceases not to be. Unborn, eternal, changeless and ancient, he is not slain when the body is slain.

Krishna takes us here to the pinnacle of wisdom from where we have an indescribably glorious vision of the absolute, the one that has never undergone a change.

The self is unborn. There is no birth and death for the self. Cosmic Consciousness looked at from an individual stand-point, so to say, is Atma, the Self - the sky that appears to us through the window as distinct from the sky-in-itself, which is Brahman. It is the narrowness of our focus that generates worries in us! A broader and deeper outlook will give us a magnificent view of what is and a realization of its changelessness.

Cosmic Consciousness alone is, even as the sky alone is, undiminished by the clouds or walls that prevent our perception of it. It is Avidya or ignorance that prevents our realization of Cosmic Consciousness. Ignorance is not a positive factor. It is a nothing. How can nothing bring about any change in the reality? How can ignorance affect it either? If we are all in a hall and suddenly the lights go off, it is true that we shall not be able to see one another. But, because the darkness descends upon us, we are not crushed nor are we in any way affected by it, and we are exactly as we were. God alone exists, totally unaffected by the apparent - because they are caused by ignorance - changes in this world and in our body and mind.

II:21 - How can a person who knows that the soul is indestructible, unborn, eternal and immutable, kill anyone or cause anyone to kill.

Daily, we are aware of three states of consciousness. In deep sleep, there is no diversity. In the dream state the mind creates an illusion of diversity in itself! In the waking state, there is an apparent diversity; apparent because it is based on primordial ignorance and it will not stand investigation. These three states are experienced by the single ego, but the laws governing them are different. You cannot prosecute a man for killing another in a dream! Nor can he ignore a wall because he did not see it in his sleep.

The same argument applies to the different states of spiritual awakening, too. It is true that ultimately God alone exists and that He is eternal and immortal. But, in the state in which Arjuna found himself, he could not ask Krishna the very pertinent question: If all these heroes are essentially indestructible, why do You ask me to kill them? He had not transcended the gross state of experience of the physical world and had to play the game in accordance with the laws that governed that state. Here we have a strange paradox. The battle of life has to be fought in the world which we should investigate all the time and realize that it is the effect of our own ignorance. Failure to fight the battle of life in this spirit will sanction ignorance and seal the door through which we should rise into the higher states of consciousness.

This is the extremely delicate art of living: to play our part in this world as though it were a reality and yet never to forget the ultimate reality which appears, through mistaken perception, as the world.

II:22 - Just as a man puts off worn out clothes and puts on new ones, so also the embodied one puts off worn out bodies, and envelops in new.

'Reincarnation' is a fact only in relation to the physical body. The Self is unborn and undying! Life is continuous, only the dress is replaced by new ones every now and then. All religions are agreed that the soul is imperishable and survives the body. There seems to be difference of opinion only in regard to its donning a physical body post mortem. It is admitted, too, that the soul on departing from here undergoes various experiences necessary for eventual ascension into the kingdom of God or to become one with Him, expressed as you care to put it.

The spirit or the soul cannot act without body, or rather, the instrument by which the soul functions and gathers experiences is called body, and getting into or assuming one of these is known as 'incarnation'. The soul does not enjoy the pleasures of a heaven or suffer the pains of a hell, except through the medium of a body composed of the five elements, organized to suit the peculiar conditions of its existence at that stage, and so subtle or gross.

There is a great difference between the physiological structure of fish and bird and that of the human being, but basically they are all composed of the five elements. The fish-body is adapted to life in the sea, the bird-body to flight, and the human-body to a different kind of life. Similarly, the souls incarnating on other planets might assume or obtain physical bodies adapted to the conditions there.

The soul is really not reborn. In fact it was never born at all. But when it assumes a new body, we say it is born.

This verse takes the sting out of death and removes fear of death from our heart. Who would not like new clothes?

It also reminds us that the body is only a garment bound to deteriorate and become useless. We should keep it clean and healthy, but not forget the self which is the enduring reality.

II:23 - Weapons do not cut the Self. Fire burns it not. Water wets it not. Wind dries it not.

II:24 - This Self is everlasting, all-pervading, unchangeable, immovable, and eternally the same.

II:25 - This Self is said to be unmanifested, unthinkable and unchangeable. Therefore, knowing this to be such thou should not grieve.

Expressions like 'I am injured. I am burnt' are defective. Even so, 'I am a bad man', etc. They betray a confusion of the Self, to which the 'I' points, and of the body and mind which are subject to all these afflictions. Take the expression 'I am sick'. If it is true, then I cannot be made healthy! It is just like the expression 'This is paper' - which cannot be made into a loaf of bread!

Injury, burning, evil nature, sickness, and so on, are superimpositions on the Self which has nothing to do with these and hence is able to shake them off at will. Its essential nature as the immortal, eternal, all-pervading, stable and ancient Self asserts itself.

Thus, even common expressions like 'I am a man', if pursued as an inward enquiry, will lead us to their logical conclusion, the Self. 'I' is really not 'a man', for the 'I' is really distinct from the 'man-body'. The 'I' is beyond all these modifications. It is the subtle essence hidden in all bodies, one and immutable.

'That which is the subtle essence of all, in that all that exists has its being. That is the truth. That is the self. That thou art, O Svetaketu!' - Chandogya Upanisad.

It is foolish to pretend that all this is true. Our Master pointed out the danger of assumed knowledge. Wicked people catch fish in the Ganga and kill them, rationalizing their action with the lofty verse 'weapons do not cut the Self'. Such perversion of truth will only make self-realization more remote.

II:26 - But even if thou thinkest of the Self as being constantly born and constantly dying, even then thou should not grieve.

II:27 - For one who has taken his birth, death is certain; and for one who is dead, birth is certain. So, in the unavoidable you should not lament.

Krishna's expressions are very clever and guarded! He does not concede that the Self is born and it dies. But if you think so, even then there is no cause for grief.

We should learn to accept the inevitable. As a famous prayer goes: 'God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.' Birth and death are inevitable; so why worry?

In the second verse, we see the cautious wording. Death is certain for that which is born and birth for the dead. But, where is it said that the Self is born or it dies? Birth and death belong to the illusion (conventional or traditional usage), not to the Self, the substratum for the 'I'. I am not born nor do I die; birth and death belong to the confusion. At best, 'birth' and 'death' are conventional expressions like the 'rising' and the 'setting' of the sun. For not even the 'body' dies finally. Birth and death are two apparent stages in a ceaseless change. They have social implications, but cease to be true when investigated into.

When you drive along a tar road in the morning, you find a mirage. When the sun sets, the mirage disappears - dies. Oh, no, it is not dead; the next morning, when the sun rises, the mirage is born again! We can accept the inevitable with wisdom and course only if we are firmly rooted in the truth or the permanent reality which is totally unaffected by these passing phenomena.

II:28 - Beings are unmanifested in their beginning, manifested in their middle state, and unmanifested again in their end. What is there to grieve about?

This is a very important thought which can immediately liberate us from worry and grief. We clothe the moment with the mantle of Eternity and worry over its magnitude. We forget that what happens now has had a cause in the unknown past and will in turn have an effect in the unknown future. In the darkness of total ignorance, we grope and break our bones.

We cling to our 'possessions', forgetting that we were alive before they came to us. We fear their loss. We grieve over the loss. Ignorant of the laws of Karma (cause and effect) we strive all the time to push unhappiness away and to acquire happiness. Pushing unhappiness away involves us in greater unhappiness. Feverish striving to acquire happiness is only misery!

The Bhagavatam reminds us of the mystery of life: 'You do not work for unhappiness and yet find yourself in it. Even so, happiness will be yours unsought-for.' They are the effects of adrsta - the unseen karma. Meditation upon this will rob us of all tensions, grief and delusion, and will snap all our attachments.

'The relationship as son, friend, teacher, father, mother, wife, brother or sister is formed through the body on account of attachment and delusion. Just as planks unite and separate in the river, just as pilgrims unite and separate in a public inn, so also fathers, mothers, sons and brothers unite and separate in this world. He who thus understands the nature of the body and all human relationships based on it, will not grieve.' - Swami Sivananda.

The enigma of a 'future' is tantalising. People are irresistibly drawn to others who profess the ability to 'read the future'. How strange! What is the use of this knowledge if 'what will be will be'; and how can one trust the prophesy if the future calamity can somehow be averted? One who knows 'what is' is not worried about what was or what will be.

The Bhagavad Gita is a small scripture of seven hundred verses, a part of the epic Mahabharata which describes the conflict between the hundred vicious sons of Dhrtarastra and the five pious sons of Pandu. The scripture was revealed by the Lord incarnate, Sri Krishna, to one of the five pious sons, the warrior Arjuna, on the battlefield.

There are some who wonder: would it have been possible for Krishna and Arjuna to have had the frame of mind needed to discuss yoga, with the war looming large over their heads? But, can it not be that Krishna wanted to teach us a lesson through this very act of revealing the scripture on the battlefield? Yes, philosophy is not for 'discussion over a club table', in the words of my Master, nor should it recline in an armchair and be treated as an intellectual pastime. It should be a weapon in our daily battle of life. That is the sole object with which these few thoughts are offered at the feet of the Lord seated in your heart.

Why does Krishna go into all these discussions concerning the ultimate truth? For a very simple reason: action which is not backed up by true understanding is itself bondage. Any action or right knowledge that is backed up by right understanding, is itself liberation. It is as simple as that. That is also what we are told right at the very beginning of the Yoga Vasistha. The bird does not fly with only one wing. It has two wings and in the middle is the bird. One wing is knowledge, the other is action and in the middle is life! Your life is not merely understanding or merely doing. The unawakened mind, when it listens to the revolutionary philosophy of the Bhagavad Gita, is capable of only one thing - misunderstanding. This is why understanding alone is not enough. It is like trying to fly on one wing, which is impossible. The other wing is karma yoga. Similarly, action alone is not enough either; understanding is the other wing.

Who is the doer of the action? The doer of the action at one point is the enjoyer of the experience at the other end. If, for instance, you pick up a cane and bring it down, you are the striker and the other is the struck. Your action is his experience and his action is your experience. Therefore, we are all bound together, brought together by every action that proceeds from one or the other. With clear understanding of this, you instantly become aware of the inner source of this action, and therefore of the source of experience. The source of expression is the source of experience. It is called expression at one end of the cane, and experience at the other end. You and the other are one. It is the same fool who hits and who is hit! This is not 'Do as you would be done by'. In that there is duality; but here there is no duality. The cane is only one. At one end what happens is called expression and at the other end what happens is called experience. Therefore, you are not hitting and nobody is hit. It is the cane which keeps jumping around! When this truth-in-action is directly realized, there arises wisdom beyond experience and expression.

II:29 - One sees this self as a wonder. Another speaks of it as a wonder. Another hears of it as a wonder. Yet, having heard, none understands it at all.

Wonderful is self-realization. The ultimate experience is non-dual and therefore inexpressible. It is not had by the mind. The self is conscious of itself. It cannot be put into words, nor even formed as a concept within oneself, yet one who has had that experience tries to speak of it and can only say: It is a wonder!

The disciple listens to the master's inexpressible wonderment at the transcendental experience. He is thrilled. Yet, it remains beyond the three acts of seeing, description and hearing.

The self alone exists. The one appears as many. The unconditioned appears to be conditioned in the individual. That is the power of maya, God's illusory power. Just as the blueness of the sky and water in the mirage are optical illusions, this is cosmic illusion. Do not question further. When the house is on fire, the first requirement is not a fruitless research into its cause, but to put it out.

The Upanisad also declare that the self is not realized by much learning or discussion, but only by God's Grace earned by self-surrender.

The verse may also be interpreted in this manner: He that sees, hears and speaks of the self is a wonderful man. Such a man is very rare. He is one among many thousands. Thus the self is very hard to understand. - Swami Sivananda.

II:30 - This self, the indweller in the body of everyone, is ever indestructible. Therefore, thou should not grieve for any creature.

This is the summing up of the philosophic argument. The body undergoes change: even the elements are not destroyed in the sense that they cease to be. Matter, too, in its ultimate analysis, is indestructible, because, as has been proved by science, mass is a static or inert energy! Life cannot be destroyed: energy itself is indestructible. Its apparent destruction is mere transmutation.

Body and life are themselves tools in the hands of the soul which is of the nature of pure consciousness. Body is inert. Life is blind energy. It is the soul which is the conscious director within these two. There is no power greater than this, for this consciousness is all-pervading and therefore one without a second.

'This Brahman, this creator, all these gods, these five great elements, all these small creatures, and others, the seeds of creation, the egg-born, the womb-born, the sweat-born, the sprout-born, horses, cows, men, elephants, whatever else breathes and moves or flies, or is immovable - all these are guided by consciousness and are supported by consciousness. The universe has consciousness for its guide. Consciousness is the basis or stay of all. Verily, consciousness is Brahman', declares the Aitareya Upanisad. That Brahman is the self of all.

In the words of sage Yajnavalkya of the Brhadaranyaka Upanisad: 'When the self alone is all this ... how can it be destroyed? It is incomprehensible, imperishable, unattached, free and not subject to pain or destruction.' Hence, this soul is not physical or psychological - not a concept or an entity totally independent on other entities. Though incomprehensible, it 'realizable'. It is realized by the one in all.

II:31 - Having regard to thy duty, thou should not waver. For, there is nothing higher for a ksatriya than a righteous war.

II:32 - Happy are the ksatriya who are called upon to fight in such a battle that comes of itself, opening for them the doors of the heavenly realms.

II:33 - But, if thou wilt not fight this righteous war, then, having abandoned thine own duty and fame, thou shalt incur sin.

Society cannot be conducted nor can man live on transcendental knowledge alone! A synthesis of high ideals and practical common sense is essential; this is achieved in our smṛti or dharma sastra which are codes of morality and which, therefore, recognize the existence (relative and fleeting) of phenomena.

As we shall see, the Bhagavad Gita emphasizes one's adherence to one's own dharma at all costs. 'Righteous war' was fought only in the days prior to the discovery of the airplane and gun-powder. Now, no war - hot, cold or lukewarm - is righteous because there is no battlefield and there is indiscriminate destruction of all everywhere, without any restraint by proper rules of conduct. Innocent children are killed. Non-combatants and people who have no idea what the war is about are killed. In the present context, all wars should be banished - hot war with guns and bombs, cold war in the field of propaganda and commerce, and lukewarm war over a conference table.

Though the philosophy of the indestructibility of the self could be applied to both commandments 'fight' and 'do not fight', it is the dharma sastra or secular duty that gives it the right direction.

II:34 - People will recount your dishonor. And, to one who has been honored, dishonor is worse than death.

II:35 - The great heroes will think that thou hast withdrawn from the battle through fear, and thus they will consider you a coward.

II:36 - The enemies also, disputing thy power, will speak many abusive words. What is more painful than this?

A wise man does not seek honor, knowing that its loss is worse than death.

When Krishna insists on equanimity in honor and dishonor (XII:19), why does he say here that dishonor is worse than death to a ksatriya? We should not confuse the two. They belong to two different aspects of our life. Discipline has two aspects: self-discipline and social discipline. A wise man does not sacrifice one for the other. For instance, if a taxi-driver speaks disrespectfully to a judge on the seashore, the latter puts up with this personal effrontery as a matter of self-discipline. But the same judge should charge even a minister with contempt of court if the latter said anything derogatory of the judge in his official capacity.

Social discipline, on the other hand, should not lead you to take upon yourself the burden of reforming society and maintaining what you consider to be law and order in the whole world. Then you might lose sight of self-discipline. An undisciplined man cannot promote social discipline either.

This is an extremely delicate maneuver, more difficult than tight-rope walking!

II:37 - Either you will be killed on the battlefield and attain the heavenly realms, or you will conquer and enjoy the earthly realm. Therefore get up and fight with determination.

II:38 - Having made pleasure and pain, gain and loss, victory and defeat the same - by so doing, you will never incur sin.

Here is a clever argument based on the highest wisdom! In karma yoga, the action itself is the goal and its performance its sufficient reward. Hence, whatever happens in consequence is joyously welcomed. Duty-consciousness at once lifts one's mind above the pairs of opposites given here by Krishna.

Pain and pleasure, etc., are mental modifications brought about by the contact or identification of the soul (purusa) and the world (prakrti) - (XIII:20).

But what we need bear in mind here is the central fact that we are prevented from doing our duty in this world by perverted notions of pain and pleasure, gain and loss, and so on. Instinctively we avoid pain and we refuse to do that which - we fear - might cause pain or loss to us, even if that is our sacred duty. Our own intellect now comes to the aid of this behaviour, and we weave very clever arguments to justify our action and make it appear righteous. This is precisely where man with his intelligence can be worse than beast which is totally instinctual in its behaviour.

Equanimity and a balanced mind which regards pain and pleasure alike are the indispensable prerequisites to the performance of one's own dharma and, hence, to the attainment of salvation.

II:39 - This is wisdom (buddhi) concerning sankhya. Now listen to wisdom concerning Yoga, endowed with which you shall cast off the bonds of action.
II:40 - In this there is no loss of effort, nor is there any harm. Even a little of this knowledge (practice of Yoga) protects one from great fear.

There is a vital synthesis here. It is between action and knowledge. Philosophy carried in the brain is an intellectual burden. Life or action not guided by philosophy - in the sense of wisdom - or an altruistic outlook - which implies an unceasing investigation into truth - is blind. As Socrates said: The unexamined life is not worth living.

We should learn to 'be good' and 'do good'. The welfare of society depends upon our good actions - so we should 'do good'. Society does not bother even if our motive is bad and attitude commonplace. But our own good and our salvation depend upon our inner motives and attitude. Therefore, we should 'be good'. Knowledge and action must be integrated. Learning and life must blend.

The word 'yoga' introduced here has a variety of meanings, as we shall see in due course. Yoga means 'union' or 'integration'. Roughly: 'integration of man and the transcendent being' is sankhya or inward knowledge, and 'integration of man and the immanent Godhead, the universe' is buddhi yoga.

When we take this path of yoga, we are on the right road to salvation. Every step takes us nearer the goal and thus there is no loss of effort at all here. The knowledge and confidence that we are on the right path itself frees us from all fear. The very movement of investigation saves us from sorrow and hence fear. Fear arises only in the darkness known as ignorance.

II:41 - Here the buddhi is resolute in purpose, and the aim is one. The intelligence of those who are irresolute is many-branched.

Having taken this path, one must not waver or stray into the by-lanes. 'Vyavasaya' is a word commonly used to mean 'agriculture' too. If a man wants to cultivate a piece of land, he should apply himself with one-pointedness to his task. If he tills the soil and then changes his mind, or if he sows the seed and neglects the farm on account of other interests, he will not reap a rich harvest.

'Yoga' is self-culture and is governed by the same laws as agriculture. Here they are in brief:

1. We burn the bush. We remove the evil qualities in our nature.
 2. We plough the ground. We resort to several yoga practices in order to prepare the ground. We 'turn' the soil, bringing the hidden part to light: the dark, hidden evils must be brought to light and thus removed.
 3. We sow the seed. We resort to the Guru who sows the spiritual seed in the form of a mantra and also of spiritual knowledge.
 4. We water the field. We vitalize the mantra by faithful repetition and by meditation on its significance, and the instructions of the guru by augmenting our faith in and devotion to him.
 5. As the young sprouts come up, we carefully guard them against weeds, animals and thieves. As we progress on the path of yoga, we guard our faith and devotion against evil activities and evil company, by ever-alert watchfulness.
- Such one-pointed attention ultimately yields us the rich harvest of spiritual experiences and self-realization. Such one-pointedness is brahmacarya.

II:42 - The unwise take pleasure in the flowery words of the vedas, saying, 'there is nothing else'.

II:43 - Full of desires, having heaven as their goal, they utter speech which promises birth as the reward of actions, and prescribe various specific actions for the attainment of pleasure and power.

II:44 - For those who are attached to pleasure and power, whose minds are drawn away by such teaching, that determinate reason which is steadily bent on meditation and samadhi is not formed.

'Veda' means 'knowledge'. The veda prescribe certain actions calculated to lead us to heaven. In modern parlance, even 'science' can be included here. Does not science promise to bring heaven on to earth? All these may be noble professions. But an element of our personality which neither science nor ritualistic religion is able to keep in check, destroys what they build. That is desire which is cause of sorrow. We should liberate ourselves from sorrow inherent in birth and death.

Krishna has given a clear psychological picture of our life here. We are all goaded in our activity only by these two: lust for pleasure and lust for power. Everyone wants to become Isvara or God (as the word aisvaryaprasakta in verse 44 implies), even with powers to create - e.g., the scientist who wants to create the living cell, or powers to protect - every father feels he is protecting the family, and to powers to destroy. Though it is not openly admitted for fear of blasphemy, such desire is there in our hearts. Man has intelligence and also free-will. If the former is overwhelmed by desire, he is left with mere free-will goaded by base instincts. When lust usurps the throne and dethrones wisdom, free-will follows. Yoga is beyond the reach of such a one.

II:45 - The vedas deal with the three attributes of nature. Be thou above these three attributes. Free yourself from the pairs of opposites, and ever remain in the quality of sattva, free from the thoughts of acquisition and preservation, and be established in the Self.

II:46 - To the brahmana who knows the self, all the veda are of as much use as is a reservoir of water in a place where there is a flood.

These two are tricky verses! The veda - the ancient scriptures and the modern scientific scriptures, too! - deal with the created universe. We should go beyond them, i.e., the three qualities of nature - inertia, dynamism and goodness. But, Krishna wants us 'ever to remain in the quality of goodness'! That is: be above even that; but now, of your own choice and not out of compulsion, be good. Do not treat goodness as a passport to heaven or as a testimonial needed for a good living, or even as a sound policy, but as something you wish to be and to do, because evil is foolish and dangerous.

The second verse has a double-meaning! The universe and the scriptures dealing with it are of no use to the sage of self-realization. Or:

Do we not find that in a place flooded by water, we cannot use it for drinking? A reservoir is still useful, and has its limited use. Even so, the sage of self-realization would still use the veda and modern science in their own limited spheres of utility, realizing that self-realization is infinitely superior to these. He is carefree for he has no desires. He is not anxious to acquire anything in particular nor to preserve what he has. Where is the good in clinging to passing shadows? He holds, without a sense of possession! If you abandon all care concerning yogaksema - acquisition and preservation, material welfare, and if you are totally devoted to God, he takes care of you! (IX:22).

II:47 - Thy right is your duty only, but never to its fruits. Let not the fruits of action be thy motive, nor let thy attachment be to inaction.

This is the central teaching of the Bhagavad Gita. Its many shades are dealt with in several other verses, but here it is good to stress a factor often ignored. 'Thy right is to work only' implies that we have a right to work and to do, a right which we should exercise. This sentence is often read with the emphasis on 'only', but every word deserves emphasis and every emphasis will reveal a new interpretation! Karma will create the necessary circumstances around us and bestow on us the rewards of our own past actions. But, in those circumstances and with those rewards, we yet enjoy the freedom to work and to do what we care to. We are not asked to surrender this right, but to exercise it and thus not to 'let thy attachment be to inaction'.

'Not to the fruits thereof' implies that there is someone else in charge of the reward - God. 'Reward' is euphemism for a 'future event'. Leave it to him. This is not slave-mentality or fatalism. It is joyous participation in his plan. Joyous participation brushes aside ideas like: 'Is God a capricious being who will visit us with pain though we do everything selflessly?' The joy of doing what we can, and should, is itself the greatest and immediate reward. On the contrary, it is the man of hope who always suffers, even from the fear of the hope not being capable of realization! I do not long even for the fruits of dharma. Dharma is my nature. He who wants to milk the cow of dharma for his own pleasure, does not get it! - Yudhisthira, in the Mahabharata.

II:48 - Perform action being steadfast in yoga; abandoning attachment and remaining balanced in success and failure. Evenness of mind is called yoga.

Yoga is 'union'. We should be in union with God. That is to be steadfast in yoga. It is not possible if we have attachment to 'the world' which includes the little self, its actions and motives. A simultaneous achievement of this twofold yoga is conducive to a balanced state of mind; in Gurudev's words, it is: Detach the mind from the world and attach it to the Lord.

Man, in his eagerness for the desired results of actions, is intensely attached to the actions themselves. 'I do' and why? Because 'I expect this to happen'. If this happens, it is success and 'I am happy'. If that happens, it is failure and 'I am unhappy'. Even if it is success and even if I am happy for the moment, it is in the shadow of a terribly oppressive fear that it may not last; and the success is eclipsed by fear of loss! Hence, man grieves all the time - in success and in failure. To the truly wise man, therefore, everyone in the world is in misery; the only difference is of degree.

Happy is the man who has a balanced mind; balanced in success and failure. To him success is not success - it is duty discharged. To him failure is not failure - for even that is duty discharged. He has done what had to be done - the appropriate action - in the right spirit. That is one's duty. Duty discharged is success. Therefore, in a way, it is perennial success, though that success does not belong to him, but to the Lord with whom he is united. God is the master: for his is 'the kingdom, and the power and the glory for ever and ever'. Man shares them, for he is a cell in the great body of God, but if he is not in tune with God's will, he degenerates and dies.

II:49 - Far lower than the yoga of wisdom (buddhi yoga) is action. Seek thou refuge in wisdom. Wretched are they whose motive is the reward.

II:50 - A man engaged in devotional service rids himself of both good and bad actions even in this life. Therefore strive for Karma-yoga of Seva - the art of all work.

Mere action, however philanthropic or humanitarian, is but labour! Even a mule may convey great learning by carrying a huge load of the best literature ; but no-one will confer a doctorate on it!

The word 'refuge' is important. Before performing any action, look to buddhi for orders. This buddhi should be 'attached or united' to God. This is buddhi yoga. This is 'skill in action', another characteristic of yoga.

History extols the great deeds of men of extraordinary skill who have shaped nations.

History is concerned with social values, not with inner wisdom. But our scriptures, which are also historical documents, exalt only men of wisdom who excelled in buddhi yoga and who were, therefore, in tune with God. Our scriptures, again, abound in instances where the material part of an action was insignificant but the spiritual content was great: the spirit is vital. When thousands of tons of earth are crushed, you get a small but most precious diamond.

The yogi goes beyond good and evil deeds. Is this a license? No. Ask yourself: Am I a yogi? Am I in constant and conscious communion with God? If you are, you will never indulge in evil action. All your actions will be the manifestation of God's Will. That is true skill in action: to do; to put your whole heart and soul into the doing itself; yet, to be free from selfish motive; to do one's duty knowing it is the will of God.

II:51 - The wise, possessed of knowledge, having abandoned the fruits of their actions, and being freed from the fetters of birth, go to the place which is beyond all pain.

In this and the last few verses has been compressed food for years of contemplation. Yoga is balanced state of mind; yoga is skill in action; yoga is renunciation of the fruits of action; yoga is uniting the buddhi with God. A one-sided approach lands a pseudo-yogi in a ditch. To justify his failure in the daily battle of life, he invents a fictitious line of demarcation between mundane life and divine life! Krishna's promise is not of a distant paradise to be reached through vales of tears, but freedom from grief here and now.

The yogi must be discriminative and wise; he must be calm and clever; he must be desireless and dexterous; he must be selfless and sensible; he must be a practical idealist; he must be a blend of the best of both the worlds! For it is the omniscient, omnipotent God whose will works through him; and even as every cell in our body shares the life of the whole body, the little finite man lives in tune with the infinite, happy and blissful here, now and forever.

The fetters were forged by ignorance. Buddhi yoga loosens them. The free yogi soars into the region of eternal light. Evil, pain, grief, delusion and all the negative fancies of his world-dreaming life disappear. To the enlightened, there is no evil; to even the smallest candle there is no darkness. The enlightened one is totally free from evil in himself; and he does not see evil in others the 'others' are his own self! He is no longer bound by birth, even if he, to fulfill the Lord's mission, is reborn here. He is never tainted by sin nor is he harassed by pain; they do not exist for him. He is a step higher than the yogi mentioned under verse sixteen.

II:52 - When thy intellect crosses beyond the mire of delusion, then thou shalt attain to indifference as to what has been heard and what has yet to be heard.

II:53 - When thy intellect, perplexed by what thou hast heard, shall stand immovable and steady in the self, then thou shalt attain self-realization.

The mind is filled with wrong thought-forms - the traditions, dogmas, preconceived ideas, prejudices - all from the dead past. We have dead, crystallized and fossilized ideas of good and evil. We want to do what is regarded as good, at least to win the favor of society! Completely unselfish, desireless or egoless spontaneous action is, therefore, meaningless to us!

This delusion will not disappear when we utter a magic formula! We hear the truth from the great ones, and then hear it again and again. Reading is a form of hearing through the eyes! As truth slowly sinks in, delusion gets shaken.

But what is heard does not produce yoga any more than removing the bandage from your eyes creates the sun in the sky! As the Zen Buddhists, in particular, believe: truth shines as a flash of lightning of its own accord, not in response to any action on our part. When the mind is 'shocked' by the understanding that all the thoughts entertained so far were false and others which may arise now and later are equally false, it is perplexed and becomes still. That stillness is samadhi. That is yoga. There is no more need to hear.

The young girl buys a number of books on obstetrics. She has read a few. A few are still on the shelf. In the meantime, she has a baby. She knows now. There is no need to read those books!

II:54 - Arjuna said: What is the description of him who has steady wisdom, and is merged in the super-conscious state - how does one of steady wisdom speak, how does he sit, how does he walk?

The state of unruffled wisdom or cosmic consciousness is within the apprehension of neither thought nor speech. One cannot grasp it by thought nor can it be described in words. Teaching or instruction necessarily involves description. If that is ruled out, how is anyone even to aspire to cosmic consciousness?

Hence, our great scriptures are replete with stories illustrative of the ideal man. For instance, even the simple virtue of 'endurance' can be misunderstood to suggest impotent submission. What is the difference between enlightened surrender and helpless slave-mentality? Outwardly both of them might look similar. To bring out the inward distinction, we have the stories of the trials and tribulations which the Pandavi had to endure.

In reply to Arjuna's query, Krishna gives the vital characteristics of a sage: they are illuminated in great detail in the lives of Rsabha, Jada Bbarata, and devotees like Prahlida and Sudama. It is from their personal example that we derive direct inspiration. They can and should only inspire - 'breathe into' - us. Having received the breath of religious life, we should live it and not even try to compare ourselves with or blindly copy them.

Study of the lives of great saints is the greatest spiritual tonic or food, which no yoga aspirant can afford to neglect. Spiritual truths live in them. Studying their lives and studying scriptures bear the same relation as eating sugar and eating paper with the word 'sugar' written on it - without, of course, discounting the value of scriptural study, which has its own place of secondary importance in the aspirant's life.

II:55 - The blessed Lord said : When a man gives up all varieties of sense desire which arise from mental confection, and when his mind finds satisfaction in the self alone, then he is said to be in pure supernatural consciousness.

To the modern man, thoroughly prejudiced by the psychologists emphatic declarations that an action invariably springs from a desire - almost always selfish, and a personal motive, the Gita-ideal is incomprehensible. The biologist, in his study of the behaviour of an individual cell, often forgets that it is governed by the over-all life of the whole organism. It is the life and activity of the total organism that motivate the life and activity of the single cell. Man is part of a whole. Cosmic consciousness expresses itself in cosmic life. Man himself is a cell in the body of God. When personal and selfish desires pull him in a direction away from that of the divine will, he experiences pain. If he lives in tune with the divine will, he is free from pain and he enjoys a sense of fulfillment, since he consciously desires the divine will and is thus saved from frustration which would be inevitable if he desired the contrary.

Desirelessness or indifference to the result of action should not make us callous. Often people cover up their inefficiency with 'See, I am not bothered about the outcome'. If you did not do it well, then you deserve nothing but failure! Only if you did your best, and did your duty well, and then remained unconcerned about the result, have you understood the spirit of the Gita. Surely one should learn to distinguish between 'natural desires or urges' like hunger, and 'desires of the mind' like craving for chocolate. When off and the mind is relieved of selfish motives and desires, we joyously participate in the divine will, and, therefore, in supreme bliss or cosmic consciousness.

II:56 - He whose mind is not shaken by adversity, who does not hanker after pleasures, and who is free from attachment, fear and anger, is called a sage of steady wisdom.

This is a vital teaching of the Gita, repeated by the Lord over and over for emphasis and clearer understanding. The yogi should greet pleasure and pain, prosperity and adversity and such pairs of inseparable or complementary opposites with unshakable equanimity. Obviously, he, too, becomes their target in due time, and he, too, is human enough to know what it what!

He should also be free from 'attachment, fear and anger'. Raga is inordinate liking. Bhaya is fear. Krodha is anger. These three are relative and depend entirely on our mental attitude or conditioning. The 'object' does not demand attachment, evoke fear or rouse us to anger. But our attitude generates these emotions.

Our attitude is the product of the sum-total of our tendencies or the past impressions left in our mind by our own past actions and experiences. All people are not afraid of rats nor does everyone feel attracted by sweetmeats! The tendencies are different. However, these tendencies can be altered, slowly but steadily and surely. That is the purpose of yoga. We do not readily see the hidden springs of these tendencies in the subconscious. We are aware only of their peripheral manifestation in the conscious mind. When, through meditation, we quieten the conscious mind, the subconscious sources will be revealed. First sublimate these emotions. Be attached to God and a holy life, fear sinfulness, and be 'angry' with the veil of ignorance that hides the self. When thus the sensual tendencies are crushed, even these sublimated emotions will be merged in their own goal, which is God-realization. We shall then shine as sthitaprajna - sages of steady wisdom.

II:57 - He who is everywhere without attachment, who neither rejoices nor despises on meeting with anything - good or bad - his wisdom is established.

The foremost principle to be grasped in dealing with these pairs of complementary opposites is that they are vital to all growth. Heat and cold, rain and sun, night and day are necessary for plant growth, and for the growth of our vital 'vegetable' nature. Pleasure and pain, success and failure, honor and dishonor, are necessary for the growth of our 'mental' nature, the psychological aspect which should thus be purified of its dross and cleared of misunderstanding to arrive at the saner stability of mental equilibrium. Good and evil are necessary in the same way in order to raise us above them!

It is only because we have a much too narrow vision which prevents us from seeing life as a whole, that we seek and cling to what we regard as pleasant and fight to get away from what we come to feel as unpleasant. If we rouse our wisdom and raise ourselves from the purely earth-earthy life, we shall, from the lofty heights of yoga, enjoy the enthralling vision of the whole life, and perceive the wondrous pattern of these opposites ironically blending to create divine life. The pairs of opposites will lose their dreadful significance and will reveal their true nature as essential factors for our spiritual growth. The seed destroys itself to create the plant. The plant sacrifices itself to feed man. Man voluntarily sacrifices his pleasure to promote others' welfare. The whole universe is constantly subjecting itself to this endless alternation of opposites in order that the soul may be liberated from their thrall. He who sees thus is a sage of steady wisdom. Happiness seeks him unsought: happiness, when sought, is a worthless prize - for it is its own prize. Steady wisdom pursues its own source - the self, eternal, infinite fountain of bliss.

II:58 - When, like the tortoise, which withdraws its limbs on all sides, he withdraws his senses from the sense-objects, then his wisdom becomes steady.

This is a vital yoga practice which should be applied to our daily life. The tortoise is a slow-moving animal which is therefore most vulnerable to enemy attack. Yet God's wisdom has provided it with natural protective armour.

Our spiritual progress or evolution is also very slow. All our life, all the way to spiritual perfections we are extremely vulnerable to adverse influences. Unless we provide ourselves with a spiritual armour, we shall not reach the goal!

Our Master used to stress our spiritual need to have a background of thought which is our spiritual shell into which we can withdraw our limbs: the senses and the mind, whenever they are threatened by temptation or 'sneha'. This word 'sneha' which usually means friendship or attachment, also means glue! Before we get stuck in the world, we should withdraw our free 'limbs' into this 'shell,' into this background of thought.

The best way to build this shell is thus: have a mantra - a Name of God, and a mental image of God. Repeat this mantra constantly and also visualize the image of God as much as you can. This must be done specially and intensely in the morning and at bed-time. The meditation-current must be generated then; the armour must be 'built inside' then. Even without any provocation, we should withdraw the mind into that shell whenever the mind is not actually occupied in essential activity, so that the mind is never idle and is therefore not vulnerable. Especially when we are subject to temptation, we should immediately and intensely repeat the mantra and contemplate on God so that the mind is protected by the spiritual armour - the background of thought.

II:59 - The objects of the senses turn away from the abstinent man, leaving the longing behind; but this longing also turns away on beholding the Supreme.

Which shall we restrain first - the mind or the senses? If we starve the senses, they temporarily lose their keenness for sense-enjoyments. But the complacency is deceptive and often dangerous; for the taste is still lurking unperceived in the mind! Unless the mind is also controlled, we are not out of the woods. But the mind cannot be controlled unless and until the senses are under control! The two must go hand in hand for success to be achieved.

Cravings, desires, hatred, fear, anger, etc., are all deep-rooted habits formed in the citta or the subconscious mind. This throws up ripples (vrtti) which manifest on the surface as thoughts and emotions. When the vrtti arises, we should endeavour not to act upon it but to let it drop back into the citta itself. At the same time, we should discover and deal with the real cause.

Cravings give birth to evil actions. But the craving and the wrong mental attitude to life itself springs from distorted exaggerated values of worldly objects and enjoyments. Let us never forget that neither indulgence nor rejection can help us in getting complete mastery over the mind; the mind will run after only that which it has been taught to value. Hence Krishna asks us to become 'mat-parah' - that is, we should regard God as the only stable value in our life, worth seeking. When God is seen thus, even roots of cravings die. The world and its pleasures will then lose the glamour that tempts the worldly man and repels the ascetic. They will drop away as valueless factors in the life of a sage of steady wisdom. The mind and even the senses will seek only God and rest in him. It is then that one becomes a true devotee, directing the functions of all his senses and mind towards the realization of God's indwelling omnipresence. It is then that daily life becomes divine.

II:60 - O Arjuna, the turbulent senses violently carry away the mind, also of a wise man, though he be striving to control them.
II:61 - Having restrained all the senses, he should sit steadfast, intent on me. His wisdom is steady whose senses are under control.

The senses are powerful, too! The wise spiritual aspirant can never ignore this in the belief that since they depend upon the mind for their functioning, all that he has to do is to sit and brood over the methods of controlling the mind!

The very fact that the senses still function is proof that the mind is 'leaking' through them. As long as we are alive, the senses will continue to function in however feeble and restrained a manner. A small hole in the side of a very big dam can break the whole dam, however strong it is. Only when attachment to the body or the false notion 'I am this body' is completely removed can we 'seal' the inner holes of the senses. Then the senses will not react in the ordinary way to worldly impressions; this is illustrated in the story in which Bhagavan Rsabha Deva walked into a forest fire!

Till that state is reached, one should practice both sama - control of mind, and dama - control of the senses. One-sided control here is no control at all. It is like filling a pot without closing the holes through which water leaks. This two-fold control will be truly effective only if our stable value is God, which is meant by 'intent on me'. When the mind is intent on God, the senses function only by past momentum or according to God's will and their pleasure-seeking impetus is cut off. Our wisdom is rooted firmly in God, our stable value.

II:62 - When a man thinks of the objects, attachment for them arises; from attachment desire is born; from desire anger arises.

II:63 - From anger comes delusion; from delusion the loss of memory; from loss of memory the destruction of discrimination; from the destruction of discrimination he perishes.

This is somewhat parallel in construction to Arjuna's words in chapter I, verses 40-42.

What are the 'steps to destruction' - anartha-parampara? Arjuna had traced it from war to the destruction of traditional religion. Here, lord Krishna points out that the trigger of self-destruction is within oneself. It is the very act of thinking! Self-willed and desire-motivated thinking leads man away from his own self. Going away from his own centre, the self, he roams on the periphery of worldly life, and, like a rudderless ship on the stormy uncharted sea, wanders aimlessly, helplessly and hopelessly, till he 'destroys himself'. What can be more self-destructive than to miss the goal of human life, which is self-realization or to be established in the self?

'Dhyana' or contemplation is the channel by which the mind goes towards construction - integration or self-realization, or destruction. When it thinks of the worldly objects, it takes the path to destruction. This thinking is an important idea. It can be positive or negative. The man who dislikes wine is thinking about it as much as the man who likes it! Failure to appreciate this thwarts the well-intentioned efforts of ascetics. Thought itself must be dropped, not by the suppression of thought - which is done by another thought - but by becoming aware of its root and source, which is the 'I' thought. The self is right 'next' to this. Enquiring into the self or God is meditation. 'Meditation' must be of God and this is possible if our stable value is God and only God, which implies the dropping away of every conditioning - for God is the unconditioned.

II:64 - But the self-controlled man, moving among the objects with the senses under restraint, and free from attraction and repulsion, attains to peace.
II:65 - In that peace all pains are destroyed, for the intellect (buddhi) of the tranquil-minded soon becomes steady.

This is the technique of yoga in essence. The mind and senses are controlled by the yogi. Control is not suppression, repression, ignoring evil and thinking of the opposite, or resorting to a routine method - all of which though initially helpful and desirable, will inevitably fail. It is inner alertness. As life flows on, the yogi watches the mind and the senses constantly; the enlightened buddhi which is in constant contact with the self within watches over the mind and the senses. Desires and the latent psychological impressions which give rise to them are thus effectively monitored.

It is difficult to decide where the world is! The objects outside have no value for you if you are not conscious of them. When the mind alights on an object either directly or through resurrection of past experiences stored as memory, the object is reproduced in the mind. This causes a desire to arise, because the mind selects particular objects on account of its past tendencies or conditioning. Desire in turn gives rise to anger and one loses his temper; losing one's temper means losing the temper - keenness - of the intelligence within. When thus one's discrimination is lost, the ego identifies itself with the mind (and therefore the object in it) and forgets its substratum, the atman. This was described in verses 62-63 above.

The wise man's buddhi treats both the mental image and the external object, as objects of perception. He develops the witness-consciousness. Even as a spectator is unaffected by the events in the ring, the yogi is the blissful, peaceful and silent witness of this world-play.

II:66 - There is no knowledge of the self to the unsteady; to the unsteady no meditation is possible; to the unmeditative there can be no peace; and to the man who has no peace, how can there be happiness?

'Peace above all' should be the wise man's motto to guide his life. For if there is no peace of mind, one cannot have the least happiness here. Peace cannot be had in the market! One cannot strive for this peace which is disturbed by the very effort! It has to be discovered within oneself, and what is more important and difficult, too, it has to be preserved without being disturbed by anything that happens around one. This is possible only if we meditate regularly and build a 'shock-proof' protective armour around ourselves.

Meditation will provide us with the background of thought - like 'I am the immortal atman, a witness of this world-play untouched by pain', and by diligent effortless alertness we should maintain this background of thought. This background of thought is, however, not thought, but an awareness of truth beyond thought. It is this truth which is realised in meditation.

Peace is happiness - they are indistinguishable. Even worldly happiness is not possible if we do not enjoy peace of mind. Craving for pleasure drives pleasure or happiness away by creating a tension or stress. Satisfying this craving only temporarily allays the tension by weakening it. But soon the tension is built up again: it is pain. The peace sustained by regular meditation and coupled with the fourfold bhavana or sane attitude towards our neighbours - friendliness towards equals, happiness at the status of superiors, compassion for the less fortunate, and indifference towards the wicked - will ensure unperturbable inner tranquility and, thus, supreme and perennial bliss. The awareness of truth beyond thought - the inner light - will make it impossible for any disturbing thought to arise, though natural life - with the natural functions, thought, word and deed - will continue to flow in inner and outer harmony.

II:67 - For the mind which follows in the wake of the wandering senses, carries away one's discrimination, as the wind carries away a boat on the waters.
II:68 - Therefore, O Arjuna, his knowledge is steady whose senses are completely restrained from sense-objects.

Krishna does not encourage us to run away from the world. It is the most unintelligent way of self-restraint, even if it were possible. Nor does he favor violent suppression of the senses and the mind. His yoga is one of intelligence and common sense. Elsewhere, he reminds us that the senses will always respond to the sense-objects and foolish, violent restraint is useless. The wise aspirant will sincerely, silently and non-violently change his mental substance and effect sublimation of his nature. The yukta or yogi views the world from his point of union with or awareness of the reality; his inner values are radically different from the values of the worldly man. He is not carried away by emotions and sentiments, desires and cravings.

It is not easy; the old morbid habits must be changed. Here a few practical hints can be of use. Make an involuntary habit voluntary. Then substitute a new mental response to external stimuli for the old response. Start the new habit with the greatest possible enthusiasm. Avoid slipping into the old habit. Exercise the new habit consciously and voluntarily as often as possible. In this process, you will come face to face with the conditioning which sustained the old habits. They will drop away, unwanted. The new, healthy habits will become effortless. You will go beyond all conditioning and be established in the wisdom of God.

II:69 - That state which is night to all beings, to the self-controlled man is wakefulness; when all beings are awake that is night for the sage who sees.

The worldly man is ignorant. The sage 'does not understand' how the worldly man finds his pleasure in the objects of the world, in spite of the fact that the daily deep sleep experience teaches him that all happiness is within and life teaches him that pleasure is inseparable from pain.

The worldly man is ignorant of the path that leads him to bliss of the self. The sage turns a blind eye on worldly pleasures which do not attract him. For him they are like an object lying in a dark chamber. At night one who is in a brightly illumined room sees only darkness outside, even if there is moonlight; in the divine light of his self-realization, the sage sees the world as a pale and misty illusion!

Tamas or darkness or ignorance is exceedingly difficult to remove. Illusion dies hard. It is possible to remove the pain in an aching hand; but sometimes there is pain 'in' an amputated hand - the hand that is not there or the phantom limb! This pain is extremely difficult to cure.

The worldly man has no idea at all of the inner world of the qualities of nature, the senses, the mind, the buddhi, etc. He is completely at the mercy of nature which, in his case, is base nature, the large residue of past incarnations. The sage is aware of this inner world and is also aware that the outer world is part of the body of God. The earth disappears from his view; the whole space looks blue - the colour of the body of God! A word of caution: there is no use in attempting to gain this vision without practicing self-control. This vision is not imagination nor is it psychedelic experience. It is the vision of the unconditioned when all conditioning has dropped away.

II:70 - He attains peace into whom all desires enter as waters enter the ocean which, filled from all sides, remains unmoved; but not the man who is full of desires.

The mind which runs outside, carried away by the senses is full of evil qualities, the chief among which is ceaseless and insatiable desire, born of rajas and tamas. The mind that is controlled by buddhi is pure. The pure mind is peaceful. Desirelessness is peace.

Krishna gives us a beautiful picture vividly illustrating this wonderful truth. Water rises from the ocean as vapour. The wind drives it over the land where the clouds drift over hill-tops and the water comes down as rain. As little streams and rivers, it is then drawn down, and its fate before it reaches the plains is one of extreme uncertainty and restlessness. As it flows over the plains, it is a bit calmer, but not till it reaches the ocean does it attain that supreme peace which was its own original nature! However, the vapour that rises from the ocean regains its original state at once if it rains on the ocean itself. The ocean itself remains the same all the time.

The man who is ignorant and full of rajas and tamas is like the cloud driven over the land - restless and unhappy. Only when he reaches the plain of the guru's feet and satsang does he have a little peace. After much restlessness he attains God, the ocean. But the desireless, sattvika man knows how to redirect every desire into its own source, the self. When a desire arises in the mind, let it get reabsorbed into itself, the source of bliss. The self or 'what-is' does not undergo increase or decrease, though all life apparently emerges from it and returns to it.

II:71 - The man attains peace who, abandoning all desires moves about without longing, without possessiveness, and without egoism.

The egoless man is not a lifeless stone. He lives; only he lives. He lives in God and God lives in him and works through him. His actions are not governed by profit-motive. He is not egoistic in whatever he does.

The egoless man is an inspiration to all mankind. He is God on earth. He possesses nothing, yet even an emperor is a pauper compared to him. My Master used to say: A sannyasin is one who has no bank balance of his own, but operates on the purses of all; one who has no house of his own, but dwells in the houses of all.

The man who constantly uses the two words 'I want...' is a pauper even if he is an emperor; only a beggar is constantly in want. On the other hand, he who is free from the sense of want is the emperor of emperors. He is a sage, a man who has no desires, no sense of possessiveness and no egoism.

This is the greatest teaching. This is the message of Krishna. My Master was fond of this verse. Meditate on this verse every morning. Study daily stories of great sages like Jada Bharata who lived such a life of total renunciation, and yet moved about and even worked in this world - Jada Bharata carried Rahugana's palanquin.

Desire is the cause of our woes. Desire binds us to samsara. Desire keeps us away from God. Desirelessness is the threshold of liberation. You cannot even desire to be desireless. True, desire for self-realization ends all other desires and, if it is genuine, ends itself. But, even that desire has to be abandoned. Desire for God is desire, 'for God' is an after-thought. Desire and self come to an end when source is investigated.

II:72 - This is the seat of Brahman, O Arjuna. Attaining to this, one is not deluded. Being established therein, even at the end of life, one attains to oneness with Brahman.

To be totally desireless, mine-ness-less and egoless, is to live in tune with the infinite. The ego is the limiting factor. It is this sense of separation that is subject to grief and suffering, to sin and to sorrow. Since even this arises in the reality or cosmic consciousness, it is experienced as if this sense of separation were real! In fact, it is a non-entity. It is but the aggregate of beginningless ignorance, conditioning and thought. In its shadow, the cell which is one with the body of God, an integral part of the body of God, forever inseparable from it, assumes individual, private, limited and egoistic existence. It enjoys for a moment now and then, and suffers over long periods. The momentary joy arises when a 'desire' subsides; sorrow when the desire prevails. It is deluded into thinking that there is diversity here, feeling that some are good and others are evil, some friends and others enemies. This delusion-created conditioning or diversity is the field for the ceaseless play of manifold evil. All sins have their origin in it; all problems arise in it; it is restlessness itself.

One who is free from this egoism is rid of this delusion and thus the offsprings of delusion. He is never deluded. He has experienced the infinite in the egoless state. No words can describe this experience; the mind is powerless to grasp it.

Here is a hint and a warning: if one is established in this cosmic consciousness, one will not be deluded. In other words, if one is inclined to be deluded, obviously one is not established in it. If, however, one falters in it, even at the hour of death, one is subject to birth and death. If one is firmly established till the last hour, he attains to brahma-nirvina, final liberation.

This is the goal of life. Eternal vigilance or ceaseless awareness is the path.

3. The Yoga of Action

At this stage in the Gita we are on the threshold of a revolutionary concept of religion. In the popular mind, throughout the ages, religion means church-going, hymn singing, cloister-life, fasting and feasting. World and work are considered somehow opposed to reality and religion. Krishna delivers a stunning blow to this misconception. He would prefer service without religion to religion without service!

In the life of the former there is a void, a vacuum, which will be filled sooner or later with God, whereas the latter is full ... of nonsense ... and even the corrective influence to restore the proper balance between religion and service, may have to await a complete degeneration of the pseudo-religion.

Only God can restore this balance - and he does, by periodically manifesting himself on this earth-plane. Two such manifestations rule the hearts of humanity today - Krishna and Christ. Are they two? Do not even the names and similar? And their lives ... and their teachings ... ?

Christ was born in the manger; Krishna in a prison-cell.

Both were whisked away to a far-off place immediately after nativity. The former, for fear of Herod; the latter, for fear of Kamsa - both of whom were the rulers of the country. Both of them sought early in their lives to effect far-reaching reform in the modes of worship.

Both of them had control over the elements.

Both of them exalted the power of faith - Christ said faith could move mountains, and Krishna demonstrated it by lifting a mountain with his little finger.

Both of them taught wonderful ethical and spiritual lessons. The Sermon on the Mount and the contain the same gems of truth.

Both of them were glorified by some as God and ridiculed by others.

Both of them were killed.

Both of them blessed their tormentors. Christ forgave them; Krishna insisted that his killer should go to heaven first.

Even the legend which says that lord Krishna married over sixteen thousand wives might mean no more than this: every Christian nun is considered the bride of Christ, and it is possible that even at the time the biography was written, there were over sixteen thousand of them.

Are they two or one? Historians charm us with well-reasoned arguments to prove Christ lived two thousand years ago, and Krishna (if at all) nearly four or five thousand years ago. In prehistoric calculations, thousands of years are but hours in contemporary history! Could it be that Christ lived a little earlier and Krishna a little later than at present believed? Could it be then, that we are talking about the same person, some calling him Christ and others, Krishna?

There is a 'missing period' in the life of Christ. Some are endeavoring to fill it by surmising that he must have traveled east. It is just as possible that some of the stories connected with Krishna's early life could also have been 'fillers' to link up the missing period.

Any guess is hazardous. But if God reveals the truth, may it not unite us all - Hindu and Christian - in the realization that we are all truly brothers and sisters, worshipping the same divinity?

III:1 - Arjuna said : If you think intelligence is better than fruitive work, O Krishna, why then urge me to engage in this terrible action?

III:2 - With these ambiguous words you confuse my mind; therefore, tell me that one way for certain by which I may attain bliss.

The pendulum swings from one extreme to the other - that is its nature. The subtle middle path where the opposites blend is elusive and the gross mind refuses even to believe in it or see it. We all know what is activity. We all know what is knowledge. With us knowledge is in the mind and action flows from the limbs. We do not even feel it necessary to find their point of contact, or the subtle middle path where God meets man, where the divine meets

and blends into life, forming divine life. In it there is no contradiction between knowledge and action. On the contrary, knowledge is action.

In the absence of true understanding, confusion is quite natural; it is inherent in the very nature of the mind, but the vain ego always tries to blame it on others! Krishna did not confuse Arjuna; the confusion is in Arjuna's own mind. This is extremely difficult to see in the initial stages of our spiritual progress.

The disciple Arjuna is yet keen on attaining sreyas - the ultimate good. Whenever we are on the horns of a dilemma - even a real one, we should look for the path that will lead us to our ultimate spiritual good - the sreya-marga. Much of our misery is due to the fact that very often we are satisfied with superficial solutions which yield immediate satisfaction, though it may be temporary and unsatisfactory in the long run. The sincere spiritual aspirant has his eyes riveted on sreyas.

III:3 - The Blessed Lord said : In this world, O sinless one, there is a twofold path, as I said before : the path of knowledge of the sankhyas, and the path of action of the yogis!

This is a truly Krishna-like statement!

There are not two paths - the path is a synthesis of the two, it is twofold! The path to God-realization is twofold; in fact the statement need not be restricted to refer to the path to God-realization! In this world, the path taken by anyone and everyone is of this twofold nature! Krishna does not exclude anyone in this world.

The sankhya or the 'philosophers' speculated about the reality. The yogi were busy living a life of service and rituals. The former did not interest themselves in living. The latter did not ensure that the service or the ritual had the light of knowledge to illumine and enliven the spirit in it. The two drifted apart; the philosopher and the yogi specialised in their own fields, and built their own empires which in course of time actually became antagonistic! If they are exclusive of each other, there is conflict and confusion, knowledge becomes hypocritical and action becomes destructive and self-aggrandizing. Thus, the two which sound very healthy and wholesome actually produce contrary results. Krishna reconciles them. On another level, neglect of this 'wholesome' approach is fraught with danger. Modern science bears witness to this. The so-called 'true science' generates knowledge of nuclear forces and of genetic mutations. Applied technology creates dangerous weapons - for which neither accepts responsibility. A 'wholesome' 'holistic' approach will bring them together - and avoid dabbling with destructive forces.

The path is twofold. The two - knowledge and action - must blend in every one of us. As we shall presently see, the one implies and includes the other: a philosopher is no philosopher if he refuses to act on his philosophy - obviously he is not sure of it! A yogi is not a yogi if he does not know what he is doing! Blind action and lame philosophy must unite to march forward to the goal of divine life. This is Krishna's yoga - buddhi yoga.

III:4 - Not by the non-performance of actions does man reach actionlessness; nor by mere renunciation does he attain to perfection.

III:5 - Verily none can ever remain for even a moment without performing action; for, everyone is made to act helplessly by the qualities born of nature.

The vicious circle has to be broken. It is the self-perpetuating momentum of karma. Action produces reaction and the reaction serves as action producing its own reaction. Cause gives birth to result which serves as the cause for another chain-result. It is like the seed and the plant, the egg and the hen - one leads to the other in an endless chain.

Shall we sit quietly then, and refuse to have anything to do with this? This view of actionlessness appeals to some, but not to Krishna.

Action is threefold - thought, word and deed. Action is performed by the individual at various levels of his consciousness, on different planes of his inner being. It is ignorance to think that we live only on the periphery of our personalities. Deep within are the springs of real action. Whether they take gross, subtle or causal forms, they are actions still, enough to keep the wheel of karma in motion. For, refusal is an action, as firmly based on the false ego as the performance of action. 'Action for material achievement' and 'refusal to act believing that only thereby one can achieve salvation' are both equally deceptive mental conditioning. This conditioning is bondage - neither action nor what one believes to be inaction.

As we shall see, the whole creation is the body of God and individuals live as part of his nature. The qualities of his nature will function, independent of individual will; to try to stop this is as easy as it is to chew up the stars! Krishna's solution to this is the yoga of the Bhagavad Gita. It is true transcendence - nais-karmyam in which the ego is stripped of its mask. All action is seen to be life, and the self is realized to be divine - Divine Life.

III:6 - He who, restraining the organs of action, sits thinking of the sense-objects in mind, he, of deluded understanding, is called a pretender.

III:7 - But whoever, controlling the senses by the mind, engages himself in karma yoga with the organs of action, without attachment, he is excellent.

Krishna's yoga is karma yoga or buddhi yoga; the yoga that does not discourage activity, but, on the contrary, insists on intelligent dynamism. The man who refuses to do his duty vainly rebels against God's will. There is activity in his mind; if the mind is not active, he would cease to live. Even the mind's recognition of the position of one's own limbs is the result of wrong identification of the self with the body, which is part of the world! Foolish suppression of mental activity will only result in an explosion, which could take the form of a simple mental aberration, a criminal tendency or lunacy. What is vital is a direct perception of the conditioning which generates aspirations and aversions which in turn taint one's mental and physical activity. Such perception dispels the psychological conditioning and its offspring - the ego, and reveals the divine as the source and the goal of all life.

Krishna's ideal is one of self-controlled participation in the divine will, which is karma yoga. Control is not suppression or repression. In any field of life, suppression only means compression which, sooner or later, leads to explosion. We see this happen in the life of a man, of society, of communities and of nations. Control, on the other hand, is right expression - neither suppression nor license. This is the middle path of the Buddha, the buddhi yoga of Krishna, the Christian way, and the Divine Life of our Master. An excellent parallel is seen in the expression 'Mr. So-and-so has good control of the car'. He knows when to stop or to start, which way to go and at what speed. The enigma of this yoga lies in its simplicity.

III:8 - Perform your bounden duty, for action is superior to inaction - even the maintenance of the body would not be possible for you by inaction.

III:9 - The world is bound by actions, other than those performed for the sake of sacrifice; do you, therefore, O Arjuna, perform action for that sake for sacrifice alone, free from attachment.

Krishna has the divine genius of going at once to the root of the problem. What binds man to the wheel of action-reaction, or more simply, sin and suffering? Selfish desire and attachment! Removal of these two liberates us from it. On the other hand, if we stubbornly and ignorantly refuse to take part in the world's activity, we lose the best way to understand the nature and strength of the chain that binds us. It is the ego, the 'me'. It is the ego that suggests that inaction is liberation. The approval and adulation of ignorant people stiffens and strengthens the ego of the pseudo-sage who has 'renounced the world'. Covering filth with a Persian carpet cannot remove it. Therefore, Krishna advocates positive action and vigilant effort at self-purification. We are bound to the wheel of karma by selfish desires. These must be sacrificed, and our actions should be our sacrifice at the altar of the omnipresent God. 'Ya' (that) 'jna' (knowledge) - that action which is of knowledge and leads to knowledge. If yajna means 'animal sacrifice', the animal to be sacrificed is not outside, but within us. That animal is the personality full of selfishness, lust, hatred and egoism - in a word 'me'. But if sacrifice means 'offering' then we should offer all our actions to God as sacrifice. If sacrifice means 'to make sacred', then everything (all our actions, experiences, and even the ego) should be offered to God to be made sacred. Self-sacrifice, selfless service will not bind us, but liberate us. But even these should be performed without attachment to the actions (the feeling that we do or do not do) and their rewards.

III:10 - In the beginning of creation, the Lord of all creatures sent forth generations of men and devas (gods), along with sacrifices for Vishnu, and blessed them by saying, 'Be happy by this yajna (sacrifice), because its performance will bestow on you all desirable things.'

III:11 - 'Nourish the Gods with this, and may the Gods nourish you; thus nourishing one another, you shall attain to the highest good.'

The spirit of sacrifice was created by God. It is God himself. Hence we find that the seed dies to give birth to the plant, the mother suffers birth-pangs to create new life.

Metaphysically even creation is the supreme self-sacrifice of God - the one who has become many. It is this spirit of sacrifice that promotes life and well-being here.

In this sense it is not a 'slaughter of a victim', as 'sacrifice' is translated by the dictionary, but a mystical, magical, divine transmutation of all substances and of all activities inherent in life. In this there is no loss, but fulfillment. The fulfillment of a seed growing into a tree, the fulfillment of motherhood, and the fulfillment of all life by the realization of potential divinity. With the sacrifice of self-limitation, the self realizes its oneness with the cosmic being, the drop shines as the ocean in supreme cosmic love. Thus sacrifice is pure love in which there is no sin, no sorrow.

Which Gods do we nourish by sacrifice? If the above injunction is read with the commandment in the Taittiriya Upanisad that we should treat our parents, teacher and guest as god, it is clear that the god is our neighbour in the Christian sense. In other words, we should all serve one another; and the word yajna or sacrifice reminds us that we should not have the slightest trace of selfishness. Our charitable acts should leave no egoistical trace behind, even as ghee poured into fire is totally consumed.

We make one another's life miserable here only on account of selfish desires, greed and inferior motives. When the spirit of self-sacrificing service governs the actions of man, and when he learns to rejoice in the happiness of his neighbour, then we will have paradise on earth and everyone's desires will be fulfilled. This doctrine of self-sacrificing, selfless service is truly the wish-fulfilling cow.

III:12 - The gods, nourished by the sacrifice, will give you the desired objects. But he who enjoys these gifts without offering them to the devas in return is a thief.

This is a great psychological truth.

When the spirit of yajna or sacrifice rules the heart of man and becomes the content of his thoughts, words and deeds, even the gods are pleased and man obtains the desired objects. He is peaceful, happy and prosperous.

Who and where are the gods? They are the subtle forces or powers that animate the whole of creation. They have their seats in the various organs of the body, too. Thoughts and emotions have a tremendous effect on these. Anxiety grips the stomach. Anger alters the colour of the skin and the eyes. Fear chokes the throat. Thoughts are things! Good thoughts can favorably influence the gods presiding over the organs of our body. The selfless man's face is bright and cheerful. Compassion flows from his eyes. His speech is honeyed and sweet. His gait is soft. The vibrations that emanate from him are holy and beneficent. People readily pick them up and also react favorably. The selfless person is not deliberately setting an example for other to emulate - any such motivation would re-activate, however subtle it may be. But people may be inspired.

Thus the selfless man's limbs are strong and healthy. He thinks well, speaks well and acts well. He achieves the desired objective; the gods presiding over his limbs enable him to do that. The gods residing in all, and in the very atmosphere, also help him in every possible way.

The man who is selfish, who grabs, is a thief. A society composed of such people can obviously not be prosperous. Selfishness is the most deadly virus which is highly contagious. In no time one man's selfishness expands to epidemic proportions. It destroys one's vision one's intelligence. If you observe yourself and the world you live in, you can see for yourself the havoc it can cause.

III:13 - The righteous, who eat of the remnants of the sacrifice, are freed from sin; but those sinful ones, who cook food only for their sense enjoyment, verily eat sin.

Not the ritual called 'yajna', but the simple universal daily act of cooking food itself is regarded as yajna or sacrifice here. It is symbolic and illustrative, but not descriptive and exhaustive. Even so, all our actions should be acts of self-sacrificing, selfless service - always for others, never for ourselves. We are 'the other' of others!

That settles once and for all this futile wrangling over ethics - what is good and what is evil? Self-sacrificing, selfless and desireless service is good; selfish action is evil. It does not matter what the action appears to be externally - an act of selfless service is good. It does not matter how grand and philanthropic it looks - a selfish action is evil.

The spirit of sacrifice was woven into the very fabric of our life, so that we were almost compelled to feed our fellow-men and animals and insects before we ate. Self-sacrifice is our religion. Charity is our supreme duty. Our prayer to the Lord is that everyone should be happy; all beings should enjoy peace, happiness and prosperity. Balidana, popularly an animal sacrifice or its symbolic equivalent, is the culminating point of yajna. According to Bhagavatam, King Bali gave everything to and eventually offered himself too, in an act of supreme self-sacrifice. True Balidana is total sacrifice of our whole being, our very soul, at the altar of God, so that in the full and direct realization that the 'I' is and has always been a non-entity, a shadowy dividing factor, even the thought 'I do this' or 'I enjoy' or 'I suffer' is no more in our heart. Charity involves sacrifice. Sacrifice leads to self-sacrifice. We are freed from sin.

III:14 - From food come forth beings; from rain food is produced; from sacrifice arises rain; sacrifice is born of action.

III:15 - Know you that action comes from Brahma, and Brahma proceeds from the Imperishable. Therefore, the All-pervading ever rests in sacrifice.

Sacrifice produces rain! It is asserted by some that the smoke that rises from the sacrificial pit brings about the necessary change in the atmosphere to induce the cloud to rain. Even subtler than this is the power of good thoughts. There is a proverb in Tamil which says that if there is one good man in the village, the entire village will be blessed with sufficient rain to ensure its prosperity. The selfish man is more concerned with destroying the prosperity of the neighbour than with building his own, for he wants to shine as a superior person, one better than the neighbour. When all are selfish, the whole atmosphere is full of vicious thought-currents; ill-will fills the whole place and the mood of destruction prevails. The very elements respond to such thought-vibrations and we have famine and pestilence.

On the other hand, if there is self-sacrificing selflessness in the heart of man, then there is prosperity. It is easy enough to see that with that selflessness in his heart, man will ever try to promote the prosperity of others. His actions will be pure and prosperity-promoting. Such pure action is divine, rooted in the imperishable, the eternal law that has created and that sustains the whole universe.

This is the law of the divine. Man should live a self-sacrificing, selfless life of service to all. Sacrifice is born of action. It is action, it is life. A life of sacrifice is therefore a full and dynamic life. Sacrifice knits knowledge and action into the fabric of divine life.

III:16 - He who does not follow the wheel thus set revolving, who is of sinful life, rejoicing in the senses, he lives in vain, O Arjuna.

The first principle of the Gita-way of life is introduced here.

The whole of creation is constructed on the law of reciprocal self-sacrificing service.

Charity characterizes God's good world. Charity is not a good policy, or a privilege or even a meritorious act; it is the law of life!

Life is one and universal. It is the very nature of cosmic being - God. The recognition of this truth - that all are indivisibly though not visibly one - is love. The expression of this love is service, charity and reciprocity. Not in a condescending attitude, but ... there is no choice. Look at God's good world. Between the plant and the mineral, between the plant and the human, there is reciprocal service. What man gives out, including his outgoing breath full of carbon-dioxide, is food for the plants. Whatever the plants give, including the oxygen that they 'breathe out', is food for man. One is not doing charity to the plants by breathing out carbon dioxide! One will die if one refuses to do so. Neglect of charity is starving the soul.

No tree eats its own fruit. On the other hand, trees live and propagate themselves by giving off their fruits to man. Man cultivates them, not for their sake, but for the sake of the luscious fruits! He eats them and then plants the seed, helping the plants to perpetuate themselves. Even so, charity will enable us to live well in society, grow and perpetuate the human race. He who rejoices in the pleasures of the senses, refusing to serve others, is like the tree eating its own fruits! It is sin. He destroys himself ultimately. He transgresses the law of God. He is a thief.

III:17 - But for that man who rejoices only in the Self, who is satisfied in the Self, who is content in the Self alone, verily there is nothing to do.

III:18 - A self-realized man has no purpose to fulfill in the discharge of his prescribed duties, nor has he any reason not to perform such work. Nor has he no need to depend on any other living being.

As long as you yourself are dependent on others, so long as your happiness and well-being are dependent on the services of others, serve and be good. These two verses both have a philosophic import and offer practical advice.

Is this not a common failing of man? He expects others to serve him and work for him. He wants to enjoy all comforts himself at the expense of fellow-men. He will cheat those dependent on him, but will moan and grumble if he himself is let down. Here is Krishna's sweet warning. As long as you expect others to serve you and to promote your prosperity, as long as your own happiness depends on what others do to you, take a deep interest in the happiness of others too. It is the re-statement of the golden rule: 'Do unto others as you wish them to do unto you.'

However, there is a state of being where the sage rests in the self. He is not obliged to do or not to do. But what is the self in which the sage rests? Self is awareness - the all, the indivisible - not the fragmented thought-born personality which we selfishly call the self. Self is the 'choiceless awareness' in the words of Ramana Maharsi, 'witness consciousness' of Gurudev Sivananda, and 'observation without an observer' of Krishnaji. When it is veiled, another self - the ego arises apparently, not really, and thinks that it is dependent or independent of others. Awareness being self does not have a self to generate selfishness. The sage who rests in the self alone is unselfish! The entire universe is his body. He is like the sun: by his light he illumines all. He is one with all and thus does everything through everyone, though he might apparently be inactive; yet, he does nothing, though the body and mind might be busy, for the fragmented ego has vanished with the lifted veil.

III:19 - Therefore, without attachment, always perform action which should be done; for, by performing action without attachment, man reaches the Supreme.

Krishna is not in favor of our abandoning our 'duty'. Various expressions are used: niyatam karma - action in accord with the cosmic order, karyam karma - action that should be done, or sva karma - one's natural action. And these are used as synonyms for sva dharma - one's own duty. Duty holds society together. My duty is your privilege and vice versa. Action performed with this ideal in view is dharma. It holds people together in love and harmony.

Both selfish action and the performance of another's function, obviously taken over through selfish desire, are to be abandoned; but not one's own duty. Not even a monk should renounce his own duty. Krishna gives a revolutionary definition even to samnyasa. Our scriptures give us several instances of yogi attaining perfection while leading their normal household lives in the right spirit, i.e. without desire and without attachment. An exaggerated value of worldly objects creates desire in the mind. This desire gives rise to attachment to the actions calculated to secure the desired object and the reward too. This attachment is the source of all sins; it itself is sin. Renunciation of attachment is the surest way to attain perfection. The world is not a hindrance. Work is not a hindrance either. But attachment is a definite hindrance on our path to perfection.

What is popularly known as 'detachment' is not the true opposite of or antidote to attachment; that is another form of attachment - attachment to self-interest, self-esteem and the adoration of one's ideology, and aversion to others. Non-attachment is the discovery of the truth concerning attachment itself. Even so with 'duty'. It is the discovery of what is 'natural' to oneself, not some injunctions or prohibitions prescribed or proscribed by others.

III:20 - Janaka and others attained perfection verily by action only; just for the sake of educating the people, you should perform your work.

III:21 - Whatever a great man does, that other men also do; whatever he sets up as the standard, that the world follows.

Yet another reason why one should not abandon one's duty is given here. People are fond of imitation and a sinful action is more readily copied than a virtuous one! Even a sage like king Janaka, therefore, persisted in the performance of his duties. People blindly follow their leader and if the leader is even slightly negligent in his duties, the followers totally abandon theirs!

So, then, firstly as a kind of reciprocity in return for the benefits that the yogi enjoys in this world, and secondly in order to set the right example for others to emulate, one should engage oneself in the performance of one's duty, even though he has nothing to achieve thereby. This is a double-edged sword and has to be handled wisely. If the only motivation is to be an exemplar, it might give rise to hypocrisy; but rightly understood, even a initial hypocritical example might lead to right action.

Again, the sage who has cut off all attachment and who lives in complete dissociation of even his own body, will let the body exhaust its own karma and the past momentum. He does nothing; it is the body and mind that function in the world of matter. Why will he prevent them from doing so if he is unattached to them? True, he will not supply them with fresh fuel to gain more momentum. He is unattached, desireless and egoless, but if he even forcibly restrains them, he comes into contact with them and identifies the self with them. The worldly man is a slave of the senses, the ascetic holds them back, but they are both in contact with them. The sage is not.

III:22 - There is nothing in the three worlds, Arjuna, that should be done by me; nor is there anything unattained that should be attained; yet I engage myself in action.

III:23 - For, should I not ever engage myself in action, unwearied, men would follow my path, Arjuna.

III:24 - These worlds would perish if I did not perform action; I should be the author of confusion of castes and destruction of these beings.

God, when He incarnates Himself here in this world, also engages Himself in unwearied action. That is as it should be. Saints and sages are seen to engage themselves in unwearied action for the welfare of mankind. The unselfish man is more active than the selfish one. The former's service is spontaneous, enthusiastic and zealous, free from procrastination and postponement which characterize the half-hearted service of the calculating man of lust and greed. The unselfish man has more time and energy to work, because he has no worry about profit and loss.

We have the glorious examples of saints before us, but we do not follow them. Do we ever follow anyone's good example? Even in their lives we try to pick out only defects as excuses for our own indulgence. We discover human weaknesses in their personalities, and we turn our blind eye on the vital spiritual truths illustrated in their lives. It is the worst tragedy.

We are the real losers. The moment we realize the emptiness and the sorrowfulness of our own pleasure-seeking life, we shall desist from evil, and without seeming to and without effort, follow the example of the good.

One should try to live for a hundred years, doing one's duty. - Isavasya Upanisad.

III:25 - As the ignorant men act from attachment to action, O Arjuna, so should the wise act without attachment, wishing the welfare of the world.

The verb is the most important word in this verse, and it is often overlooked. The tone is not optional but obligatory. The wise man is left with no choice; in fact the very validity of his wisdom would be questioned if he did not abide by the commandment contained in this verse.

What is ignorance? Identification of the self, which is but the witness consciousness, with the body and the world, which constantly change. What is wisdom? Realization that the self is but the witness of this world-process and world-activity. The wise man will, therefore, not interfere with the course of nature, either by positively providing fuel for it by his own desires or cravings, or by negatively holding it back by refusing to let his body function as part of the world, which it is!

The world is maintained by God's energy and the world includes the wise man's physical being, too. He is part of the whole, and his egoistic withdrawal from life will confuse the minds of others on the field.

In order, therefore, to ensure the welfare of the society in which he lives and to set an example for others to follow, the wise man must do his duty in this world, and what is more important, do it as if he were as interested in the affairs of the world as the ignorant, so that the ignorant man has no excuse to avoid following the wise. The difference is not in external appearance or behavior, but it is the wise man's inward spirit of nonattachment. Is it possible for one to deceive oneself and others that he lives in this spirit? Surely it is. Deceiving others is waste of time. Self-deception is a misnomer - surely, the wise man is free from pretension. His wisdom is luminous enough to keep away the darkness of attachment born of ignorance.

III:26 - Let no wise man unsettle the minds of ignorant people, attached to action; he should engage them in all actions, himself fulfilling them with devotion.

This is the basis and the sanction for all the different cults and religions in the world. They are all one in their aim and they lead all men to the same goal, but people differ in their temperaments. Their beliefs will be in accordance with their temperaments.

Proselytisation has always meant demoralisation! Once a man's faith is drastically disturbed, it is nearly always difficult for him to find stable ground to stand on. Once a man is told that what he and his forefathers firmly and devoutly believed is myth and nonsense, it is well-nigh impossible to make him believe entirely and wholeheartedly in what is dished out to him by the proselytizer. He may accept it as a temporary expedient, but the slightest provocation is enough to uproot the new belief!

Krishna does not encourage even premature revelation of what he considers as the ultimate truth. Even if we find that our brothers are ignorant of it, even if we find them engaging themselves in what appears to us to be fruitless activity or misguided spiritual effort, our duty is not to shake their faith but to fulfill it. This is a more delicate operation than brain or heart surgery - neither the organ itself nor any part of the healthy tissue should be affected in the least. Extreme care is called for to ensure that the fundamental faith is not disturbed. Even harmless superstitions are allowed.

However, in God's good time, the man himself will realize the fictitiousness of false beliefs, and when he is mature and 'awake', he will drop all beliefs (II:52,53). It is then that faith arises in him. Faith is not a 'religious denomination' or 'belief', but it is the reflection of God in the heart of the godly. It is, as it were, the penultimate stage to God-realization or self-knowledge.

III:27 - All actions are wrought by the qualities of nature only. The mind, deluded by egoism, thinks it is the doer.

III:28 - But he, O Arjuna, who knows the truth about the divisions of the qualities and their functions, knowing that the gunas as senses move in the middle of the gunas as the sense-objects, is not attached.

III:29 - Those deluded by the gunas are attached to the functions of the gunas. A man of perfect knowledge should not unsettle the one of imperfect knowledge.

What is nature? It is God's nature. In accordance with God's will, the qualities in his nature are constantly active. We are also part of his nature. We are all cells, as it were, in the cosmic body of God, but we assume to ourselves an independent personality on account of ignorance.

This individuality is a mystery. It is truly indivi(sible)-duality. We are all truly indivisible, one in him. We are all together the body of God. To realize this is wisdom. To forget it is ignorance.

In our own body, for instance, at every moment millions of cells are performing various vital functions. They work in harmony, in accordance with the dictates of the single unified life-force that commands all of them. There is, therefore, harmony and health in the whole body. In the same way, if all of us feel and realize that we are the body of God and carry out his will, there will be peace and prosperity in this world; but the foolish ones assume false egoism and thus create disharmony and disaster.

Expressions like 'good and evil', 'right and wrong', lose their significance in this light. But the wise man will not disturb the mind of those who believe in them!

III:30 - Renounce all actions in Me, with the mind centered in the Self; fight, free from hope, free from egoism, free from mental fever.

The commandment to fight should not be taken literally! Arjuna was a warrior and his duty was to fight a righteous battle. In other words, it is a commandment that we should all do our duty, in the spirit of this verse.

'Renouncing all actions in me' - that is, God; the Sanskrit word is 'nyasya' which is difficult to translate. It also means 'placing all your actions in God', or in other words 'feeling that all actions are done by God'. The actions of a foolish man seem to have their roots in him, but the wise man knows that his actions spring from God.

He whose mind is wayward, swayed by the storms of desires and cravings, and whose mind is, therefore, not centered in his own self, thinks that he thinks, he sees, he works and he speaks. His actions are egoistic. He arrogates to himself the power to do, not to do and to undo, which in fact he does not possess!

His actions are naturally directed towards a selfish, base and worldly goal or hope. Hopeful of attaining the desired goal and at the same time afraid of not being able to reach it, this egoistic man is constantly torn by the two opposing forces of attraction and repulsion. This tension is referred to as mental fever here. The wise man is free from this tension or mental fever. He knows that God's will is done here; he is free from personal hopes. He is centered in the self or atman. He is free, peaceful and blissful.

But he is not self-centered in the sense of selfish, even if taken to mean he is interested in doing his duty. Self is not an object. It is the universal subject. The mind does not know it. Thought ... and attention ... and lastly awareness seek the self, the centre, the subject. This is meditation. This is 'mind centered in the self'.

III:31 - Those who constantly practice this teaching of Mine with faith and without cavilling, they too are freed from actions.

III:32 - But those who carp at my teaching, and do not practice it, are to be considered bereft of all knowledge, befooled, and doomed to ignorance and bondage.

The idea is quite clear and plain. He who practices this buddhi yoga, feeling that he is one with the entire creation, that one cosmic consciousness pervades all, and in that consciousness he is one with all - is instantly freed from ignorance and from all karma which give rise to birth and death. Renunciation of egoism destroys the 'bundle of karma' (sancita) waiting to fructify; these 'effects' of past actions, not yet ripe for fructification, are deprived of the ego-centered body on which to spend their force. Even prarabdha karma or karma which has already begun to work itself out in this birth through the present body, is deprived of its 'sting', since the yogi does not identify himself with the body and its experiences of pleasure and pain, etc. The actions that he now performs (the agami or kriyamana) are not performed by his ego; his mind is centered in God and therefore there is direct realization that the actions spring from the divine. Hence they do not affect him in the least. He is liberated from karma - the law of action and reaction, cause and effect. When the body falls, he is totally absorbed into the infinite.

Only the faithful man will practice this, but its effectiveness does not depend on faith - in the sense of belief! It is not a naïve doctrine to hypnotize the gullible, but a scientific approach to divine life. Nor is there a suggestion that it is the only path! There are other means to freedom - 'they too are freed'! Self-knowledge or self-surrender - surrender to the divine, is common to all religions. All religions encourage the seeker to surrender himself to the divine or to seek and discover that there is no self independent of the totality or God. Regardless of what the religion is called, it will lead you to this freedom.

III:33 - Even a wise man acts in accordance with his own nature; beings will follow nature. What can restraint do?

III:34 - Attachment and aversion for the objects of the senses abide in the senses; let none come under their sway, for they are the foes.

Your physical body and mind and the senses are part of the cosmic nature of God and hence not 'yours'. They function in accordance with the nature of the energy or power they possess. The eyes see illumined objects. The ears hear sounds. The tongue tastes. These things happen even in the case of the wisest of men, so long as there is life in the body. As long as the mind is linked with the body, the senses will function naturally.

There is a vibratory correlation between the senses and their particular objects. It is like wavelengths and the broadcasting systems. When you tune the radio at a particular point, the receiver picks up certain wavelengths and not others. The vibratory scale of light and sight, sound and ear, smell and nose, etc., are identical, and so they mutually react. This reaction is either favourable or unfavourable, in accordance with whether the sensation is pleasant or unpleasant. Up to this point, the process is automatic and mechanical. If the mind is introverted and the intelligence is united with the self, there will be equilibrium within oneself, even though the senses might continue to react naturally. But if the mind, through thought, registers a pleasant experience, for example, likes it, revives it as memory and hope, and desires a repetition, the chain-reaction towards self-destruction is set in motion. (II:62,63).

The Krishna-approach should not be missed. You cannot assume what nature is, and what is natural. Man's mind has suffered terrible pollution over thousands of years with what we call civilization and tradition. To be natural is to live as the image of God!

III:35 - Better is one's own duty, though devoid of merit, than the duty of another well discharged; the duty of another is fraught with danger.

This is the natural corollary of the basic teaching of the Bhagavad Gita - that all life is sacred, that there is nothing high or low in life's activities, and that our actions should not be motivated by private desires. Why and when does one switch from the discharge of one's own duties to take on the duties of another? More often than not - i.e. when it is not as part of the natural evolutionary process - when he is tempted by an earthly reward, or by self-aggrandizement.

Even today the amateur who is not really qualified to do a job and does something out of his way, gets a lot of publicity! This desire for name and fame and perhaps the material benefits accruing from them, attracts people, tempting them away from their own duty into the provinces of others.

The professional does his work with a calm mind. The amateur torments himself day and night. The glare of the limelight makes him lose his head. The natural public criticism depresses and annoys him. These are the emotional states which Krishna expressly asks us to avoid.

The central ideal of the is equanimity above all. Anything that disturbs the inner equilibrium is fraught with fear and danger. We must attain that equanimity and then never let anything in the world disturb it.

Total tranquility of the mind is indispensable for enabling us to look within, to study the nature of mind and thought, to see our conditioning and the source of fear, to realize what true love is and to recognize its caricature with which we are familiar, as also to realize what our real nature is and how perverted it has become. This awareness is the first step towards the enlightened life that Krishna reveals to us.

III:36 - Arjuna said : O Krishna, by what is one impelled to sinful acts, even unwillingly?

III:37 - The Blessed Lord said : It is lust, Arjuna, which is born of contact with the material mode of passion and later transformed into wrath, and which is the all-devouring, sinful enemy of this world.

The question is extremely pertinent; if God's nature is responsible for all actions, and if it is inevitable that the senses should automatically respond to the stimuli from the sense-objects, then how is man responsible for any evil that may proceed from such response?

Why is it said that a particular action is sinful and a particular person a sinner?

Krishna goes straight to the root of the problem and reveals the true culprit. Desire is sin.

Anger or hate is sin. Raga - likes and dvesa - dislikes are sinful. When man is prompted to perform an action by desire or selfish motive, he sins.

If the inner motive or attitude alone is the governing factor, then can we stretch this rule to cover our sins? Obviously not. For we should never forget that we shall know our duty truly only if our mind is tranquil and our intelligence united with God. Ordinarily, we should adhere to accepted moral standards. Such acceptance immediately leads to inner tranquility. When there is tranquility, insight is bright, unagitated. Desire arises when insight is veiled and when there is unawareness. When insight becomes aware of the arising of desire, the distinction between natural urges (like hunger and thirst) and unnatural craving is realized; the unnatural does not happen and the natural is not translated into 'my desire' by thought. Thus the way for unawareness and lack of insight to encourage pursuit of pleasure and the formation of likes and dislikes is not paved.

III:38 - As fire is enveloped by smoke, as a mirror by dust, and as an embryo by the amnion, so is This enveloped by different degrees of this lust.

III:39 - Arjuna, wisdom is enveloped by this constant enemy of the wise in the form of desire, which is unappeasable as fire.

By 'desire' is meant selfish desire, which is neither natural to life (as desire for food) nor the uncaused desire for God which is accompanied by wisdom and unselfishness, and which naturally leads to its own extinction in God-realization. Desire and anger are two sides of the same coin.

Smoke hides fire and brings about darkness where there should be light. Similarly, desire envelops wisdom and brings about evil where there should be divinity.

The mirror is hidden by dust and cannot function. Similarly, desire nullifies wisdom and puts it out of commission. Even the wise man under the influence of desire is unable to see his own face! Hence our life is a song of regrets and remorse.

But there is one saving feature. Desire encloses wisdom but is unable to overwhelm it, dissolve it or even dilute it, just as the amnion envelops the foetus in the womb, but the child is not adversely affected by it.

It is possible to fan the flame to dispel smoke. It is possible to wipe the mirror and to see one's face in it. It is possible for the child to be delivered, untainted by the amnion. Even so, it is possible for wisdom to be fanned by right living and by right meditation; it is possible to wipe desire off wisdom by selfless service; it is possible in samadhi - perfect absorption of the mind - to deliver wisdom from the clutches of desire and to enjoy divine communion.

Desire to be desireless is indeed desirable. But it can be deceptive. Hence the need for the utmost vigilance - and even more, God's Grace.

III:40 - The senses, the mind, and the intellect, are said to be the seat of desire; through these it deludes the embodied soul, and veils the wisdom.

III:41 - Therefore, O Arjuna, controlling the senses first, kill this sinful desire, the destroyer of knowledge and wisdom.

Responsiveness to sense-stimuli is inherent in the senses, mind and intellect. All these are the material half of divine nature. Water dissolves salt but not stone. Fire burns dry firewood but not a plantain stem. There is a responsive relationship. This responsiveness is instinct in the senses, impulsiveness in the mind and judgment in the intellect. The same power is given a different attribute when it operates from its different seats. Thought converts these natural responses into pleasure which gives rise to desire, or craving which veils wisdom.

Wisdom refers here to the right knowledge of the nature of desire and also the nature of the witness consciousness within. The effort to curb instincts and impulsiveness and also to restore saner values is meaningful only because the self is forever untouched by desire. This is wisdom.

This wisdom is veiled by the turbulent senses, impure mind and unwise intellect ridden by false values. It is as if we are looking at the bed of a lake through the disturbed surface of muddy water which covers the pearl as also pebbles on the bed. A start must be made somewhere. The desire-aggravating activity of the senses must be curbed first; of course, this is only another way of denoting control of the mind. When the mind and senses are calm, the intellect must be made to abandon its false values.

'With what and by whom is the mind controlled?' is a question that does not admit an easy answer. The desire to give up desire arises in the mind, but when it is rightly understood there is awakening of an intelligence other than the mind.

III:42 - They say that the senses are superior; superior to the senses is the mind; superior to the mind is the intellect; and one who is superior even to the intellect is He - the Self.

III:43 - Thus knowing oneself to be supernatural to material senses, mind and intelligence, one should control the lower self by the higher self, and conquer this insatiable enemy with giant strength.

The subtle has greater power over the gross which cannot limit the former, even as the prison-wall cannot limit one's thoughts. The senses, the mind and the intellect are like the brick, mortar and plaster of a house in which the master - the self - dwells. They have no freedom to act and they depend on one another and ultimately on the self or pure awareness.

We are not really slaves of the external world. All the beauty in the world is nothing to a blind man. The most delightful orchestra is silent pantomime for the deaf. The senses are superior to the objects.

What can the senses do if the mind switches off the inner controls? When you are intently listening to a soft whisper of your beloved, you do not see the person standing in front of you. The mind is superior to the senses.

Husband, wife and child walk past a department store. The man remembers only an amazing new piece of electronic equipment - he is an engineer. The wife remembers only a new dress, and the child saw nothing but a toy! The intellect provided the scale of values; the mind, acting on this, directed the senses to 'work on' the scene in front. The intellect is the governor!

Behind even this 'light' that illumines our inner world, there is the light of lights, the self or spark of God, in whose borrowed light the intellect shines. If we learn to appeal to him in meditation, he will so illumine the intellect that it will present the divine scale of values for the mind and senses to act upon. The self restrains the self on account of its indivisibility.

4. The Yoga of Wisdom

IV:1 - The Blessed Lord said: I taught this imperishable Yoga to Vivasvan; he told it to Manu; Manu proclaimed it to Ikshvaku.

IV:2 - This, handed down thus in regular succession, the royal sages knew. But in course of time the succession was broken, and therefore the science appears to be lost.

IV:3 - That same ancient Yoga has been today taught to you by Me, for you are my devotee and friend; it is the supreme mystery.

'There is nothing new under the sun'! The same old truth is re-stated over and over. The presentation is different - adapted to suit different peoples, generations and conditions prevalent.

The Mahabharata has eighteen chapters or 'books'. The Gita has eighteen chapters. One plus eight is nine, the final number. It is a symbol of finality - the last word. There are some who are sure that the Gita contains the 'last word'. Others claim the title for the Holy Bible or the Holy Quran. One who realizes that all these three spring from the same source sees no confusion here. The Indian wisely adds, however, that this 'last word' can be re-stated time and time again, with a slight difference in the modulation and accent. This is the secret of his tolerance, understanding and all-inclusiveness.

Truth gets perverted and lost on account of disuse and misuse. The intellect is incapable of comprehending the spiritual truth which spiritual experience alone can approach. When the latter is absent, the intellect feels compelled to spin a web of myth and superstition - known as philosophy - around the truth which is totally covered up in this cobweb in course of time.

The Lord revives true knowledge once more.

IV:4 - Arjuna said: Later on was your birth, and prior to it was the birth of the Sun; how am I to understand that you didst teach this Yoga in the beginning?
IV:5 - The Blessed Lord said: Many births of Mine have passed, as well as of yours, O Arjuna! I know them all, but you knowest not.
IV:6 - Although I am unborn and my supernatural body never deteriorates, and although I am the Lord of all sentient beings, I still appear in every millennium in My original supernatural form.

God is omnipresent and omnipotent. He is like the umpire in a football match. He lets the two teams - the divine and the undivine - play on. He himself remains unnoticed till the need arises and then he suddenly reveals his presence. The word 'avatara' or 'descent' is only symbolic. God, who is omnipresent, bursts into manifestation, even as electricity, which is subtle and 'does not seem to exist at all', reveals itself through a light-bulb or where there is a short-circuit.

You and I have had countless births. God has also manifested himself countless times. You and I are also manifestations or incarnations of the omnipresent God! So were Rama, Krishna, Buddha, Zarathustra, Moses, Jesus, Mohammed, etc. There is this difference: two people go into the sea; the fool is drowning and the lifesaver jumps in to save him. We are drowning in ignorance and evil. God - as the saviours and prophets - comes to save us. We are bound by ignorance and maya. He play-acts as if bound, in order to liberate us. It is blasphemy to say that this cannot happen. It is a rash denial of the omnipotence of God. True, the special manifestation does not cancel his omnipresence. When there is a great white cloud above us, it does not mean there is no water-vapour anywhere else. God is ever omnipresent, even while he is with us as an avatara.

IV:7 - Whenever there is a decline of dharma, O Arjuna, and rise of unrighteousness, then I manifest myself.

When does God thus manifest himself? Whenever the forces divine, 'the children of light', are overwhelmed by the undivine forces or the offspring of darkness, there is a divine manifestation to restore the balance.

This, however, seems to run counter to the scriptural declaration 'satyameva jayate' - truth alone triumphs. Is it possible for unrighteousness to overwhelm righteousness, even temporarily? No. Even that seeming triumph of unrighteousness is but a victory to righteousness.

Legend and history bear witness to this process. First there is oppression of the good by the evil. The wicked have no need to reflect, no qualms of conscience. The good are circumspect. The former take undue advantage. 'You need not turn the other cheek. I know where it is', says the wicked man who persists in his oppression of the good. When this oppression reaches the limit, there is compression which disturbs the very core of the 'good' being oppressed. At this core, there is God. When evil reaches this core, there is explosion; his power manifests itself in its own glory. This is the historical process: oppression, compression, explosion. The first two are necessary conditions for the third and hence it is possible to see in the seeming triumph of unrighteousness a true victory for righteousness. Extreme unrighteousness does a signal service of bringing God and divine power into manifestation.

If all this is puzzling, the Bhagavatam fans it further. It is not as though the children of light are God's and the wicked ones are the creatures of some other creator. They are all God's children. There are periods in the cyclic world-process when one or the other of these creatures holds sway. That, too, is God's play.

IV:8 - For the protection of the good, for the destruction of the wicked, and for the establishment of righteousness, I advent myself in every age.

What does God do when he manifests himself? He protects the good, destroys the evil and establishes righteousness. Please note that 'the good' need not be confined to 'good people'. 'Protection of the good and destruction of the evil ...' - fill up the blanks, as you like! Even good and evil tendencies may be brought within the meaning of this verse. Only the good are protected: not a privileged community. Hence, 'be good, do good' if you want God's protection!

There is no real destruction, even of wicked people; they have to be purified and redeemed. Only the evil nature or tendencies have to be destroyed. Hence even the good people whom Rama and Krishna protected, died, and the wicked ones whom they killed went to heaven - because their evil nature had been removed.

This is the only definition of the purpose of avatara. The criterion that determines who is an avatara is not supernatural birth or deeds, not supernatural appearance or disappearance, but the power to establish righteousness. Hence we regard the human Rama as an avatara and not the powerful and 'superhuman' Ravana. In this light, Rama, Krishna, Buddha, Zarathustra, Moses, Jesus, Mohammed and Mahavira, are all avatars of God. We admit that the son of God is even as God; the son of a lion is lion.

We admit that the Prophet of Islam, too, is an avatara; the messenger sent by light is light only. When a candle gives birth to another, it is also a candle - not son of the candle or the messenger of the candle.

Since this avatara effectively veils himself with his own maya, he may behave as God or man, he may proclaim his divinity or hide it - if he upholds righteousness, he is God.

IV:9 - He who thus knows in true light my divine birth and action, after having abandoned the body is not born again; he comes to me, Arjuna.

At this stage it is necessary to remind ourselves that the first person singular used in this scripture does not refer to the personality 'Krishna', but to the godhead revealing itself through him. The speaker could well have been Krishna, Christ, Buddha or Allah. The meaning and the significance will not suffer in the least.

It is in this light that we should take the declaration of lord Jesus that he is 'the light, the truth and the way and that no-one goes to the Father but through me.' We can realize the unmanifest godhead only through the manifest divinity.

There is, however, no harm in the followers of Krishna regarding him as their only way, and the followers of Christ adhering to his feet with equal zeal. What is harmful, however, is running others down, which is a waste of time anyway. It is absurd, too, to say: Only my mother is a woman capable of giving birth to human children, yours cannot be. We all have only one mother, but motherhood is not restricted to that woman - it is common to all women.

The manifest divinity is more easily accessible to the embodied being than the unmanifest transcendental being. In fact, that is the very purpose of manifestation or avatara: God symbolically descending to our level in order to accept, redeem and uplift us. When we learn not to cavil at these avatara, but to accept, adore and worship them, knowing their true divine nature, we shall have attained enlightenment and liberation.

It is equally important to remember that 'knowing their true nature' implies recognition of the essential divine nature of oneself, and the urgent need to shake off the dust that covers it. Such recognition is an avatara, too!

IV:10 - Freed from attachment, fear and anger, absorbed in me, taking refuge in me, purified by the fire of knowledge, many have attained to my Being.

When we are thus convinced of the divine purpose behind this creation, viz., the establishment of righteousness and the destruction of evil, we give up vainly craving for the objects of the world and getting attached to them. Desire and anger cease in us. When we assure ourselves of God's protection if we are good, then fear ceases. The good can never be harmed by anyone; and here, legends and history assure us that the truly good man blesses his oppressors, for they compel him to seek refuge at the feet of God. Western psychology tells us that 'likes, dislikes and fear' are present even in a new-born baby. But these are absent in the yogi! There is a radical transmutation.

All this is possible only if we kindle the fire of knowledge within us and keep it forever alive. This fire dispels the darkness of ignorance and gives us the comfort of the warmth of divine assurance. It saves us from the pit of temptations, from the evil within ourselves, and promotes goodness in us; for we begin to realize that goodness is closer to God.

This knowledge confers upon us the greatest boon of forbearance and fortitude to endure the fleabites of evil forces, in the certain conviction that they cannot harm us, but on the contrary, they do keep us awake in God. This knowledge thus liberates us from our own evil tendencies and reveals to us that even the good ones are but the protégés of God. True goodness and righteousness belong to him. We are immediately filled with wonderment and gratitude in which we let our little ego be absorbed in him. We attain to God's being. We return to the centre, source and goal of our being, the ground of our existence. The knower of God becomes God, says the Upanishad; charcoal offered into fire becomes fire. This man-of-god is man only to our human vision - in truth he is one with God.

Lord Krishna's searchlight illuminates the inside of man! Religion gets a revolutionary meaning. Life glows with a divine purpose. Man's puny individuality receives a fatal blow, only to be resurrected in and as God. Step by step we are led into the heart of the reality where nothing but God exists and where even the visible universe is but the body of God.

The little ego asserts itself. It has its own petty desires and cravings, attachments and aversions, dogmas and doctrines. Krishna warns us: These must go. That is the meaning of 'samnyasa' - renunciation.

We should practice true samnyasa without advertising it. It is not for others, but for our own sake. Advertisement might provoke some to antagonism and prompt others to hero-worship, thus the purpose will be defeated. Incidentally, the following is a wise rule if you value your peace of mind: never let anyone know the innermost secrets of your life, what you value most and wish to achieve. Or else you will be exposing your vulnerable points. Krishna advocates gradual growth or evolution, not overnight transformation or revolution. You might be tempted to swear: I will be totally selfless from this moment. Avoid that temptation. Prayerfully hold the ideal in front of the mind's eye every day. If you take a vow, you will only be provoking all the latent inner enemies and external forces, which will compel you to break the vow the very next day. Have you not noticed that on the day you resolve to fast, you feel hungry earlier than usual? When the vow is broken you will waste further time and energy in useless remorse.

By God's Grace, we shall come out victorious, in due time!

IV:11 - In whatever way men approach me, even so do I reward them; my path do men tread in all ways, O Arjuna.

IV:12 - Those who long for success in action in this world sacrifice to the devata; success is quickly attained through action.

This could well have been the basis of the numerous 'spiritual healing' techniques evolved specially by the westerners. If one realizes that God is good, perfect, full of light, life and love, then he experiences these qualities in him and around him; God himself comes to him as such. One who has no faith in an abiding truth or reality surrounds himself with darkness. He who regards God as a tyrant is terrified.

God has bestowed upon man intelligence which is but a spark of God's consciousness, and free-will which is particularisation of God's omnipotence; man can use them for his own uplift or downfall. He is free within wide boundaries.

Even in the 'religious' approach, the Hindu firmly believes that the countless viewpoints of God - which are the different religions - are all valid, and will lead us to the same God. The ultimate experience, viz., God realizing himself, is beyond the pale of the ego; but the highest spiritual experiences, too, may differ from man to man, as is revealed in the 'different' religions. This conviction fills us with tolerance and understanding, without loss of individuality.

Even they who seek material gains, or even spiritual perfection, resort only to God through the various divinities - powers of God's nature; and God responds to them via the same channel, as the fruits of those actions - success or failure, pain and pleasure, and so on. We adore God alone in various ways. This knowledge frees us from fear, attachment, anger, intolerance and proselytism.

IV:13 - The fourfold caste has been created by me according to the differentiation of Guna and Karma; though I am the author thereof, know me as the non-doer and immutable.

IV:14 - Actions do not taint Me, nor have I a desire for the fruits of actions. He who knows me thus is not bound by actions.

Men, desiring worldly rewards, work in different fields. Their inherent and predominant quality or nature - guna, leads them along these paths of activity - karma. God as we noticed in the last two verses, 'goes' to them along those very paths. He provides them with the congenial atmosphere in which they can evolve with the help of their own guna and their own karma; the yoga of the Gita does not demand transplantation, but only transmutation. This congenial atmosphere is the caste system in its pure and uncorrupted form.

God, being the centre of all, is equidistant from all, whatever their caste and whatever be their duty or activity. God-oriented performance of one's own duty is the direct road to perfection. This path (the caste system) originates in his nature, but it should not be attributed to him - that is: it should not be regarded as the absolute, because it is the individual's nature that determines or paves it, and as this nature undergoes transmutation, the path might vanish in the destination! God is not bound by anything in this universe.

God is not even bound by this notion of 'unbindability'; so he may incarnate himself and appear to be bound! He is beyond all concepts.

The second verse can also be used as a formula to meditate upon, in order to disentangle the soul from the mesh of our body and mind. The 'me', then, would refer to the soul, the witness consciousness, the true self which is not tainted by any action of the body and mind. This meditation will liberate us from bondage to karma.

IV:15 - Having known this, the ancient seekers after freedom also performed actions; therefore perform actions as did the ancients.

This is the doctrine of total freedom of the Bhagavad Gita. In the light of this doctrine, even 'bounden duty' is sublimated into joyous abandonment which is but a synonym of a free participation in the divine will. We seek not only freedom from external authority - and the consequent mental conditioning, but freedom from inner reaction to authority - which is an expression of vanity.

Glimpses of this freedom are seen in ourselves, during sleep and during deep meditation. The inner intelligence which had, during its unawakened states known as waking and dream, foolishly bound itself to the body and the mind, which are nothing more than the bricks and mortar of residence, realizes upon awakening that pain and pleasure and so on, which it had to endure during those two states were the necessary sequel of its wrong identification of itself with its residence.

As in the human body, so also in the body of God called the universe. We are tiny cells in that body of God. His life pulsates in us as our immortal being. His power flows through us as will. His consciousness shines in us as intelligence. None of these is 'ours'. Yet, if we but joyously offer our little self to the care of the great body, then even as a tiny copper wire becomes charged with formidable electric current on account of its passive contact, we too, shall share his life, power and consciousness.

Not bound to anything in this world we shall still take part in all its activity as a witness, in choiceless awareness. Realizing that both egoistical action and egoistical withdrawal are forms of the false identification of the soul of our soul with the body and mind, we shall surrender ourselves to God's will and live in this house of God, unaffected by its construction, alteration and demolition, freely moving in it and using it in accordance with the divine will, which is natural and appropriate action.

IV:16 - What is action? What is inaction? As to this even the wise are confused. Therefore, I shall teach you about action. Knowing which you shall be liberated from Samsara.

IV:17 - The true nature of action should be known, also of unlawful action, and of inaction; hard to understand is the path of action.

People have asked themselves: What should I do? The self-arrogating ego has led them along the by-lanes of varied activities, often described as duties and scripturally ordained injunctions, and sometimes restrained them to a state of inaction on the assumption that all action is tainted with evil. Are actions good or evil in themselves, or are they to be judged by their results? If the latter, how is it possible for us to foresee the result? If the former, who is the judge to tell us which action is good and which evil and what are the criteria? These problems have worried even the great ones.

As a renowned saint of India declared: The scriptures differ among themselves and even the sages differ among themselves. Truly, the secret of righteousness is hidden from mortal gaze. That path which the holy ones have trodden should be followed. The Mahabharata illustrates this riddle. The righteous Yudhishthira is often faced with this fundamental problem: What is right action? On top of all this, lord Krishna himself suggests what appears, on the surface, to be decidedly unrighteous!

Yet, an action may be unrighteous from the standpoint of human law and righteous according to the divine law. The world has only too often witnessed diabolical rulers impose their will on their subjects with the sanctity and 'cover' of the divine law! Modern political and religious institutions have taught us that even man's conscience can be so colored as to regard man-made law with greater veneration than divine law which is deliberately obscured from his vision. What is right?

IV:18 - He who seeth inaction in action and action in inaction, he is wise among men; he is intelligent, although engaged in all sorts of activities.

The puzzle can be solved only by 'seeing' the whole universe as the one body of God. Indwelling this universe is the cosmic consciousness which is the eternal witness since it is uninvolved (like space) in whatever takes place in it. In God's body the countless cells vibrate constantly; these cells are the different worlds and the beings in them. When they vibrate in accordance with the divine law which is the operative part of God's divine nature, they are said to be good and to do good, and to engage themselves in right action. This atonement, however, is spontaneous and not rationalized or willed.

When the cells, on account of the inherent free-will, fall out of alignment with the divine will, the latter, in order to protect the total organism from injury, allows the rebellious cell to disintegrate by its own power - even as a palm tree defying a storm is felled, whereas a blade of grass which bows to the storm is saved; and, even as a healthy cell in our body is protected and a cell which will not co-operate with the life-force is eliminated. Vicious actions disrupt the social structure, which is the body of God. When such disruption has already taken place, the divine will employs other cells to restore harmony by quelling the rebellion - resulting in activity which partakes of the nature of the rebellious cells themselves. This explains lord Krishna's mysterious ways.

On such occasions, if our atonement to the divine will is blind and impulsive, we might at times find ourselves on the horns of a dilemma. But if our atonement is based on the right understanding that we who seem to be ever active do nothing and that it is the intangible divine will which is ever active, then we realize the unity of our own little intelligence with His, our finite will with His infinite will and our whole being with His. The 'I' dissolves in the all, the doer of all actions.

The impulsive man's instinctual action and the rationalist's selfish, clever and calculated action are in truth inaction; both of them are reactions, the former to external stimuli and the latter to circumstances. A wise man observes himself and the world around him, and this self-awareness acts spontaneously and non-volitionally. Hence true action is 'inaction'. Self-awareness is total action.

IV:19 - He whose undertakings are all devoid of desires, and whose actions have been burnt by the fire of knowledge, the wise call him a sage.

IV:20 - Abandoning all attachment to the results of his activities, ever satisfied and independent, he performs no fruitive action, although engaged in all kinds of undertakings.

The ever-vibrant universe is rooted in the supremely quiescent Brahman - absolute reality, who is supreme peace itself. The ever active body is indwelt by the self which is the peace that passeth understanding. Beneath the turbulent surface, the ocean itself is calm.

Fragmentation is conflict, wholeness - holiness is peace.

Activity is the nature of form, quiescence is the nature of the spirit. Ignorant superimposition of the characteristics of the form on the spirit is the root-cause of endless suffering. He who regards the quiescent spirit as the doer of actions paradoxically endeavours to restrain the form - body and mind from their natural activity! Such a man is full of tensions. He thinks he knows what to do and what not to do; he is full of desires and schemes. Desires and schemes are the generators of tension. He does not know what he is. Only self-knowledge removes selfishness. Hence Gurudev Sivananda emphasized: Be good, do good, in that order.

The cell that is ignorant of the body entertains selfish desires and has its own private schemes. When the fire of the knowledge that we are all cells in the body of God burns this ignorance, then contentment born of total self-surrender to the will of God arises.

Selfishness, egoism and their retinue of evil disappear, even as the ghosts of the dreamer's dream vanish on his waking.

A man who is awake in this knowledge is not idle, he is a true channel for the flow of God's will. The actions of such a man are movements in cosmic consciousness, without cause, without goal, without dependency, and without the idea 'I do this'.

IV:21 - Without hope and with the mind and the self controlled, having abandoned all greed, doing mere bodily action, he incurs no sin.

IV:22 - Content with what comes to him without effort, free from the pairs of opposites, free from envy, even-minded in success and failure, though acting, he is not bound.

Desire and its consequent 'planned activity', are the generators of evil; when they happen to be in accordance with divine will, they confirm the ego in its self-arrogating doership of actions; when they are not, and so there is failure, they cause tension which intensifies the soul's ignorance.

The wise man's mind, too, may entertain hope. If he is a perfected yogi, it will invariably be the reflection of the divine will. If he is an earnest seeker, he will hope for success, but be prepared for the opposite! Thus he goes beyond both. This is not merely 'positive thinking', but 'perfect thinking'. We strive, for that is our birthright and the expression of divine nature in us, too. This effort may even be backed by 'positive thinking' and wishing for the best. But it is free from egoistic projection of self-will, for we are prepared for what at the moment appears to be the worst - in the knowledge that God's will is ever the best. This fusion of positive and negative is perfect thinking which transcends both.

Pain and pleasure, success and failure, are the egoistic interpretation of the divine will when the selfish man breaks life into fragments or foolishly imagines that the coin of life has only one - the pleasant, successful side! Corners and patches of a painting appear ugly or beautiful, dark or bright; but when the whole painting is seen, they coalesce into a masterpiece of portraiture.

The yogi is not a gloomy pessimist. He hopes for the best, but accepts whatever happens as the best. In him the sins of ignorance, desire and private hope, are absent.

IV:23 - To one who is devoid of attachment, who is liberated, whose mind is established in knowledge, who works for the sake of sacrifice, the whole action is dissolved.

IV:24 - Brahman is the oblation; Brahman is the melted butter; by Brahman is the oblation poured into the fire of Brahman; Brahman verily shall be reached by him who always sees Brahman in action.

The sage who is established in wisdom regards his whole life itself as a sacrifice. Yajna - sacrifice is God - God sacrificed his unity, as it were, in the fire of diversity, creating infinite beings and imposing on himself the duty of preserving and redeeming them.

Nothing can be 'outside' the infinite God. Nothing can be apart from his being. This creation, too, is within him. All the activity that is experienced takes place within him. The only suitable analogy is the dream in which the dreamer creates space, time and material diversity within himself and views the phenomenon as if he were apart from the other dream-objects, which derive their power, intelligence and individuality from the dreamer himself. Hence, the world is often spoken of as God's dream.

This knowledge should be sustained even in our waking state of consciousness. God is in all. God is the all. God is the all-in-all. The symbol of the Indian ritual of yajna or havan can be extended to include all actions. The performer of the action, the instruments used, the act itself and the one to whom it is directed - all are God only.

God or the reality is not a static existence but a process, beginningless and endless. Thus, there is nothing unsacred in the universe. To live in this spirit is brahma-karma-samadhi or the egoless participation in the will of God, described in verse twenty-one as 'doing mere bodily action' without the least isolation from the totality. The wise man sees that the bodily functions are already and always will be independent of the ego!

IV:25 - Some yogis perform sacrifice to the gods, while others offer the Self as sacrifice in the fire of Brahman alone.

The highest wisdom is not attained overnight. Man's consciousness is shadowed by ignorance and superstition, pride and prejudice, false notions and ideologies. It is not given to all to uproot this mighty tree of ignorance with a single axe-stroke of supreme wisdom. The path of the majority lies through the gradual evolution and sublimation. This sounds easy; it is not. One has to be eternally vigilant if one is not to slide back or to run round in circles. Eternal vigilance is not different from instant enlightenment!

There are some yogi who 'sacrifice' to the gods. They engage themselves in ritualistic worship. When the ritual is performed with right understanding - that the whole universe is God's self-sacrifice, it transforms one's whole life into divine life. The yogi's vision expands to include in his concept of God, his parents, teachers and guests. The ritual widens into charity. The heart is gradually purified, eventually to let the light of God shine unobstructed by the distortion of the ego.

There are others who do not worship the gods, but perform religious rites, for their own sake. Though these rites promise heaven to the performer, he is encouraged to cut out this desire, in order that his action may lead him to the supreme. Hence even the oblations are followed by the formula 'na mama' - 'not mine' or 'not for me'. When these sacrifices purify one's heart the light of God reveals itself.

Eventually, this yogi offers sacrifice itself as an oblation into the fire of Brahman, the absolute. All activities which were superimposed on Brahman, in ignorance, are offered in the knowledge of the transcendental reality which is the eternal witness of the dynamism of its nature.

IV:26 - Some again offer hearing and other senses as sacrifice in the fire of restraint; others offer sound and various objects of the senses as sacrifice in the fire of the senses.

IV:27 - Others sacrifice all the functions of the senses, and those of the vital energy or Prana, in the fire of the Yoga of self-restraint, kindled by knowledge.

These are not external but internal 'rituals'. External rituals are props for an internal process of meditation. To the vast majority of people they are necessary. There are a few spiritual heroes, however, who can dispense with them and enter the inner realm.

1. First kindle the fire of self-restraint within. Into that burning desire for achieving perfect restraint, offer the cravings and longings of the senses as and when they arise. The symbolism of the fire-worship will greatly help.

2. In the case of such activity and even such righteous enjoyments as are inevitable to the living of life, visualize the senses themselves as the sacrificial fire. Offer the objects of enjoyment into this fire; this is a very effective way of getting rid of 'likes and dislikes' which are the result of over-rating the objects of the world. The objects are like inert firewood, fuel for the senses which are the fire to be sustained so long as it is necessary for the enlightenment of the soul.

3. In a higher kind of meditation, the fire is samnyasa - combined practice of concentration, meditation and samadhi, and the oblation is the action, present and past, of all the senses and even the vital force.

Once the oblation is offered into the fire, it becomes one with the fire which alone shines. Thus, when the senses and the vital force are offered into the fire of atma-samnyasa, the self alone shines, after absorbing the oblations - senses and vital force, into itself.

IV:28 - Some offer wealth, austerity, Yoga as sacrifice; while the ascetics of self-restraint and rigid vows offer study of scriptures and knowledge as sacrifice.

IV:29 - Others offer as sacrifice the outgoing breath in the incoming, and the incoming in the outgoing, restraining the courses of the outgoing and the incoming breaths, absorbed in the restraint of the breath.

Gradually, the spirit of yajna or sacrifice should widen to include all of one's activities, sacred and secular. In all these the symbolism of 'sacred oblation', should be well understood and rightly applied.

1. In charity, the receiver is the fire and the gift is the oblation. The wise man expects not even a word of thanks; the act is complete in itself.
2. In austerity, the fire is renunciation and self-denial, arid desires and cravings are the oblation. The fire blazes more brightly with each oblation.
3. In yoga, the inner self is the fire and the mental modifications are the oblations. The fire purifies the latter, transforms them into pure thoughts - sat samkalpa.
4. Svadhyaya or self-study of scriptures: desire for self-knowledge is the fire which is augmented with successive oblations of study of scriptures.
5. Jnana-yajna or the wisdom-sacrifice: seekers after truth are the fire and knowledge itself is the oblation. The former are enlightened.
6. In pranayama, the solar - positive, prana force is offered in - united with - the lunar - negative, apana force; and the negative is poured into the positive at the solar plexus. The fire thus generated, rouses the latent Kundalini Shakti, whose union with Siva at the crown of the head is enlightenment.

IV:30 - Others who regulate their diet offer life-breaths in life-breaths. All these are knowers of sacrifice, whose sins are destroyed by sacrifice.
IV:31 - Those who 'eat' the remnants of the sacrifice, which are like nectar, go to the eternal Brahman. This world is not for the man who does not perform sacrifice; how then can he have the other, O Arjuna?

Lastly, there are those who are abstemious in their diet. They eat merely to keep body and soul together. When the life-force in them clamors for more, they turn it upon itself - offering, as it were, the life-force itself as the oblation into it.

The spirit of sacrifice destroys sin. All these practices are neither good nor bad in themselves. For example, austerity - tapas or fire can either lead to the destruction of the sinful nature or increase one's vanity - depending on the inner spirit. The spirit of yajna 'detaches' the self from the activity itself, thus allowing the latter to wipe the mirror clean so that in it the ever-pure self is instantly reflected in all its glory. Failure to understand and adopt this symbolism will often result in our wiping the mirror with the face, thus transferring the evil tendency from the mirror - the body and mind, to the skin of the face - the ego. The spirit of sacrifice also warns us not to expect anything in return; only the ashes of purity or sattva will remain after the sacrifice. The sacred ashes are so dear to lord Siva - the divine auspiciousness itself, who naturally bestows upon us all that is good. This residue of the sacrifice is nectar which confers immortality on us. We must let it nourish our life in every way. It also refers to the remnants of charity, specially of food, which become holy and soul-purifying. He who is devoid of the spirit of sacrifice - the selfish man given wholly to sense-indulgence - is a burden on earth.

IV:32 - Thus, manifold sacrifices are spread out before Brahman. Know then all as born of action and thus knowing, thou shalt be liberated.

IV:33 - Superior is wisdom-sacrifice to the sacrifice with objects. All actions in their entirety, O Arjuna, culminate in knowledge.

The sacrifices given here in the Gita are only examples. They indicate the essence of the art of life, the spirit of sacrifice or unselfishness. It is not an ideal known as unselfishness, but the direct realization that there is no self independent of the totality. With this shall men flavor all the actions of this life. The Creator intended that this spirit should govern all activities of all beings here. Whereas the so-called 'lower' orders of creation - the plants, and the animals to a great extent, instinctively live in this spirit, man, instead of consciously participating in God's will which this spirit inculcates, dares to flout it and arrogate the action to himself. He who knows that all sacrifices involve action and all actions should be performed as sacrifice, is liberated - from ignorance and egoism, sin and suffering.

Of the sacrifices described in this chapter and of the many more alluded to, the wisdom-sacrifice is the best. All other gifts and all other activities are transitory in their effect. Life itself is short, and even the most spectacular action is reduced to a few lines in a book of history and one more tendency in the soul - if it is not accompanied by right knowledge. Knowledge, on the other hand, liberates the soul from bondage to samsara or the ever-revolving wheel of birth and death. Do not forget that the giver of knowledge is a devotee who considers the recipient as his lord!

Whereas actions are inevitable, knowledge is the goal. The inevitable actions should be performed in the spirit of sacrifice; but knowledge should be acquired and imparted at every turn. For self-knowledge is the goal of actions themselves.

IV:34 - Know that knowledge by prostration, by question and by service; the wise who have realized the truth will instruct thee in it.

IV:35 - Knowing that, thou shalt not again get deluded like this, O Arjuna; and by that thou shalt see all beings in thy self and also in me.

This knowledge which is the goal as well as the basis of all actions, the knowledge of the spirit of sacrifice, has to be acquired from the 'knowers of truth' , but they wait till the seeker approaches them in the attitude of discipleship.

Prostration is only a symbol of surrender - prapatti. This sanskrit word has a wonderful import. The student realizes in his heart that he is sunk in grief for lack of knowledge, that he cannot obtain it on his own, from books etc., and that the guru alone can guide him to it. Before this three-fold fact is immediately and directly 'seen', and one's own vain 'knowledge' firmly rejected all of which enables true humility to arise in one's heart - no knowledge is of any practical use. Even if some knowledge is acquired, it only acts as an intellectual burden, sinking man a little lower into the mire of vanity. But once the right attitude is acquired, there is deep and genuine yearning at heart, and we can learn from anything and anybody. Dattatreya had twenty four guru.

The jnani or the guru is like a bridge. The bridge is the 'other shore's' helping hand reaching out to this. The guru is God's helping hand reaching out to the seeker. The seeker must surrender his vanity to the guru and prove his devotion by whole-souled service. The guru will then impart the highest knowledge to the disciple, understanding, grasping and assimilating which, the latter will experience cosmic consciousness. Incorrect understanding of any of the factors involved will lead to a dreadful caricature of the beautiful guru-disciple relationship.

IV:36 - Even if thou art the most sinful of all sinners, yet thou shalt verily cross all sins by the raft of knowledge.

IV:37 - As the blazing fire reduces fuel to ashes, O Arjuna, so does the fire of knowledge reduce all actions to ashes.

This jnana or intuitional knowledge or wisdom is fire - it burns, it purifies, it illumines. It burns all the impurities within the human heart. It purifies all that it touches. It illumines the truth. The self, hidden in the heart of man by the veil of ignorance with its heavy encrustation of sinful deeds birth after birth, is the truth. It is the veil that is affected by sin. The self - like space - is unaffected by whatever happens; it is unlimited and ever pure. When the fire of knowledge is kindled in the human heart by the sage-guru, this fire reduces the evil - which is veil misspelled - to ashes. The heavy encrustation of sin only makes the fire grow more fierce! The thickness of this encrustation is immaterial; fire is unaltered by what it burns, and fire burns all! Quantity is not the criterion here; a spark can reduce a whole forest to ashes.

Unlike most forest fires, but like the fire that catches a veil, this fire of knowledge destroys the very roots, the entire veil of sinfulness. With ignorance is burnt desire along with its ramifications as sinful tendencies. The fruits of past actions (sancita karma) are burnt too, for they were themselves part of the dream from which the wise man has been awakened. The future actions (agami karma) are egoless and desireless and so bear no fruit. But 'sarva karmini' is plural, not dual. Even prarabdha karma - the effect of past actions which have begun to fructify, which governs this incarnation, is 'cheated' by the wise man who does not identify the self with the body and the mind. Parabdha karma can afflict only the body and the mind. Thus freed from karma and ignorance, even the most sinful man shines as a sage in the light of knowledge of the self. Neither the veil of ignorance, nor the evil action, nor to live in sin and suffering - veil, evil, live have the same letters - is based on truth. They are born of non-understanding and die on understanding.

IV:38 - Verily, there is no purifier in this world like knowledge. He who is perfected in yoga finds it in the self in time.

IV:39 - The man who is full of faith, who is devoted to it, and who has subdued the senses obtains knowledge. And, having obtained the knowledge, he goes at once to the supreme peace.

No-one is barred from knowledge of God or self-realization. No-one is eternally damned here. All beings will gradually evolve into perfection. In due time, every living being - even a worm which you may tread on, will attain perfection in yoga and find knowledge in the self. That is the purpose of creation; the world exists to provide schooling for the individual so that it may attain perfection. Perfection is the direct experience that imperfection - self-limitation, sin and sorrow - is but a dream. Self-realization is the truth; self is ever real! There are some who say: We shall get it in due time - why bother? They fail to see that only when the time has come does one bother. The pregnant woman bides her time. It is only when the time arrives that she bothers. Not that she bothers because she wants to. The seeker cannot help it; his time has come. For the others, too, the time will come, for all are evolving towards perfection.

How can we recognize whose time has arrived? By faith. The seeker who is at the threshold of knowledge is full of faith. This faith is totally different from the faith - blind, biased belief - that breeds conflict. This faith is born of a veiled vision of truth. In the ignorant, the truth is veiled; in the faithful, truth shines through the veil. This faith compels him to be devoted to that, the self or God, with his body, mind, heart and whole being. This whole-souled devotion is accompanied by its natural corollary - he is self-controlled and his mind and senses do not run riot. All this burns the veil and reveals knowledge.

This knowledge quickly leads the seeker to the supreme peace or Brahman.

IV:40 - The ignorant, the faithless, the doubting self goes to destruction; there is neither this world nor the other, nor happiness for the doubting.

IV:41 - He who has renounced actions by yoga, whose doubts are rent asunder by knowledge and who is self-possessed - actions do not bind him, O Arjuna.

IV:42 - Therefore, with the sword of the knowledge cut asunder the doubt of the self born of ignorance residing in thy heart and take refuge in yoga. Arise, O Arjuna.

He whose time has not yet come is known by his faithlessness. He goes to 'destruction', not total annihilation, but destruction of this precious opportunity granted by the Lord. This human birth is the door to liberation. He who utilizes it for this great purpose is saved; he who does not, slams the door in his own face. He destroys, as it were, the raft that could have taken him across the ocean of samsara.

Doubt is a great destroyer. We are commanded by the Lord to question our preceptors. Towards the conclusion of the Gita, Krishna further commands Arjuna to reflect over what he had told him. We should question the guru and then reflect over what he tells us - but with faith, not with a doubting intellect! Questioning and doubting are two very different mental actions. Questioning is a necessary step to the acquisition of knowledge; doubting is refusal to listen, refusal to think, refusal to look within, refusal to understand. Under cover of doubt, the ego thrives - the ego manages not to doubt itself. The man whose heart is full of doubts has no peace, no happiness even in this world; he does nothing good which could earn him a better world hereafter. What a loss!

Doubt must be slain by knowledge. The seeker must quickly begin the practice of yoga!

5. The Yoga of Renunciation of Action

V:1 - Arjuna said: Renunciation of all actions, O Krishna, thou praisest, and again yoga. Tell me conclusively that which is the better of the two.

V:2 -The blessed Lord said: Renunciation and the yoga of action, both lead to the highest bliss. But, of the two, the yoga of action is superior to the renunciation of action.

V:3 - He should be known as a perpetual renunciate who neither hates nor desires. For, free from the pairs of opposites, O Arjuna, he is easily set free from bondage.

The confusion arose over a misunderstanding of verse 41 of the previous chapter! The word 'samnyasa' meant - and means even now to the narrow-minded, orthodox bigot: giving up of all activities and enjoyments. Enjoyment was supposed to cause attachment and action provided the fuel to keep the wheel of karma revolving. To talk of samnyasa and activity in the same breath was obviously a contradiction in their eyes.

The famous story of queen Cudala in the Yoga Vasistha brings out the kernel of renunciation graphically. Renunciation should be of that which is 'mine'. Worldly objects belong to the world; renouncing them would be like the beggar in South India renouncing his claims to the throne of England. They do not exist! Attachment to worldly activities may be replaced by attachment to so-called spiritual activities, with no real spiritual benefit! If a king enjoys his cup of wine, a mendicant might sip a cup of milk with equal pleasure! Patanjali warns us that even the 'bliss' of savikalpa samadhi is an extremely subtle substitute for sense-pleasure. Real renunciation is abandonment of egoistic acceptance and rejection, love and hatred, likes and dislikes. Real renunciation is renunciation of the only thing that 'belongs to me' viz., ignorance, the foolish ideas of 'I', in relation to the body and 'mine', in relation to the objects of the world.

Longing and aversion both spring from false values. By giving both up one is freed from their bondage while remaining active.

V:4 - Only the ignorant speak of devotional service as being different from the analytical study of the material world. Those who are actually learned say that he who applies himself well to one of these paths achieves the results of both.
V:5 - One who knows that the position reached by means of analytical study can also be attained by devotional service, and who therefore sees study and devotional service to be on the same level, sees things as they are.

Why does man 'renounce' objects of sense-enjoyments? When a scorpion falls into your lap, why do you throw it away? Because you fear it will sting you. The sting will give you pain and take away happiness - sense-pleasure, which you wish to enjoy! You value that pleasure and you credit the scorpion with the power to take it away. Similarly in the case of other objects; you super-impose on them a certain exaggerated value in relation to your own egoistic pleasure-instinct. So long as this valuation lasts, even their renunciation is of no value. For, the renunciation of pleasure is motivated by the desire for pleasure - euphemistically called supreme bliss or heaven.

Knowledge deflates this value. In the light of knowledge, the man of wisdom perceives the whole universe - of which his body and mind are parts - as the body of God with the countless beings doing their duty as cells in it. Likewise, such a man's body and mind obey his will, unfettered by his self-arrogating ego.

Being established in this knowledge, he finds that the only factor to be renounced is ego and its private reactions - likes and dislikes; even this is not 'renunciation', as the ego as an independent entity is non-existent. Knowledge enables one to realize the unreal as unreal. God rules the wise man's body and mind which function according to his will. It cannot be otherwise. Knowledge of God gives knowledge of his will and this will is done by the yogi spontaneously. Knowledge and action are two sides of the same coin. To be established well in one is to practice both!

V:6 - Merely renouncing all activities yet not engaging in the devotional service is hard to realize. But the wise engaged in devotional service can achieve the supreme without delay.

V:7 - One who works in devotion, who is a pure soul, and who controls his mind and senses is dear to everyone, and everyone is dear to him. Though always working, such a man is never entangled.

This renunciation of egoism, private desires and hopes is impossible without the practice of yoga - which is described in the next two verses. It will be seen therefrom that the practice of this yoga involves dynamic living. Without this dynamism one might fall into the error of clinging to inflated, subtle, false values, after unwittingly renouncing the right values - even as a man who peels a banana sitting inside a railway compartment might throw the fruit out of the window and put the skin into his mouth.

The ever-watchful yogi acts in this world in the right spirit. He finds that life itself offers him countless opportunities of discovering his own hidden evils, of purifying his heart, of detecting the wiles of the cunning ego, of understanding the innumerable guises in which his own lower self might appear and lead him astray, and of piercing the veil of maya.

He who practices the yoga described in the next few verses will discover that the world, far from being a hindrance, is truly a great help in the practice of yoga. The Bhagavatam assures us that that is truly the purpose of the Lord's creation - to help the souls to evolve, to awaken and to lead them to enlightenment.

The yogi must realize that his self is the self of all; and how can he do that if he 'renounces' the world and all activities? It is in the context of an active life in the world that yogi discovers how the momentary experiencer - the ego - is turned into a permanent entity by a trick of memory - the me. This discovery is the ending of the ego, and the arising of the spirit of yoga.

V:8 - A person in the divine consciousness, although engaged in seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, eating, moving about, sleeping and breathing, always knows within himself that he actually does nothing at all.

V:9 - Because while speaking, evacuating, receiving, opening or closing his eyes, he always knows that only the material senses are engaged with their objects and that he is aloof from them.

There is a subtle snag here; it is not as though the 'I' feels greatly superior to all these activities and makes this declaration as a business executive might: I do nothing, my staff is efficient. The 'I' itself loses its first person-ness, being absorbed in the cosmic being. Failure to appreciate this will land us in perversion and terrible vanity. The truth has to be discovered, not assumed and asserted. This is possible not by a physical or even psychological withdrawal from the world but by an unceasing enquiry into the source of all action - not 'I' but 'God'.

Is it possible for one to be devoid of this and yet continue to live and act? Yes; though, in the very nature of phenomena such people are bound to be extremely rare. To give a crude analogy, they function like plants. Plants have life and perhaps wonderful intelligence. Even today scientists are struggling to discover what makes the grass green and why it is capable of manufacturing food direct from the elements, whereas man has to depend upon plants for his nutrition. The plants have no individual ego-sense. They respond to God's nature, to his will.

Similarly the egoless man responds to God's will rather, he serves as a clear channel, absolutely non-resisting, for his will. But in his case the guiding factor is intuition, a ray of God's own omniscience, which lets him do God's will spontaneously. Since there is no egoistic intelligence in him, he is not even aware of this intuitive wisdom. But we can recognize him by the total absence of personal selfish desires in him, and by the unbroken peace that he radiates. He is no longer man, but he is God.

V:10 - One who performs his duty without attachment, surrendering the results to the supreme, is not affected by sinful action, as the lotus leaf is untouched by water.

V:11 - Yogis, having abandoned attachment, perform actions only by the body, mind, intellect and also by the senses, for the purification of the self.

The emphasis on 'abandoning attachment' is worth meditating upon. Those two words are like a double-edged sword without even a handle - it is difficult to hold! Likewise it is difficult to realize this state of non-attachment. The man who says: I am not attached to anything, is terribly attached to that estimation of himself! It is not 'doing this' or 'refraining from this' that is the criterion; for both may be born of 'attachment'! No guidance whatsoever can be given here - the mind may get attached to the guidance, and mistake the description for the truth. Only the vigilant yogi knows what this means. The yogi is ever mindful of the presence of God in himself - which he had mistaken for the 'I', and the omnipresence of God in all beings. He endeavors to keep this awareness steady in his mind all the time. But the mind might play wonderful tricks with him, too. A pleasurable object or person might appear to be truly full of God; and the yogi might find his mind sticking to it. Incidentally, the Sanskrit word for 'friendship' is 'sneha' which also means 'glue'. He has to retrieve his heart from it with skill but retain the right attitude to God's omnipresence. Again, the ego might assert itself and proclaim that God is the indwelling presence, specially manifest in the yogi's heart, goading him to keep away from this or that. The ego might speak in God's voice! The ego might spread a subtle net of self-importance in which the yogi might be caught. If, however, he is able to find the subtle middle path - without withholding himself and without getting attached - he will live in God, doing his will, never tainted by the sin of egoism. The second verse gives freedom of action not only to the body and the senses, but to the mind and the rational faculty. The ego? It has no permanent existence.

V:12 - The steadily devoted soul attains unadulterated peace because he offers the result of all activities to Me; whereas a person who is not in union with the divine, who is greedy for the fruits of his labor, becomes entangled.
V:13 Mentally renouncing all actions and self-controlled, the embodied one rests peaceful in the nine-gated city, neither acting nor causing others to act.

Whether the doer of all actions is God himself, or whether it is his nature - prakrti, it is certainly not the individual ego. The individual ego rises and falls with every action or experience; the real ego is part of God's nature! The whole universe is the body of God in which his will prevails, guided by his consciousness. In this context, renunciation of desire for 'fruits of actions' is the most natural and sensible thing to do! Even the most vital organ in our body - the heart, which functions day and night, does not demand a reward! Yet we, who are little parts of a cell of the body of God do nothing unless assured of a reward! This desire is bondage. Its renunciation is liberation. When this is clearly seen, the desire does not arise at all. Even as every cell of our body receives its nourishment and life-force as long as it does its job, even so we shall receive from God what we deserve. Why beg for it? Krishna asks us to atomize ourselves and regard our self as the citizen of this nine-gated city, the body. The body has its own king - God, and administration - God's nature or prakrti. The citizen enjoys peace, prosperity and security by merely living in obedience to the law. It is useless on his part to suffer the king's headaches. The same analogy can be applied to us who are cells in God's cosmic body. He is the doer, or perhaps he causes his nature to do; but we neither do anything nor do we cause anything else to do. It is the motor which rotates the many wheels, not the other way round. God is the Cosmic motor.

V:14 - The embodied spirit, master of the city of his body, does not create activities, nor does he induce people to act, nor does he create the fruits of action. All this is enacted by the modes of material nature.

V:15 - The Lord accepts neither the demerit nor even the merit of any; knowledge is enveloped by ignorance, thereby beings are deluded.

There is plenty of work to do in the Lord's good world - but it is his world, his body. His life, power, nature or Shakti is the motive force. His consciousness or intelligence is the guiding force. His own body, the universe, is the field. The innumerable microcosmic beings are cells in that body, joyously and purposefully participating in his work, sharing his life, power and nature, and united with his consciousness or intelligence. The individualized fraction is not the whole; but it is non-different from the whole; and when it realizes its true nature as such, it is indivisibly one with the whole.

Egoism is a mysterious deluding power. Individuation is inherent in the infinite as a potentiality all the time. Creation is the actualization of this potentiality. Like the unperceivable dot on the circumference of a circle, like the raindrop which has not isolated itself from the rain bearing cloud, it should be - and is - ever one with the infinite - though misunderstood to be only part of it. How this assumes independence of the infinite is a mystery! Is it ever independent of the infinite, in truth?

But, thank God, such division is a product of ignorance. When this ignorance is removed, it will vanish. Even the law of cause and effect is based on this ignorant and egoistic idea of agency. In God, in his eyes, there is neither cause nor effect, neither merit nor demerit, neither heaven nor hell, neither bondage nor liberation. None of these affects him; and none of these helps him in us to reveal himself. All of them function in the darkness of our soul-slumber. They will vanish when we wake up.

How does one wake up? Wake up!

V:16 - When, however, one is enlightened with the knowledge by which nescience is destroyed, then his knowledge reveals everything, as the sun lights up everything in the daytime.

V:17 - Their intellect absorbed in That, their self being That; established in That, with That as their supreme goal, they go whence there is no return, their sins dispelled by knowledge.

When one wakes up, his dream with all the dream-objects - pleasant and unpleasant, dream-experiences - happiness and misery, dream-actions - good and bad, dream-creations - heaven and hell, and the dream-personality, bound to a delusion, vanish. Man immediately realizes that he is a cell in the body of God, that his self is the self of all, that by virtue of his oneness with the all, he is the all! Not the deluded and ignorant 'I', but God's nature prevails here, and functions in him, as it functions in the entire universe. This, however, is not mental activity, nor intellectual assent, nor a pious belief. It is realization; one who has it need not intellectualize it or verbalize it.

The yogi who has this knowledge enters the state of sleepless sleep. In sleep, too, our entire physical organism functions, in obedience to God's nature. We are at peace and we commit no sin. The man who lets God's nature or will prevail even during the waking hours is at peace and commits no sin. He lives in the constant awareness that Brahman alone is true, the 'world' as such is false perception, and the individual soul is, in essence, one with Brahman. His self realizes its identity with the supreme self. It is not a question of faith or belief, but firm conviction, an unshakable one like the conviction 'I am a human being', needing no proof. This conviction, permeating every thought, word and deed, itself is his goal. With ignorance, egoism and self-limitation gone, he is not subjected to limitation of birth any more!

V:18 - The humble sage, by virtue of true knowledge, sees with equal vision a learned and gentle brahmana, a cow, an elephant, a dog, and an outcaste.

V:19 - Those whose minds are established in sameness and equanimity have already conquered the conditions of birth and death. They are flawless like Brahman, and thus they are already situated in Brahman.

This doctrine of essential equality or 'sameness' is difficult for the ignorance-conditioned intellect to grasp. It is not the dull and drab sameness of uniformity in which all skins will be treated to have the same color, all noses and faces will be standardized by plastic surgery, all men and all beings will eat the same food, wear the same clothes, and will be treated in identical manner. The sage views all in the same light. He does not forget that they have different duties, places and needs - as cells in different parts of the one body of God. He recognizes that the dog and the cow are one in God, and this recognition takes the form in him of attitudes and actions as befit the different roles allotted to them. The application of this doctrine is not as simple as it sounds! For, it is the seeing of sameness that is vital, and any action that substitutes this seeing will lead us astray.

This 'sameness' is the nature of God. God is faultless and spotless. We see that also in his nature, the five elements are all pure and purifying. The self is identical with God and thus free from sin. Sin is ignorance. In the dark, you see some animals moving in the backyard. You throw a stone and go to sleep satisfied that they have gone. They were but shadows! But the 'stone-throwing' created an impression in your mind. In our lives, such actions give rise to tendencies that lead to sin and rebirth. The enlightened soul does not get involved in delusion, sin, and therefore birth and death! Absorbed in 'sameness' it realizes its eternal oneness with Brahman, the infinite.

V:20 - A person who neither rejoices on achieving something pleasant nor laments on obtaining something unpleasant, who is self-intelligent, unbewildered, and who knows the science of God, is to be understood as already situated in beyondness.

V:21 - Such a liberated person is not attracted to material sense pleasure or external objects but is always in trance, enjoying the pleasure within. In this way the self-realized person enjoys unlimited happiness, for he concentrates on the Supreme.

The knowledge outlined in the preceding verses is a double-edged sword. The clever, cunning and pleasure seeking ego often uses it in pursuit of its own revelry in the darkness of ignorance. Hence, the ancient sages had wisely withheld this knowledge from the unclean hands of the undisciplined soul. Krishna, while throwing the gates of knowledge open to all, exposes 'the other edge' of the sword clearly.

It is easy to say 'God's will' or 'I see God in all' when the mind and senses are pampered and the ego is inflated. It does not demand spiritual heroism to demonstrate brave equanimity when life is smooth and fortune is smiling. But, just as night follows day, their counterparts follow them. Then is the time to demonstrate true equilibrium of mind! If you can truly be indifferent to misfortune, dishonor, failure and pain, you are a yogi. This is possible by a twofold sadhana:

1. Detach the mind from external contacts. Reduce the self to zero. In your own heart experience the bliss of God.

2. Expand. Know that the self is the all-pervading Brahman. Realize you are the all. Enjoy the perennial bliss.

In (1) the external disturbing elements do not even touch you. In (2) you identify yourself with them too; you are the robber and you are the robbed - you have only changed the lost object from one hand to the other! You will ever be happy.

However, unless this sadhana springs from, or is at least accompanied by self-knowledge, it will lead either to hypocrisy or, worse, to repression of emotion.

V:22 - An intelligent person does not take part in the sources of misery, O Arjuna, which are due to contact of the senses with the material objects; such pleasures have a beginning and an end, and so the wise man does not delight in them.

This applies even to our own physical body! When there is a rash on the skin, scratching it feels pleasant, but the result is a worsening of the condition. When there is high fever, the tongue likes food and drink which aggravate the misery. As cells in the body of God, this is true of us. These 'cells', conditioned perversely by the pleasure-seeking ego, indulge in 'contacts' which are harmful.

The soul, which is forever one with the supreme being, is carried away by these momentary sense-pleasures. They are not eternal. When they come they appear to be pleasant, but this is soon followed by their departure which causes unpleasantness over prolonged periods.

This tragedy, however, is the direct result of the mind labeling and liking the momentary experience as 'pleasure', thus making it desirable and giving rise to a craving for repetition.

A careful observation will reveal that, in truth, the so-called worldly pleasures are 'the mothers of pain'. By looking at the offspring, it is possible to know the genes of the parent.

We know that in this world every indulgence in worldly 'pleasure' is sooner or later followed, as its offspring, by great pain. The pleasure that gave birth to this pain should, logically, have been pain only. It was; but was mistaken for pleasure.

This definition must qualify the wise man whose characteristics we studied in the foregoing verses. He is naturally not interested in worldly pleasures. Mark that Krishna does not ask him to shun them! There is no struggle involved in this. He who is blissful in God is just not interested in worldly pleasures, in perpetuating them by thought.

Even the description of these pleasures as 'wombs of pain' and 'limited by time' is but a statement of fact and not a preventive threat! We should not forget that the yogi is tranquil, not even frightened by contact with worldly objects.

V:23 - He who is able, while still here in this world to withstand, before the liberation from the body, the impulse born of desire, he is a yogi and a happy man.

V:24 - One whose happiness is within, who is active within, who rejoices within and is illumined within, is actually the perfect mystic. He is liberated in the Supreme, and ultimately he attains the Supreme.

In the inner depth of one's being is the point of contact with Brahman the absolute. It is significant, therefore, that modern science has turned its searchlight of analysis on the 'nucleus', the subtler than the cell structure, for a knowledge of the fundamentals. No wonder, either, that herein is discovered amazing intelligence, power and order. Are we on the threshold of a scientific discovery of God?

We, too, shall find our peace and bliss, light and life, in that innermost depth where the soul is God. We shall realize that the force of God's love holding the whole universe together is misunderstood by the soul as the source of that sense-pleasure which is easily experienced. The soul foolishly desires such pleasure, transferring it to external objects. The yogi clears this mist of ignorance and rejoices within the self.

Pleasure is not the goal of Indian ethics or religion. If personal pleasure is good, and so the goal of man, then there would be chaos in this world. For what is pleasant for one causes pain in another; and someone's pleasure is always bought at the expense of another's. Krishna, therefore, deliberately turns man's vision away from pleasure-seeking desire. Pleasure and pain will still seek us out, on account of past karma, but if we refrain from desiring pleasure and hating pain, karma will work itself out and we shall be liberated.

V:25 - One who is beyond duality and doubt, whose mind is engaged within, who is always busy working for the welfare of all sentient beings, and who is free from all sins, achieves liberation in the Supreme.

V:26 - Those who are free from anger and all material desires, who are self-realized, self-disciplined and constantly endeavoring for perfection, are assured of liberation in the Supreme in the very near future.

The whole series of verses describing the nature of a wise man should be read together in order to obtain a clear picture of Krishna's idea. Half-knowledge is like jumping half the width of an abyss.

'Sameness' is Brahman; and if we get firmly established in perfect equanimity and equilibrium of mind, we shall realize our oneness with the absolute. That sounds simple! But that is only part of the definition.

The wise man is full of dispassion. He does not allow himself to be led away by desire and hatred - the two emotions (e-motion, i.e. externalized movement) that lead the soul away from its centre, Brahman. That seems simple, perhaps, especially to a dry kill-joy ascetic. But this again is only partial description.

Such dispassion must be born of an inner experience of supreme bliss. The wise man is full of it. He is convinced of its reality. You may think: 'Perhaps even this is not so difficult after all; people have discovered drugs which will create an inner wonderland.' Oh, no....

This bliss is not hallucination, but an inner light. It is not a fool's paradise, but the paradise of the sage who sees the self in all and is, therefore, vigorously engaged in the promotion of the welfare of all beings!

Such bliss is the true, perfect, perfection.

We are now dealing with an exciting part of the scripture. In this, Krishna hands us the key to the kingdom of eternal bliss.

When we enter the spiritual path of yoga, we should be prepared to face one enigma after another. Our reaction to environment and opportunity is largely determined by our own preconditioning, mainly brought forward from previous incarnations; but this is not absolute and we even have the privilege of wiping away the whole ugly picture of past vicious tendencies, if only we care to be awake, alert, see and recognize them and vigilantly exercise our free-will to eradicate them. While we depend very much on divine grace for our spiritual practice and progress, the Lord himself will continue to remain aloof and witness them. Here we are thrown upon our own resources, as it were; but, however much we try, the ultimate experience is God's gift which he will bestow upon us only when there is no egoistic receiver. We shall, of course, not know when this false ego has been totally negated; for then who is there to know? These are some of the enigmatic paradoxes we encounter on our march to God - but an intelligent understanding of the principles involved makes the pursuit a deeply interesting spiritual adventure.

In our spiritual practice, the guru will help; and without him we may get lost. Fellow spiritual aspirants may help too. However, no-one but your own purified mind can lead you towards God. That pure mind alone is your best friend. Even the Guru's instructions must be assimilated and made your own. Otherwise, a lifeless imitation might result. Spoon feeding by the Guru will cripple the inner God-given faculties, producing dullness and spiritual suicide. You have to discover the great truth yourself.

Modern scientific knowledge is highly unscientific in this respect. It has a label for everything, including psychological expressions and experiences. This robs us of our greatest opportunity to know, intimately and immediately. The words 'infinite', 'eternal', 'absolute' that we come across on a printed page create an illusion of understanding and knowledge within us, thereby preventing immediate and intimate knowledge of the real, inner meaning of these words - the truth they indicate.

We might, of course, make use of all these crutches, but without feeling complacent enough to dispense with our own legs! Krishna very carefully warns us against such spiritual sloth and slavery.

V:27 - Shutting out all external sense objects, keeping the eyes and vision concentrated between the two eyebrows, suspending the inward and outward breaths within the nostrils - thus controlling the mind, senses and intelligence, the transcendentalist becomes free from desire, fear and anger. One who is always in this state is certainly liberated.

V:28 - With the senses, the mind and the intellect always controlled, having liberation as his supreme goal, free from desire, fear and anger, the sage is verily liberated for ever.

It is all very well to talk of inner experience of the supreme bliss, the spiritual light, and so on, but that is not enough. Intellectual understanding or theory is the starting point, but it is useless unless translated into practice, leading to the realization that the theory vaguely suggests. Krishna is one hundred per cent practical in his approach to life in the world and to God-realization, and introduces here the way in which the inner spiritual experience is to be had by the seeker after the reality.

Experience of the 'sameness' is prevented by the desire-filled mind and deluded intellect, identifying the self with passing phenomenal experiences had via the limited, finite and deceptive senses, and the consequent creation and adoption of false values. Hence, Krishna's yoga consists in inner enlightenment in which the seeker's scale of values is radically altered, the spiritual truth taking the place of the older material ones until the evaluating ego dissolves itself in choiceless awareness - witness consciousness.

Here, again, one should know the art of discerning and disconnecting the disturbing elements! Krishna describes this technique in detail in the next chapter.

Behaviorism - a school of western psychology - recognizes that fear, rage and love are the three innate emotions even of an infant - the natural or animal instincts. Yoga recognizes these emotions, too, and demands that the yogi should be free of them, in order to attain perfection.

V:29 - Knowing Me as the enjoyer of sacrifices of renunciations and austerities, the Supreme Lord of all realms, and the benefactor and well-wisher of all living entities, attain peace.

Before proceeding to describe the technique, Krishna assures us that God's Grace will certainly enable us to achieve that perfection. That perfection is also supreme peace. We need God's Grace to achieve success in anything, most of all in our spiritual quest. That Grace is available to us all, pervading all throughout our lives. There is a reason for it. God is the dearest friend of all beings, and this friend-indeed will enable us to overcome all obstacles and crown all our efforts with success.

Nor is it difficult to propitiate God and earn His Grace, for He is the enjoyer of all sacrifices and austerities. All our actions and services, all our charities and austerities, all our prayers and adorations reach God. If only man recognizes this great truth, then his whole life and all his actions are spiritualized and sublimated. Every action that he performs and every prayer that he offers flows towards the Lord, deepening and widening the channel day after day and hour after hour, so that at the same time God's Grace may flow towards him in ever-increasing abundance. No one need despair.

No one need fear obstacles. With a changed angle of vision the seeker looks upon obstacles as stepping stones. The thing that obstructs our smooth progress along the corridor is not an obstacle, but a step meant to lead us upward and onward!

God's Grace alone will enable us to see it in this light and God is waiting to shower His Grace on us! It is God's Grace that enabled all this to be written, it is God's Grace that enables you to listen to His Song! Divine life is Divine Grace.

6. The Yoga of Meditation

VI:1 - The Bhagavan said : One who is unattached to the fruits of his work and who works as he is obligated, is in the renounced order of life, and he is the true yogi; not he who lights no fire and performs no work.

VI:2 - What's called renunciation is the same as yoga, or linking oneself with the Supreme; for none can become a yogi unless he renounces the desire for sense gratification.

Krishna breaks down all man-made distinctions, created by a mind limited by its own preconceived ideas and imperfections. The man of renunciation - samnyasi - wore the orange robe, had the title of 'swami' and was learned in vedanta; he abandoned all rites and rituals, and did not engage himself even in social activity. The yogi, on the other hand, practiced certain psycho-physical exercises and possessed and exhibited certain psychic powers. The samnyasi need not necessarily do these and the yogi need not necessarily be a man of renunciation. That was the belief.

It is not the validity of these distinctions but the underlying idea that matters. Caught in the snare of these distinctions, we often tend to lose sight of the goal of both renunciation and yoga! We make them an end in themselves, leading in different directions.

Krishna points out the synthesis. Yoga is samnyasa. How can we ever contemplate God if we have not learnt to detach the mind from the world, and to remove worldliness from our mind? How, on the other hand, can we learn to detach the mind from the world, if we do not attach it to God? The two attributes - detaching the mind from the world - samnyasa, and attaching it to God - yoga, are but two ends of the same stick.

Where such synthesis does not prevail, there is hypocrisy, pride and conflict. Where it does, there is sincerity, humility and harmony - whatever be the outward appearance.

VI:3 - For one who is a neophyte in the eightfold yoga system, work is said to be the means; and for one who has already attained to yoga, cessation of all material activities is said to be the means.

VI:4 - A person is said to be have attained to yoga when, having renounced all material desires, he neither acts for sense gratification nor engages in fruitive activities.

Indeed, there are stages in the seeker's life when he should be involved in certain external practices, and there are stages when he becomes engaged in internal practices. In the highest stages, however, the sage is completely quiescent, at rest in the self that is cosmic consciousness.

Until the state that is known as yoga is reached, one should not renounce external practices, for premature renunciation would prevent progress. This is true even of worldly objects and duties. It is more sensible and wiser to cultivate the proper attitude to them and to establish in oneself the correct scale of values, so that the objects drop away, their values deflated, and the duties are seen in their true light as the ego's excuse to cling to the world. The ego does not initiate action. Action comes from somewhere else. Correct scale of values, the correct sense of proportion is itself samnyasa, usually translated as renunciation. Physically pushing the world away might only drive it deeper within oneself, psychologically.

Yet this should not be interpreted to mean undue emphasis on action. A stage comes in the life of every seeker when the external and later the internal action is no longer necessary; then, resting in the peace of the self, he realizes that that is both the doer of all actions and the witness of all passing phenomena! This is not a state to be presumed; it has its own criteria - complete non-attachment and the absence of selfish desires and worldly and heavenly dreams and schemes, which are inwardly and actually seen as haunting phantoms. At that stage, a false sense of duty or the needs for demonstrative practices drop away unnoticed.

VI:5 - A man must elevate himself by his own mind, not degrade himself. The mind is the friend of the conditioned soul, and his enemy as well.

VI:6 - For him who has conquered the mind, the mind is the best of friends; but for one who has failed to do so, his very mind will be the greatest enemy.

How often do we blame our failures on others, on external conditions and on the weather? Everyone is given what we call some blessings - some misfortune and some good fortune. All these are mixed very nicely. It is not that some people are favored and others are not favored. Life does not know any distinction whatsoever. The real trouble lies within ourselves - why do we want to look elsewhere for a solution? The wise man knows that his own impure mind is his worst enemy and the pure mind his best friend.

Yet it is not as though these two are distinct and different. Hence Krishna uses the same word 'self', risking confusion. Just as we have one body with a head and limbs, even so we have an antahkarana - inner instrument or subtle body, the mind, which has its different aspects and functions. Just as a single iron rod may be hot at the end close to fire, and cold at the end farthest from fire, the same mind is pure and strong where it is turned towards the indwelling presence of God, and impure and weak where it is turned away from him and towards the world of sense-experiences.

God has given every man the free-will to adjust the mind in such a way as to bring the whole of it close to God, or to remain turned away from him. The worldly man chooses the latter alternative and thus his own mind becomes his worst enemy, tormenting him with desires and cravings, love and hatred, likes and dislikes. In the case of the wise man, however, the whole mind is close to God and is, therefore, luminous with the knowledge of the indwelling omnipresence.

VI:7 - For one who has conquered the mind, the Self is already reached, for he has attained tranquility. To such a man happiness and distress, heat and cold, honor and dishonor are all the same.

VI:8 - The yogi who is satisfied with the knowledge and the wisdom, who has conquered the senses, and to whom a clod of earth, a piece of stone and gold are the same, is said to be harmonized.

Conquest of the senses does not mean their total inhibition. To be of the same mind does not imply insensibility. It is easy for an idiot to bear insult and injury. One who suffers from the disease known as syringomyelia does not feel heat and cold. Yet I know, from the example of my own Master, that the yogi is extremely sensible, perhaps sensitive too. It is this that enables him to sympathize with others in distress, to feel their need for a blanket in winter, and to desist from hurting their sentiments. My Master showed us that the yogi is far from being a wooden-headed, stonehearted and insensible creature.

The first verse makes it clear that it is the supreme self that is balanced; the self-controlled yogi does not identify that self with the body undergoing the varied experiences of heat and cold, and the mind experiencing pleasure and pain. He recognizes that his abode is subject to the vagaries of the climate; he takes the necessary steps to remedy the situation, without losing his inner balance. The inner balance is lost when there is false identification of the self with the body and the mind.

Concomitant with this wrong identification is the false value that the deluded mind attaches to the objects of the world. The yogi will use a clod of earth to clean his hands, a stone to keep his papers from flying and a piece of gold to feed the hungry - but he has risen above the false sense of values. Each object's true value is its value in context.

The man who cannot distinguish gold from mud, is a mad man; one who sees the difference but is not affected by it, is a sage. He knows the true value of every object in God's nature, and fulfills God's will in every way.

VI:9 - He who is of the same mind to the good-hearted, friends, enemies, the indifferent, the neutral, the hateful, the relatives, the righteous and the unrighteous, excels.

In chapter V, verse 18, the Lord said that the wise men have equal vision. This is a very important concept or teaching in the Bhagavad Gita and needs clear-cut understanding. Our Master used to point out samadarsi - man of equal vision - is different from samavarti - man who behaves alike to all. We are asked to see the same self in all; but that should not lead us to the absurd position of trying to feed the goat with meat and the tiger with grass. To remove the possibility of such misconception the Lord uses another expression here - samabuddhi. This same-mindedness is an entirely inner state that is very difficult to bring down to the level of exhibitionism. The yogi is aware of his unruffled state of mind when he meets any of the people listed in the verse above.

The yogi knows the difference between a newspaper and a currency note; but the sight of the currency note does not produce in him the excitement that it does in a worldly man. The only sign by which we shall know how he feels is the total absence of greed he exhibits and his unwillingness to hoard wealth.

The yogi has trained his buddhi or intelligence to be aware of the indwelling presence in all. But as long as he lives in the physical body, in this material world, he has a double-consciousness; he sees the gold and the clod of earth, but is aware that they both are part of God's nature. His intelligence is aware of God's omnipresence, though the mind and senses still receive the varied impressions in the world. His actions and reactions are strictly in accordance with God's will, unconditioned by personal likes and dislikes, love or hatred. He is naturally not attached to anything, neither rejecting it nor clinging to it, but enjoys it while it is there, knowing that everything is pervaded by God and his will be done. His individual 'me' always knows itself as part of the great 'He'.

VI:10 - Let the yogi try constantly to concentrate his mind on the Supreme, remaining in solitude, alone, with the mind and the body controlled, and free from hope and greed.

VI:11 - In a clean spot, having established a firm seat of his own, neither too high nor too low, made of a cloth, a skin and kushagrass, one over the other,

Now follows practical instruction on the art of meditation. It is not as if God is somebody else upon whom we meditate. When the wandering self abandons its pleasure seeking misadventure, God-consciousness is experienced. The effort put forth is more to restrain this waywardness of the mind than to see anything. Seeing sights and hearing sounds are often subtler expressions of the waywardness of the mind. Patanjali, the author of Raja Yoga Sutras, asks us to beware of them.

The 'hope and greed' mentioned here need not necessarily be restricted to worldliness. Even greed for rapid spiritual evolution may be included, for such greed will inevitably give the ego the best chance to present illusions of supernormal phenomena and thus distract the self from its higher pursuits.

Solitude is important; we should choose for the following practice a place and a time where and when we are not likely to be disturbed and where, therefore, our attention is secure. However, true solitude is psychological and inward - the knowledge that you and I are alone in this world.

A clean spot refers not only to physical and outward cleanliness, but also to the atmosphere of the place. It should be holy - associated with God. In meditation, the mind becomes extremely subtle and is therefore subject to the very vibrations in the atmosphere.

The seat should neither be too low, thus subject to disturbance from insects, nor too high, causing fear of a fall. The prescribed seat of grass, skin and cloth prevents the body from being affected by the condition of the earth and also preserves the inner magnetic force, preventing it from being earthed and lost.

VI:12 - There, having made the mind one-pointed, with the actions of the mind and the senses controlled, let him, seated on the seat, practice Yoga for the purification of the self.

The light of the self is veiled by its own rays, blinding our conditioned and limited perception. These rays are conducted via the mind - conscious and subconscious - and the senses in order to illumine the world. In meditation, the yogi controls the inner rays in such a way that his attention is not distracted by the senses and the activity of citta - subconscious mind.

The citta functions on account of:

- (a) latent desires and tendencies - memory, and
- (b) the movement of prana.

The yogi, therefore, practices pranayama - regulated breathing - and turns the desires upon their own source! Thus the citta is freed from turbulent activity and it therefore becomes transparent enough to reveal the underlying essential divinity of the self.

The mind and the senses are already turbulent. Violently subduing them will only result in making them more turbulent! A wind opposed by another will only make a whirlwind. Control is best illustrated in the expression: he has good control of the motor-car. Not that he has shut the engine off, but he knows in which direction to steer, when to apply the brakes or press the accelerator. Controlling the mind and the senses, therefore, implies that we are their masters, their skilled manipulators, not their prison warders.

Some people foolishly assert that the aggregate of the senses is the mind. On the contrary, the senses are the leaking holes of the mind. Hence, when they are controlled, the energy and the intelligence that leak through them will be made available for the higher purpose of purification of the self.

When control is achieved, the self is experienced as ever-present and eternal reality.

Meditation does not create the self but only removes the opacity, purifying the mind so that the insight shines, unveiling the truth. When the mirror is cleaned the face is seen; the cleaning did not create the image, but only removed the dirt which hid the image.

VI:13 - Let him firmly hold his body, head and neck erect and perfectly still, gazing at the tip of his nose, without looking around.

VI:14 - Serene-minded, fearless, firm in the vow of a Brahmachari, having controlled the mind, thinking of me and balanced in mind, let him sit, having Me as his supreme goal.

The body and mind are interrelated. If the mind is unsteady, the body shakes too; as in anger. If the body is agitated, the mind is not steady. The body must be kept still in order that it may be forgotten and transcended.

The 'erect' posture is the natural one - though it is considered to be a special yogi's posture on account of the distortion of our normal posture. In it, the vital force or prana flows smoothly, especially along the spine, thus ensuring equilibrium both of the body and the mind, which the prana links and enlivens.

'Nasika-agra' in the original text may mean tip, root or front of the nose. Sanskrit is a rich and flexible language. Certain yogis claim that special psychic merits accrue from gazing at the tip or the root of the nose, between the eyebrows. It is best to look directly in front of the nose at a symbol of God or the flame of a lamp. When you think of God and endeavor to visualize him within yourself, you will discover that the vision is abstracted and therefore even the objects in front of you fade away. The important point is to sit without looking around.

Once the desired concentration of mind and internal visualization of God have been achieved, then it matters little if the eyes are kept open or closed. The visualization is imagination. Imagination has image in. Looking at it enquiringly reveals the substance of which this in-image is made. If the visualization is dull, the result is nil.

'Brahmacari' is one whose mind roams in God or Brahman - though in a restricted sense, it refers to continence. Fearlessness is extolled because in deep contemplation, when one forgets the body, one is apt to be afraid of losing it. One whose goal is God is fearless and is prepared to sacrifice anything to reach him.

VI:15 - Thus, always keeping the mind balanced, the yogi, with the mind controlled, attains to the peace abiding in Me, which culminates in liberation.

The yogi seated in meditation learns to balance his mind. Krishna, by quietly and unpretentiously slipping this verse in here, points out at this stage that the yogi's balanced mind is not at all upset at any time. 'Always' warns us against the delusion that peace is attained only during meditation. If this balance or peace is itself a type of meditation, then such meditation too is continuous and unbroken.

In fact you will notice that the popular misconceptions about meditation are swept away by Krishna. He does not decry or condemn them; he does not even want us to discourage others who have their own ways of approaching the truth. He wisely instructs us in the best way, his own way, in which we shall ever dwell in him.

The yogi does not enjoy the peace of mind or of meditation, but the peace abiding in God or the peace of abiding in God. When the mind is controlled and the attention is focused on God, excluding the distracting rays which reflect over the surface of the mind and leak through the senses, the yogi discovers that the whole universe is pervaded by God-consciousness, filled with God's life and clothed in his body. In a not-so-obvious manner, it is the one divine presence that pervades all things. When that truth sinks deeper and deeper, the yogi suddenly discovers that the inside-outside divisions are non-existent. With closed eyes, he sees God within; with open eyes he sees God all round. God lives in him, and he dwells in God.

The peace of abiding in God culminates in nirvana - liberation. Nirvana is completely stripping oneself. There are no coverings. All covering is ignorance. Not that the yogi should go about naked; but he should and does cease to identify the self with the changing forms of the body and of mentality. He sees everything, right from 'his' erstwhile ego, mind and senses, down to the remotest object in the world, as none other than the one consciousness. Nirvana is the extinction of pleasure-seeking, whether it was seeking for worldly pleasure, heavenly pleasure, or some other goal described as supreme bliss.

VI:16 - There is no possibility of one's becoming a yogi, O Arjuna, if one eats too much, or eats too little, sleeps too much or does not sleep enough.

VI:17 - Yoga becomes the destroyer of pain for him who is always moderate in eating and recreation, who is moderate in exertion in actions, who is moderate in sleep and wakefulness.

Yoga is not a physical, mental or psychic feat. It is life itself; not the kind of restless life swinging constantly between the two extremes of exhilaration and depression, indulgence and denial, sensuousness and asceticism, but the harmonious flow of the divine will along the wise middle path. The Kathopanishad characterizes the spiritual path as 'the razor's edge', difficult to tread. The razor's edge is difficult to tread, not on account of the fear that it may injure our feet, but because it is so sharp that it is invisible.

On both sides of this subtle middle path there is danger, pain and suffering. Both extremes imply a strong identification of the body, mind and the personal ego with the self. Yoga aims precisely at the removal of this false identification, and the consequent private desire and 'seeking' under whatever label it appears.

The man who loves eating is a glutton; but the man who refuses to eat is an egoist. The former identifies the self - atma - with the body; the latter, with the vain personality or egoism which swells with pride at its ability to go without food. Both of them are confusing the self with the not-self. The yogi, however, dissociates the body, mind and ego from the real self, while allowing God's nature to reveal itself through all these.

In gluttony there is pain, as also in abstention. Pleasure is invariably followed by pain. Vanity is accompanied by fear or injured pride. The yogi who pursues the middle path is blissfully free from all these. Only he lives; others drag on in miserable existence.

VI:18 - When the perfectly controlled mind rests in the Self only, free from longing for the objects of desire, then it is said: he is united.

VI:19 - As a lamp in a windless place does not waver, so the yogi, whose mind is controlled, remains always steady in his meditation on the transcendent Self.

Again and again, Krishna reminds us that control of mind and yoga imply non-attachment, which itself does not mean vain, foolish and egoistic hatred of, or running away from anything in this world, nor deluded cruelty inflicted on one's own body. Non-attachment is an intelligent understanding of the real nature of the soul as the image of God, and the body, mind and ego as the external nature of God. The body, mind and ego provide an abode for the individualized self to dwell in, become perfect and thus witness the reality of God.

The body exists, even as the house exists. It comes into contact with various objects of this world, even as the house comes into contact with wind, rain and sunshine. From these contacts the mind is continually learning its lessons in this vast school of the world. However, ignorance attributes pleasure and pain to the objects and experiences, and consequently reacts with attachment and aversion. These are the factors that keep the individual soul in bondage. They constantly disturb the inner equilibrium, being themselves the fruits of inner disharmony. If the mind is not at peace, life is a nightmare, a string of endless trials.

The yogi's mind, on the other hand, is like a lamp in a windless spot, burning calmly and steadily, illuminating all that surrounds it. This is one of the reasons why the seeker has a candle burning at the altar always - to remind him of the ideal he is striving for. It should never be forgotten that this inner harmony should prevail at all times, not only during meditation. The lamp in a windless place is not inert, but it is unimaginably intense activity called combustion. Similarly, the yogi's steady mind is not dull; it is the home of blossoming insight. In that insight life flows on uninterruptedly, blissfully, in strict accord with God's will.

VI:20 - When the mind, restrained by the practice of Yoga, attains to quietude, and when, seeing the Self by the Self, he is satisfied in his own Self,
VI:21 - When the yogi feels that infinite bliss which can be grasped by the intellect, and which transcends the senses, and, established wherein he never moves from the Reality.

Satisfaction is an inner subjective experience. When the sensual urge, the surge of the animal passions - which is nothing more than tension, stress or pain, subsides on account of an artificial release of the tension by the appeasement of that urge, there supersedes an experience of satisfaction within oneself; but since it is merely an appeasement, the tension builds up once again and once again man experiences pain. As he continues with this policy of appeasement, the intervals between two periods of stress become shorter and shorter and there is continuous pain .

The yogi knows this and he therefore consciously remains rooted in the fountain-source of satisfaction, satisfaction in the self - atma. He resolutely refuses to let the tension or urge build up, culminating in futile appeasement. Such an attitude is possible only if we are able to lift the veil of ignorance which hides the fountain of infinite bliss beyond the intellect and the senses. The veil usually confuses our vision and deludes us into thinking that the happiness that is experienced after the appeasement of the urge, comes from the appeasement itself. It is thought that causes this confusion; thought is the veil. Thought links the external experience with the inner delight, and craves for its repetition and continuance. Thought silenced is meditation.

The yogi overcomes this confusion through meditation. Delight experienced in meditation, without any external prop, gives the lie to the old notion that happiness is outside. Independent happiness is the most intense, and it is unshakable because it is self-dependent. So long as our peace or happiness depends upon external agencies, we cannot be happy.

VI:22 - Which, having obtained, he thinks there is no other gain superior to it; wherein established, he is not moved even by heavy sorrow,
VI:23 - Let that be known by the name of Yoga, the severance from union with pain. This Yoga should be practiced with determination and with an undespending mind.

When everything is all right and the sun is shining on you, you may think that you have no doubts at all and that you know exactly what God is, what meditation means, and that you see God. But when there is trouble in life, where is that God? Suddenly the ego rises, there is insecurity, fear, agony, and all your belief deserts you. This is the danger of a belief. So Krishna says here: If you have a vision of truth, test it against this definition: established in that truth, can you withstand the greatest calamity and smile? If you can, then it is possible that you have discovered the truth. If you have not been put through such a test, then suspend the judgment.

As long as we identify the self with mind, body and the world, and experience only external pleasure, we are always in pain. When this deluded identification is removed and the consciousness is united with the self, as in yoga, then we are in bliss, we are bliss itself. This is the highest attainment; for there can be no happiness greater than the bliss that is independent and complete. This bliss cannot be removed from one established in it, nor can it be modified in him.

Since he is totally detached from the world, the body and the mind, and since he has realized that the self is an independent silent witness of the world phenomena, including his body and mind, he remains unmoved in all conditions. He knows the self to be the immortal, eternal, all-full, perfect and independent bliss. The real divinity within.

What we need is firm determination - not the pig-headed obstinacy with which it is confused, real understanding and an intelligent approach to the truth of our essential, divine being.

VI:24 - Abandoning without reserve all the desires born of Sankalpa, and completely restraining the whole group of senses by the mind from all sides,
VI:25 - Gradually, step by step, with full conviction, one should become situated in trance by means of intelligence. And thus the mind should be fixed on the self alone, let him not think of anything else.

Sankalpa has been translated into thought, notion, concept. But, simply, it is when a thought is entertained and strengthened. The samkalpa is formed between the experiencer and an experience which takes place in the mind. So, what we call our thoughts are not very different from imagination; yet, throughout the day we think!

Suddenly we realize that life has been a slave to these samkalpa - these imaginary objects which give rise to cravings and desires, and we have painted a gruesome world in which we see friends, enemies, saints, sinners and so on; and because this mind or samkalpa interferes, we do not know what is natural to us, and life is a struggle. The yogi, having determined this, constantly endeavors to withdraw himself into his own self - knowing that this is the greatest source of joy and satisfaction - whilst carrying on his normal activity in the yoga spirit.

That is what my Master called his background of thought. Even while he worked, lived and enjoyed in the external world, as it were, he was established within the self. This swinging between meditation and life is Krishna's way of intimating their unity. One without the other is imperfect and incomplete.

During the active state, the yogi tries to realize 'All this is God'; but in order to prevent subtle attachment and self-delusion creeping in, during meditation he tries to remove the consciousness of the All completely, and remains rooted in the self alone. Firmly holding on to the one God thought 'All this is God', the mind drops all other thoughts and desires and remains serene. But, God is not thought; hence even this has to be transcended.

Beyond thought is a dimension quite different from all that has been thought of or expressed. Krishna, the supreme preceptor, points to that.

VI:26 - From whatever and wherever the mind wanders due to its flickering and unsteady nature, one must certainly withdraw it and bring it back under the control of the self.

VI:27 - The yogi whose mind is fixed on Me verily attains the highest happiness. By virtue of his identity with Brahman, he is liberated; his mind is peaceful, his passions are quieted, and he is freed from sin.

VI:28 - Steady in the Self, being freed from all material contamination, the yogi achieves the highest perceptual stage of happiness, in touch with the Supreme Consciousness.

Detach the mind from the objects, attach it to the Lord, said my Master, Swami Sivananda. This is not easy, but it is not impossible, and, what is vital to remember, it has got to be done.

The mind, wandering away from the center of our being, seeking the contact of the objects of this world, is the cause of sin and is itself sin. This, verily, is suffering too. The mind, uprooted from its own center - the self, wanders in misery, weeping in pain, groping in darkness, desperate in anxiety. Even as a child that has strayed away from its mother is filled with dread, weeps, and is unable to enjoy the carnival, the mind of the worldly man who has lost his contact with God is filled with worries, and he is unable to enjoy the omnipresence of God.

When that mind is detached from the contact of worldly objects by constant and persistent practice, and when it is simultaneously attached to Brahman, it enables the yogi to enjoy infinite bliss which is his own essential nature.

Once this inner contact is made, the yogi should try to remain in it. It will be easy because the happiness derived from it is incomparably superior to all else, and the mind will be ready and eager to drop all other pursuits. The path thenceforth becomes easy and smooth. Remaining firmly established in Brahman, the yogi becomes Brahman, i.e., he realizes that Brahman alone is real, and the 'I' has never been real. I exist, of course, but not as 'I' or 'me' or 'mine'. The ego sense, the mind, the intellect, the world and matter are there, but as integral, inseparable God.

VI:29 - With the mind harmonized by Yoga, he sees the Self abiding in all beings, and all beings in the Self; he sees the same everywhere.

VI:30 - For one who sees Me everywhere and sees everything in Me, I am never lost, nor is he ever lost to Me.

Meditation - as described in verses 11 to 14 - May 8th-10th - is only a part, though a vital, indispensable spirit-awakening part - of yoga, but should never be regarded as all that yoga means. God is omnipresent. God-realization must, therefore, definitely mean realizing his omnipresence, not only within oneself or within one's own sanctuary, but in and ultimately as all.

When we come into contact with the objects and personalities in this world, the mind immediately reacts in the customary way furnishing them with names, forms and assumed attributes - good and evil, ugly and beautiful, pleasant and unpleasant.

Language is a screen. We use words to cover up what we do not want to see. We indulge in this name-calling because we do not know the truth and do not care to know the truth.

However, it is possible to reach the realization that ignorance has created these names and the simultaneous illusion that 'I know', whereas in fact, we do not know anything. One who is able to enter into that spirit gets the grace and enlightenment.

Therefore, the yoga student is asked to meditate and first establish inner contact. Once this is done, it is easier to overlook the name and form of the objects and personalities and perceive the divine essence in all.

Meditation alone without this dynamic practice of the omnipresence of God is of very little use. Meditation itself is not possible if our daily life denies his omnipresence. We can make no progress if we start the car and do not make a move!

It is the one infinite being that shines through all this diversity as all this. To see this is, in fact, meditation. Then there is neither withdrawal from nor involvement in the world.

Samsara - the perennial stream - flows on neither calling for your involvement nor demanding your withdrawal. To see this is to see God; to see God is to be God!

VI:31 - He who, being established in unity, worships Me who dwells in all beings, that yogi abides in me, whatever may be his mode of living.

VI:32 - He who, through the likeness of the Self, sees equality everywhere, be it pleasure or pain, he is regarded as the highest yogi.

This is the goal of yoga, clearly stated here and still more graphically reiterated in verse 46 of the 18th chapter. We worship God in shrines, churches and mosques; we approach him through his various manifestations - which we shall study in the 10th chapter; we sit in a secluded spot and meditate upon his presence in our heart, but all these are the exercises necessary to acquire proficiency in the art of yoga. Without them we shall get nowhere; but if we get stuck in them, we shall get nowhere either.

Krishna clearly declares two vital truths here: the yogi should worship all beings in whom God dwells, and his mode of living is immaterial if this attitude of worshipfulness is ensured. Whatever be one's trade or occupation, one can be a yogi. Whatever be one's caste, religion, color or nationality, one can be a yogi. From God's standpoint, there is nothing secular or mean, profane or impure, because he is the source of everything. It is the inner attitude of worshipfulness that is important. That is the philosopher's stone which transforms all activity into yoga. The yogi does not entertain the least idea of profit; he does not feel he helps anyone or even that he serves anyone. The yogi worships all beings. This worship naturally takes the form of loving - God-loving - service.

Just as the Lord dwells in one's own body and mind, with all their weakness and imperfections, he also dwells in others' bodies and minds. The yogi transcends good and evil. Pleasure and pain are events, not experiences; praise and censure are opinions which do not affect him. His mind - or, rather 'the mind' - is rooted in God consciousness, and therefore he goes beyond all these and rests in same-ness which is the omnipresence of God.

VI:33 - Arjuna said : O Krishna, the system of yoga which You have summarized, appears impractical and unendurable to me, for the mind is restless and unsteady.

VI:34 - For the mind is restless, turbulent, obstinate, and very strong, O Krishna; I deem it as difficult to control as to control the wind.

Anyone who has endeavored to fix the mind knows how difficult it is; if the object of our attention is outside, and sensuously attractive, perhaps it compels our attention. Anyone who has tried to focus the attention on an idea or an ideal within oneself will appreciate what Arjuna says here! An otherwise passive mind becomes suddenly active; the otherwise placid lake of the mind becomes agitated; and the mind takes us farther away from the inner ideal than we ever imagined it could!

The power of delusion, of ignorance, of animal desires and instincts, is so strong that any attempt at controlling the mind is seriously resented by it. It is the experience of many that since beginning to concentrate and meditate, the inner impurities seem to have grown. We seem to be farther from God now than before we even thought about him.

It is good to know that it is a step towards God, a sign of progress! The inner devil has been disturbed, shaken from his complacent existence as the lord of our inner world. Like an angry cat at bay, he is now fighting with his back to the wall - he is cornered!

The fight is hard and long-drawn, but let us fight the good fight with faith in the Lord, for once the mind itself is offered at the Feet of the Lord, to serve him, it will become our best friend. This is the symbolism of Hanuman, the son of wind - wind and mind are the same, only the 'm' is upside-down, in the Ramayana. This restless monkey - the mind is invincible, wise, and heroic, and is able to work wonders, once it is made to serve the Lord.

VI:35 - The Blessed Lord said : Undoubtedly, O Arjuna, the mind is difficult to control and restless; but, by practice and by dispassion, it may be restrained.
VI:36 - For one whose mind is unbridled, self-realization is difficult work. But he whose mind is controlled, and who strives by right means, is assured of success. That is my opinion.

The greatest aid to control of the mind is the realization that the uncontrolled mind is our worst foe. Sooner or later it must be controlled. It must be controlled before we reach the goal. Well then, why not now?

Practice makes everything perfect. No-one achieves proficiency in anything without persistent practice with ever-increasing intensity. If two slices of bread do not appease our hunger, we ask for more, but if two hours' meditation is not enough to still our mind, we do not prolong and intensify it, but abandon meditation altogether! Why this illogical approach?

In the word practice are included several allied practices like yoga postures - asana, pranayama - breathing, study of scriptures, repetition of holy names and singing hymns. 'Practice' should not be merely repetitive and dull. Practice is alertness, constant vigilance. However, practice alone will not do. Practice without vairagya - dispassion only helps us to master the technique of mind control, but not to control the mind. If we are strongly attached to the pleasures of the senses while practicing to free ourselves from them, we labor aimlessly and vainly, like drunken men who row a boat the whole night without first loosening the chain that binds it to the shore! We might develop our muscles but we will not reach our destination.

Vairagya is inner absence of infatuated desire or craving. It is not running away but turning away from worldly pleasures. Even with wide open eyes, while moving about in the world, the gaze is turned within; and the yogi thus perceives the Lord in and through the world. He neither shuns the world nor clings to it, but pierces the veil and perceives the Lord. That is true vairagya or dispassion.

VI:37 - Arjuna said : What is the destination of the man of faith who does not persevere, who in the beginning takes to the process of self-realization, but who later desists due to worldly-mindedness, and thus does not attain perfection in mysticism?

VI:38 - Fallen from both worlds, does he not perish like a rent cloud, O Krishna, supportless, and deluded on the path of Brahman?

VI:39 - This is my doubt, O Krishna, and I ask you to dispel it completely. But for You, none is to be found who can destroy this doubt.

Granted, it is possible to control the mind if we have the necessary faith. But, faith in the electric kettle alone will not boil the water! We have to fill it with water, plug it in and switch on the current. Yet, something might still go wrong somewhere and our purpose may be defeated.

This is especially true in the path of yoga. Worldly duties and scriptural rituals often drop away from the student of yoga, yet, in the words of lord Krishna, if these are abandoned prematurely, out of delusion or because they are painful and troublesome, it would be wrong. How does one know?

Sometimes the scriptures themselves warn us that the abandonment of these duties is sin. We are on the horns of a dilemma now. We, as students of yoga, do not have sufficient faith in the scriptures to fulfill our duties. We have faith in yoga; but we may not have the will-power, the understanding, single-minded dedication to the quest and the ability to look within and see that pleasure is a mental creation and pleasure-seeking a folly. We have leapt off one cliff of the ravine but have not been able to reach the opposite side, or so it seems.

Are we doomed to destruction or frustration, then?

It is a very real and valid fear. We abandon worldly pleasures, but have no inner strength to reach supreme bliss. Do we then wander about as demented men or stray dogs?

VI:40 - The Blessed Lord said : O Arjuna, neither in this world, nor in the next world is there destruction for him; none, verily, who does good, my dear friend, ever comes to grief.

Once again we have a great verse in the Bhagavad Gita, every verse of which is indeed memorable and inspiring. Lord Krishna goes one step beyond the answer to the immediate question and makes a sweeping, most reassuring generalization. Every verse in the Gita should be in gold lettering, but this one should be studded in diamonds.

With what loving solicitude the Lord addresses Arjuna - and so you and me: O my son - everyone and every devotee especially, is the son of God. How lovingly does he assure us that we are forever safe, if we do good always!

At some time or other in life everyone is overwhelmed by the doubt: what is the use of doing good in this world of injustice with its perverted scale of values? We often find rogues prospering, cruel oppressors and heartless exploiters rolling in wealth and power, while the voiceless, god-fearing man of righteousness and the humble servant of God are trampled upon. Yet Krishna assures us that no evil ever befalls the good man! Our welfare is already guaranteed by the omnipresent divinity, God.

We should revise our empirical logic. The wicked man's road to hell lies through an increase of worldly wealth and power, the good man's path to God-realization lies through apparent - he does not feel it, since his mind is devoted to God - suffering in which he sheds all his worldliness, lurking evil tendencies and the effects of his own past karma. Let us rejoice! Never shall we suffer in the least if we do good, and even if in the eyes of the world we pass through suffering, inwardly we shall rejoice that we are drawing closer to God. These experiences - wrongly called suffering - are birth-pangs after which we shall be reborn in God, to enjoy perennial bliss and immortality. He who has rightly understood that pleasure is a creature of thought and is thus free of it, is also free of pain.

VI:41 - Having attained to the worlds of the righteous and, having dwelt there for everlasting years, he who fell from Yoga is reborn in the house of rich aristocracy.

VI:42 - Or he takes his birth in a family of transcendentalists who are surely great in wisdom. Verily, such a birth is rare in this world.

The theory of evolution is inextricably bound up with the theory of reincarnation. Self-purification which leads to the instantaneous, spontaneous and indescribable realization of the ever-present self-luminous self, is not possible in a single life-span, though this need not necessarily involve taking birth after birth. You are trapped in this world in which you experience a succession of happiness and unhappiness, success and failure, pleasure and pain. Something is born in you, something dies in you. That itself is enough reincarnation. Each day you are born and you die a thousand times. Every hope is a new birth. Every frustration is a death. With faith you will recognize naturally, in and through these changes, something that is immutable. This is the key to self-realization.

Even the 'intervals' of physical 'death' - which is only an unusually extended form of deep sleep - are an indispensable step in this delicate process of purification, meant to ensure that the overall effect of the accomplishments of each life-span is preserved and the cumbersome and distracting details are washed away. Thus, life span after life span, the individual soul is dyed deeper and deeper into the color of God. That is what Jesus meant when he said: Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect. The perfection alluded to here is a perfection equal to the perfection of God.

Krishna specifically mentions that the soul incarnates in worlds other than this; several recent incidents prove that it is possible for the soul to return to this very earth. Even the 'recall' of Lazarus by Jesus points to this possibility. However, that we assume a body suitable for further evolution towards divine perfection is certain.

Rightly understood, this doctrine will not cause despair or pessimism because of the length of time this process of self-purification needs. Time itself is relative and illusory: he who vigilantly strives to discover perfection lives in the eternal now.

VI:43 - There he comes in touch with the knowledge acquired in his former body, and strives again for perfection.

VI:44 - By virtue of the divine consciousness of his previous life, he automatically becomes attracted to the yogic principles - even without seeking them; he stands always above the ritualistic principles.

In his next incarnation in the house of a yogi, the seeker's spiritual aspiration is rekindled. We have a beautiful synthesis of the theories of individual evolution and heredity. Man is now what he had made of himself in the past birth. He carries with him the subtle residue of the sum-total of all his actions, good and evil.

How does this reconcile with our discoveries about heredity? Let us bear in mind that heredity does not always operate; it is an influence even as environment is an influence. It influences ... what? The evolving soul, which has its characteristics largely determined by the activities in a past birth. Hence, genius is seldom inherited. With few exceptions it seems to appear spontaneously in families not unusually gifted.

However, Krishna gives us a clue to the reconciliation of the two theories. The evolving soul is reborn in a family of kindred souls; this appears to our unenlightened vision to be the operation of the law of heredity.

Hereditary influences and environmental influences may or may not be conducive to spirituality - even one's own superficial tendencies may be unspiritual! No one is perfect in the world and the incarnating soul is certainly not so. As Jesus Christ would have said: Why call me good? Only God is good. Yet, the force of past yoga practice compels the aspirant to pursue the goal from where he left the path in the previous incarnation. A study of the lives of saints is the best way to understand this paradox. Often they are suddenly whisked away from a worldly life to the path of yoga.

VI:45 - But when the yogi engages himself with sincere endeavor in making further progress, being washed of all contaminations, then ultimately, after many, many births of practice, he attains the supreme goal.

Eternal damnation is a childish idea. If it is found in some scriptures, it is used only as a figure of speech - a hyperbole. It is meant to frighten immature souls from the path of unrighteousness.

How can the good God damn us forever, having created us in his image? He, who is our father and mother, will never condemn us forever. If purgatory is a place of purification, hell is only a place of more intense purification. The difference is one of degree, not of essential nature as the difference between a washbasin and a bathtub.

Our scriptures emphatically declare that God, having created us, has entered into us as the soul of our soul. The soul is nothing other than the image of God. He is the sole reality in us. Even if it were possible for God to condemn us forever, in effect he would be condemning himself - which is too absurd to deserve a second thought.

There is only one course open to the soul of man and that is redemption. We must be redeemed, and that is why the Lord sends us teachers, saints, saviors and his own incarnations time and again. If we assiduously follow their precepts, we shall reach the goal sooner.

After studying the Gita, put into practice a little of what you have learnt. In yoga, the light-switch for the next stage of the staircase is on the previous one, to which you first have to climb. Then the next stage becomes visible! You cannot see the final stage or goal now. Others have seen, described the levels and have also erected the stairway of yoga practice. Have faith. Follow their instructions diligently. You, too, will reach the highest goal. Blind faith is blindness, not faith. Faith implies a glimpse and a longing for a vision. This faith, very different indeed from 'religious faith', sustains spiritual efforts. Spiritual progress is gradual - this is a statement of fact, not a commandment to make it so slow!

VI:46 - A yogi is greater than the ascetic, greater than the wise, and greater than the fruitive worker. Therefore, be a yogi, O Arjuna.

VI:47 - And of all yogis, he who always abides in me with great faith, worshipping me in supernatural loving service, is most intimately united with me in yoga and is the highest of all.

Here the expression 'yogi' should be taken to mean: one who practices the yoga described in the previous verses - he who has harmonized himself with the indwelling omnipresence and he who, therefore, is freed from all self-centered attachments and aversions, selfishness and egoism.

Asceticism and erudition often lead us only farther from God, by adding the reinforcement of vanity to the naturally impenetrable wall of ignorance. The aim of yoga is to break down the little ego, in order that the cosmic I - which is non-different from 'he' and 'you' - may be revealed. Mere asceticism, erudition or even service only fattens the little ego and thus blocks even the struggle for its eradication.

For the eventual transcendence of the ego, several paths have been laid down by our ancient masters. In all of them there is lurking danger ever present: if the sense of direction is lost, if the means are mistaken for the end, or if the landmarks usurp the glory of destination, great may be the fall. That is what is known as the goal-less wandering in the jungle of dogma.

Krishna presents a revolutionary concept of yoga here; and it is a wonderful aid to meditation, too. Instead of trying to fill the finite heart with the infinite Lord, the devotee is asked to offer himself into the heart of God! This attitude can be adopted in meditation too. Start with the visualization of God in the heart, let him expand and take over, your body, the room, and the whole world. Merge yourself in him. If the meditation is not imagination but realization, humility arises and the seeker is swallowed up in the seeking. The ego dissolves and the king of the universe is seen - see-king.

7. The Yoga of Wisdom and Realization

VII:1 - The Blessed Lord said : O Arjuna, now hear how by practicing yoga in full consciousness of Me, with mind attached to me, you can know me in full, free from doubt.

VII:2 - I shall declare to you in full this knowledge, combined with direct realization, after knowing which nothing more here remains to be known.

The scriptures are full of knowledge and wisdom garnered from direct, intuitive, inner experience. The masters can impart knowledge to you and lead you to the threshold of the highest experience, saving you from pitfalls and inspiring you at every step. However, the great sage Vasistha says: Enlightenment is not reached by resorting to a teacher or a teaching; but it is not had without them. The teacher and the teaching act as catalysts, their purpose is unknown. They are necessary, but not to be dependent upon.

We ourselves should be intent on God-realization, on the practice of yoga. We shall have to equip ourselves with the four means to salvation: discrimination, dispassion, virtues conducive to tranquility of the mind, and an intense yearning for God.

Knowledge of God is beyond the mind and intellect. It must be devoutly and lovingly received by the heart. This wisdom is not something which can be gained merely by studying or listening to discourses. It is not in words, nor in concepts. But, unless the mind is calm and the intellect open, that knowledge cannot gain admission into the inner chambers of our being. And unless the heart is pure, free from passions, attractions, selfishness and worldly pursuits, it will not receive the knowledge. Only the pure heart is 'intent on God'.

How are we to ensure these receptive conditions? There is only one aid here - satsang or constant association with the wise, the devout and other spiritual seekers. Study of their works also constitutes satsang. Frequent gatherings to talk about God and yoga, to contemplate the nature of the world and life, to meditate upon God and thus to acquire a reassessment of values, are a great help, too. However, these must awaken us from our slumber of ignorance, keeping us vigilantly watchful of the mind and aware of the sorrow that thought-process is.

VII:3 - Among thousands of men, one perchance strives for perfection; even among those successful strivers, only one perchance knows me in essence.

Humanity can be likened to a pyramid, broad at its base and becoming progressively narrower as we ascend to the top. The world is full of souls who have risen just one step above the animal, still not secure in their foothold even there! Yet, they too, shall reach the goal in God's good time, even though they are full of instinctual behavior and are interested only in their own survival. They are animals in human disguise and are laborers who toil for mere selfish ends. A few more births of experience chisel them into better human shape and they are elevated to the rank of workers, promoting their own welfare with one hand and the welfare of others with the other. Experience soon teaches them the futility of such work and they begin to question: What is the purpose of all this? They seek an answer, becoming seekers. This fire of quest burns furiously in their heart, consuming the animal nature, selfishness, and self-seeking. It also sheds a beam of light on their path to God-realization. In that light, in course of time, they see the truth and become sages. The world is full of laborers, few workers, fewer seekers and still fewer and rarer, sages. The striving seeker will eventually become a sage, perhaps now or a million years hence. In the words of the Bible: Many are called, few are chosen. Nobody knows what determines this, but this doctrine of grace must be understood correctly. Only he who has completely surrendered himself to the divine becomes eligible for grace. Not one who is satisfied merely with intellectual understanding, but he whose heart is receptive to spiritual truths. Yet, he who has truly surrendered himself to God does not know it. This total surrender is not for the ego to determine; only God can determine it. Hardly one of the sages, the perfected ones, knows God in essence! Why? Because on attaining perfection they merge in him. In that state of complete integration God reveals himself, but only to a few. It is they who return to the world as God's gift of himself, to guide us as our masters.

VII:4 - Earth, water, fire, air, ether, mind, intellect and egoism, thus is My Nature divided eightfold.

VII:5 - Besides this inferior nature, O Arjuna, there's a superior energy of mine, which comprises all the living entities, who are struggling with material nature and are sustaining the universe.

What is nature? It is God's nature! This long-forgotten truth is revealed here. Its realization opens the kingdom of God to all - scientists, biologists, artists and poets, all worshippers of God's nature. Therefore let us never forget again that they who think of, admit the existence of, and are devoted to God's nature cannot escape the admission of the existence of God.

The five elements which constitute this material universe, and mind, intellect and egoism are all God's own nature - they do not belong to you! This is a startling revelation. The mind is a modification of the same substance - God's nature, though subtler, and so it reacts automatically to the five elements. Even the ego is part of this nature. It is ignorance and misconception to regard it as independent. So, we are told here that all the material manifestations of the universe are the inferior nature of God. But, just as in our body the life-force is distinct from the skin, flesh, bone, etc., - inasmuch as it can withdraw itself from the body, there is a divine spark in all beings which is called the jiva, the living soul, the image of God within. This is God's superior nature.

If we adopt the image of God concept, then we find that mirror and image are mutually dependent - one cannot exist without the other. What Krishna suggests here is: God is the reality, mirror is the material substance - the elements, mind, intellect and ego - and the soul is the reflection in that mirror. The reality, God in his essence, is, in a certain sense, beyond the mirror and the image. It is God reflected in matter, including the mind, that is seen as the individual personality or consciousness - the soul. So, we are given a new and beautiful vision here: the entire material universe is the inferior aspect of God - the body of God - and the indwelling spirit or soul is his superior nature.

VII:6 - Know that these two are the womb of all beings. So, I am the source and dissolution of the whole universe.

VII:7 - There is nothing higher than me, O Arjuna. All this is strung on me as clusters of gems on a string.

There is nothing other than God! God alone exists. He alone is the reality. How can the unreal exist? God is not an entity that you and I can see or experience through the senses, through the intellect. But what exists - the complete cosmic entity - is God. Even the word God is unnecessary, because there is nothing outside of him; therefore there is no name, there is no form. If we must feel that the material universe and all the diverse beings have an existence, we should realize that all of them together constitute the body of God, while the indwelling consciousness, the soul of this universe, is the spirit of God. What a superb vision!

We talk of creation and dissolution of the universe. All that is nothing but the manifestation and the unmanifestation of the nature of God. There are some sages who treat even such expressions as God willed the creation into being as imperfect explanations meant for spiritual children. The sun shines without intending to shine; that is God's very nature. Even so, all the elements and the life-potency - DNA - are God's nature and the manifestation-potential is always present in him. This potential is made manifest and then unmanifest, alternately; that again is his nature.

In ignorance of the unity of God, we assume that he created the world as a man creates a piece of pottery. When we clearly realize that there is nothing other than God, then we see that whatever arises, arises in that consciousness. In the analogy used, consider a rosary in which the beads and the connecting string are of the same thread. Thus, one string appears as 108 beads and their connecting link. So, God alone appears as these myriads of beings and their connecting link; yet he is the only reality.

Yoga is both philosophy and religion - not in their sectarian connotation, but in their true sense. It is love of the highest wisdom; and it is a practical way to realize that self is God. 'Life is short; time is fleeting', repeatedly warned our Master. He said: It is difficult to get a human birth, therefore, try your best to realize the self in this birth. We know that we shall become perfect sooner or later; but, having attained this human birth, why not realize the self in this very birth?

What happens when one leaves this world? Where does one go and what kind of birth does one take? What can I do to avoid a rebirth in this world of pain and death? What is the extent of this universe and the length of its life? All these and many other questions are discussed and answered by the Lord in this holy scripture, Bhagavad Gita.

In the 6th chapter we noticed how very practical his approach to meditation was. Now, he gives us more practical instructions which enable us, on the one hand to remember him constantly, and on the other to withdraw the soul from the body - when the time arrives for us to leave this world - in a special way so that we deliberately take an immense stride towards liberation.

VII:8 - I am the sapidity in water, Arjuna, the light in the moon and the sun; I am the syllable Om in all the Vedas, sound in ether, and virility in men.
VII:9 - I am the sweet fragrance in earth and the brilliance in fire, the life in all beings; and I am austerity in ascetics.

Here we are lured from the gross to the subtle. The sense of taste is associated with water. It is housed in the watery portion of all tasteful objects; and when it is brought into contact with our tongue, too, the first reaction is salivation. What actually is that essence - rasa in that liquid or watery portion which we refer to as taste? It is God's manifestation; something which is beyond the reach - at least, yet - of the modern scientist. Water and even the water-element in sugar, salt, vinegar, pepper, are but the carriers, vehicles or abodes of this innermost essence which is the real secret of taste. The nature of these vehicles can be altered; if you add pepper-water to a lump of sugar, it will not be sweet any longer! But there is an unalterable essence within that vehicle called sugar which is so subtle that no sense or instrument can discover it. That is the reality or manifestation of God. It is that which gives the distinctive quality to these vehicles.

Scientists have been asking themselves: What makes the grass green? Chlorophyll. How is that formed? The ultimate principle in this quest is the manifestation of God - not God himself, yet! That is the life principle in all beings. Its existence can be guessed, experienced, but not grasped by the senses or the mind. We ought to be grateful to God that his divine power is gently leading even the most atheistic and materialistic of scientists of today towards this penultimate step of sheer wonderment.

Wonderment gives rise to quest, enquiry. Without the latter the wonderment may degenerate into sensuality, emotional exhibitionism or materialism. Enquiry is discovery.

VII:10 - Know me, O Arjuna, as the eternal seed of all beings; I am the intelligence of the intelligent, the prowess of all brave men.

VII:11 - Of the strong, I am the strength devoid of desire and attachment, and in all beings, I am the desire unopposed to Dharma, Arjuna.

The goal of the modern scientist was reached by the yogi, via pure spiritual enquiry. Their angle of approach is different, but their goal is the same. The scientist approaches it from the external form; the yogi from the inner spirit. Hence, our Master granted that even the scientist was an externalized raja yogi.

Krishna does not let us abandon this quest of truth at any wayside station. We must not be satisfied merely with labels and names. As seekers of the truth we must go to the root or seed of such qualities as asceticism, strength, splendor or intelligence, and there come face to face with that which gave rise to them in the various beings. If we are vigilant, anything will lead us to the ultimate reality, for all things are rooted in God.

A clear understanding of this philosophy will give us two life-transforming secrets:

(1) Subjectively, if we wish to grow in any of the virtues, we should meditate upon God as their source, and

(2) Objectively, we should see God in the strong, the wise, and so on, and thus avoid jealousy, fear and other negative and destructive emotions.

The qualifying statements in respect of 'strength' and 'desire' should be meditated upon.

Benevolent strength and desire that do not transgress righteousness are God's own manifestations. If there were no desire at all, life would come to a standstill. Therefore, God himself, his energy, his consciousness, his power manifests itself as desire in the human heart and in the hearts of living beings, to carry on the function of creation. What is absent there, is 'I' desire or 'my' desire. In the heart of the yogi who adopts this vision, there is no undivine desire, and therefore he does not judge others. In one who has such an ennobling vision, what has to be done is done spontaneously by God's will, as determined by him.

VII:12 - All states of being - be they of goodness, passion or ignorance - are manifested by my energy. I am, in one sense, everything - but I am independent. I am not under the modes of this material nature.

VII:13 - Deluded by these three qualities of Nature, all this world does not know Me, as distinct from them and immutable.

Krishna is very cautious! Asceticism, and so on, are the manifestation of his nature, not to be confused with him. He remains further behind, beneath and within them. Again, within should not be taken to mean that he is somehow encased, limited or restricted by them. They are all in him, but he is not contained in them as a pot contains water! God is like the crystal which reflects the color of a nearby object. It is ignorance that attributes to the crystal itself the color of the object.

A crude analogy may help. Look at the flame of a candle. The extremely subtle, intangible, axiomatic and self-existent power that carries out the process of combustion in that flame is comparable to God. The flame of fire itself resembles his nature - though in philosophy even his nature and its modes are subtler than the candle-flame. The fire of the flame has three characteristics: light, heat and smoke, comparable respectively to sattva, rajas and tamas, which are modes of God's divine nature . All beings in the universe, sentient and inert, participate in these three qualities because they all form part of God's nature.

If we do not see that these qualities flow from the divine, we remain deluded by the manifest phenomena, not caring to probe them to discover the reality. However, sooner or later man asks the right question, and, pursuing the right line of approach, he discovers that just as the ocean is one indivisible mass of water, so the three distinctions of sattva, rajas and tamas do not exist separately in God. They are made only in order to promote our understanding. The truth is seen to be transcendent - something which embraces all these. They exist in God without division, yet he is beyond them and also changeless.

VII:14 - This divine energy of Mine, consisting of the three modes of material nature, is difficult to overcome. But those who have surrendered to Me, can easily cross beyond this divine illusion.

VII:15 - The evil-doers and the deluded, who are the lowest of men, do not seek Me; they whose knowledge is destroyed by illusion follow the ways of demons.

Maya is regarded as an illusion, and illusion is such only to one who regards that illusion as the reality. A careful study of these two stanzas reveals to us several great truths. Evil-doers are so because they are deluded and their knowledge is destroyed by this illusion. But their own reality cannot be destroyed by this or even by the worst sin or evil, as Krishna never tires of repeating. Sin is only a product of delusion, demanding nothing sensational or spectacular to remove it. We must awaken ourselves to the fact that as long as we are in the grip of the delusion of the three modes of nature, the guna, we shall go on erring. The fact that people are different and that stupidity, dynamism or piety prevail in this universe, is divine nature manifesting in a particular form. The arising of this vision enables us to cross this illusion.

Nature is God's nature; and the guna are modes of his nature. Yet, they have the power to delude us. Smoke is born of fire; yet, when it enters our eyes, it can compel us to close them against the light of fire. Tamas - inertia or stupidity - is a quality that effectively prevents us from even perceiving the truth about nature.

This illusory power is divine and hence outside the pale of rationalization. It is like the 'liquid that will dissolve everything' - where can it be stored? The human intelligence itself is a reflection of spirit in matter, part of this illusion. Knowledge of the reality will dissolve all illusion, including the rationalizing power of the intellect! This knowledge is not intellectual but intuitive, immediate experience, obtainable only by total self-surrender and relentless quest.

Hence, the Kathopanishad warns us: Arise, awake, resort to the Master and learn. The path is like the razor's edge, difficult to perceive and to tread.

VII:16 - Four kinds of virtuous men worship me, O Arjuna: they are the distressed, the seeker of knowledge, the seeker of wealth, and the wise, O Lord of the Bharatas!

VII:17 - Of them, the wise, ever steadfast and devoted to the One, excels; for, I am exceedingly dear to the wise, and he is dear to Me.

To pray and to worship God motivelessly is of course good. Some people feel that it is a sign of depravity to pray for selfish ends and material advantages. Here, Krishna disagrees: they who worship him for these are surely virtuous men - not necessarily wise. The poor man who prays to God for wealth is surely nobler and more virtuous than the thief or dacoit. The sick man who prays for relief is better than the drug addict. In fact, one of the purposes of poverty and sickness is to turn man to God. Unconsciously the poor and sick recognize this if they are virtuous and that recognition or awareness comes by God's grace. A hot pan will burn your finger, whether you touch it knowingly or unknowingly. Even so, the fire of God's power will devour desire and ignorance whether you touch it deliberately or accidentally. Thus, prayer is good whatever the motive. When the prayer-contact is made, the Lord's love burns to ashes all earthly desires, and frees us from all selfishness and egoism.

However, this does not minimize the glory of unselfish love of God for his own sake. The wise man, jnani, who loves God motivelessly is supreme. He knows the appearance as appearance, and therefore he knows the reality of the appearance. He is fully aware that the diverse world phenomena are purely manifestations of God's divine nature. Hence, he knows that he loves God because he cannot help doing so, since God is the very soul of his soul. He knows, too, that this eternal unity or oneness is expressed in him as irrepressible love. He is the pure iron needle; God is the magnet. In his case, the devotion and surrender are natural. He rests in God, in unbroken, eternal communion.

VII:18 - Noble indeed are all these; but I deem the wise man as My very Self; for, steadfast in mind, he is established in Me alone as the supreme goal.

VII:19 - After many lives, he who is in knowledge surrenders to Me, knowing Me as all that is. Such a great soul is very rare.

The wise devotee of the Lord knows that his love of God is nothing other than a manifestation of his unity with God. In his endeavor to gain the vision of the truth concerning life, the world, the ego, appearance and the reality, the wise seeker sees one physical appearance as different from another, but inwardly he realizes that these differences are superficial. Just as all trees grow from the same soil, so all manifest creation has its origin in God. This is an unalterable, eternal fact of existence. In that vision there is wisdom, insight, enlightenment and incomparable love.

This sublime state of supreme love of God is not attained in a single lifetime. We adore the perfected saint, the man of God, but seldom realize that he has not attained this state by chance or even by magic or miracle, but by many lifetimes of persistent and intense endeavor to reach the pinnacle of God-consciousness.

The expression used here is Vasudeva. This is a proper name of Krishna, which also means that which envelops all - the omnipresent. By which sign can we recognize the great soul? He is so expansive of heart that in his cosmic vision all beings are experienced as the one omnipresent being. He has been working towards this highest realization by constantly endeavoring to remove name and form and by seeing the hidden inner essence - God. We, too, shall eventually reach this goal, only to realize that what we sought is the seeker's love! One optimistic note is possible here. When the Bhagavad Gita tells us: After many lifetimes of striving one attains this perfection, I think it is proper for us to ask: How do you know that all of us have not already been striving for many lifetimes, and this is the last one? It is possible.

VII:20 - Those whose minds are distorted by desires, surrender to other devas, and follow the particular rules and regulations of worship according to their own natures.

VII:21 - Whatever form any devotee desires to worship with faith, that faith of his I make firm and unflinching.

Here is a sample of the most wonderful Krishna-approach to any problem. A defective or negative aspect of our life, an imperfect or distorted vision of the truth, are not allowed to pass unnoticed, but they are not condemned outright. Every thing has its own place in creation - that which we call good, evil or neutral. It is easy to idealize but difficult for many and nearly impossible for the vast majority to put this concept into practice. How often do we find the disastrous and arrogant attitude on the part of some religious leaders who profess to monopolize the truth whilst vehemently condemning all other faiths! What a colossal waste of time! What a loss of a great opportunity to embrace all and thus reach perfection! If only all religious leaders would mind their own business! There is no harm in glorifying their own viewpoint, but they should not bother to judge others. If they can, they should help those treading other paths, encouraging each in his own path, instead of disturbing the faith of others, proselytizing with fervor and then leaving them untended and in the lurch.

The world would be a much happier place for everyone to live in if all were left to worship God in their own way. This understanding is the divine attitude. Krishna commands: strengthen everyone in his own faith; never disturb anyone's faith.

The truth is that God or the infinite pervades the entire universe. There is nothing and nobody outside of it. Hence, verse 21 tells us: whatever the form in which the devotee wishes to adore God, let him do so. Even the materialist who, encouraged and motivated by his own desires and cravings, worships power or wealth, will eventually, in God's good time, discover the futility of such worship and arrive at the pinnacle of self-realization. A few seeds of divine thought sown in him will germinate in their own time; but an immature, premature leap will only be ineffective.

VII:22 - Endowed with that faith, he engages in the worship of that deity, and from it he obtains his desire, these being verily ordained by Me alone.

VII:23 - Verily the reward that accrues to those men of small intelligence is finite. The worshippers of the gods go to them, but my devotees come to me.

The superficial meaning is clear as daylight. No-one is compelled to accept or reject any particular method of worship of any form of the supreme being as long as that worship is with the faith that: I am worshipping God. The Hindu is not an idol worshipper. He worships God, the divine presence in the idol, which is the medium through which he can contact God. He worships God in and through his guru and the saints, in and through God's manifestations in the mineral, plant, animal, human and celestial kingdoms; but there is the ever present faith that he is worshipping not the form, but the spirit in all these. This faith is initially based on intellectual or metaphysical grounds and the testimony of sages and saints. In due course, it becomes a conviction born of direct realization.

The great declaration of the veda: The reality is one; sages designate it variously indicates that whatever religion people profess, they are worshipping the supreme being in their own way, with faith. God, being omnipresent, responds to the devotee's prayers, meditation or worship in his own way. Having this attitude, the devotee regards whatever he receives in his life as the gift of God, and he is forever happy and unperturbed.

He who recognizes the all-pervasiveness of God and still worships the supreme being alone through his different aspects, will go to the supreme; but he who, unable to comprehend this truth, worships the forms themselves as God - even he is not lost! He will become one with that aspect of God, and in course of time realize God's infinity. What a heart-warming doctrine! No-one is condemned forever. Whatever be one's concept of God, faith redeems him, for while the form remains as such, God is made manifest in the heart.

VII:24 - Unintelligent men, who know me not, think that I have assumed this form and personality. Due to their small knowledge, they do not know my higher nature, which is changeless and supreme.

VII:25 - I am never manifest to the foolish and unintelligent. For them I am covered by my eternal creative potency; and so the deluded world knows me not, who am unborn and infallible.

The fundamental nature of reality is that it is unborn, unmanifest, unchanging. But, the infinite has two aspects: one is the unmanifest and the other the manifest aspect. God is the unmanifest being, the infinite which is unmanifest. This is capable of infinite manifestation, not only limited to this world. We have very little idea of the manifest infinite, let alone the unmanifest! Our world consists only of father, mother, wife, children and acquaintances. Yet, the unmanifest is not exhausted by its own manifestation; it is infinite.

Just as clouds come together and disperse, the elements present various patterns. The ignorant man imagines that worlds and bodies come into being, grow and die. These changes pertain to the compounded elements or the interaction of the three modes of nature. They belong to the inferior nature and not to the essential nature of God.

God is not obvious. There is an illusion, yoga maya, based primarily on the senses and the intellect, which have limited function and no ability to perceive the truth. The eyes see, the ears hear, and the mind believes that the messages brought in by the senses constitute the entire truth. The intellect creates its own limitations, regarding them as absolutes which therefore appear to be obvious. This is where the danger lies: what is obvious to one is not obvious to all beings. It is your own mental projection or point of view, a maya. We must recognize, too, that even the belief in the existence of God is just one point of view!

The deluded man, identifying the Lord with the manifestations of his nature, is satisfied and does not pursue further. He forgets the total truth and considers his individual belief to be the ultimate truth. Buddha provides the ideal prescription, however: can you see that all points of view are narrow and limited; and refuse to have a point of view of your own? If you must have one, know that even it is only a point of view. Then you are totally free.

VII:26 - I know, O Arjuna, the beings of the past, the present and the future, but no one knows Me.

VII:27 - By the delusion of the pairs of opposites arising from desire and aversion, O Arjuna, all beings are subject to delusion at birth.

Scientists, discussing the travel through space of light rays, assure us that if at this moment someone on a planet or star one hundred light years away, were able to see the earth, he would be witnessing what took place here a hundred years ago! Similarly, 'the future', too, is already present somewhere; only it has not yet come into our view.

This may sound fatalistic, but is only so where the material or physical part of the universe is concerned which is the very least of it! The seasons and the changes, the floods and the earthquakes are as predictable as eclipses. However, unpredictable are man's reaction and his inner attitude, for it is life that reveals the depth of our understanding, and it is the depth of understanding that flavors life. Some sages have conceded that whereas even man's actions and reactions are predetermined, he is free to be egoistic and thus feel bound to sin and suffering, or to realize that he is the witness consciousness and thus be liberated from these.

Each individual conscious soul is, at the very dawn of creation - the birth of the soul, enshrouded in ignorance which gives rise to egoity. This is followed by attraction and repulsion, attachment and aversion, likes and dislikes, and these in their turn, sustain the whole cycle of delusion-ignorance-egoity-action-reaction. If the 'I' sits in the judgment seat, trying to determine whether someone is good, bad or indifferent, one cannot understand God.

Objects come into being, exist and disappear in this world - it is God's will. But ignorant man desires some and dislikes others; thus he is not only bound, but reaps a harvest of pain and pleasure! He who is able to overcome these is undeluded by the pairs of opposites; and to him both past and future are ever-present, God being the river which touches the beginning, the middle and the end at the same time.

VII:28 - But those men of virtuous deeds whose sins have come to an end, and who are freed from the delusion of the pairs of opposites, worship Me, steadfast in their vows.

VII:29 - Those who strive for liberation from old age and death, taking refuge in me, realize in full that Brahman, the whole knowledge of the Self and all action.

VII:30 - Those who know me as the supreme lord, as the governing principle of the material manifestation, who know me as the one underlying all the devas and as the one sustaining all sacrifices, can, with steadfast mind, understand and know me, even at the time of death.

The vision of God cannot be obtained unless the heart and mind are made completely pure through perfectly ethical and moral conduct, when sinful tendencies have been totally overcome. A man meditating on the form of his guru without forgetting the ideal he stands for, grows in the virtues of the guru. Through worship of the various manifestations of the Lord, much virtue is gained and sinfulness ceases.

There is no effort, even, to abandon sinfulness; such effort would likely become the seed of future sin - arrogance. Sinfulness has to drop away. It is not possible to acquire virtue, to abandon wickedness or to grow in humility. When the right vision is acquired, these happen automatically. Till then, one must strive to grow in virtue and reduce wickedness by all means. Virtue and God-realization are simultaneous, without the relationship of cause and effect.

God is the very essence and soul of this material universe. He is the basis of whatever concepts of God each one of us may have - however diverse these may be, and the spirit whose supreme sacrifice constitutes creation. Such a homogeneous and comprehensive truth can only be grasped when the mind is steady and the heart absolutely pure. In that transparent heart the light of God is truly reflected. May we all enjoy that vision in this very birth.

8. The Yoga of the Imperishable Brahman

VIII:1 - Arjuna said : My Lord, what is Brahman? What is the self? What are fruitive activities? What is this material manifestation? And what are the deva? Please explain this to me.

VIII:2 - How does this Lord of sacrifice live in the body, and in which part does he live? And how can those engaged in devotional service know you at the time of death?

The Indian approach to the reality is both analytic and synthetic. The sage or the yogi does not approve of or sanction a mere off-hand rejection of anything, even if he is assured that ultimately he will have to reject it. All the philosophical categories must be clearly analyzed, understood, and synthesized, ignoring the illusory differences.

Take, for instance, the great declaration of the Upanisad: That - Brahman - thou - the soul - art. The two must be clearly analyzed and understood in their own respective aspects.

Brahman is the infinite, greater than the greatest and beyond all limitations. The atman is the innermost self, the subtlest of the subtle, minuter than the minutest, and that which is left after all the personal limiting adjuncts have been negated, by the process of: 'I' is not this body, 'I' is not this vital sheath, 'I' is not this mind, 'I' is not this intellect and 'I' is not this causal ignorance. It is not as though this is a negative practice whereby the seeker attempts to reject or nullify the body, mind and so on, but the practice involves seeing the body in its true nature as merely body, the mind as mind, etc., not involving or belonging to the ego, I. It generates in the seeker the understanding of the self as abstract, nameless and formless. Herein lies the genius of the Indian philosopher-sage. When this analytical-synthesis is pushed to its logical conclusion, the result is the immediate realization of the identity of that - Brahman and thou - atman.

Even though God himself is all the characteristics mentioned in the last two verses, Arjuna, the good seeker, seeks to know them as they are.

VIII:3 - The Blessed Lord said : The indestructible, supernatural living entity is called Brahman and his eternal nature is called the self. Action pertaining to the development of these material bodies is called karma, or fruitive activities.

The absolute - Brahman is imperishable, supreme, infinite and beyond all these descriptive attributes. Any description limits it. Thus our Master used to say: To define Brahman is to deny Brahman. Hence it was that Buddha refrained from discussing it, and that Dakshinamurti conveyed the wordless knowledge of it to the Sanatkumara, by silence filled with transcendental knowledge.

Brahman is not an inert nothingness or a void. The supreme or totality does not undergo any change or decay. Yet, in it, there is constant change, which implies constancy and change. These are not contradictory but complementary. The nature inherent in this totality is adhyatma. Or, conversely, atma, or selfhood, is inherent in this totality even to the point of individuality. That is, you do not belong to yourself; yourself belongs to the totality. This totality has, as its very substratum, infinite diversity which is the self of all; just as the night sky is studded with millions of diamonds - the stars. Thus, self-knowledge is a re-attainment of something which the personality has lost. When the personality is keenly analyzed, it becomes transparent, revealing its own substratum - that cosmic consciousness which is the goal, the supreme fulfillment or self-knowledge.

The compound word 'bhutabhavodbhavakaro' suggests a dream or vision of something as if it existed. That is the karma of the totality or God. Hence, God does not create as the carpenter creates furniture, but in that cosmic being there arises a feeling - bhavana of the manifestation - bhuta of all this multi-diversity. That is called the universe which is maintained by God's grace, so that the souls therein may gain the necessary experience to attain self-knowledge. Understood in this light, even the law of karma is seen as a contributory factor towards evolution and attainment of self-knowledge.

VIII:4 - Physical nature is known to be endlessly mutable. The universe is the cosmic form of the supreme Lord, and I am that Lord, the inner soul, dwelling in the heart of every embodied being.

The elements, *adhibhutam*, have a beginning and an end. This is a continuous cycle that no one can arrest. They are not totally destroyed, but as their nature changes, the forms perish; like the transition from ice to water to vapor. The fundamental essence, however, is changeless. It is absolute immaturity to be afraid of the inevitable.

In this world, things grow, decay and disappear from view; but there is something which is capable of observing the structure that starts as a wedding procession and itself turns into a funeral procession. That observer is called the *purusa*. This term is almost impossible to translate. According to the two systems of Indian philosophy - *sankhya* and *yoga*, *purusa* is the imperishable, individual soul, uninvolved in the body and mind. According to the *veda* it is the cosmic consciousness that pervades all, the God of gods. *Purusa* is that which is able to observe all changing phenomena including those of your own body, mental states, states of consciousness or existence, and your states of immaturity and maturity.

A subtle distinction is made here between the perishable nature of the supreme being and the imperishable nature - *purusa*. These are not two separable entities but two integrated principles, like the smallest blood capillaries that are all pervading in our body! The distinction between *adhibhutam* and *adhidaivam* is one of viewpoint only, not of essence. God alone is the principle of sacrifice in the body - cosmic and individual. Hence the *veda* call him *yajna* - sacrifice. *Yajna* is a certain type of knowledge which enables you to give and take, to engage yourself in appropriate action, and to understand that all creatures in this universe have the same needs as you have. The spirit of sacrifice is God himself. By living a life of sacrifice we shall shed all illusion and delusion and attain self-knowledge. Do not read this with your eyes, mind or intellect, but with the eyes of your heart!

VIII:5 - And whoever, leaving the body, goes forth remembering me alone at the time of death, he attains my Being; there is no doubt about this.

VIII:6 - Whoever at the end leaves the body, thinking of any being, to that being only does he go, O Arjuna, because of his constant thought of that being.

Where will I go from here? - this question has worried every man at some time or other. Krishna's answer is extremely simple. It will depend entirely upon the state of your inner being - that is what bhava means - at the time the soul leaves the body. If that state is one of total saturation with God, then the soul reaches him.

This does not contradict the karma theory, but completes or fulfils it. The state of inner being of man is made not only of his actions, but also of the impressions they left behind and his desires and aspirations, all put together. This is what determines his next incarnation, for the very simple reason that it acts like a crystal inviting others of the same substance to adhere to it and thus to form a new body. Antakala is when the body is released from my grip or connection. In other words, the idea that 'I am this body' or 'the body is mine' is suspended.

Antakale is the last hour. This occurs not only at the time of what is called death, but every night when one goes to sleep! Normally, the state of one's inner being is reflected in the last thought which is sure to be the image of one's ruling passion in life. There are some who persist in thinking bestial thoughts though they may have neither the courage nor the opportunity to act on them. They may appear evolved, but the inner picture - bhava is of an animal. When the human mask is dropped at death, they assume the real shape - that of an animal. Yet, we wonder: How can a human being descend into an animal birth?

No theorizing, wishful thinking or rationalization is of any use here. The fact is not altered by one's belief or disbelief. Hence the vital need, without planning for a better birth in the future, is to be better now.

VIII:7 - Therefore, at all times remember me only, and fight. With mind and intellect absorbed in Me, you shall doubtless come to me alone.

VIII:8 - With the mind constantly engaged in remembering Me, made steadfast by the method of habitual meditation, and constantly meditating, one goes to the Supreme Person, the Resplendent, O Arjuna.

This is the yoga of the Bhagavad Gita, which will, with guaranteed certainty, lead us to the Lord. It is buddhi yoga - the yoga of understanding; not confined to any physical activity - whether it be charity, service, ritual or yoga practices such as asana, pranayama, concentration and meditation - though these are not excluded, looked down upon or discouraged. The yogi must acquire, by diligent cultivation, what my Master Swami Sivananda called 'double consciousness'. He must be able to realize the crystalline nature of the self, and also perceive all activity as being sustained by the modes of the guna - the divine nature. Realizing that he is the immortal self or atman, he must behold the ever-active nature of God of which the self is but a silent, non-participant witness. The self, being non-different from the infinite, ceases to interfere in this shadow play of nature on the silver screen of God.

Established in this realization, contemplation of the omnipresent God is not contradicted by activity. The yogi does not shy away from what must be done. With body and mind he works in this world doing his every duty flawlessly and efficiently. Only, in his heart, likes and dislikes, fear, pleasure and pain are absent. His inner being stands aside, ever vigilant yet uninvolved, in constant remembrance of God. This is continuous meditation, dynamic contemplation or contemplative dynamism - the innermost teaching of the . There is no suppression or repression, but a whole-souled participation in the divine will without the least tinge of egoism. Hence, the yogi is never drawn towards the objects, though he moves amidst them. He lives in God.

VIII:9 - One should meditate on the Supreme as the one who knows everything, as he who is the oldest, who is the controller, who is smaller than the smallest, who is the maintainer of everything, who is beyond all material conception, who is inconceivable, and who is always a person. He is luminous like the sun and, being supernatural, is beyond this material nature.

VIII:10 - At the time of death, with unshaken mind, endowed with devotion and by the power of yoga, fixing the life-breath in the middle of the two eyebrows, he reaches that resplendent Supreme Person.

This is the yogi's conscious exit from the body. As a result of continuous and intense practice of yoga, particularly hatha yoga, the yogi attains perfect control over prana, the life-force - not just the breath that flows in the nostrils, nor even the oxygen in the air, but the extremely subtle divine power that utilizes all these gross substances and maintains the soul's abode, the human body.

That life-force - prana is spread out and distributed throughout the body to activate its various functions. The hatha yogi gives the same prana various names to indicate the different functions it performs. He designates the force that moves upwards as prana and the force that tends to move downwards as apana. The former is positive and the latter negative. By a process of regulated breathing, the yogi brings them together, reversing their course. Their fusion gives him power similar, say, to high-voltage electricity. With this he awakens the dormant psychic power in him, the kundalini Shakti which is then led by stages from one center of consciousness to the next along the innermost core of the spinal cord, and eventually to the ajna chakra, the center between the eyebrows. With this psychic power, the whole prana is also withdrawn. From the ajna chakra, he merges his self in God-consciousness and is liberated.

In the case of the yogi, as the body is dropped, handed over to the elements, as it were, the entire being is totally saturated with the realization of God's omnipresence, and there is no further movement. He reaches the supreme.

VIII:11 - That which is declared Imperishable by those who know the Vedas, that which the ascetics and passion-free enter, that desiring which celibacy is practiced - that goal I will declare to you in brief.

Ksara is something which causes to flow, pour out, according to the veda. Aksara in the veda is that which is not thus involved in flowing out, pouring out, i.e., that which is uninvolved in creation. That aksara is the supreme transcendental reality, the ever-present thing in-itself, the colored pieces of glass in a kaleidoscope, the fundamental principle, the unmodified substance whose modifications and manifestations appear to us as the created universe. It is the screen on which the ever-moving objects and the colorful panorama are projected. One who is absorbed in watching the drama projected on the screen is unaware of the screen on which it is projected. It demands tremendous inner discipline to perceive, as it were, the screen and the film independently, at the same time.

Hence, the ancients prescribed an austere and ethical life of self-control and total freedom from passion - for normally the mind is kept in a state of continuous flux by passions and is thus prevented from perceiving the screen, the substratum. Then the mind, free from desires and passions, is not thus disturbed and with the requisite training will be able to perceive the substratum. This training is called brahmacharya - to live, move and have one's being in Brahman. Its own preliminary step is continence, the restraint of one of the most powerful instincts in man.

What such yogis reach and how they reach it is now explained by Krishna.

VIII:12 - Having closed all the gates, confined the mind in the heart and fixed the life-breath in the head, engaged in the practice of concentration,
VIII:13 - Uttering the monosyllable Om, remembering Me always, he who departs thus, leaving the body, attains to the supreme goal.

Just as it is important for us to know how to live, it is equally important for us to know how to die - not to be afraid of death, to block it from our minds or even to long for it. Death is inevitable. The Bhagavad Gita, in addition to teaching the art of living gives instructions in the art of dying.

The hatha yogi closes all the 'gates' of the body with the help of a few simple psycho-physical exercises. Sitting in siddhasana, he presses the left heel firmly on the perineum thus closing the rectum and places the right heel on the generative organ, closing that 'gate' too. By the practice of yoni mudra, he closes the other 'gates': the ears with the thumbs, the eyes with the index fingers, the nostrils with the middle fingers, the upper and lower lips respectively with the ring and little fingers. Now he sees the subtle core of the sushumna-nadi or the spinal cord as a radiant hollow tube through which the awakened Kundalini Shakti ascends, piercing centre after centre of the gross elements. With his mind fixed in his heart, symbolically at the feet of the Lord, he takes the kundalini Shakti - prana to the crown of the head. Thus the prana has been consciously and deliberately withdrawn from the whole body i.e. from matter.

When the time comes for him to leave the body, the yogi utters the monosyllable Om, the sound-picture of the absolute, and discards the body remembering God. In accordance with the law of last thought-form, he reaches God.

If we train ourselves in the art of withdrawing the prana from the body now, by constant, diligent effort and daily practice of these exercises, perhaps we will use them in the last hour, and departure will be facilitated.

VIII:14 - For one who remembers me without deviation I am easy to obtain, O Arjuna, because of his constant engagement in devotional service.

VIII:15 - Having attained Me, these great souls do not again take birth in this world, which is the place of pain and is non-eternal; they have reached the highest perfection.

If a man thinks of God constantly, and daily, he will automatically think of him in the last hour, too. All devotees of the Lord recognize the near impossibility of governing one's own last thoughts. One devotee actually prayed in pathetic and pleading tone: Oh Lord, may my mind enter your lotus feet right now; for who knows what it will think of when my throat is choked in the last hour of my life. This is especially true these days when sudden and violent accidents and heart attacks snatch life away, without notice! Therefore, it is all the more important to be ever God-conscious so that even if the last moment were untimely, the mind would by habit think of God and reach him.

Desire and karma, which together constitute the state of inner being called bhava, determine the next incarnation. When ignorance-born desire and ego-engineered activity - karma - cease, then, freed from these shackles, the soul awakens from the slumber of ignorance, and shaking off the dream-state of bondage regains self-knowledge.

Once the individualized consciousness has become totally merged with the cosmic consciousness there is no return to this world of pain and impermanence. It is like throwing a bucket of water into a lake; that same water can never be retrieved. Lord Buddha's life teaches us that pain and suffering exist in this world in order to remind us of a state of being in which these shall not be and to lead us to that state.

VIII:16 - All the worlds, including the world of Brahma, are subject to return again, O Arjuna. But he who reaches Me has no rebirth.

Every moment, the past moment is dead; and each moment dies an instant after it is born. Death is co-existent with life. That is, there is birth, death and rebirth moment after moment. When one realizes this, life and discipline become effortless. To live in this spirit where there is death every moment, one had to see a great master like my Gurudev Swami Sivananda.

When death is brought into life, there is no attachment or craving. The ego, as the storehouse of experiences, is dropped and when this happens there is God. This is possible only by Grace.

Some extremely ignorant people ask: What happens to me after I become one with God? The fact that they are so seriously concerned about what happens to their individual personality is proof positive that God-realization is still far away from them. A seeker once wrote to our Master: I have realized God; now, please tell me what to do. What an absurd question! If he has realized and become one with God the omniscient, does he not know? Yet, the world is full of such wonderful people whom we have to answer. The simple answer is: When you become one with God, his will and yours will be in perfect alignment. A lump of salt coming into contact with the ocean, becomes inseparably one with the ocean. It is not lost, but has attained to the incomparable dignity and glory of ocean-hood. Similarly, God-realization is no loss of personality; it is the expansion of that personality to cosmic dimensions. The sage of self-realization thus becomes God himself. When, as in the case of specially chosen masters, the personality is returned to the world, it is no longer a limited, egoistic, imperfect personality, but a gift from God of a part of himself. That is why we regard the guru as God.

VIII:17 - Those who know the day of Brahma, which is of a duration of a thousand yugas, and the night, which is also of a thousand yugas' duration, they know day and night.

VIII:18 - From the unmanifested all the manifested proceed at the coming of the 'day'; at the coming of the 'night' they dissolve into that alone which is called the unmanifested.

Indian astronomers and sages of intuitive wisdom have calculated that a maha-yuga is of the duration of 4,320,000 years according to the earth calendar. A thousand of these constitutes the creator's day-time - the period during which the manifest world exists. After this there is an equal duration of the 'night' of the creator. I believe the latest scientific discovery is that just as once everything emerged from God, later, everything will collapse into itself - first there was an explosion, and later there will be an implosion where everything will be sucked into its own center. The entire universe will be reduced to a pinpoint called a singularity. What is wrong with calling this Brahman, God? Though here and there in our scriptures there is a description of creation, such descriptions are quickly followed by a statement that it is a repetitive process. At the beginning of creation, the creator re-creates what was during the previous day of the creator. No one can ever visualize a creation from nothing. For then we should foolishly accept the idea that this manifest universe has existed only for a brief while and before that, from beginningless time, there was nothing! It is a cycle, with its projection and reabsorption; beginningless and endless - though he who is awake to self-knowledge is not caught in this relentlessly turning wheel. Many scientists and astronomers today seem to agree with this view of an ever-existing universe, condensing and expanding. Meditation on the magnitude of the universe will save you from the worries of the moment. The words and the concepts of time, night and day are relative and illusory. Realizing this, all fear falls away from you.

VIII:19 - This same multitude of beings, born again and again, is dissolved, helplessly, at the coming of the night, and comes forth at the coming of the day.

VIII:20 - But verily there exists, higher than the unmanifested, another unmanifested eternal, who is not destroyed when all beings are destroyed.

All this coming and going, according to one school of thought (amply supported by the Bhagavatam which contains highly colorful stories of such creation), takes place in the mind of God (II:20). The Hebrew word in the Genesis story of the Bible, which is usually translated in the beginning also means in the head - creation took place in God's head! The universe is an extensive and prolonged dream of God. Even as during the course of our own dream the dream-objects are indeed real, the objects of this universe seem to be real to us, while the dream of the cosmic dreamer is still in progress.

Otherwise, how is it that though scientists have proved that the whole universe is nothing more than a perpetual movement of light-waves, and that all objects of this universe are, in the ultimate analysis, nothing but energy, we persist in seeing a variety of objects? What sees what? I see this paper. When I and paper are both vibrations of energy, what makes I 'I' and paper 'paper'?

When thus we pursue all our sense perceptions - which together we call the manifest universe, we arrive at the ultimate unmanifested principle - the reality or the absolute. That absolute is beyond the intellect and the senses. The unmanifested root-matter or mulaprakrti, which projects itself and withdraws such manifestation is what Fred Hoyle calls the eternally self-creating root element of which the universe is composed. It keeps changing, over the substratum of the absolute which is unchanging. That is Brahman. That is the self. That thou art, cry out the Upanishad!

VIII:21 - That supreme abode is called unmanifested and infallible, and it is the supreme destination. When one goes there, he never comes back. That's my supreme abode.

VIII:22 - That highest Purusha is attainable by unswerving devotion to Him alone, within Whom all beings dwell, and by Whom All is pervaded.

Being beyond the intellect and definition, the absolute eternal godhead is attainable only by devotion. Faith, love and total self-surrender are the only means here; not intellectuality, reasoning or ratiocination. Intellect is but a creature of the cosmic dream. Hence, it can only lead us either farther from God or, at best, to his threshold - if we make it sub-serve faith, that is. Devotion is the key that unlocks the gates of eternal truth. Krishna emphasizes again and again that while the seeker ought to do everything possible in his power to be good, to do good, to practice yoga for the purification of the self, the ultimate freedom, buddhi yoga, the eye of intuition or nirvana can only be God's gift. Even the self that demands them, that seeks them, must disappear in the fire of the seeking! The seeker and the sought must become one, merging in that point when the seeker has nothing more to seek. It is then that the sought is revealed or experienced. The seeker is the sought, for the self is nonexistent and illusory. God-love tears the veil of illusion and removes the distinction between the seeker and the sought. This is the path of devotion of love and of self-surrender.

Even the Kathopanisad declares that the self cannot be realized by one through much learning, but reveals itself to whom it will. This does not mean that God is whimsical, but that total egolessness is known only by God.

This much is certain: devotion and self-surrender guarantee self-realization.

VIII:23 - I will now explain to you the different times at which, the yogi, passing away from this world, one does or does not come back.

VIII:24 - Fire, light, daytime, the bright fortnight, the six months of the northern path, departing then, men who know Brahman go to Brahman.

VIII:25 - Attaining to the lunar light by smoke, night-time, the dark fortnight or the six months of the southern path, the yogi returns.

VIII:26 - The bright and the dark paths of the world are verily thought to be eternal; by the one a person goes not to return again; by the other he returns.

These verses can be taken literally or symbolically.

What is there during the day that you find absent at night? The sun, the representative of the light. Thus, these verses may mean that if you have lived an enlightened life in full consciousness, in light, in clarity, in doubtlessness, then of course you go to Brahman. You are liberated, free. But if the life is characterized by darkness, if it is full of doubts, regrets and remorse, then of course you keep going round and round in this world cycle.

Not all people who pass on during the periods mentioned in verse 24 attain Brahman. Only those who have known Brahman. The yogi who has undergone the psychophysical practices mentioned earlier in this chapter ought to be able to separate the soul from the body at will. On the analogy of Bhishma, who was slain in battle, but who discarded his body at a later date, some feel that the yogi, to discard the body, must choose such time as the path of light will open to him. There are others, however, who declare that the yogi or sage who is awake to the reality gives his body no special value at all and lets it fall when it may, to decay and return to the natural elements. Such a sage does not depart at all, but becomes one with Brahman immediately.

VIII:27 - Knowing these paths, O Arjuna, no yogi is ever deluded. Therefore, at all times, be steadfast in Yoga.

VIII:28 - Whatever fruits or merits is declared to accrue from the study of the Vedas, the performance of sacrifices, the practice of austerities, the offering of gifts, beyond all these goes the yogi, having known this; and he attains to the supreme primeval abode.

What man who has clearly understood this continual birth-death-rebirth cycle and the endless miseries that it brings with it, could be foolish and blind enough to cling to this earthly life or value it?

Think of the millions of years that you have eaten, drunk and slept, enjoyed sensual pleasures and suffered the consequent misery. Should you still wallow in delusion?

Think of the thousands of births you have had and the thousands of parents, wives, husbands and children that you have had in those births. Should you still wallow in delusion?

Think of the desires gratified and thus strengthened, the ambitions fulfilled, the houses built, money made and property acquired, and think of how all these have been razed to the earth by the ravages of time - the millions of millennia that this universe has existed. Should you still wallow in delusion?

Think of the insignificance of a short span of fifty years of active life in comparison to the millions of years that constitute a day of the creator. What can you do during this short span that can compare to self-realization which can liberate you from transmigration for ever? Should you still wallow in delusion?

Think of the insignificance of this life-span and rejoice that its pleasures and even its pains do not last a split-second. 'Even this will pass away, balance your mind in pain and joy', said our Master. Do not wallow in delusion, but seek to attain the supreme abode this very moment.

9. The Yoga of the Kingly Science & the Kingly Secret

IX:1 - The Blessed Lord said : I shall now declare to you who does not cavil, the greatest secret, the knowledge combined with knowing. Having known this, you shall be free from miseries.

IX:2 - This is the kingly science, the kingly secret, the supreme purifier; realizable by direct intuitional knowledge, according to dharma, very easy to perform and imperishable.

In the last chapter, the Lord quietly slipped in an idea which, on the surface, looks impossible: Think of God constantly and at the same time never neglect your duty here. How does a single person split himself into two, for how else can one fulfill this commandment? In this chapter, Krishna answers this vital question. Hence all the flourish at the very outset.

'Rajavidya' literally means 'the king of all knowledge'. This highest knowledge is available only to one who is king of his mind and senses, since these are the outlets through which true intuitive knowledge is lost.

Krishna is no vain egoist. The precarious middle path is imperceptibly subtle, so we are not usually sure where humility ends and timidity begins. A simple rule might help: personal effrontery must be humbly borne, but the glory of the divine wisdom must not be underrated or allowed to be trampled upon. Krishna demonstrated true and divine humility by becoming Arjuna's charioteer, but he is emphatic that the yoga he now teaches is a kingly science. It is a kingly science, no doubt, yet the fanfare is also used in order to enable us to listen more attentively - this is no ordinary science!

The word 'secret' is used, perhaps, 'so that we will be tempted to spread the message! Maybe Krishna also meant, when he declared the teaching to be a secret, that although the interpretation of the words may be clear, the message is secret and requires investigation. It is a profound secret on the non-verbal level, and must be understood not with the head, but with the heart. When that happens, it becomes a living truth and instantly you are purified.

IX:3 - Those who have no faith in the path of devotional service, O Arjuna, return to the path of this world of death, without attaining Me.

The word 'sradda' cannot be easily translated. Merely translating it into 'faith' does not make it clear. However, the rest of the verse gives an indication of its meaning. If that something called 'sradda' is not there, you do not reach the truth or self-realization. If you do not reach self-realization, you experience birth and death again and again. You are trapped in this, world in which you constantly experience happiness and unhappiness, success and failure, pleasure and pain. When this 'sradda' arises, then the constant succession of changes - beginnings and endings is like water on a duck's back and the ultimate truth becomes 'realizable by direct intuitional knowledge'.

'Sradda' - we shall call it faith - is important. If a man has no faith in a teaching, he fails to adopt it in his life. Hence, though this dharma - knowledge of the self - is a kingly science, and though God and all saints are ever ready, willing and eager to bring more and more souls on to this path, the path becomes a 'kingly secret'.

Lack of faith makes us doubt the value of practice, so we wallow in delusion! If we have the necessary faith, however, we take up the practice and realize that self-knowledge which is superior to all else.

Self-knowledge is different from a layman's knowledge of the radio; all he knows is how to turn the knobs, the rest was done by the engineer. In self-knowledge there is no second-hand knowledge, hearsay or dependence upon the authority of someone else. Here, we accept a working hypothesis - on faith - practice yoga, attain direct realization and prove the hypothesis ourselves.

Faith itself will purify our heart and mind. If it does not lead to this, self purification, it is not 'sradda'. Our heart and soul are polluted because of our identification of the soul with inert and changing matter. Rain water is pure, but is polluted on coming into contact with the earth. When this identification of the self with the body and mind ceases, we regain our pristine purity. If we have this 'sradda', then we let life flow in a profound realization - which has been described in the rest of this chapter.

IX:4 - All this world is pervaded by Me in My unmanifest aspect; all beings exist in Me, but I do not dwell in them.

What is that kingly science or kingly secret? As is characteristic of Krishna, he gives, in a simple, straightforward verse, the whole truth. The entire universe is completely permeated by God, the reality, but in an unmanifested, not-so-obvious guise. That is what is really meant in Gurudev's famous Universal Prayer: 'You are omnipresent'. Omnipresent means that there is nothing other than God. If that understanding arises there is nothing to be negated. This understanding is prevented by various factors, one of which is thinking that this may not be the reality. Instead of investigating what the reality is, the mind assumes that the reality must have certain characteristics and whatever does not possess these characteristics is not the reality. It gets caught up in its own web of thought, of maya. The truth of God's omnipresence is, in fact, scientific, though science which is fast moving towards the same conclusion may yet take some time before even surmising it. We have already reached the stage at which we are scientifically assured that only-one thing exists in the universe vibrant energy which, when it is comparatively at rest, appears to be mass. All the elements are atoms arranged in a particular combination and the atoms themselves are distinguished in accordance with the number of electrons and protons they contain. Yet, how is it that a table is different from a book?

There is obviously some erroneous perception in the beholder. Who is this beholder? The man. He, too, shares the same fate as the universe which to him appears outside. He is also composed of the same elements and factors. Though in reality one alone exists, there is this mysterious 'internal reflection'. It is loosely comparable to the dream of a sleeping man: objects created in and by the one mind acting on one another. Though in calmer and saner moments we may glimpse this truth, it is hard to realize and live in it.

This is Krishna's yoga: constantly remember that God is the sole, though not-so-obvious, reality pervading all, including you, but never limited to or conditioned by anything in the universe.

IX:5 - Yet everything that's created does not rest in Me. Behold My Divine Yoga! Although I am the maintainer of all living entities, and although I am everywhere, still my Self is the very source of creation.

Measure not the immeasurable in words, warned lord Buddha. Dakshinamurti indicated it by silence and the symbol of wisdom - cin-mudra. The vaidika seers exclaimed 'Hau, hau', unable to find words to express their vision. Sage Yajnavalkya declared that all positive definitions are distractions and that the reality can only be approached by the total negation of all names and forms, thoughts and concepts - 'neti, neti' , 'not this, not this'. Yet, if no-one said anything, no-one could learn - except the rarest few to whom silence is meaningful. Here we are, on the horns of a dilemma! The method adopted by the Indian sage to overcome this is paradoxical. Every thesis is immediately opposed by its antithesis, and the resultant inexpressible synthesis is the nearest point which human intellect can reach before awakening to the reality, which is enlightenment - an event which the Zen Buddhists call 'satori' .

The previous verse said 'all beings exist in me', and here we are told 'nor do beings exist in me'! Deep meditation on this conundrum will remove the suggestion of duality and plurality implied in the first statement. It is not like saying: sweets are in the tin, but rather vapor is pervaded by water, where vapor and water are not two different things, but one is just the manifestation of the other. Thus, the reality is there, everywhere, all the time, in not-so-obvious a manner.

God is the creator and sustainer of all beings, yet not outside them. God dwells in all beings, yet is not limited to them. All beings are pervaded by him, yet not as 'all beings' - diverse and different, but in a mysterious manner all are forever one with him, without in any way affecting him, tainting him, limiting him or conditioning him. This indeed is the divine yoga; and the Lord explains it further in the following verses.

A novel method for self-realization is suggested by the Lord in the Bhagavad Gita. Other methods had been suggested before him. There were those who wanted us to close our eyes to the world, go into seclusion and by a process of introverted mental gaze, perceive the light of the self within. Others insisted on our doing our duties and serving humanity with the sole intention of self-purification, but refused to discuss the next step.

Krishna is a genius. He discloses that the very duties and the service that we are compelled to perform daily, contain in themselves, not only agents to purify us but to reveal - unveil God for us to see! But how? We should see the world, but not as the world; we should see it as the manifestation of God, his power, his glory. In other words, this is as if we were sitting in the cinema with wide open eyes and not only seeing the moving figures, but the screen on which they are projected. Try it!

The essence of this method is to be able to perceive the substratum - God, even though looking at the name and form. When you look at a wise man, you immediately remember that the wisdom in him is God. You learn to abstract that from the name and form, perceive that alone to the exclusion of everything else, and realize that it is the manifestation of God.

This demands rigorous preliminary discipline and training; the training was prescribed and described in chapter 6. Modern Zen Buddhism, too, leads its adherents along this royal road to self-realization. First you see the tree; then you see the void; and then again you see the tree! But the second time, though the tree is the same, you are quite different and your inner vision is enlightened. That is the difference between the layman and a sage - the latter is enlightened. May you shine as an enlightened sage!

IX:6 - As the mighty wind, moving everywhere, rests always in the ether, know that all beings rest in Me.

The reality is just like space and what is obvious is like the wind - the movement of air in space. This wind, existing and moving in space, enables all things to come into being, to flourish. In a manner of speaking, it is the wind of life-force or prana that manifests itself as all this. Vibrating somewhere, it is called something; vibrating elsewhere, it is called something else. Prana or life-force is responsible for the manifestation of the diverse phenomena and diverse beings. Yet, space is totally unaffected by these beings arising, existing and dissolving. This is an important concept which must be clearly grasped. All things exist in space; they are part of space as it were.

When a building is erected, space has not vanished or been destroyed. It is still there, not merely as the enclosed space within the building, but as the space that even the solid walls 'occupy'. It is in the building - not confined to it, but really confining it! God exists in us in this sense only. By virtue of his omnipresence, he is within us and all around us.

In quantum physics we are knocking at the door of this truth, having come close to the immateriality of matter. We are just dancing sub-atomic particles, which may also be waves. If all of us are mere waves of energy, we are not so solid after all!

So, the not-so-obvious is the reality in all that seems to be obvious. This is the distinction between material and immaterial beings. Water in a jar moves with the jar. The immaterial space in an empty jar, being omnipresent, does not move with it. Similarly, the omnipresent God is not subject to activity, birth and death. Despite the cyclonic activity in the universe, the self or Brahman or God, is ever quiescent. Even the birth and death of beings are only apparent.

You are space, my friend, mere space. That space is filled with the divine presence whose nature is Chit-Shakti, not blind energy, but energy which is full of consciousness. This consciousness somehow becomes aware of a world and of an infinite variety of creatures. That awareness itself is the creator; and that awareness itself you are.

IX:7 - All beings, O Arjuna, enter into my Nature at the end of a Kalpa; I send them forth again at the beginning of the next kalpa.
IX:8 - The whole cosmic order is under Me. By My will it is manifested again and again, and by My will it is annihilated at the end.

Animating my nature, I again and again send forth all this multitude of beings, helpless by the force of nature. The 'big bang' theory of creation states that all matter was condensed into a single super atom billions of years ago, and when it burst, the universe was born. The force was such that the universe is still scattering! On the other hand, the 'steady state' theory asserts that the universe is beginningless and endless and that out of the rudimentary hydrogen, new galaxies are constantly being formed to fill the space vacated by others moving away.

Krishna reconciles the two. The 'big bang' is manifestation of his nature at the beginning of a kalpa - age. Since it is still in process of manifestation, we are not able to realize that one day all these will be withdrawn into his nature. i.e. When the galaxies have dispersed far enough from one another to exhaust the original impulse, they will begin to return to the centre. God, his nature and the potentiality of manifestation and unmanifestation, projection and withdrawal are all eternal; hence the continuous creation theory is also true.

Kalpa is a super-astronomical period of time; but in reality it is only kalpana - imagination, a thought in the divine mind. Thought involves both imagining and guessing in response to sensory stimuli. Careful observation shows that at one point, just before we drop off to sleep, it seems as though the senses and the imagining faculties are returning to our nature; and once the imagining and guessing has ceased, they have returned. When we wake, in dream or otherwise, those faculties start streaming out. This happens to us every day, and to God every one of his days, which means that there is nothing but God.

IX:9 - These actions do not bind me, O Arjuna, sitting like one indifferent, unattached to those acts.

IX:10 - Under Me as supervisor, Nature produces the moving and the unmoving; because of this the world revolves.

When are we 'bound'? When we are affected. The vital truth to be realized and always borne in mind is that nothing external really affects us, but that 'we affect ourselves'. Hence it is that Krishna warns us that we are our own friend or foe. No-one can irritate us; we irritate ourselves. No-one can insult us - beyond expressing their opinions about us; we interpret their opinions as insults. This affection is caused by attachment, itself born of ignorant identification of the self with the body and mind.

When we realize directly, not merely intellectually or intuitively, that whatever experience we may have is just our experience, and even so there are countless other experiences; that what we see is just one point of view and even so there are countless points of view; then instantly we will be loving, humble and enlightened. We realize we are just one small point of the cosmos and we learn to look at everything in the universe as part of this totality.

Here is a puzzle. I am your guest and we both go to the sea for a swim. I am attacked by a shark. The shark is happy. I yell with pain. You are worried. A few soft-hearted women weep. Others, disdainfully turn their faces away. A photographer is busy taking the 'picture of the year'. Now, we know that God dwells in all. How does he feel about the incident? He is unaffected, for the simple reason that he does not identify himself with any one of the actors in this drama. It does not mean that he is cruelly indifferent to the pains and sufferings of man; he is totally free from ignorance and false identification, and so is free from these pains and sufferings. Man, too, by identifying his self with God can thus free himself. This identification is not a mental activity, but the identification of the reality - the homogeneity or unity in this universe - which is not obvious - after the cessation of mental activity. That is the goal of yoga.

IX:11 - Fools disregard Me, clad in human form, not knowing My higher Being as the great Lord of all beings.

IX:12 - Those who are thus bewildered are attracted by demonic and atheistic views. In that deluded condition, their hopes for liberation, their fruitive activities, and their culture of knowledge are all defeated.

'People do not recognize me clad in human form' may refer to particular incarnations such as Rama, Krishna, Moses, Mohammed, Buddha, Jesus and so on, but it may also mean that we do not recognize the not-so-obvious divinity in one another. The embodied self is none other than the supreme self; only illusion limits it. That is why Gurudev Swami Sivananda emphasized: See God in all; and Baba Muktananda used to say: Treat one another as God. What appears to be a human form is nothing but an outer appearance; and appearance appears to appear only to one to whom it appears. Thus the same reality that is in you shines in all. It is one divine being that dwells in the hearts of all. Let the consciousness expand to see this unobvious truth with the eye of the insight.

You have the privilege of keeping this insight open - observing, enquiring, seeking constantly for this reality concerning yourself, all your relationships and what exists. You also have the privilege of shutting your eyes and creating your own reality.

'Asuri' means the absence of light, all that is darkened. In other words, one whose insight is darkened or closed. When we are blind spiritually, we see a separate reality created by our own ignorance. They are fools who accept the verdict of the senses, the intellect and their limited faculties and fail to realize the infinite. Their life is wasted in groping in darkness and self-limited by hugging ignorance. Even their fondest hopes, greatest actions and profoundest knowledge are tainted by illusion and therefore useless.

Ignorance is undivine; hence their nature is undivine and sinful. They can become divine - if they open their inner eye.

IX:13 - The great souls, O Arjuna, partaking of My divine nature, worship Me with the mind devoted to nothing else, knowing Me as the imperishable source of beings.

IX:14 - Always glorifying Me, striving, firm in vows, prostrating before Me, they worship Me with devotion, ever steadfast.

The previous two verses stated the characteristics of a person of diabolical nature. Here we are introduced to the characteristics of the man of divine nature. Nature is God's own nature. It is the law of manifestation, however, that everything has two poles or sides. All that is within material, temporal, rational or conceptual levels has two extremes which are the pairs of opposites. Ignorance and knowledge, divine and undivine, manifest and unmanifest, truth and falsehood, reality and unreality - these always co-exist as the two poles of a single manifest being. However, God is beyond these because he is beyond all materiality, temporality, rationalization or concept.

God's nature, when it is manifest here, has the two extremities of the divine and the undivine. The human soul however, is endowed with the intelligence to discriminate between the two, to make the choice; and the will to make that choice operative, i.e. act upon that choice. We shall see more about this division of divine and undivine natures in a later chapter.

Suffice it to say here that those who have chosen to pursue divine nature, partake of that divine nature and adore God with all their being while at the same time, realizing that he is the divine presence in all beings. Bowing to all beings as the shrines of the divine spark, they serve all, love all and adore all beings. This is the symbolism of the holy cross, too, in which are synthesized the two commandments of lord Jesus: Love thy Lord and Love thy neighbor as thine own self; the vertical beam representing the former, the horizontal beam representing the latter, and the intersection indicating their identity.

IX:15 - Others also, sacrificing with the wisdom-sacrifice, worship me, as the one without a second, diverse in many, and in the universal form.

IX:16 - But it is I who am the ritual, I the sacrifice, the offering to the ancestors, the healing herb, the mantra. I am the butter, the fire, and the offering.

There is not and need not be a uniform approach to the infinite hidden in all finite objects. One can approach the infinite through any or all of the finite objects; but the object of our quest must be the infinite; the finite objects should not bedim or dazzle our vision, sidetrack our quest or thwart our Endeavour.

There are various yajna or ritualistic acts described and prescribed for seekers in the veda. Krishna introduces a new yajna here in the Bhagavad Gita. It is the jnana-yajna, the wisdom-worship or sacrifice where the symbolism of the ritual is pierced and the truth realized and revealed.

Based on this right understanding, all our actions can be and should be directed towards God who is 'faced in all directions' - i.e. omnipresent, who is one and who is manifold, neither limited by the one nor by the other. He can be worshipped as one, as many, as distinct or as identical; for he is ultimately beyond all these. The path to the transcendental is everywhere and through all. After all, is not God the seeker, the quest, the goal, the path and all? That is what Krishna points out to us in the second verse above, using the symbolism with which the people of his time were familiar, the havan - fire worship. When the spirit of sacrifice is thus fostered, our interdependence is seen. One sacrifices to the other - the seed sacrificing itself gives rise to the tree, the tree sacrifices itself to produce the fruit. Hence, there is an interconnectedness where we are all interwoven into the fabric of the world. Once this comprehensive understanding is attained, the worldliness of the world vanishes, and the seeker of wisdom rests in God. He experiences God in himself and in all.

IX:17 - I am the father of this world, the mother, the dispenser of the fruits of actions, and the grandfather. I am the object of knowledge, the purifier, and the syllable Om. I am also the Rig-Veda, the Sama-Veda, and the Yajur-Veda.

IX:18 - I am the goal, the sustainer, the master, the witness, the abode, the refuge, and the most dear friend. I am the creation and the annihilation, the basis of everything, the resting place and the eternal seed.

IX:19 - I give heat; I withhold and send forth the rain; I am immortality and also death, existence and non-existence, O Arjuna.

From the transcendental to the abstract! The mind is unable to think of even space and its dimensionlessness. It cannot transcend its own finite nature and yet remain 'mind'; the knower-beyond-mind is intuition. The transcendental reality can only be intuitively grasped, for it is beyond thought and rationalization. Whatever may be thought of by the mind is the reality converted into a thought by the mind, converted into a substance by the mind. The reality has no name, no form, no quality, no attribute and can neither be characterized as existence nor non-existence, for then we fall into the error of 'pairs of opposites'.

Is there then no hope for the man who is unable to rise to the level of the realization of the transcendental? Is the jet the only mode of travel? Is there no ship for the man of weak heart? Yes; meditate upon these abstract concepts, but remember that they are pointers and guideposts, not the destination.

The synthesis of opposites in the third verse is very important. God is not this or that; yet he is this and that, by virtue of being their substratum and reality. He embraces all opposites because he transcends them all. From his point of view the opposites are like the light and shade of a painting, like the sympathetic and para-sympathetic nervous system in us, performing opposite functions for a common benefit, under the direction of life.

IX:20 - The knowers of the three Vedas, the drinkers of Soma, purified of all sins, worshipping me by sacrifices, pray for the way to heaven; they reach the holy world of the Lord of the gods, and enjoy in heaven the divine pleasures of the gods.

IX:21 - They, having enjoyed the vast heaven, enter the world of mortals when their merits are exhausted; thus abiding by the injunctions of the three Vedas and desiring desires, they attain to the state of going and returning.

The realization of the absolute is our goal. We may take the smooth path or the rugged one. We may swim across or ride in a ferry-boat. The path of holiness and the path of diabolical beings are not different. Life is the same, but the insight of the holy ones shines brightly whilst the eyesight of the insight of diabolical beings is closed. In our quest we should never for a moment forget the goal.

The veda and other scriptures are like the ferry-boat, and they are also like the mighty banyan tree that provides cool shade to the weary traveler scorched by the sun - of austerities and of the intense inner effort to transcend the mind. They encourage the despondent soul by providing him with tangible versions of the intangible, clothing the immaterial with the material, the spirit with form. He who complacently surrenders to these and goes to sleep under the banyan tree, abandoning the quest, exposes himself to the danger of wild animals - of desires and evil actions later in this life and subsequent lives.

Rituals, forms and scriptural injunctions are useful only so long as we do not forget the real, ultimate goal, which is realization of the absolute. They do not take us to the destination, but are only pointers without which it may be difficult to find the way.

However, they should never be regarded as the goal or a substitute for the goal.

Do all the good you can - obviously because you are convinced that you will go to heaven.

This conviction moulds your citta - subconscious mind. And, it determines your next incarnation - meaning: on dropping this body you will be convinced that you are in heaven!

IX:22 - To those men who worship Me alone, thinking of no other, I secure what is not already possessed, and preserve what they already possess.

This is the royal secret, the royal road to the realization of the absolute! We should disengage ourselves from the self-manufactured snare of illusion. Thinking of God for a while and then of the objects of the world for the rest of the time betrays insincerity and a doubt. The test of our sincerity here is the natural attitude of our mind to be ever conscious of God. This habit must be cultivated, realizing that it is on account of his grace that we are able to see, speak, hear, think and so on. By merely becoming aware of this tremendous truth, we are freed from our own motivations and we live free, doing whatever has to be done. We are able to be intensely active and at the same time constantly aware of God's existence.

Krishna uses a clever psychological approach here: Think of me always; and I shall protect you. If God only protects those who constantly think of him, who protects the others? God alone. To him all are equal and he is not partial towards any, except inasmuch as they open themselves to him and therefore receive his grace in greater abundance. If you have the courage and the intelligence to investigate life, you find that all that you needed at a certain moment had already been created years ago. The wheat for the bread that you had this morning grew specifically for you three years ago!

When the devotee meditates upon the assurance contained in this verse, the hypnotic suggestion of the Lord takes effect upon him and he lets himself go entirely. It dawns upon him like a flash of lightning that God and God alone is the protector of all; and thenceforth he abandons all selfish activity and dedicates himself to the service of mankind in the spirit of the Gita, remembering God constantly.

It does not mean that such a devotee will be indifferent to the business of the world; on the contrary he will make himself an egoless, selfless and dynamic instrument in the hands of the Lord, for his will to be done. The actual technique of attaining this state of being will be explained as we go on.

IX:23 - Even those devotees who, endowed with faith, worship other gods, worship me only, O Arjuna, but by the wrong method.

IX:24 - For I alone am the enjoyer and also the Lord of all sacrifices; but they do not know me in essence, and hence they return to this mortal world.

IX:25 - Those who worship the devas will take birth among the devas; those who worship ancestors go to the ancestors; those who worship ghosts and spirits will take birth among such beings; and those who worship Me will live with Me.

At the outset a word of caution. It is possible to see the 'me' and 'God' that occur in the Bhagavad Gita, as implying the transcendental cosmic reality, the infinite which is manifest in infinite ways and whose nature is the entire manifest creation. That is the correct principle, the right approach, the proper method.

Those who cannot rise immediately to this height in yoga sadhana are not forsaken. They can approach God through any of the paths, modes or symbols, but they should never forget that the goal is the supreme being and not the path, mode or symbol chosen. If this is remembered, the great indwelling presence in all will accept their worship and lead them to the correct method, through the spirit of enquiry.

It is on account of ignorance or misunderstanding that the frail human heart accepts the symbol as the truth, the part as the whole, the aspect as the reality. When this happens, the soul reaches union with those objects of adoration. Though it has lost a golden opportunity of direct self-realization, it will return here to make further progress. Thus, whatever path or symbol is chosen for worship, there should be an awareness that the symbol is worshipped 'as God' in the sense that what is actually worshipped is the infinite, not-so-obvious reality in the universe. What is obvious is a mental creation. From that, investigation into the nature of God begins, and then the answer arises - God-realization happens. When this happens, the questioner is absent. Swami Sivananda has a beautiful poem which says: Ignorance knocked, wisdom opened and ignorance ceased to be! Ignorance cannot face wisdom, darkness cannot face light, the ego cannot face God.

IX:26 - Whoever offers me with devotion and a pure heart, a leaf, a flower, a fruit, or a little water, I accept this offering.

IX:27 - All that you do, all that you eat, all that you offer and give away, as well as all austerities that you may perform, O Arjuna, should be done as an offering to Me.

Whatever may be our approach to the supreme being, in accordance with our inner equipment, predisposition, temperament and taste, we ought to make it a point to feel that in and through the chosen symbol, we are contacting the supreme being himself, as he is the indwelling presence.

It is not so much what we do that matters, but with what feeling we do it. Just as almost any appealing and God-reminding symbol can be chosen to represent the supreme being, almost anything may be used to represent the inner spirit with which we approach him. A leaf, a flower - it does not matter what; for it is but a symbol that stands for the spirit of worshipfulness and total surrender which fills our heart. Minus this spirit, the offering is of very little value. Minus the recognition of the presence of the supreme being in the object, as we have seen, the worship is imperfect and will not liberate us.

When these two conditions have been ensured, it only remains for us to treat our whole life as worship of God and to offer all our actions as flowers of our worship of Him.

Verse 26 may be taken to refer to ritualistic idol worship and also to charity. To the God who dwells in all we may offer in charity anything, however little it is, with love. This attitude encourages charity. Some people feel that unless they give in a big way, they should not think of giving at all. It is a great loss. So give what you can, but give with love, feeling that you are worshipping the indwelling presence thereby.

These two verses are life-transforming. Our Master used to recite verse 26 whenever he gave anything to anybody, thus revealing His attitude - worship of the indwelling God.

IX:28 - Thus shall you be freed from the bonds of actions yielding good and evil fruits; with the mind steadfast in the yoga of renunciation, and liberated, you shall come to Me.

IX:29 - The same am I to all beings; to me there is none hateful or dear. But those who worship Me with devotion, are in Me, and I am in them.

Liberation is from ignorance; renunciation is of its offspring - egoism and mineness. When the devotee of the omnipresence humbly performs all the activities of his life as worship of God, he is liberated from ignorance and the ignorant belief that some actions are high and others low or menial; that some actions yield auspicious and others in-auspicious fruits. In a truly holy man, action does not need a motivation, since everything connected with every action is holy and divine. In his view, all actions are performed 'by God, to God, for his own sake', thus he is unbiased. Such a man is a supreme devotee of the Lord and quickly reaches him.

To the uninitiated and evil-veiled eye it looks as though God is somehow partial when one man, who to all outward appearances is like any other man, is granted liberation! He seems to be the beloved of God, the chosen one. Is God, then, a whimsical being with his own private loves?

In the history of religions, many have claimed to be 'the chosen' people, race or men. The idea occurs even in the Katha Upanisad! 'The self reveals itself to whom it pleases.' The Holy Quran also resorts to such expression. This divine mystery is explained in the Gita: God chooses the humble ones who have totally surrendered themselves to him, to serve as his instrument, knowing that they will never misuse that privilege or thereby become swollen headed. They are chosen because they deserve such choice; and such choice is therefore in the interest of all. There is no suggestion that certain communities or peoples will be chosen. In the eyes of God, all have an equal opportunity to be chosen. All needles stand an equal chance of being attracted by the magnet, but the clean needle enjoys that privilege, while the rusty one does not.

He who thinks he is fit to be chosen, he who says that he is the chosen one, is not chosen.

IX:30 - Even if the most sinful worships me, with devotion to none else, he too should indeed be regarded as righteous, for he has rightly resolved.

IX:31 - Soon he becomes righteous and attains to eternal peace; O Arjuna, know you for certain that my devotee is never destroyed.

Judaism and Islam, in particular, have declarations that only God is worthy of our worship. May I humbly suggest that in these two verses Krishna, while agreeing with the biblical and the quranic commandment, exposes the context and, therefore, the true inner meaning?

The sinner - and the worldly man in general - worships and is devoted to a thousand objects and personalities in this world; in fact that is why he sins, for to forget God in being attached to passing phenomena is itself the worst sin. The 'jealous God', with the compassionate intent of bringing him to the right path, visits him with mixed, varied and unexpected experiences in the form of pain and pleasure, etc. If he realizes his folly - usually by association with men of spiritual insight, and if he has the strength of will to resolve aright, he will naturally be devoted to God and God alone.

'He has rightly resolved' is not merely resolution but an application of energies or attention in the right direction. If you turn and move towards the light, it is possible that for every two steps forward, you are pulled back one and a half. Never mind, you are still moving forward!

One with such resolution soon becomes a devotee of God, in his own way. An understanding of the expression 'devoted to God in his own way' offers an appreciation of the innumerable ways in which God has been attained. In the Bhagavatam there is a lovely verse which says that people have attained God by fearing him, loving him, hating him, fighting with him or befriending him. In fact, people have attained him in all manner of ways. We are devoted to God in accordance with our own nature. Thus, the freedom to worship him in any manner the seeker likes has already been granted.

IX:32 - Those who take shelter in me, O Arjuna, though they be of lower birth - women, vaisyas, as well as sudras - can approach the supreme destination.
IX:33 - How much more easily than the holy Brahmins and devoted royal saints, attain the goal. Having obtained this impermanent and unhappy world, worship Me.

When we take refuge in God, we offer ourselves to him and become his property. It then becomes his responsibility to preserve that property. God will not let us go. A deluded miser clings to a piece of gold and risks his very life for it; how much more valuable is a human soul! Remember lord Jesus comparing sparrows and the human being? Moreover, since, to God, the love of the human soul is natural, born of their eternal unity, once this re-union is effected it is not lost. The divine grip over the human soul may even take the form of worldly losses and bereavements. These are meant only to prevent the devotee from 'adoring anything but God'. The Lord might now scrape the adhering taints of past sinful life, which may be felt as pain by the human mind, and polish it, possibly giving the experience of psychic visions, just as the jeweller's rubbing and polishing of gold jewelry are prompted by his love of his property and his eagerness to increase its lustre and therefore its worth.

When thus visited by the conventionally misunderstood pain, misery and dishonor, the devotee sees them as proper signs of the true nature of the world in which he is born - impermanent and frustrating, and of the redeeming grace of God, which thus prevents him from being deluded. He does not blame the Lord nor is his devotion disturbed. Endowed with this understanding, men and women of all castes and orders of life become eligible for the light which leads them to the supreme goal, without the least partiality or victimization incident upon their birth.

IX:34 - Fix your mind on Me; be devoted to Me; sacrifice to Me; bow down to Me; having thus united your whole self with Me, taking Me as the Supreme Goal, you shall come to Me.

This is the essence of Gurudev's Integral Yoga. This is the essence of the Bhagavad Gita. Krishna is so fond of this idea that he repeats it at the end of his teaching.

The delusion that envelops our understanding must go. The ignorance that veils the reality and projects the false appearance must be dispelled. The mind must be rid of its clouds of diversity. This is achieved by saturating the mind with God. The process of meditation is not like dropping a stone into a cup of water, but like dropping a lump of sugar into it - when the mind is thus fixed on God and becomes saturated with him, its very nature is changed! That is the meaning, purpose and fruit of meditation.

This is simultaneously accompanied by a whole-souled devotion to the Lord. With the evaporation of the delusions of the mind, its desires, based on lop-sided valuations, vanish. Then the evanescence of the world and the eternity of the bliss of the self are understood. The heart drops the world and clings to the Lotus Feet of the Lord.

The 'hands' spontaneously, involuntarily and joyously participate in this adoration of the omnipresent being, by working for the Lord, serving the Lord in all for His sake.

Thus the three aspects of our personality - the head, the heart and the hand - are integrated and our whole being is directed towards realization of God as the only goal of our life. Then our life is not idle day-dreaming; it is full of dynamic action - karma yoga. It is selfless but not soul-less service, full of love of the omnipresent God - bhakti. It is neither blind action nor sentimentalism, but is filled with and directed by the light of God-consciousness - jnana.

Has not such a devotee already 'come to God'?

10. The Yoga of the Divine Glories

X:1 - The Blessed Lord said: O Arjuna, listen to My supreme word. I shall declare it to you, who art beloved, for your welfare.

X:2 - Neither the hosts of the gods, nor the great sages know My origin; for I am the source of all the gods and the great sages.

The spiritual meaning here should not be overlooked. I will tell you this wonderful truth, for I alone can - i.e. Only God can know God. The Kenopanishad ridicules the little man who prattles: I know God, and emphatically poses the riddle: He who knows, knows not and he who knows not, knows. How can I know God? Can the finite measure the infinite? At best, the 'I' can disappear and dissolve in God.

The commandment 'Please listen' is important, too. Spiritual truths are not heard by the physical ear, the conditioned mind or the prejudiced intellect, but with the ear in the centre of the heart. When the truth is heard with that ear, a fresh mind and calm intellect, it becomes a living truth - the word made flesh.

Two types of beings are mentioned in the second verse - gods and sages. This can be interpreted both literally and metaphorically. Metaphorically, the gods are the powers that preside over the various organs and functions of the body. Each element is presided over by a divinity and governs an organ. The sages can be interpreted to refer to the mental faculties - the senses and the mind, which cannot know God, for he is their creator and lord.

Literally, the gods and sages were also created by God and hence are finite and in some measure imperfect - incapable of grasping the infinite. No doubt, through their insight they have become intuitively aware of the reality of God, but they cannot know him because he cannot be objectified. There is something in master which is in direct communion with God. This omnipresence which is the unveiled divinity in the master is also in every being, but as the veiled divinity.

X:3 - He who knows me as unborn and beginningless, the great Lord of the worlds, he, among mortals, is undeluded; he is liberated from all sins.

What is God's own knowledge of himself? What is God's wisdom concerning himself?

First, he is unborn and, therefore, beginningless; and second, he is the great lord of the worlds, or planes of consciousness or viewpoints. Here is an interesting thesis, antithesis, synthesis and transcendence. God is unborn and is not involved in all these passing appearances or phenomena. Who, then, is the controller of these phenomena which, by their orderliness and purposefulness, suggest such a governor? It is God. He is not involved in them, yet they do not function independently of him! Shall we, then, compare God to a despotic ruler who whimsically controls the destinies of people without getting involved in their miseries in any way? Oh, no! That would leave no room for his great compassion and love, which virtually 'compel' him to serve those who are devoted to him. He is very intimately conscious of the problems and strivings of mankind and, therefore, whenever the balance of right-and-wrong is greatly upset, he incarnates himself.

God's own nature keeps the entire universe vibrating and scintillating, but in that there is neither an action nor an actor. In other words, he is not limited to unity, mere infinity - as opposed to finitude, or transcendental - as opposed to sensible - nature. He is one; he is many; he is one in many; he is many in one; and he is that inexpressible 'something' which we all try to express in various ways.

Hence one who realizes God as this, that, both, neither, and that which remains when all pairs of opposites have been affirmed, denied and transcended - by fusion, is never deluded. He is free from sin, for if sin is forgetfulness of God, he never forgets God!

X:4 - Intellect, wisdom, non-delusion, forgiveness, truth, self-restraint, calmness, happiness, pain, birth, death, fear and also fearlessness,
X:5 - non-injury, equanimity, contentment, austerity, charity, fame and infamy, these are the different kinds of qualities of beings arise from Me.

The danger of a negative approach in metaphysics is that the subtle truth which transcends all viewpoints, but in a way includes them, is lost sight of. Hence, the goal of the yogi is beyond philosophy and metaphysics. It is the great eloquent silence which is the substratum for the one - the monosyllable Om, and the many - language and speech, beyond all affirmations and denials. That goal is the supreme peace which is the foundation of the created universe - one, and all the objects in it - many. It is that supreme bliss which is the basis for the experience of undifferentiated happiness - one, and of different experiences - many, from the highest pleasure to the worst pain.

God is the bed of the river, and all these are its waters which flow on and on from immemorial past to unforeseeable future. In the light of this truth, the shadow called the ego vanishes. Hence, the Lord enumerates a few of the many qualities that characterize our inner being and topography. You will notice that they all arise from him. You will notice, too, that they are self-contradictory. We see this wonder in nature: elements like fire and water are present everywhere and peacefully co-exist, though their natures are different. All of them have God as their substratum. They all spring from him, they exist on account of him, but they do not in any way limit him - nor need we 'protect' him by denying their indescribable and wonderful relation with him.

One who see this welcomes all experiences. Such a one was Swami Sivananda. He welcomed joy and sorrow; He was not ashamed to be glorified, nor was He bothered if He was insulted even by His own disciples. All these arise in God. However, this spirit is not easy to grasp. What do we do till then? Look for that God experience.

X:6 - The seven Maharshis, the four Kumaras, and the Manus, are born out of My Nature and My mind; and all creatures in these realms descend from them.

X:7 - He who in truth knows these manifold manifestations of My Being and Yoga-power of Mine, becomes established in the unshakeable Yoga; there is no doubt about it.

Hinduism, especially Hindu mythology, has woven colorful legends into a charming pattern of creation. The Bhagavatam and many other scriptures contain interesting stories which invariably conclude with the note, 'All this is the Lord's play'. The four ancient sages who were the first born of the Creator's mind were not interested in progeny. The second lot of seven were prompted by the indweller to do this job, whilst the four illuminated the path of renunciation and return. These eleven sages and the manu, 'were born of my mind'. In other words, they are not to be mistaken for gross, physical, material beings! They are the thought-forms or the dreams of the Lord. They are the archetypes in the macrocosm of certain physio-mental faculties in the microcosm.

The four ancient sages represent the four aspects of the mind - the conscious, the subconscious, the intellect and the egoity. The seven sages, however, represent the seven dhatu - components of the physical body. The mana are thoughts themselves in the waking state, and the dreams of the dream-state. But all these are only in the cosmic mind! i.e. They are God's dreams. And, 'from them are these creatures born in this world!' i.e. The concrete, material, sensible world that seems to exist is nothing more than God's dream-object. Why, then, do we not experience it as such? Because the dream is still in progress and we are all dream-objects. Whilst the dream is in progress, no-one can convince the dreamer that he is dreaming! All seems so real. It is only on awakening that the dream is realized to have been a dream. The knower of this truth practices the 'unshakable yoga' for he is no more deluded, though he sees both sides - the dream and the dreamer dreaming his dream!

X:8 - I am the source of all; from me everything evolves; understanding thus, the wise, endowed with meditation, worship Me.

X:9 - With their minds and lives entirely absorbed in Me, enlightening each other and always speaking of me, they are satisfied and delighted.

God is the source of all. The whole universe has issued from him as dream objects issue from your consciousness during dream; yet it remains within him, pervaded by him, essentially one with him - nay, is he himself.

The enlightened ones do not merely repeat these formulae or think about these truths, but what they say and think is flavored by the nature of their own being. It is not the lips that utter the words, or the brain that thinks these thoughts. It is the entire being which expresses the truth, for that being is steeped in the realization of this truth.

The Lord is lord of the universe. When you enter into the spirit of this teaching, your citta becomes totally saturated with God. The word 'saturated' is highly inadequate because saturated means that there is a medium in which something else is held, whereas 'maccitta' does not mean that. God is not a percept or a concept. When all mental activities cease and the unreality of the ego is realized, God reveals himself, and you realize that everything there is totally pervaded by him. When your whole being cries out that this is the truth, what happens to you is maccitta.

So, the enlightened person is silent, unless it be the divine will that he should teach. Such enlightened men talk to one another, keeping one another awake and enlightened. To them there is absolutely no guru-disciple or teacher-taught relationship, but it is merely a case of enlightened persons talking about God. That is the spirit in which the Bhagavatam was narrated, and that is the spirit in which all the great ones assemble, singing the glories of God without in the least considering themselves to be more enlightened than the others. In their eyes it is simply two hands scratching two sides of the face.

X:10 - To them who are ever steadfast, worshipping Me with love, I give the Yoga of discrimination en the buddhi, by which they come to Me.

X:11 - Out of mere compassion for them, I, dwelling within their Self, destroy the darkness born of ignorance, by the luminous lamp of knowledge.

We can talk about God. We can love God. We can constantly meditate upon God. We can serve humanity as manifest God. We can - and should - do all these and much more. But God-realization is his gift. We should not forget this for a single moment in our life. Hence, lord Krishna reminds us of this great truth at every turn in the Gita.

We cannot demand, except in the sense of yearning God-realization. Who demands? The ego! We do not deserve God-realization so long as the ego is active. When the ego is not there, who is there to demand? This is the greatest of all puzzles, which only God can solve. Therefore the wise seeker leaves this final step to him.

This does not mean that fatalistically we give up our sadhana. Oh, no! That would be impossible if we were sincere in our spiritual aspiration, and if we were mature enough to commence our spiritual return-flight. The man who says: I am unable to do even japa, or meditation, because God has not blessed me with such opportunities and grace, is still far below the 'human' stage of evolution - though, like an actor, he may wear a human mask. In addition, he is clever enough to invent a philosophic argument to hide it! It is our irrepressible nature to strive, to do sadhana, but only God destroys our ignorance - not because we deserve it, but out of sheer compassion. What do we deserve? We have only used the faculties bestowed upon us by him, as they should be used. Is there great merit in this? No. So if God destroys our ignorance, it is not because we deserve it - if our arrogance feels so, the veil of ignorance will become thicker, but out of his sheer compassion for us.

X:12 - Arjuna said : You are the Supreme Brahman, the supreme abode, the supreme Purifier; the eternal divine Purusha, the primeval God, unborn and omnipresent.
X:13 - All the sages have thus declared you; also the divine sage Narada; so also Asita, Devala and Vyasa; and now you yourself sayest so to me.
X:14 - O Krishna, I totally accept as truth all that you have told me. Neither the gods nor the demons, O Lord, know Thy personality.
X:15 - Verily, you yourself knowest Yourself by Yourself, Supreme Purusha, source and Lord of all beings, God of gods, Ruler of the world.

Hymns are as old as time, and hymn singing is a method adopted by the devout seeker, to side-track the doubting intellect, with its insatiable 'appetite' to destroy knowledge aimlessly, and to appeal directly to the light of God within to reveal itself. In the east, the Sama-chanters particularly, resorted to singing the glories of God in his various aspects, invoking his blessings and grace in various ways and for different purposes. In the west, the psalmist did the same. Incidentally, note the phonetic similarity between psalm and Sama - which refer to the same thing - and which were later extended to 'charm' in white and black magic. This ancient method has been recaptured by the highly advanced scientist of today and reintroduced into society in the form of 'suggestion' which the psychologist defines as 'the inducing, or the attempt to induce an idea, belief, decision, action, etc., by one individual in another through stimulation, whether verbal or otherwise, but exclusive of argument'. Even as hypnosis can be self-applied, suggestion, too, can become auto-suggestion; but it should again be 'exclusive of argument'. It has, however, been the experience of all mystics that such acceptance was eventually rewarded by direct experience of the reality which the hymn 'suggested'.

X:16 - You should indeed tell, without reserve, of Your divine glories by which You existeth, pervading all these worlds. None else can do so.
X:17 - How shall I, ever meditating, know you, O Yogi? In what aspects, Blessed Lord, are you to be thought of by Me?
X:18 - Tell me again in detail, O Krishna, of Your yoga and Your glory; for I am not satisfied with what I have heard of your life-giving words.

'Tell me again' - not only indicates Arjuna's thirst for wisdom, but a method which all of us can adopt to whip up interest, keep away boredom and thus keep the inner receptor open for the reception of divine light. In the words of the wise, there is always a germinal seed. Arjuna is a wise seeker; his prayer here is the prayer of all sincere seekers who realize their own limitations, though they will rise above them one day. Our mind can grasp only that which is 'below' it in the degree of subtlety. It cannot grasp something which is more subtle. The sieve is a very crude illustration: if the particles of flour are smaller than the perforations of the sieve, it cannot hold them. That which is capable of being grasped is obviously more limited than the grasping instrument. But is it possible to limit the infinite? The transcendental aspect of God is extremely subtle, and so cannot be grasped by the mind and intellect. The mind can govern the senses and grasp through them the object of their perception. However, the mind also has the power to fall back on itself and thus, in a mysterious way, experience and infer that which is the essence of the objects and of itself - not, however, as an object of thought. This process can be called intuition. The wise devotee resorting to 'manifestations of God' in order to meditate upon him, utilizes these two avenues open to him. He approaches God through God's own manifestations, but he also wisely peeps through these into their 'heart' where, as it were, he first infers and later experiences the presence of a super-physical, spiritual reality.

X:19 - The Blessed Lord said : Yes. I will declare to you My divine glories in their prominence, O Arjuna! There is no end to their detailed description.
X:20 - I am the Self, O Gudakesha, seated in the hearts of all beings; I am the beginning, the middle, and also the end of all beings.

Here is a very interesting prologue to a startling approach to the supreme being - a warning that we should accept the symbol, but not confine the reality to it. God is in it, but not confined to it. It is God, but not to the exclusion of anything else. If the caution administered in these two verses is borne in mind, almost anything will lead us to God - for in effect the whole universe is the manifestation of a part of his infinite glory and power. Again, we can only take a few manifestations, we cannot encompass even these in their entirety with our limited mind. Try to think of space in its entirety. The mind reels and staggers!

But any form will do - for God is the self in the hearts of all beings. He is the reality in all appearances. He is the truth represented by the symbol. He is the noumenon in all phenomena. He is the formless Brahman in all forms. He is that in this.

Everything in the universe is filled with the same energy, with the same intelligence, the same consciousness. Thus, the objects that we use in our life, the actions that we do with this body, the persons to whom our actions are directed, are nothing but the manifestations of God. This is a remarkable truth, which, until it becomes a realization is a remarkable attitude.

Constant vigilance is necessary in order not to lose sight of the goal. We have our feet planted firmly on the ground and let our heart and mind fly aloft in the realms of the infinite. We grasp the form and let the indwelling presence envelop our heart, our consciousness.

X:21 - Among the Adityas, I am Vishnu; among the luminaries, I am the radiant sun; I am Marichi among the Maruts; among stars the moon am I.
X:22 - Of the Vedas I am the Sama Veda; of the Devas I am Indra; of the senses I am the mind; in living beings I am the living force knowledge.
X:23 - And, among the Rudras I am Shiva; among the Yakshas and Rakshasas, I am Kubera; among the Vasus I am Pavaka; among the mountains I am the Meru.

All these names of gods deserve deep study and research. We do not recognize the existence of many gods. We are not polytheists. We are not even pantheists, believing in one deity somehow enveloping all. Indeed, we are not even monotheists, believing in one God. We are monists, believing that one alone exists, and that ultimately even the distinction between God, world and man ought to be resolved into the transcendental self-realization of non-duality. All the names of gods and deities, divine and demoniacal beings, mentioned in the scriptures and alluded to here have a meaning and are not mere proper names.

The twelve aditya have been identified with the twelve signs of the zodiac. The twelve suns are worth identifying in the heavens, of whom the most powerful is Vishnu 'whose light envelops all' - that is the literal meaning of the word. 'Of all luminaries I am the sun' - which is most luminous. In all these it will be noticed that we are asked to regard the best as the manifestation of God. This does not mean that only the best is his manifestation. At the present stage, it is easier for the mind to accept it to be so, and eventually its vision will expand in concentric circles to include all else into it, for, 'among the senses I am the mind'. Thus, the mind's own undefiled substratum with unlimited potentialities, is God himself. He is the 'intelligence among living beings'. When this 'knower' of all is understood and realized, all objects will be perceived as divine, one with the subject!

X:24 - And, among the household priests, Arjuna, know me to be the chief, Brihaspati; among the army generals I am Skanda; and of bodies of water I am the ocean.

X:25 - Among the great sages I am Bhrigu; among words I am the monosyllable Om; among sacrifices I am japa; among immovable things the Himalayas I am.

X:26 - Among the trees I am the peepul; among the divine sages I am Narada; of singers of the gods I am Citraratha; and among perfected beings I am Kapila.

X:27 - Of horses know me to be Uccaihsrava, who rose out of the ocean, born of the amrita; of lordly elephants I am Airavata, and among men I am the monarch.

God's manifestations are not confined to the human kingdom. A careful study will reveal the astonishing truth that the Lord describes himself as the best among all animate, inanimate and insentient objects, and it is a blunder to limit God to human beings alone! There are infinite varieties of plants, animals and minerals. This merely shows that God is infinite. The essence is one and infinite, the manifestation is diverse and infinite. Infinity plus one equals infinity plus infinity. In all these diverse phenomena the truth is only one, yet has no specific form but is not condemned to formlessness.

God's own grace is guiding the research of modern scientists to the discovery that even minerals are alive, 'vibrating' masses of energy. When we come to regard the entire universe as the body of God, we can easily understand that the mineral kingdom is to Him what the hairs and nails are to us.

The yajna for this age is mantra repetition. However, we neglect this simple but highly efficacious mode of adoring God, and cling to outmoded and anti-social forms of sacrifice. The yajna of japa is a continuous pouring of the oblation of the mantra into the 'inner fire' of God-love.

X:28 - Among weapons I am the thunderbolt; among cows I am the wish-fulfilling cow Surabhi; of procreators I am Kandarpa, the god of love, and of serpents I am Vasuki, the chief.

X:29 - I am Ananta among the Nagas; I am Varuna among water-Deities; Aryaman among the manes I am; among the dispensers of law I am Yama.

X:30 - And, I am Prahlad among the demons; among the reckoners I am time; among beasts I am their king, the lion; and among birds I am Garuda, the feathered carrier of Vishnu.

X:31 - Among the purifiers I am Pavana, the wind; Rama among the warriors am I; among the fishes I am the shark; among the streams I am the Ganga.

With great tact, wisdom and circumspection, Lord Krishna introduces here objects and concepts that are generally regarded as 'evil' by man. Weapons are evil, but God is the thunderbolt, the most terrible among them - equal to a number of 500-megaton hydrogen bombs together! He is not only the celestial wish-fulfilling cow, but also the chief of poisonous and non-poisonous serpents. He is the God of love whom sages and yogi's dread! Even so, he is the shark, the lion, and so on.

All these have their own place in God's plan. We do not remember this and hence we fear them and regard them as evil and unnecessary. They seem to be unpleasant to our self-centered, self-loving and luxury-addicted personality and hence we hate them. Yet the more we push them away, the more we cling to them. 'I am Yama among the governors', but for Yama - identified with death, this world would not even have standing room for the population, and the aged would be compelled to lead an existence worse than death. Yama or death regulates all things in this world. Without such a governor, the pendulum might swing too much towards one extreme.

There is great good within what we regard as evil; the inclusion of Prahlada's name in this list is indicative of this. Though born of demoniacal ancestry, Prahlada was a great devotee of the Lord. It is not from which genes we were born, but what we are that matters; and in all of us there is the highest divinity waiting to be revealed.

X:32 - Among creations I am the beginning, the middle and also the end, O Arjuna! Among the sciences I am the science of the Self; and among logicians I am the conclusive truth.

X:33 - Among the letters I am the A, and the dual among the compounds; also I am the inexhaustible or everlasting time; and of creators I am Brahma, whose manifold faces turn everywhere.

X:34 - And I am all-devouring Death, and prosperity of those who are to be prosperous; among feminine qualities I am fame, prosperity, speech, memory, intelligence, firmness and forgiveness.

X:35 - Among the hymns I am the Brihatsaman; among metres Gayatri am I; among the months I am Margasirsa; among seasons I am the flower-bearing spring.

God is the source and end of all beings and, therefore, all creations. But he is the middle, too. If the middle is absent, there is neither one end nor the other. Though 'I' and 'You' seem to be very real, the only reality is what is between us - the connecting link - which is God, the consciousness, life. That is the meaning of the words 'omnipresent', 'eternal', 'infinite', which we use freely without considering their significance. The omnipresent God alone exists; and the one cannot undergo birth or death - beginning or end. Birth is of another, and dissolution is into another. Hence, God is without these stages, yet he is their substratum.

It is worth noting that the science of the self is regarded as the best of sciences. Modern science, though predominantly materialistic so far, is gradually leading us to this conclusion. Note, too, that the prosperity of a wealthy man comes from God. If you are able to behold that prosperity as a divine manifestation, all jealousy, desire and hatred vanish and you admire only the divine.

The Lord exalts logic among controversialists. Discussion and even controversy may lead those taking part to greater and greater heights of search for the truth. Provided, of course, it does not generate lower passions, heat and hatred, we can use logic and pursue it to its own logical conclusion, leaping from there into God's lap.

X:36 - I am the gambling of the fraudulent; I am the splendor of the splendid; I am victory; I am determination of those who are determined; I am the goodness of the good.

X:37 - Among Vrishnis I am Vasudeva; among the Pandavas I am Arjuna; among sages I am also Vyasa; among poets I am the bard Usana.

X:38 - Among punishments I am the rod of chastisement, and of those who seek victory I am morality; of secret things I am silence, and of the wise I am wisdom.

We have reached the conclusion of this list of special manifestations, given by the Lord for our meditation in order to enable us to perceive their underlying divinity and eventually, by a process of expansion of our inner vision, to perceive all as God. Krishna also identifies himself as God's manifestation, as well as the disciple Arjuna and the chronicler Vyasa. If the goodness of the good is God's manifestation, even so is the gambling of the cheat! This does not mean that Krishna sanctions gambling, or that we should become expert gamblers before we can know God! Far from it. Here is a double-edged sword. Subjectively, these evils are to be ruthlessly and scrupulously avoided, as they lead us away from God. Objectively, when these qualities are found in others, we should refrain from condemning them, but endeavour to 'see through' even this veil of evil and enjoy a vision of the glorious God hidden within.

This teaching and this technique, when applied to our daily life, enable us to develop the spirit of understanding. We learn to find God - and not faults - in all. All are evolving. We must not cultivate faults in ourselves, but we must not despair when their presence in us comes to our notice. Furthermore, we must not recognize the presence of faults in others - thinking about others' faults only imports them into ourselves. It is when we are confronted with our own failures that humility arises, paving the way for devotion and growth in the divine.

The best way to preserve a secret is 'silence'! What a Divinity of practical wisdom Krishna is!

X:39 - And I am the seed of all beings, O Arjuna; there is no being, whether moving or unmoving, that can exist without Me.

X:40 - There is no end to my divine glories, O Arjuna. What I have spoken to you is but a mere indication of My infinite opulences.

There is an interesting dialogue in the Chandogya upanisad between a guru and a disciple. The guru asks the disciple to bring a small banyan fruit - a variety of the fig. The fruit is then broken. There are thousands of small seeds in it. One of them is isolated and broken. What do you find?, asks the guru. The disciple replies: Nothing. Ah, well, nothing? It is that nothing that has given birth to this gigantic tree. That nothing contains the complete blueprint of the whole tree to its minutest details. That is what makes the mango tree spring from the mango-seed and a banyan tree from the banyan seed, without the slightest error. Scientists nowadays are busy analyzing the mysterious factor in the human seed that is responsible for transmitting various characteristics from parent to offspring. Even this search is bound, eventually, to lead us to the Feet of God, provided, of course, that at the right moment we allow thought with its concepts and images, as also reason with its thesis and antithesis, to drop away, yielding place to pure wonderment. Beyond this 'seed' is the unmanifest, transcendental godhead. That godhead is clothed, as it were, with this manifestation-potential; even as each isolated, invisible electron coursing through a copper-wire contains the potentiality of the manifestation of its light and power. This manifestation-potential and the consciousness 'within' it are not really two different and distinct entities, but one and the same. Hence, if we zealously pursue our quest, anything - moving or unmoving - will take us to the goal, God.

X:41 - Know that all beautiful, glorious, and mighty creations spring from but a spark of My splendor.

X:42 - But of what avail to you is the knowledge of all these details, O Arjuna? With a single fragment of myself I pervade and support this entire universe.

Mr. Louis Orton in his 'Hypnotism Made Practical' says: A lecturer began to address his audience thus: 'What is mind? Nobody knows. We only know the manifestations of mind.' The lecturer might have said just as truly: 'What is matter? Nobody knows. We know only the manifestations of matter.' What do we know except through manifestations? This question drove the ancient eastern mystic into the depths of his own being.

God's divine glory is spread out before us in this manifest universe. God's divine potency within the earth, in the rays of the sun and the showers of rain, bestows prosperity on us all. God's divine power - Love - sustains the entire creation, keeping the stars and planets at the precise distance from one another conducive to the welfare of all, and guides them along their individual orbits in accordance with his eternal law. His power creates, sustains and dissolves - redeems.

Yet all the manifestations do not exhaust God, either spatially or spiritually. We can go to the limits of this universe, but we shall still find God spread out beyond. We can dive ever deeper into the heart of each atom of matter, only to discover with unabated wonderment that we have entered a greater realm of his power and his glory. For the manifest universe is the expression of a very small part of his power and glory. May He reveal himself to us! For only He can - when our mind stops functioning. It is God we are seeing, it is God we are living in. Unfortunately we try to grasp this truth with our puny little mind and senses, and all we can clasp is a pebble.

11. The Yoga of the Vision of the Cosmic Form

The climax is reached.

Whatever be the nature of knowledge and wisdom, it is a colossal waste if it merely adorns our intellect or heart. We should have the courage of our own convictions and live up to them. We should experience what we understand to be the highest truth - even with our own limited vision; for only then is even a verification of its validity possible. We may err; it is human. But if we do not have the daring, if we are ever standing on the brink, hesitant, we may die with a great weight in our heart - the weight of falsehood misunderstood as the truth! Hence, by all means, look before you leap - take a second look, and a third - but for heaven's sake, leap.

Arjuna takes a leap and is granted the cosmic vision. Out of this experience, several facts emerge which are discussed this month.

Until we see the universe as God's body, we remain outside the inner court of yoga.

Karma yoga is possible only if we realize we are one with God, and therefore with all.

Bhakti yoga is puerile if it is confined to idol worship and does not embrace karma yoga.

Jnana yoga degenerates into intellectual gymnastics if the truth is not realized. But when the universe is seen as God's body, and God as the indwelling omnipresent consciousness, a great and courage infusing affirmation of solace reverberates in every cell of our being. It leads us to nimitta bhavana - I am only an instrument in the hands of God - which is not a feeling or an attitude, but a living, even if unexpressed, truth.

Liberation from the thralldom of ignorance is liberation from this mysterious ego-consciousness. The sage of cosmic consciousness sees God working through him, for the benefit, as it were, of the universe which, too, is God himself! Supreme peace reigns in the heart which is alive to this truth!

XI:1 - Arjuna said : By this explanation of the highest secret concerning the Self, which you have spoken out of compassion towards me, my delusion is gone.
XI:2 - The origin and the destruction of beings verily have been heard by me in detail from you, O Lord with lotus eyes, and also Your inexhaustible greatness.

You can try this interesting experiment! At the end of an hour-long discourse, ask the members of the audience to recapitulate what they heard. You will be shocked to find how much of the discourse has flowed off the duck's back. Often people ask: But how can I improve my grasping power and memory? Become interested and remain interested in the whole discourse; otherwise the mind which works on the basis of the buddhi's - discriminative power's - valuation, will refuse to concentrate, absorb and retain.

In order to be interested or to listen, you must be 'on the same wave-length' as the master; his words must be meaningful to you as both of you are embarking on the spiritual adventure together. These words should enter your being and become living truths in you, not because you heard them from a great man, but because you see the truth. It is then that knowledge begins to flow.

Considering that Krishna and Arjuna were on the battlefield, these two verses, which sum up the teaching so far, are excellent indication of the intellectual powers of Arjuna. My delusion is gone, he says. That was the purpose of the Gita, and hence we can say it ended with the 10th chapter. Even at the end of the 18th chapter, Arjuna only repeats these words. Hence it is right to conclude that the first ten chapters of the Gita contain its philosophy, and the remaining eight contain the practical application of this philosophy. The 11th chapter is more in the nature of a demonstration of the great truths expounded by the Lord in the 10th chapter.

Lotus is symbolic of unfoldment. Lotus-eyed therefore means 'one whose inner vision has unfolded to infinite vision'.

XI:3 - O Supreme Lord, as You have thus described Yourself, I wish to see your Divine Form.

XI:4 - If you, Lord, think it possible for me to see it, do you, then, Lord of the yogis, show me Your imperishable Self.

Arjuna had heard, as a keen student should hear, all the instructions of the Lord with one-pointed attention, asking a question here and there with a genuine eagerness to have his doubts cleared, rather than to doubt or decry. This approach greatly encourages the teacher. It provides the 'intellectual cross-ventilation' as it were, inviting the outside wind to blow in. As we shall see towards the end of the Bhagavad Gita, the Lord compels neither blind allegiance to nor blind rejection of his teachings.

The wisest approach to all teaching is: receive, then analyze in the light of your own intelligence - you have a right to do so and need not surrender that right. Do not doubt or condemn anything, but accept what appears acceptable to you and let the rest drop away. Only that much was good for you at that stage of your evolution; perhaps the other factors were meant for others to whom they might appeal.

This acceptance should not be mechanical, but should 'happen', because, aided by the teacher, you yourself see the truth of the teaching. This communion between the guru and the disciple is real, though non-verbal communication. Here, the physiological organs of hearing are open, the mind is silent, the heart is afire with affection and the truth instantly becomes enshrined in the heart.

The conclusion of the 10th chapter proved too great a temptation for Arjuna to resist. What is the Lord's form as 'Isvara'? Isa or Isvara means 'is', the simple English verb, though Vedanta gives it all sorts of complicated explanations. It is 'suchness'. When all appearances or manifestations have been overcome, what remains is - That is all - That Is all - That is All. If you shift the emphasis to each of these three words separately and meditate upon them, you will truly understand what Isa or Isvara - and perhaps Jesus - means.

XI:5 - The Blessed Lord said : Behold, O Arjuna, my forms by the hundreds and thousands, of different sorts, divine and of various colors and shapes.

With a shudder of excitement and divine anticipation, we now enter the kingdom of direct realization. As we shall presently see, this realization is extra-sensory and even extra-rational. The senses function only within an extremely narrow and limited field. The rational faculties are similarly bound by certain traditional laws and codes fed into the intellect by aeons of ignorance. The only relevant answer to the question: How do you know that God or the ultimate reality exists? is the counter-question: Why do you speak through your mouth? Honest rationalization is bound to lead one to a logical absurdity or cul-de-sac; for ignorance is the parent of intellect whose offspring is logic. Hence, your questions are always based on assumptions which you do not question!

The expression 'my forms' thus gives rise to a misunderstanding that God has some special forms - 'hundreds and thousands' of them. This may be true; nevertheless it is a convenient expression. However, we must recognize that all expressions or theories are limitations and are, therefore, incapable of approaching the absolute. When you mistake a theory for the truth, you are caught and so thoroughly confused that it is impossible to find the truth. Yet, we have to admit the use of the theory - the half-truth - as a stepping-stone to truth. Says Bertrand Russell: I shall never forget my disappointment when I found that Euclid started with axioms. Since I was anxious to go on, I admitted it provisionally.

Every theory is born of man's quest for a solution to an immediate problem; such problems being sorrow, anxiety, inability to relate to the environment or to others. When the theory is used as an aid only, the truth is suddenly discovered to be extremely simple. Intellect, logic or rationalization is the catalyst and should reduce dogmas, superstitions, bias, prejudice and ignorance to the pure ash of direct self-realization.

XI:6 - Behold the Adityas, the Vasus, the Rudras, the two Asvins and also the Maruts; behold many wonders never seen before, O Arjuna.

XI:7 - Here and now, behold, O Arjuna, in this, my body, the whole universe centered in the one, including the moving and the unmoving, and whatever else you desire to see.

One of the most significant and beautiful declarations, repeated in the Bhagavad Gita a number of times in different formulations, is that there is nothing in the universe except the divine. In chapter 10, v 21-23, we came across the same expressions as we have in verse 6 above. I repeat: these 'names' are worth investigating to discover their physical or astronomical identity.

Verse 7 is most important. The universe is God's body - though this is not obvious. This one thought will solve all our problems and dissolve the ignorance that produced them. This cosmic body of God is centered in one, rooted in one, built around one. An imperfect analogy again has to raise us to this stage. Just as our body and mind are super-impositions on the one soul, just as the different parts of the body and the different faculties of the mind inhere in the one soul - even so the multifarious moving and unmoving, sentient and insentient objects of the world are centered in the one which needs no name because it is unique, incapable of being compared or contrasted. The diversity implied is apparent, yet the charm lies in the wisdom of perceiving the underlying unity. Life is not obvious, the truth is not obvious. What is obvious is a creation of the mind. Thus you can see in the universe - the body of God - 'whatever else thou desirest to see!' The world is only the projection of our past and present wishful thinking; the reality is that it is the body of God. However, even this knowledge is not so obvious. Hence, the wise man constantly remembers that there is an unobvious reality in the universe which is the reality.

XI:8 - But you are not able to behold me with these, your own eyes; I give you the divine eye. Behold My lordly Yoga.

These physical eyes of ours are useless beyond a certain very limited range of the spectrum. We cannot see what the microscope or the telescope sees. We cannot see what the X-ray sees.

Hence, neither the 'severally all' nor the 'underlying one' is within the field of our physical vision. We are able to see only a few of the several and the one is, of course, beyond the limits of our visualization. This is not because of the insufficiency or inefficiency of the 'light within', but because of the limitation of the senses themselves. Helen Keller was able to enjoy the beauty of a flower, though she was blind from a very early age.

It is an incontrovertible fact that the divine eye potentially exists in us, whether or not the pineal gland is the atrophied remnant of this divine eye - the third eye, or, whether or not it lies at the centre of the eyebrows. The brain-centre or 'sixth sense' enables us to visualize, with closed eyes, a scene not present before us. That is the divine eye which is far beyond all our present concepts of extra-sensory perception. That light is still available and active, even when this brain-centre is 'closed'.

As we shall presently see, this 'sense' is able to transcend space and time, and cannot be adequately explained. There is not even a need for explanations, since this is and can only be God's gift. As long as the 'I' functions, the divine eye remains closed. When the non-existence of the 'I' is directly realized, the divine eye perceives all as the divine. This divine eye is not an organ, but the realization of the divine.

'Yogamaigvaram' in the text has been translated as 'lordly yoga'. Yoga is union. Isvara's yoga is the immediate union of the reality and the appearance, the one and the many - which is and shall ever be a divine mystery to the little 'I'.

XI:9 - Sanjaya said : Having thus spoken, the great Lord of Yoga, Krishna showed to Arjuna His supreme and divine form as the Lord.

XI:10 - With numerous mouths and eyes, with numerous wonderful sights, with numerous divine ornaments, with numerous divine weapons uplifted;

XI:11 - Wearing divine garlands and apparel, anointed with divine unguents, the all-wonderful, resplendent, endless, with faces on all sides.

The anthropomorphic tinge often deters the Indian himself! He closes the Bhagavad Gita as a book with which he would not like to associate himself. That is the best climate for antagonistic winds to blow. Proselytisation thus gets its best handle. When you yourself admit that there is something wrong with your religion, it is unnecessary for the opponent to convince you of it; he only sees his victim in you.

If you carefully look into any scripture in the world, you will find such anthropomorphic presentation of spiritual truths - the only one which can be easily grasped by the human mind. Poets have described the sky as the diamond studded crown of the earth; scientists have given names to cyclones; and writers often describe the fate of a ship in a cyclone in almost human terms! 'Life' magazine published a series of articles on the human body, literally painting landscapes and factories into it!

All the mouths and all the eyes of all beings are God's. The wonderful sights in the world that meet the eye are his. The divine weapons may be thunder, lightning, earthquakes and volcanoes. When the whole world is God's body, are not the countless gardens of the world garlands on his body? The infinite has, obviously 'faces on all sides' - every vibrant electron is its 'magic eye'.

I shall explain later why even this 'explanation' of the anthropomorphic presentation is unnecessary.

XI:12 - If the splendour of a thousand suns were to blaze out at once simultaneously in the sky, that would be the splendour of that mighty Being.
XI:13 - There, in the body of the God of gods, Arjuna then saw the whole universe resting in the one, with its multiformity.

The divine eye with which Arjuna was able to 'see' God was capable of transcending time, space and materiality. Here, in verse 12, we have perhaps a description of the state of the universe at the beginning of the kalpa. Scientists and astronomers tell us that before the stars and planets condensed into their present forms the universe was in a state of hot plasma, radiant with the radiance of a thousand suns. That was just after the scientist's 'super-atom' or, the Indian's 'golden egg' broke. Perhaps Arjuna had a vision of that, or, perhaps, all materiality dissolved and he saw through the divine eye only 'light' within the atom.

What did he see in the body of the God of gods? He saw: (1) the whole universe, (2) resting in one, (3) divided into many groups.

This is extremely difficult though vital to understand. We know God pervades all in an imperceptible way. However, in everything there is the obvious factor which is resorted to the moment the unobvious truth is abandoned. Then the obvious becomes the focal point of a relationship which is unnatural. The unobvious 'relationship' is a oneness - and therefore it is not a relationship! God or the self alone exists. This means he is all-one. But he is not even conditioned, by that criterion, or condemned to be one! All the different strata of creation, all the different orders of beings, are He - that is what is meant by 'pervaded by God', on account of His omnipresence. The whole universe, which is the body of the God of gods, rests in Him, not as an entirely different entity - like a child resting in its mother's lap - nor as identical unity, but in a relationship which is vaguely felt by us - the life-spark, in relation to our body: 'It is I and yet not so'.

XI:14 - Then, Arjuna, filled with wonder and with hair standing on end, bowed down his head to the Lord and spoke with joined palms:

XI:15 - Arjuna said : I behold all the gods, God, in your body, and hosts of various classes of beings; Brahma, seated on the lotus, and Lord Shiva, and all the sages and the celestial serpents.

'Hair standing on end' has been described to be one of the signs of religious experience. The experience that Arjuna describes in these verses tallies with what raja yoga styles 'savikalpa samadhi'. The seer, sight and seen; the knower, knowledge and known have not yet merged into one. The triad is still maintained. This is the highest experience granted to the surviving individual as long as there is still a trace of ego or duality. From here the salt doll - individual soul, takes a leap into the sea - Brahman. In the words of sage Yajnavalkya, in that state one does not know another; hence it is the state of existence-knowledge-bliss absolute, undivided and infinite - 'nirvikalpa samadhi'.

However, Arjuna still retains the 'I' and is therefore able to enjoy the cosmic vision. It is not without its price, as we shall see - he is terrified.

Here are mentioned five categories of beings:

- (1) all the gods - the deities that indwell and govern the elements and the different phenomena;
- (2) Brahma, the creator of the universe - the power hidden in the 'super-atom' of the astronomer or the 'golden egg' of the Indian;
- (3) various classes of beings;
- (4) the sages - the men of the highest evolutionary level; and
- (5) serpents.

From the highest divinity, the creator himself, to the lowest creature, specifically mentioned as 'serpents', all are pervaded by God. The serpent symbolizes 'time' as well as 'evil'; all these, too, are in God, for let us remind ourselves, He is Omnipresent.

XI:16 - O Lord of the universe, I see in your universal body many forms - bellies, arms, mouths, eyes - expanded without limit. There is no begin, there's no middle, and there's no end to all this.

XI:17 - Your form, adorned with various crowns, clubs and discs, is difficult to see because of its glaring effulgence, which is fiery and immeasurable like the sun.

If these verses sound like gibberish, it is only because the experience is beyond expression or description. No description is ever the same as that which is described, and no description ever describes what it pretends to describe. This has been the joyously tortuous experience of every sage; the experience of the highest is inexpressible, but the urge to express is irrepressible! The result is paradox, contradiction and extra-logical synthesis of the opposites. We laugh at these, but they forgive us knowing that we are still dreaming this world-scene of logic and reason which they have transcended.

Time, the beginning, the middle and the end, is not an object of sense, however subtle, but a mode of thought. The eternal now which (con)-fuses the past, present and future is a state in which the beginning, middle and end are indistinguishably united. Hence Arjuna is unable to see them.

Once again we are confronted with the anthropomorphic description - the diadem, the club, etc., though it is all pervaded by a mass of radiance. From a certain point of view it is possible to 'see' such forms in this very universe. This was brought home to me at the planetarium in Johannesburg. The constellations have names and descriptive patterns, and with a little bit of mental adjustment it is possible to see those descriptive forms in the constellations. The diadem, the club, etc., may all refer to such phenomena.

XI:18 - You are the Imperishable, the Supreme Being, worthy of being known; you are the great treasure-house of this universe; you are the imperishable protector of the eternal Dharma, the ancient Person.

XI:19 - I see you without beginning, middle or end; infinite in power; of endless arms; the sun and the moon being your eyes. By your own radiance you are heating this entire universe.

God is the inexhaustible treasure-house of this universe, for the very simple reason that nothing in him is ever destroyed! There is and can only be change of form or mutation. That, in fact, is the meaning of the Sanskrit word 'nas' - to become invisible. We call it 'destruction', for it suits our limited vision and understanding; what I cannot see does not exist!

Arjuna's experience here supports the 'continuous creation' or 'steady state' theory in regard to the universe. God's nature - the vast universe - becomes partly manifest and that manifestation later becomes unmanifest. It does not in any way alter the quantum of his nature which remains constant. As scientists are saying nowadays, the distribution of the galaxies today is the same as it was millions of years ago and will be the same millions of years hence; they may change place or form - though in infinite space such expressions have no real meaning, but essentially they will remain the same.

'The sun and the moon being thine eyes' and the subsequent descriptions in verse 19 make us wonder: are we actually seeing parts of God's infinite body and calling it the universe with its diverse classes of existence? Krishna's friends were once entering the mouth of a python, saying: Look at this mountain-cave; does it not look like the mouth of a python? Are we making the same mistake? When actually looking at the cosmic form of the Lord, are we saying: Look at the sun and the moon, they are like the two eyes of the Lord.? They are, perhaps, his eyes!

XI:20 - The space between the earth and the heaven is filled by You alone; having seen this, your wonderful form, the three worlds are trembling with fear, O Great-souled Being.

XI:21 - The devas are surrendering and entering into you. They are very much afraid, and with folded hands they are singing the Vedic hymns.

Different theories have been advanced to explain what is often dismissed as nothing - space. The corpuscular theory admitted of a 'substance' called ether, but the wave theory made that unnecessary. Theories apart, intuitive common sense inevitably presumes that space as such is a tremendous power which is able to hold all other substances within it. Even for these 'waves' to radiate there should be a stable substratum, and that is what we regard as space. The power and the consciousness in that space is God.

'The three worlds are trembling with fear!' A simple common sense explanation is possible for this. Do we not know that the entire universe is a limitless panorama of vibrant atoms? Apply that condition to yourself. When you vibrate, what is the condition called? Trembling. When do you tremble? In fear.

We need not be troubled if the explanations sound ludicrous. They will serve two purposes: (1) to help us develop faith in the scripture and not dismiss it as nonsense, and (2) to lead us to the door of intuitive realization, even as the Zen koans do.

It is then that we realize that these explanations are not nonsense, but non-sense - beyond the senses. It is then that we understand the beauty of Kierkegaard's expression: God does not exist, he is eternal. These puzzling paradoxes do bring the transcendental close to the eye of intuition, breaking all conditioned mental activity. Then this insight becomes intuitively aware of its own reality which is God.

XI:22 - The Rudras, Vasus, Sadhyas, Adityas, Vishvas, the two Ashvins, the Maruts, Ushmapas, Gandharvas, Yakshas, Siddhas and Asuras, are all beholding you in wonder.

The 'sadhya' are a class of deities. However, the term may also imply that it is possible to attain and know them, to propitiate them and to win their grace. The transcendental truth offers the finite intellect of man an open window in and through these designations. They are not the final goal, even as the window is not the sky, or the door our destination; yet, the wise man realizes that without the window he cannot view the sky, and the door leads him to his destination.

As has been repeatedly emphasized, these divinities are the macrocosmic correlations of several functions and faculties in the individual. Meditation upon them, therefore, promotes those very functions and faculties in the individual. Take for instance the visvedeva. As Gurudev points out in his commentary on the Gita: They were considered protectors of human beings. They were called guardians of the world. They were givers of plenty to the human beings. They are: kratu - sacrifice, intelligence, purpose, desire, determination, daksa - dexterity, vasu - wealth, gold, water, satya - truth, kama - desire, lust, dhvani - sound, kala - art, rocaka - hunger, tonic, adrava - non-fluid, i.e. solid, pururava - a mythical link between god and man. Is there any doubt that these promote our prosperity?

The two asvin are divine physicians. They appear in the sky before the dawn in a golden carriage drawn by horses and birds and they bring treasures to men, averting misfortunes and sickness. The signposts of legend, symbolism and myth point down the road of common sense. Of course you can have these treasures - only if you are awake! Then the whole day - the greatest treasure - is yours; early rising will give you good health and avert sickness, too; and you can meditate and avert your misfortunes.

XI:23 - Having beheld your immeasurable form, with many mouths and eyes, O Arjuna, with many arms, thighs and feet, with many stomachs, and fearful with many teeth, the worlds are terrified, and so am I.

XI:24 - On seeing You, touching the sky, shining in many colors, with mouths wide open, with large, fiery eyes, I am terrified at heart, and find neither courage nor peace, O Vishnu.

The scene keeps constantly changing, even as the 'appearance' of the universe changes constantly over the unchanging substratum. Good and evil, pleasantness and unpleasantness, beauty and ugliness - are all the attributes which the finite human mind projects on this ever-changing pattern. However, the difference between the obvious - the manifest, and the unobvious - the unmanifest infinity, is that the obvious is capable of being grasped by the senses or the mind whereas the unobvious is not. None-the-less, the finite helplessly tries to delimit the infinite and the standard way in which it does this is to limit the infinite to a form and stick the label of a name to it. Then, endeavoring to understand this, the finite once again drapes the infinite with the only apparel it has, hence creating the various attributes mentioned above. That is the inevitable fruit of the finite trying to grasp the infinite. The vicious circle is now complete. Having bestowed these attributes on the infinite, the finite trembles before it and weeps aloud.

Expressions like 'Oh, it is terrible. It is a catastrophe. It is evil, and so on,' issue constantly from the lips of the finite being as the direct result of his original sin of trying to grasp the infinite, instead of offering himself to it. It is best to surrender to the ocean, there to swim in bliss and peace.

These two verses should stop us from envying Arjuna's lot. Sages and yogis have had similar - though not identical - cosmic visions. We shall see towards the conclusion of this chapter the prerequisite for the cosmic vision, and the risk of testing our strength by trying to lift a hill.

XI:25 - Blazing like the fires of cosmic dissolution, I see Your mouths, fearful with teeth; I do not know where to find refuge. Have mercy, O Lord, abode of the universe.

XI:26 - All the sons of Dhritarashtra, with the hosts of kings of the earth, Bhishma, Drona and Karna, with the chief among all our warriors,

XI:27 - they hurriedly enter into your mouths with terrible teeth and fearful to behold. Some are found sticking in the gaps between the teeth, with their heads crushed to powder.

This 'fearful mouth' is all-changing time - as revealed in verse 32. Here we are only concerned with Arjuna's vision.

'I know not the four quarters' means that space seems to lose its spatiality; for the mind and the intellect, when confronted with the cosmic vision, stand still. East, west, north and south are arbitrary creations of man for his own orientation. 'Above' and 'below' are merely relative. These words have no meaning in limitless space where there is no floor or ceiling. When the divine eye perceives the cosmic being, the intellect is awakened to its own limitations and man, who derives his sense of security from the creations of ignorance, suddenly finds himself in a state of divine insecurity. If even this earth is a pin-point in the cosmos which does not respond to the human sense of direction, what else can man rely upon? There is a momentary doubting restlessness, which, however, is removed by realization of the cosmic consciousness.

Even the time-sense is blurred in this vision. Arjuna, with his divine eye, sees even at this stage, the sons of Dhrtaristra entering death. It is a known fact that the light of the distant star we see today left it hundreds of years ago; and something is happening there at this very moment which will be revealed to our limited vision only in the far future. Thus, elsewhere, the present is past, and the future is already present!

XI:28 - Just as many torrents of rivers flow towards the ocean, even so these heroes of the world of men enter your flaming mouths.

XI:29 - As moths hurriedly rush into a blazing fire for destruction, so also the creatures of this world hurriedly rush into your mouths for destruction.

The mystery deepens. Into this great being's 'mouth' enter all beings, as rivers enter the ocean. Into this great being's 'mouth' enter all beings', as moths rush into a blazing fire. Two similes are used with good purpose for there is a wonderful distinction between the two, and a significant reason why the Lord used two to illustrate a single factor. The river entering the ocean finds its fulfillment; but the moth entering the fire finds its destruction - not in the sense of annihilation, but in the sense of non-fulfillment.

These are the two courses open to each human being. The wise one chooses the former which the Kathopanisad calls 'sreyo marga'. It implies turning away from the objects of the senses, daring to defy obstacles - just as the river encounters obstacles in its progress, overcoming them in various ways and eventually surrendering the limited personality which has been the cause of all our woes in order that we may become one with the whole. The path does not seem to be rosy and smooth, tempting and attractive, but the goal is supreme peace and total fulfillment.

The unwise man, blinded by the blazing fire, of illusion, refuses to see the reality and takes to the 'preyo marga' - the path of pleasure - which pleases the senses. The blazing fire is beautiful! It is tempting and inviting. The ignorant moth rushes towards it, having no time to think or reflect, since the call of the senses - the eye of the moth in this case - is irresistible. At the first touch of the fringe of flame, the wings of the moth are destroyed; and man loses his wisdom and will. Now it is too late. All his vain effort is destroyed.

XI:30 - You lickest up, devouring all the worlds on every side with Your flaming mouths. Your fierce rays, filling the whole world with radiance, are burning, O Vishnu.

XI:31 - Lord of lords, so fierce of form, please tell me who You are. I offer my obeisances to You. Please be gracious to me. I do not know what your mission is, and I desire to hear of it.

In the previous chapter Krishna mentioned that among the aditya, he is Vishnu. This cosmic ray is capable of devouring everything; its radiance fills the whole world, burning all. We know that of the elements - earth, water, fire and air, it is fire that is capable of destroying and burning anything. Earth, water and air, in fact, promote life and its growth. Air, too, can at most move a thing from one place to another. But fire burns and destroys. When a dead insect lies exposed to the elements, especially to the sun, it quickly decomposes - it is destroyed. A subtle cosmic power acts on it. There is a balancing force that sustains this universe, that maintains the essential nature of all the objects, and at the same time the dynamic nature of the universe tends to disturb that equilibrium.

Vishnu - meaning: all-pervading - is that factor in divine nature, that aspect of God that maintains the whole creation by bringing about a continuous change in form, while forming and preserving the substratum. When the molecules are broken into atoms, the atom into its components and each in its turn resolved into the sheer energy they are made of and in which they maintain their individuality, what remains is Vishnu - or more correctly, the power of Vishnu. Perhaps one day, following Einstein's lead, science will surmise, if not discover, the existence of such a unified substance in whose heart there is that power which reduces everything to simplicity, only to reassemble several such simplicities to make another complexity to suit its purpose.

Verse 31 indicates that Arjuna has gone beyond the limitation of every memory; he has forgotten Krishna and what he is doing! Unless we are free of conditioning and we look afresh - as Arjuna has done, we do not see the truth.

XI:32 - The Blessed Lord said: Time I am, destroyer of the worlds, and I have come to engage all people. With the exception of you, all the soldiers here on both sides will be slain.

This highly inspiring verse was recalled to memory by Oppenheimer, the physicist, as he sat in his watchtower during the first atomic test explosion during World War II. He confessed that the destructive mushroom which he saw in the sky reminded him of the great utterance of lord Krishna: I am the all-destroying time. 'This is it', thought Oppenheimer. How true. The bomb, like all-devouring time, does not discriminate between combatant and non-combatant, good and wicked, men, women or children; it reduces all of them - and even inanimate objects - to their elemental state.

'Lokaksayakrt' has been translated into 'world-destroying'. 'Ksaya' has several meanings, one of which is 'an abode'. This destruction is, in other words, not annihilation, but a return to the original abode, to the original state of matter from which newer forms could be fashioned. Once this fact is clearly grasped, very much heart-break can be avoided. Even so, the other expression 'lokansamahartum' has been translated into 'destroying the worlds'. 'Ahartum' has other meanings, too! Surprisingly enough, one of them is 'to unite, to bring together'. This meaning is in line with the spirit of the Bhagavad Gita. It is as though the Lord said: I have given you enough intelligence, discrimination and free-will to see that you are all one and to live in such unity. If life cannot unite you, then death will! The great misunderstanding about the role of Shiva in Hindu scriptures should be removed. He is not the 'destroyer'. The universe, being his own body - an inseparable part of the eternal, cannot be destroyed. It and all beings in it can only be redeemed. Thus, Siva is the redeemer. For the redemption of the ignorance-imprisoned individual soul, he periodically re-shapes its outer covering, to suit better its evolutionary state.

XI:33 - Therefore, stand up and obtain fame. Conquer the enemies, and enjoy the unrivalled kingdom. Verily, they have already been slain by me; be a mere instrument, O Arjuna.

God is the redeemer. At the appropriate time all souls shall vacate their habitation and find a new abode - ksaya. Even if, on account of delusive attachment or infatuation, one wishes to prolong indefinitely the life of one's beloved ones, it is impossible. Hence, lord Krishna has declared in the previous stanza: Even without thee, these shall not live.

Krishna repeats that argument in this verse: They have already been slain by me. In fact that spiritual event in the mind of God has to be worked out on the physical plane by human instrumentality. The bhavana - attitude to life - that Krishna inculcates in this verse, the nimitta-bhavana - attitude of being a mere instrument in the hands of God, is an important one. It has several implications:

1. That I am an instrument in God's hands, and I do nothing on my own. On the one hand this generates true humility: all glory is God's. On the other, it bestows tremendous power on us: God, who is working through this instrument, is omnipotent. It should be clear that the instrument does not say it is one; it is not even aware it is one! For, true humility is not experienced within oneself, but is seen by others. To function as an instrument is to be totally free of ego.
2. To be an instrument in God's hands itself is great glory. We must accord this glory to his instruments, through whom his will functions viz., saints and all others generally.
3. God's grace flows through our benefactors to us. By expressing our gratitude to them we thank God. By bowing to them we bow to God.
4. We shed the puerile attitude of egoistically refusing helpful human intervention in our life, by saying: God will help me. The right attitude is: It is God even now, who is helping me, through this person; and to that God-in-him we bow in gratitude.
5. All negative emotions like jealousy, hatred, contempt, etc., leave us. Everybody is an instrument in the hands of God.

XI:34 - Drona, Bhishma, Jayadratha, Karna and all the other warriors, these have already been slain by Me. Kill, be not distressed with fear. Fight, and you shall vanquish your enemies.

XI:35 - Sanjaya said : Having heard that speech of Krishna, Arjuna, with joined palms, trembling, prostrating himself, again addressed Krishna, in a choked voice, bowing down, overwhelmed with fear.

The most important and vital truth is repeated thrice for emphasis. People criticize repetition, yet on closer scrutiny it is discovered that their 'intellect' rebels against truth. Light hurts the owl's eyes. Having once seen the light by accident, the owl refuses to face it again.

The yogi in spiritual communion with the Lord whom he perceives through the inner eye of wisdom or intuition, forgets space, time and materiality. Arjuna did not know where he was, what the situation was or who was standing in front of him! But the divine being does not 'forget'. It is good to remember that, even if we forget our duty, the divine will not forget it or allow us to forget it.

Bow down to the inevitable. Killing is sin, but cremation is not. 'These brave warriors have already been slain by me', and what you are really going to do is to cremate them! How can one kill a dead body? Therefore, fear not and be not distressed. 'Fight and thou shalt conquer thy enemies in battle', for the simple reason that they have no life!

Having heard these flaming words of truth from the supreme Lord, Arjuna, still overwhelmed with fear but full of devotion to him, begins to praise him and sing his glories. Such inspiration founded on devotion and ecstatic communion with God is the origin of all hymns and liturgy. Sooner or later in one's life a situation is reached where one is overwhelmed by the magnitude of the power beyond human might - transcendent and yet accessible to the human being; and then there arises spontaneous devotion to it. At that point the discriminative mind is silenced and Shaktipat happens - the direct, non-verbal transmission of truth.

XI:36 - Arjuna said : O Krishna, the world becomes joyful on hearing Your name, and thus everyone becomes attached to you. Although the perfected beings offer you their respectful homage, the demons are afraid, and they flee here and there. All this is rightly done.

XI:37 - And why should they not, O great soul, bow to you, who art the primal cause, even greater than Brahma, the Creator? Lord of the gods, Abode of the universe, you are the imperishable, the Being and the non-Being, That which is the Supreme, above cause and effect.

In verse 23, Arjuna said that all the worlds are terrified. Now he says that the world delights and rejoices in God's praise. This is not a contradiction, but a revelation of the great truth that the phenomenal scene changes and that in creation, which is but a play of dualities, misery and happiness alternate every few 'moments'!

Here, Arjuna sees the world's rejoicing, the demons' flight and the perfected ones' devotion. It is a beautiful thought: the situation outside is the same, but we react in the way that our own inner condition demands. The good world - mankind - delights and rejoices in God's praise, glorifying him for all good that they see the objects that bring them happiness. They are good; they see everything as good; they seek happiness; they get that happiness and they praise God.

The demons, the wicked beings - the demoniacal, the animal clothed in human garb - see their own reflection in the environment. They are afraid of even God's own goodness and flee. The perfected ones who have gone beyond good and evil, to whom happiness and misery are but subjective projections which they have ceded, see in the external manifest universe the nature of God, understand its magnitude and praise him.

By addressing the Lord as 'mahitman', a great soul, Arjuna reflects Patanjali's concept of Isvara as purusavisesa - a special and exalted soul.

XI:38 - You are the primal God, the ancient purusha, the supreme refuge of this universe, the knower and the knowable, the supreme abode. By you is the universe pervaded, O Being of infinite forms.

We are often confronted with the unavoidable confusion which arises when an attribute assumes a proper name; a functional or characteristic definition surrenders its value and is used as a label.

'Thou art the adideva' - deva is a being of light, in fact, light itself. Thus the term could be translated: thou art the first light! It was this first light that 'saw' - in biblical language - that darkness was on the face of the earth, and demanded light. It is the eternal light which shines when all else is dark. Even now, it is that which shines through all else. That light, being luminous, does not need another to illuminate it. It illuminates itself and the other! 'The ancient purusa' - purusa does not merely mean 'man' but the indwelling presence, one who lives in the body. The ancient body is the body of God - the whole universe. This ancient body was never lifeless; the Lord has dwelt in it from beginningless time and it is he who dwells in it even now.

'Param nidhanam' - supreme refuge. Nidhanam may also mean: preserver, reservoir, treasure, wealth. If the ever-changing matter did not have cosmic consciousness as its permanent, stable and indwelling presence, there would be chaos in the universe. That presence is the preserving treasure of the cosmos. It is the reservoir of inexhaustible soul-force which untiringly and ceaselessly perpetuates this world-play. And, when all matter is temporarily dissolved, the soul-force returns to its own centre, that which we call God. Who is to know this cosmic indweller? Only God can know himself. 'I' cannot know him; the finite cannot comprehend the infinite. He it is who knows, and he knows himself!

XI:39 - You are Vayu, Yama, Agni, Varuna, the Moon, the creator and the great-grandfather. Salutations to you, a thousand times. Again and again salutations to you.

XI:40 - Salutations to you from front, from behind, and from every side. Infinite in power and prowess, You pervadest all; wherefore you are All.

The famous vaidika declaration is echoed here: God is one, sages call him variously as Indra, Varuna, etc. These are but the functional attributes of God. Even as the creator he is not to be limited to that function, for he is the 'great-grandfather'. Sometimes the creator is styled as grandfather - the father of my father. God is even the 'father' of the creator, not only in the mythological sense, but because he is the original essence of which even the creator is but an aspect.

The omnipresent being has neither a front nor a back, but the allusion here is to the bright and the dark side of his divine nature. We should learn to admire and to adore both the front of God - glory, and the back of God - the dark or so-called evil side. The two together constitute his nature. We are able to recognize the bright side only by comparison with the dark side. Suffering evokes compassion in us. Sickness in one offers another the opportunity to serve; one man's poverty is another's occasion for charity. Even national calamities like famine, earthquake, flood, and the worst of all - war, bring out great hidden, divine qualities in many. The suffering involved is, of course, occasioned by one's own karma.

Lastly, the appearance on the world-scene of mighty evil forces that are able to threaten goodness is but a trigger for the divine forces to intervene and restore the balance. Hence the advent of an avatara (IV:7). He who knows this keeps on the bright side of God, without hating the other side.

XI:41 - I have in the past addressed you as O Krishna, My Friend, without knowing Your glories. Please forgive whatever I may have done in madness or in love. I have dishonored you many times while relaxing or while lying on the same bed or eating together, sometimes alone and sometimes in front of many friends. Please excuse me for all my offenses.

XI:42 - In whatever way I may have insulted you for the sake of fun while at play, reposing, sitting or at meals, when alone with You, or in company, that I implore you, immeasurable one, to forgive.

Here again lord Krishna acts as the supreme illusionist. Step by step, Arjuna was rising to the level of the absolute. He saw the universe being indwelt by God. He realized that even the vaidika gods are but the Lord's own manifestations. Even good and evil - and all such paradoxes, merged in the Lord. All distinctions began to fade away and Arjuna saw that God and God alone pervaded everything. Even the idea of an 'everything' seemed to be absurd from that point of view. Wherefore thou art all, said he. One more step and even the seer in Arjuna would have dissolved in the sight and the seen in the state of nirvikalpa samadhi.

That was not yet to be. Hence, obviously by the influence of his will, Krishna spreads a veil over Arjuna's eyes, inducing an awareness that Arjuna was standing in front of the cosmic form revealed to him by Krishna. Memory returns to him. Mind awakes and with it the ordinary consciousness. He begins to apologies to the cosmic being for his unbecoming conduct in ignorance.

At every turn in the Bhagavad Gita this great truth is rubbed into us. The highest spiritual realization is God's gift. Though this should not lead to the absurd conclusion that the Lord is whimsical and though we should not forget that we have no business to desire God-realisation without first deserving it, we should remember that only God can realize himself and that our only task is to sacrifice our little ego at his feet. This sacrifice is not an act of the ego, but the dawn of the light of truth in which the shadow of the ego dissolves.

XI:43 - You are the Father of this world, unmoving and moving. You are to be adored by this world. You are the greatest Guru; for none there exists who is equal to You; how then can there be another superior to You in the three worlds, Being of unequalled power?

XI:44 - Therefore, bowing down, prostrating my body, I crave your forgiveness, adorable Lord! As a father forgives his son, a friend his friend, a lover his beloved, even so should you forgive me, God.

The rapid descent to human consciousness is evident in these two verses. From the vision of the all, Arjuna's focus narrows first to the immeasurable one, then the world seems to be apart from the Lord who is considered its father. He then recedes further as the worshipful one; then further still, he is just the Isvara, a special soul, the guru of all. Lastly the Lord is brought to the level at which he could be compared and contrasted with the many things that exist in the three worlds, seen once again as distinct entities.

Arjuna returns to body-consciousness in verse 44. Though he continues to implore forgiveness, one notices the unmistakable symptoms of realization of the glory of God receding further from his consciousness. Strangely enough, he betrays the trend towards the very inner attitude which He condemned a few minutes ago! Once again he assumes an air of intimacy with the Lord - a father-son relationship, a lover-beloved relationship. Once again he takes the privilege of regarding him as a friend. Though he is still dazed by the vision and knows he is addressing God, the transition to the earth-consciousness is clearly evident. Strange indeed are God's ways and the power of his maya. He alone veils. He alone unveils the truth. Inscrutable are his ways.

Let us ever have our face turned towards him. Even if we thus see only his 'back', let us persist; soon his face will be visible to us. Though that will be when he wills it, why should we worry? As long as our face is turned towards him!

XI:45 - After seeing this universal form, which I have never seen before, I am gladdened, but at the same time my mind is disturbed with fear. Therefore please bestow your grace on me and reveal again your form as the Personality of Godhead, Lord of lords, abode of the universe.

XI:46 - I desire to see you as before, crowned, bearing a mace, with the discus in hand, in your former form, having four arms, thousand-armed, O Cosmic Form.

Having made the preparation and ensured that we deserve God's grace, we should remove all aspirations and await his grace. There are some who insist that even the aspiration or desire for God should go, for it, too, is a symptom of egoism. Others claim that desire for God will act as a catalyst helping all other desires to be reduced to ashes, itself not requiring such treatment. If, while awaiting his grace, we are restless and impatient, we ought to assure ourselves that the state of complete egolessness has not been reached and that therefore we do not deserve his supreme grace!

'Desire' for God implies that the aspirant knows what God is - which is obviously absurd. God is an unknown quantity, infinity; so how is it possible to know the extent of God? What is the meaning of the word infinite? When one desires God, it is in fact a desire to free oneself from the known conditions of limitation, fragmentation and consequent ignorance and sorrow.

Arjuna was obviously a very good aspirant. He had received the highest knowledge direct from the Lord's lips. In addition to deserving the cosmic vision, he also desired it, though he couched his prayer in humble words: If you think it possible, please show me the cosmic form. The Lord consented and blessed him with the divine eye through which he saw the cosmic form.

In spite of all these precautionary measures, Arjuna was still frightened! On the spiritual path, haste is disastrous. While we should be ever active, we should never for a moment forget that the only prerequisite for God-realisation is total egolessness. Only when the ego has been fully surrendered to the Lord is the cosmic vision granted.

XI:47 - The Blessed Lord said : Arjuna, this Cosmic Form has graciously been shown to you by me by my own yogic power; full of splendour, primeval, and infinite, this Cosmic Form of Mine has never been seen before by anyone other than yourself.

This all-important truth bears repetition any number of times: the ultimate vision of God is his own gift. In other words, the ego cannot see God, the shadow cannot grasp the substance, darkness cannot see light. Any 'vision' that the ego has is its own creation. The ego will not accept something it does not understand, and therefore creates a misunderstanding! Even the eye of intuition with which the yogi sees God is God's own gift. People often wonder what that eye of intuition looks like. Countless guesses have been made with amusing results. In the hands of the spiritually jejune it has even degenerated to a surgical operation!

A wise Sanskrit maxim says: Only a wise man knows what makes a man wise; the barren woman is not aware of labour pains. One who does not possess the eye of intuition does not know what it is; in the realm beyond the intellect, 'knowing' is 'being'. Thus, as long as the mind thinks, there will always be the rising and setting of an experiencer, the ego, with each experience; and as long as one's individual ego functions, he shuts out the gift of God. That gift is the eye of intuition.

But what is the eye of intuition? Ask him who is its bestower. No man knows. From the rapturous exclamations of those who have 'seen' the cosmic form with the eye of intuition, others have tried to presume what it might be. Guesses are children of ignorance; and the arrogance which gives birth to them makes them diabolical imposters.

According to the Bhagavatam, Arjuna had a cosmic vision before the Mahabharata war; yet Krishna says here that no-one had seen it before Arjuna. There is no contradiction here if we realize that each man's experience is his own - unique and unparalleled. The ultimate experience of the absolute is the same for all, even as deep sleep is; but even the penultimate experience of a cosmic vision can differ, just as people's dreams are unique and individual.

XI:48 - Neither by the study of the Vedas and sacrifices, nor by gifts, nor by rituals, nor by severe austerities, can I be seen in this form in the world of men by any other than yourself, O Arjuna.

Dr. Zimmer, in his monumental work on Philosophies of India, expresses the view that before the veda were introduced into India by the invading Aryans, there flourished there a religion whose hall-mark was world-and-life-negation, e.g. jainism.

Zimmer includes even sankhya and yoga in their empirical form in the pre-Aryan religious thought. Yoga insists on stoutly refusing to let the purusa - individual soul identify himself with the activities of prakrti - the active principle; kaivalya - isolation of the purusa from prakrti, which was taken to imply non-participation in the world, regards all life as unhappiness, to the wise. Austerity and 'withdrawal' were vigorously advocated by these pre-Aryans.

The veda, on the other hand, extol an active life of sacrifices, rituals and gifts. They are intensely interested in this world and in the world of heavenly pleasures, considering austerities to be more expiatory than self-liberating.

Historians place the Mahabharata and the Bhagavad Gita, which is part of that epic, at a much later date than the former two, viz., sankhya-yoga and veda. Here, Krishna boldly proclaims that neither the pre-Aryan austerities and withdrawal from the world, nor the Aryan study of veda, sacrifices and rituals, can enable one to attain the beatific vision which Arjuna had.

Later sages of vedanta, too, have admitted that performance or non-performance of any action - both involving egoistic notions, do not lead to liberation which is awakening from the slumber of ignorance. How does man wake up, then? Wake up! When the time comes, the Lord will awaken you, provided you are ready to wake up. 'Time', here, is not used in the traditional sense, but in the sense of 'maturity' which is thinning out of the selfishness.

XI:49 - Be not afraid nor bewildered on seeing such a terrible form of Mine as this; with your fear entirely dispelled and with a gladdened heart, now behold again this former form of Mine.

XI:50 - Sanjaya said : Having thus spoken to Arjuna, Krishna again showed his own form; and the Lord, assuming His gentle form, consoled him who was terrified.

Stand alone on a sand dune in a vast desert. Float alone on a wooden plank in the middle of an ocean. Sit alone in a dense forest, with not a man or beast around you. You are immediately terror-stricken. The limited mind of man is afraid of the limitless - even if this merely means 'vast'. If such is the case with mere earthly vastness, how then can the limited mind of man approach the truly limitless infinite being? It trembles with mortal fear unless previously trained; this training is gradual, even as the training of a parachutist is gradual, unless one perceives spontaneously that limitation is itself the cause of fear and the infinite is instant freedom. All the yoga practices are intended to prevent this fear. In the initial stages of yoga sadhana, when one is asked to meditate - especially if the aspirant does not believe in a personalized form of God and attempts formless contemplation, and when he is at the point of 'going into meditation', the aspirant gets frightened and returns to body-consciousness with trembling fear; it makes him feel that he is dropping into a bottomless dark abyss. Hence the vital need to prepare oneself, and kindle the light of understanding.

Hatha yoga prepares the physical and vital being; raja yoga the mental and the psychic being; bhakti yoga the emotional being; karma yoga pushes the ego out of the way. When jnana yoga eventually opens the door, the entire being is flooded with divine light. Then such light no longer blinds but is gladly welcomed. To ignore this preparation is to look for trouble. Complete self-surrender and acceptance of God's will are the best preparation.

XI:51 - Arjuna said : Having seen this your gentle human form again, O Krishna, now I am composed and restored to my own nature.

XI:52 - The Blessed Lord said : Very hard indeed it is to see this form of Mine which you have seen. Even the gods are ever longing to behold it.

The gentle 'form' of God is easier to meditate upon; and when the time comes, this form itself will lead us to the formless being. It avoids the danger of violent inner disturbances on the one hand, and merely lapsing into the void a kind of sleep on the other hand. There is, no doubt, the risk of getting stuck there and, forgetting the goal; but if the aspirant is sincere this will not happen.

'Hard to see' may mean: (a) it is rare, and (b) it is a psycho-spiritual adventure which demands all the strength and talents of the heroic.

It is bound to be rare; for the man-in-the-street is so readily tempted by the glittering objects of sense-pleasure that he deems it a piteous waste of time to even turn away from them. It is only a Moses, a Buddha, a Jesus, a Dayananda, a Ramakrishna or a Sivananda who is able to 'see through' the imposter called sense-pleasure and avoid him. In the very nature of life such people are bound to be rare.

Without this natural disinclination for sense-pleasure - vairagya, it is not possible to build up a psycho-spiritual personality that is strong enough to undertake the adventure into the infinite. Krishna indicates that the gods, who are certainly not ignorant and stupid beings, are 'ever longing' to behold the cosmic form, but in them this disinclination for sense-pleasure is not natural. The dwellers of heaven lead a life of extra-sensuous pleasure, and their longing does not bear fruit. Man, on the other hand, not being subject to such intensity of pleasure, can turn away from it altogether, and with a little reflection over the pain of worldly existence, develop a natural dislike for it - thus turning to God.

XI:53 - Neither by the Vedas, nor by austerity, nor by gift, nor by sacrifice, can I be seen in this form as you have seen Me.

XI:54 - But by single-minded devotion can I, of this form, be known and seen in reality and also entered into, O Arjuna.

The Bhagavad Gita is a scripture revealed on the battle-field to deal with an urgent situation - eventually with all our urgent situations in life. The repetitions, the loose-ends and the seeming contradictions are themselves proof positive of the authenticity and historic context of the book. If it was a 'well-thought-out and reasoned' text, these would have been avoided.

The idea in verse 53 had already been expressed in verse 48. What is worse still, in chapter 18 Krishna extols the virtues of 'austerity, gift and sacrifice', and insists that they should not be given up. They are terribly important, yet here we are told that God cannot be seen with the help of these.

The wise student should endeavor to read such ideas together and ponder the real inner meaning. Austerity, charity and self-sacrifice are indeed most essential, not for self-realisation but for self-purification. With their help we dehypnotize ourselves and overcome the hallucination of worldly life and sense-pleasure. Hence, Krishna wisely warns us in the 18th chapter that even the three purifiers should be performed without attachment. Dirt on the body is removed by soap; but the soap itself should then be washed away.

Only by single-minded devotion can God be realized. 'Ananya bhakti' means love or devotion in which there is no other involved. This devotion is not exclusive of anything, but all-inclusive. Here 'all' is a synonym for God. One who sees God and God alone everywhere 'enters' into the reality, and swims saturated in His Omnipresence.

XI:55 - He who does all actions for Me, who looks upon Me as the Supreme, who is devoted to Me, who is free from attachment, who bears enmity towards no creature, he comes to Me, O Arjuna.

Krishna is so fond of this idea that he repeats it thrice in the Scripture. He concludes the 9th chapter and also his teaching in the 18th chapter on the same note. This spiritual alchemy transforms all life into divine life. It is the bridge that links the contraries, the secret that unravels all mysteries, the solution to all the riddles of the Bhagavad Gita. No activity will lead you to God, yet you cannot remain without action even for a second. Life itself is action. Actions arise in God's nature and that nature carries on the world-play. Therefore, work - but 'work for me' - realizing that God is the source of action, 'I' am not the doer at all. God is your supreme goal, but let not this idea tempt you to neglect your duties.

Knowing that God is in all, that God is the all, be devoted to the welfare of all beings. Beware, however, lest you should get attached to them. You love them - no, not 'them', but the God in them.

This non-attachment, in its turn has one peril. It may lead you to a life of isolation, a dread of people, and of living with them and serving them. It may even make you feel that the world and its peoples are your enemies who will lead you astray, so that you should avoid them like poison! If you entertain this idea, you will be throwing the child away with the bathwater. You will be shutting the omnipresent God out of your heart.

The perception of truth or the reality transforms the world into the love of God without touching it or wanting to change it. In the delicate art of loving all and yet not becoming attached to them, of loving God in them, and yet not regarding 'them' as different from God, lies the secret of self-realisation.

12. The Yoga of Devotion

The great Indologist, Dr. Heinrich Zimmer, pays an eloquent tribute to the Bhagavad Gita: The Bhagavad Gita has become the most popular, widely memorized, authoritative statement of the basic guiding principles of Indian religious life and says, It was in the great paradoxes of the epoch making that the non-Brahmanical, pre-Aryan thought of aboriginal India became fruitfully combined and harmonized with the Vedic ideas of the Aryan invaders. In the eighteen brief chapters was displayed a kaleidoscopic inter-working of the two traditions that for some ten centuries had been contending for the control and mastery of the Indian mind. Krishna's genius was synthesis. The one continuous basic note in the whole scripture is the bold declaration of the truth that this synthesis is the inevitable consequence of the realization that the reality - God - alone exists, and even the apparent diversity and distinctions have to be resolved in him. Even in the practice of yoga, though each may choose that path to which his temperament qualifies him, Krishna asks us to synthesize the different approaches into one sadhana. Devotion, service, meditative communion and intuitive realization - are all necessary for each one of us. We should love God alone at all times; but that does not mean we love God and hate all. We learn to love God in all. In order not to cheat ourselves, we should remember that all of us love one another because of His omnipresence - God-love - and ensure that there is no personal attachment. Place God in yourself. Feel he is in every part of you. He fills you now. Place yourself in God; feel you are part of Him. God is all around you now - in all, as all. Now He is all-in-all - omnipresent. You do not confine Him to yourself. And, you do not push Him out either! Wisdom and synthesis at every turn. By a series of paradoxes Krishna leads us to His Lotus-Feet.

XII:1 - Arjuna said : Those devotees who, ever steadfast, thus worship you and those also who worship the Imperishable and the Unmanifested, which of them are better versed in Yoga?

XII:2 - The Blessed Lord said : Those who, fixing their minds on Me, worship Me, ever steadfast and endowed with supreme faith, these are the best in Yoga in my opinion.

Let us not forget that these two verses are a continuation of chapters ten and eleven, where we had a description of God's manifestations and the demonstration of their 'unity-in-diversity' and 'diversity-in-unity' - which is the meaning of the cosmic form.

Indian and other schools of thought differ about the right attitude. Some say: God should be approached as nameless and formless - to give him form is false and heretical. Others hold that God can only be approached through his manifestations. Even J.L. Orton in his book *Hypnotism Made Practical*, asks: What do we know except through manifestation? The danger in this method is that the image of the manifestation may be contaminated by us transferring our own worldly defects, innate in our family, possessions and environment, to the image itself. Thus, instead of helping us to overcome our egoism, this method may subtly feed it. Much can be said for and against both points of view.

Krishna has his own method of dealing with a controversy! He asserts the truth, but has no dogma: our goal is to realize I am God and we can reach it only if we turn away from 'dogma' - the word when reversed reads 'am-god'. Therefore, he repeats what he had said at the conclusion of the previous chapter: Whatever be your approach to me, remember that one-pointedness, steadfastness, and faith are essential, and you must merge yourself in me. (XII:5)

XII:3 - Those who worship the imperishable, the undefinable, the unmanifested, the omnipresent, the unthinkable, the eternal and the immovable,
XII:4 - Having restrained all the senses, even-minded everywhere, intent on the welfare of all beings, verily they also come to Me.

The answer to Arjuna's question is highly interesting. Deep meditation on the first five verses of the twelfth chapter will teach us the best way to handle controversial matters. In the heat of controversy, we often forget the real issue! Hence, Krishna reiterated the vital factor in verse 2. He does not beg the question nor evade it completely; discussion, argumentation and even controversy are good! Metaphysical 'friction' is like mechanical friction - it generates both energy and heat. Energy is desirable and heat is undesirable. Wisdom in argument acts like radiator water, enabling us to absorb energy and avoid heat! One of the best ways to do so is to understand the opponent's viewpoint; there is some truth in all viewpoints. In verses 3 and 4, Krishna concedes that even 'they who are devoted to the nameless and the formless being, come to me'. By quietly slipping in the word 'eva' - only, he pricks the bubble of the 'superiority' of a particular path. If the fundamentals enunciated in verse 2 are borne in mind, both paths lead to the same goal!

If your temperament leads you to the path of the unmanifest, nameless, formless being - by all means tread it - 'it will lead you also to me only'. But, please do not cheat yourself; make sure that you recognize God's omnipresence in all beings by serving them, and that you recognize the real impediments to all yoga - these being the wisdom-veiling power in the senses and the mind, by controlling them. You can say God is transcendental, but you cannot say the mind and senses are unsubstantial and ignore them.

Till one is well established in the realization of the omnipresence of God, there can be no love. There is merely a business transaction or contract 'I love you because...'. When one is truly in love, the heart expands. The great devotees and yogis are devoted to the welfare of all beings. In their actions and attitude to life, one perceives love.

XII:5 - Greater is their trouble whose minds are set on the Unmanifested, for the goal of the Unmanifested is very difficult for the embodied to reach.

Here, again, you will notice that there is no wholesale condemnation of another's different point of view. The god man is sincerely eager to perceive and to understand the truth that underlies all viewpoints; this truth is common to all, and the defect, if any, belongs to human imperfection. It is only a fool who considers that his viewpoint alone is correct. A wise man knows that if another's argument appears defective to him, his argument may similarly appear defective to the other! Accepting this premise, if we look for the common factors, we shall find them in plenty.

There are those, admits Krishna, whose temperament may qualify them for abstract meditation on the absolute. We shall not forget here that even in their case, control of the mind and senses should be natural and effortless, and even they will be keenly devoted to the welfare of all beings. They will not foolishly deny the existence of the manifold manifest beings on earth and lead a parasitical life. They will first deny the validity of their own sense-impressions and the cravings of the mind, and thus deplete these of their soul distracting power.

The sincere spiritual aspirant who, wrongly feeling that the path of the nameless-formless meditation is superior, enters it, will find that the trouble there is greater than on the other path. To remove a thorn with another thorn is easy; to blow it away with an electric fan may be possible, but more difficult! An embodied being will find it easier to divert the senses from the world to a sense-comprehensible God, and to wipe the world of names and forms from the mind by filling it with nameful-formful God.

If, however, you have risen above body-consciousness, you can tread the difficult road to God-realization! Even then you will see and serve the one self in all beings.

XII:6 - But to those who worship Me, renouncing all actions in Me, regarding Me as the supreme goal, meditating on me with single-minded Yoga, O Arjuna,
XII:7 - verily I become ere long the saviour out of the ocean of birth and death.

'Upasate' has been translated into 'worship'. Literally, it means 'sitting near'. The devotee always feels that God is close to him - the unseen, but mysteriously experienced presence, feebly comparable to the experience of the fragrance of a rose. He constantly inhales the fragrance or aroma of holiness. The fragrance emanates from a flower, and the flower has a name; the living presence is often attributed to a form, and the form given a name. That is part of the ananya yoga described here, where the relationship between the omnipresent God, the devotee, and all other persons, is one of non-division.

The other part consists in single-minded devotion: in performing all actions for God's sake - which is really what the word 'samnyasya' in the text means; for he, not the work or its rewards, is our supreme goal. The devotee is ever active yet never forgets God. The catalyst that achieves these has already been described - it is 'seeing God in all'. Most important for this are the spirit of enquiry and inner tranquility of the mind.

The yogi here does not deny offhand the validity of sense-perceptions; he sees through them. He does not shut his eyes to name and form, but he perceives their underlying substratum and essence and recognizes that that essence has charmingly clothed itself in the name and form. If God has chosen to appear to him in that mask or personality, he lovingly greets him in that form; taking care, of course, to greet God-in-the-form and not the form itself for its own sake. This prevents him from slipping into the void or into lethargy.

In that love the truth is born; and with it, liberation and peace. The yogi is released from the ocean of samsara.

XIII:8 - Fix your mind on me only, your intellect in Me; then you shalt no doubt live in Me alone hereafter.

Again and again, the spiritual aspirant tries to pour the infinite into the finite. He meditates on God. He enthrones him in the lotus of his heart. All these practices are valuable aids to yoga, but in themselves they may become obstacles. They may lead us into a kind of tamasa, self-satisfied state in which the ego, the problem, maker in our life, enters the field of religion or spirituality and projects experiences of visions and voices which delude the soul, producing illusions of spiritual evolution and preventing it from proceeding further. Never make a method an end in itself.

Krishna tells us: Collect your mind and enter it into me - nivesaya, in the text. Arjuna actually saw that he himself was in the cosmic form. We are all in God. When we practice meditation, it is profitable for us to feel not only that he is in us, but that we are in him, too.

Even when we are asked to meditate on the Lord seated in the heart, it is only as a means to rid us of the ego, the 'I'. When God is enthroned in the heart, his infinity fills it, making it impossible for the ego to exist there; darkness cannot co-exist with light.

The formula of vedanta 'I am Brahman' implies the same truth. It is not as though the 'I' is God. It is not as though that 'I' is to be pushed into Brahman. We should realize that Brahman alone exists even now and that ignorance alone identifies him with the ego-consciousness.

The method, whichever be the path pursued, is firmly and calmly to assert, in the sense of 'perceive', the Lord's presence in us and everywhere. Start with feeling his presence in the heart. Let him then envelop you. Let him envelop the whole universe. Then forget that you are meditating on him. He and he alone exists; not 'I'. Is there any doubt that 'thou shalt live in him thereafter'?

XIII:9 - If you are unable to fix your mind steadily on Me, then by the Yoga of constant practice seek to reach Me, O Arjuna.

A great truth was expressed in a simple manner in the previous verse: 'If you place your mind and intellect in me, you will live in me'. We live where our mind is; life is governed by our scale of values which in turn creates an inner world. A greedy man of insatiable desires finds his millions insufficient to give him happiness. A jealous minister of a great nation spends sleepless nights at the injustice that keeps him pinned to a position lower than the highest. These frustrations are not the fault of the outer world such people live in - the world in which they occupy enviable positions, but of the inner world of all consuming desire. One who is able to create a stable inner world of spiritual values will live for ever in God. Your stable value must be remembrance of God, all the rest being added to your life as secondary adjuncts.

However, all are not privileged to enter this mansion of desirelessness and renunciation of false values. It is for a microscopic minority. The others are haunted by a perverse scale of values, their minds and intellects constantly wandering into the by-lanes of sense-enjoyment, material acquisition, and a competitive desire to have 'more than my neighbor'. Krishna does not condemn them; he condemns none! He has to reach out to them. They have to be redeemed, to be saved from themselves.

In pleading tone, he says: Please desire to attain me through abhyasa yoga. Mahatma Gandhi felt that abhyasa yoga included all such practices as yoga asana, pranayama, concentration, meditation, etc. The mind does wander; well, then, at least endeavour to contemplate the stable value of God several times a day. Gradually the intervals between these periods of contemplation will diminish and eventually vanish. Abhyasa yoga is like knocking at the door: 'Knock and it shall be opened unto you.' Then it will be possible for you to enter and rest in God.

XIII:10 - If you are unable to practice even this Yoga of constant practice, be intent on doing actions for My sake; even by doing actions for My sake, you shall attain perfection.

This is a Bhagavad Gita characteristic. More than one's own best is not expected of anyone. Though it is possible to interpret these few verses as representing a ladder which ultimately leads the aspirant to union with God, Krishna makes the rung appear as the roof. Each step is the goal itself. Each span of the bridge is itself the other shore - an outstretched arm of the shore itself! This also avoids the pitfall of assuming what the goal is and then deluding oneself that one is there! The only goal we have is 'the next step' we actually 'see'.

Sincerity is the only criterion, and a sincere expression of one's eagerness to realize God is all that is demanded of each aspirant. No maximum or minimum limit is set as the qualification for perfection. The best of your ability, the best of your knowledge and understanding is the best, according to your own light. The fruit of that best is beatitude. This sincere eagerness will eagerly grasp the helping hand of God that descends as his grace and rush forward to his feet without arguing: But, I thought that was all I had to do! If, after doing one's best at that particular stage of evolution, God's grace illumines another rung, at the same time bestowing upon the aspirant the will and the power to rise to it, he will unquestioningly obey. However, there is no suggestion that such will be the case. Each spiritual practice must be done whole-heartedly. The requisite whole-heartedness will be absent if one has even the slightest awareness that it is only a 'step' towards perfection. If worldly values are too persistent to allow even a transient elevation to God as the stable value, then continue doing your work, but do it for his sake. The men and women of the various religious orders provide the best examples here; how diligently they do all that they do 'for God's sake'!

XII:11 - If you are unable to do even this, then, taking refuge in union with Me, renounce the fruits of all actions with the self controlled.

XII:12 - Better indeed is knowledge than practice of concentration; than knowledge meditation is better; than meditation the renunciation of the fruits of actions; peace immediately follows renunciation.

To maintain the mental attitude 'for the sake of God' needs a certain amount of devotion and inner vigilance. However, if these are absent, then, too, such a person is not condemned. The word 'then' in the text can be placed after 'me' - which now gives the verse an atheistic flavor. In fact, Krishna does suggest here that it is possible for a man to be good and saintly without having the traditional 'faith in God', but the qualification 'self-controlled' suggests that he has transcended that state of faith, perhaps, and is established in an impersonal, involuntary - natural - feeling of God's omnipresence which compels such goodness accompanied by self-control. If the 'faithful' endeavour belonged to a past birth, it is possible for its details to be submerged revealing only the overall effect. Even a superficial rendering of the first verse is a call to common sense. 'If you cannot do any of the above, then work without expectation of reward.' Krishna does not say that you are to reject all rewards, but that you should not lean on the rewards. As it is, we cannot and certainly do not always achieve what we want to. A rival, a germ or a change of weather can frustrate all our efforts and ruin our ambitions. So, why not be desireless, just doing our duty? We may get nothing at all out of it, or we may get the world. From here, the previous verse is just one automatic step forward. Desirelessness creates a vacuum: If I am not working for profit, then for what? - which is filled by the answer: For God's sake. Yet, desirelessness or renunciation of reward itself will bestow on us 'the peace that passeth understanding'.

XII:13 - He who hates no creature, who is friendly and compassionate to all, who is free from attachment and egoism, who is balanced in pleasure and pain, and forgiving,

XII:14 - Ever content, steady in meditation, self-controlled, possessed of firm conviction, with mind and intellect dedicated to Me, he, My devotee, is dear to Me.

The eight concluding verses of this chapter are thrilling and superb. They are called 'amrtastakam' - the immortal eight. Krishna, who has said that there was none dear or antagonistic to him, suddenly declares that there are some who are extremely dear to him! Who they are and what their nature is, he describes in these eight verses.

We should remember:

(a) That God is not a worldly ruler with friends and enemies.

(b) That he who answers to these descriptions becomes receptive to God's divine, omnipresent love. The pure heart receives and reflects this love, even as pure iron-filings rush to the magnet, while rusted ones do not; through no fault of the magnet itself.

(c) That whether we regard God as aloof and unconcerned with the world, or in his omniscience, as able to fulfill the delicate dual role of a witness and active participant in this world-play, he is never whimsical.

(d) That the characteristics mentioned in connection with the devotee are almost the same as those mentioned in connection with descriptions of the sthitaprajna - one who is unshakably established in super consciousness, or guna-tita - one who has transcended the three qualities of nature, following jnana or karma yoga paths. In fact, a close study of the Bhagavad Gita should convince us that these paths are but one path viewed from the aspirant's particular standpoint; even as descriptions of the universe and of God vary, depending upon the standpoint of the viewer.

(e) Since God is one's innermost reality, this God-love dispels the psychotic self-love and self-hate which distort man's vision and estimation of himself with consequent maladjustment in society.

XII:15 - He by whom the world is not agitated and who cannot be agitated by the world, and who is freed from the agitation of joy, envy, fear and anxiety, he is dear to Me.

XII:16 - He who is free from wants, pure, expert, unconcerned, and untroubled, renouncing all undertakings or commencements, he who is devoted to Me, is dear to Me.

The modern world, in its mad rush for an immediate magic cure to our maladies, finds no time to seek the root of any problem. Wars, revolutions, strikes and other socio-political agitations, various international controls, birth control and tranquillizers - are all proof of our incompetence and unwillingness to look for the root of the problem. Headaches, complexes and neuroses are symptoms, not diseases in themselves. They warn us of the presence in, and around us of reactionary forces which violently disturb our inner equilibrium. Population explosion is a sign of altered social and family values - where pleasure has usurped duty's place. Strikes and so on, reveal that in commerce, profit rules and not a sense of duty to our fellow-men. Wars and revolutions betray, again, that our scale of values has dangerously degenerated.

The devotee is not a revolutionary or a reactionary. He does not indulge in disputations and proselytizing missions. The world often hero-worships such people, unjustifiably, for they are still worldly however exalted and useful that worldliness may be! The true devotee realizes that such agitation is unnecessary and is thus unaffected by the agitations of the world. By precept and personal example, he radiates truth without agitating anyone's heart. He is a lover of peace; he is peace. Thus he is free from wants and ever happy. The flame of faith and love is kindled in his heart leaving no room for egoism, selfishness, hate, jealousy or fear.

By God's Grace, this seeker is gradually led to direct realization of his cosmic presence.

XII:17 - One who neither grasps pleasure or grief, who neither laments nor desires, and who renounces both auspicious and inauspicious things, is very dear to Me.

XII:18 - He who is the same to foe and friend, and in honor and dishonor, who is the same in cold and heat, in pleasure and pain, who is free from attachment,

XII:19 - He to whom censure and praise are equal, who is silent, content with anything, homeless, of a steady mind, and full of devotion, that man is dear to Me.

When the tilt in the scale of values is corrected, the inner balance is restored. It is then that one is able to see the situation outside as it is, not as it appeared to be through the colored glass of personal desires, egoism and conditioning. It is then that one is able to play his role efficiently, with a pure heart, free from anxiety. This role may demand the seeker's dynamic participation in the external conflict between the forces of light and those of darkness. It may lead him through alternate success and failure, honor and dishonor. But since he has offered all his actions to God, and since his own ego does not commence any undertaking - which is always prompted and conducted by the Lord - he has surpassed good and evil. He knows that what happens to him is God's will and calmly accepts it. Do these verses make it appear as though the devotee is a dull and heartless walking corpse? Certainly not! His compassion keeps him busy in the service of all creatures. But, he has entered his mind and intellect into God who created the world, sustains it and who thus works through him, his devotee.

The vital difference is that the devotee sees God where we see the world. We work, while he worships his lord through all his work.

Humility, devotion, surrender and non-condemnation are the beautiful attitudes of a devotee of God, of a sincere seeker.

XII:20 - They verily who follow this immortal dharma as described above, endowed with faith, regarding me as their supreme goal, they, the devotees, are exceedingly dear to me.

'Dharmyamrtam' is translated into immortal dharma. It is also immortalizing dharma. Krishna makes it plain at every opportunity that his is not a new doctrine or philosophy but a re-statement and reiteration of the eternal dharma - not just the oldest, but also the ever-new.

It is dharma - the balance which sustains the universe and every living creature, the cohesive force that keeps us together. It is not Hinduism, Christianity, Islam or Judaism in their restricted sense, but their very essence and soul. It is eternal but capable of being re-interpreted and re-delivered from time to time. Wood remains wood, but every human generation fashions some new gadget out of it, putting it to different uses. Initially, man made houses, bridges and boats with wood. When iron and concrete super ceded wood in construction, it was used for paper. Now man makes various garments from wood. All these have two factors in common: wood and service to man.

Modern man, though he does not discard objects of nature, sneers at dharma, feeling it is out of date. However, it is eternal and can and should still serve man, making his life happier and richer. Just as there are factories and research laboratories to discover newer uses for old materials, there should be more spiritual research centers to re-discover this eternal dharma, this pattern of our existence, and suggest ways and means of applying it to the present-day world.

To the man-of-God these verses representing the eternal dharma are like a blue-print for perfection. He builds his personality on their pattern - not by blindly copying, but by intelligently living. He lives as if he were a great devotee of God, for that is his objective. He grows in the characteristics mentioned in these verses and in course of time is established in them.

These eight verses are worth daily repetition, contemplating their meaning.

13. The Yoga of Distinction Between The Field & the Knower of the Field

XIII:1 - Arjuna said : I wish to learn about Prakriti (matter) and the Purusa (soul), the Field and the Knower of the Field, the knowledge and that which ought to be known. The Blessed Lord said : This body, O Arjuna, is called the field; he who knows it, is called the Knower of the field by those who know of them, that is, by the sages.

If this chapter is regarded as a necessary follow-up to the 11th chapter to amplify certain truths mentioned in it, and if, as many have done, we omit from our study Arjuna's question, then Krishna's statement that this body is called the field may be taken to refer to the cosmic body. You were wonderstruck by merely witnessing my cosmic body; even that is only the field, the material playground in which I carry out my divine play. 'This body' may also mean the individual body.

In fact, Indian philosophy insists on equating the microcosm with the macrocosm; the former is but the miniature of the latter. There is a world within an atom; and the world itself may be an atom in something of greater magnitude!

Within this body, the field, as its all-pervading soul, resides the knower of the body - the soul. It is an extremely subtle and powerful intelligence. Thus, the field is a phenomenon which can be observed. This could be part of the personality. The entity which understands this, the observing intelligence, is the knower of the field. Correct understanding of the field and its knower constitute wisdom. Without this our whole life becomes a complete mess, because we confuse the observed phenomenon with the observing intelligence. With this confusion arises ignorance, fear, attachment and wrong action.

The field - the body - is like a sports-field or swimming pool, in which the soul exercises itself to grow stronger, purer and to attain perfection. One must not run away from it or sink, but swim. Without the body, the soul cannot evolve; and by getting attached to it, the soul cannot evolve either! Hence, a knowledge of both the body and the soul is essential.

XIII:2 - Also know Me as the Knower of the Field in all fields, O Arjuna; knowledge of both the Field and the Knower of the Field, is considered by Me to be the knowledge.

XIII:3 - What the Field is and of what nature, what its modifications are and whence it is, and also who the Knower is, and what his powers are, hear all that from Me in brief.

XIII:4 - Sages have sung in many ways, in various distinctive chants and also in the suggestive words indicative of the Absolute, and is presented with all reasoning as to cause and effect.

Please remember that God is the soul of all beings. He is the sole reality, the cosmic consciousness which by virtue of its all-pervasiveness is the substratum for the individualized consciousness, too, though its true nature is veiled by ignorance. Whether you take the whole universe as one entity, the macrocosm, and accept the Lord as the knower of this mighty field, or you believe that this universe is composed of millions upon millions of beings, each of them being an independent field, God is the knower of them, or it.

Knowledge of exclusively either the field or its knower is incomplete; knowledge of both is true knowledge. As long as diversity is visible to our eyes and as long as the mind thinks in terms of diversity, it will be impossible for it to conceive of another reality; it cannot see what it sees as reality to be unreal. Therefore, the reality can only be established by ceaseless investigation. It is true that from the point of view of the absolute this diversity does not exist as diversity; that is not because the absolute is exclusive of 'all these', but because it includes and transcends them. A knowledge of the absolute can be had, therefore, only by acquiring an integral knowledge of the matter and the spirit, and then transcending them by God's grace. Hence the Isavasya upanisad commands man to acquire a knowledge of both 'knowledge and ignorance'. When he tries to understand matter, it is suddenly transformed into spirit and the veil is lifted.

XIII:5 - The great elements, individuality, intellect, and also the unmanifested Nature, the ten senses and the one, and the five objects of the senses,
XIII:6 - Desire, hatred, pleasure, pain, the aggregate (the body), fortitude and intelligence, all these are considered, in summary, to be the field of activities and its interactions.

The field is the object, and the knower is the subject. Here we are given a description of the object. Strange as it may seem, even egoism and the intellect are included in the list of objects! Viewing the whole universe as the body of God, it is apparent that individualization is inherent in that body. When we realize this, a host of puzzling questions is banished. Even this egoism is not a totally foreign commodity imported in ignorance, but it is inherent in the 'object' of God who is the subject. However, in states of ignorance it assumes alarming proportions.

Again, since we - the ego are ourselves objects, limited and veiled, occupying but a small part of the 'field', it is impossible for the little 'I' either to completely understand other 'objects', or to fully understand the subject of whom we are only allowed occasional glimpses.

Our waking and dreaming consciousness is filled with objects acting as subjects, such subjects acting as objects for others in their turn. The object is thus a projection of the subject on to something else, another subject! Hence, any scene is the object of the eye, the eye is the object of the nerves, the nerves of the brain, the brain of the intellect and the intellect of the ego-sense, which itself is the object of the self - the sole subject.

Even thoughts and emotions, desires, and so on, are objects of the self or consciousness. One who knows them thus has full control over them and does not identify with them.

When we are tempted to be certain about the source of our emotions and thoughts, whether happy or unhappy, we should remind ourselves that what is obvious may not be true. Let us enquire into the emotion till we arrive at the reality that is hinted at. It is the ego's ignorant identification of the knower with the field that gives rise to karma, sin and rebirth. The wise man is free from this bondage. The body is not his, yet it functions; the mind is not his, yet it thinks. In his case there is instant harmony within, and great love.

XIII:7 - Humility, unpretentiousness, non-injury, forgiveness, uprightness, service of the teacher, purity, steadfastness, self-control;
XIII:8 - Indifference to the objects of the senses; absence of egoism; perception of the evil in birth, death, old age, sickness and pain;
XIII:9 - Non-attachment, non-identification with son, wife, home; constant even-mindedness on the attainment of the desirable and the undesirable,

Jnana or true wisdom is recognition that the silent and tranquil spectator enjoys the show. It is common experience that our wisdom is overpowered by the heat generated by intense activity; yet, in calmer moments, all of us 'know' what we should have done! Mental modifications are events that take place in our mind - brain. The ego sense, the 'I' seated in the heart, need only watch those mental modifications without getting involved in them. Then life would flow smoothly and our thoughts, words and deeds would be full of wisdom. But the ego-sense has the age-old habit of identifying itself with these mental modifications. For instance, when the body needs nourishment, we say: I am hungry, and not the body is hungry. When the mind is confused, we say: I am confused. The 'I' jumps from the heart, into the whirlpool of thought-currents; this is e-motion - motion outwards. Hence the ignorant man is subject to wrong emotions, which are the symptoms of ignorance.

However, wisdom must not be confused with intellectuality. Jnana is knowing that the 'I' is a silent witness of the world, the senses and even the mental modifications, and is not necessarily involved in them. Can you be good and do good without intention? If, in being or doing good, there is an intention or motivation, it is not goodness but something else. Can the qualities mentioned in these verses be present in you? If they can, you will behave like one who has this jnana or wisdom.

XIII:10 - Unswerving and unalloyed devotion to Me by Yoga, resorting to solitary places, detachment from the general mass of people,
XIII:11 - Constancy in Self-knowledge, perception of the end of true knowledge - this is declared to be knowledge; everything what is opposed to it is ignorance.

Unswerving devotion to God is not possible without non-attachment to the world and non-identification of the self with son, wife, and so on - qualities mentioned in the previous verse. Such attachment and identification are the products of ignorance. There is really no 'attachment' anywhere in creation! We came into this world alone and we shall go alone, leaving even the body behind. All are independent, though ignorantly, we do not live that independent life here. We develop 'sneha' - a word for friendship and also for glue, which makes us cling to things unwisely. Hence our suffering. The fire of wisdom will make this glue melt so that we neither cling nor kick. The capacity to live with or to part from one another is non-attachment; and this process is as simple as life entering and leaving the body. This non-attachment, its counterpart - 'unswerving devotion to God' - and the other divine qualities mentioned in these five verses, are the chief characteristics of jnana or wisdom.

If they are not found in a man who is otherwise deemed 'wise', his wisdom is locked up within his intellect; and it is extremely difficult to teach that 'great wise man' once the lock has rusted! The rust should be wiped out by the cultivation of the good qualities mentioned in these five verses. Then the wisdom within will reveal itself.

Our Master, Sri Swami Sivananda, was very fond of these five verses. If you cultivate these qualities, the source of all evil which is the mind and the ahamkara or ego-sense, will come into the open because their existence is threatened! Gurudev used to say that this is the best way to purify the mind and conquer egoism.

XIII:12 - I will declare that which has to be known, knowing which one attains to immortality, the beginningless supreme Brahman, called neither being nor non-being.

XIII:13 - With hands and feet everywhere, with eyes, heads and mouths everywhere, with ears everywhere, It exists in the worlds, enveloping all.

Now Krishna describes the knower of the field, the subject. One should know what this subject is. Such knowledge is twofold: paroksa - indirect and intellectual, and aparoksa - direct and intuitive. The former is knowledge by contact, via a medium - e.g., scripture, guru, and the latter is knowledge by identity. It is immediate knowledge, without a medium, and arises from direct experience. Such knowledge is real knowledge and puts an end to all doubt and uncertainty.

The power to reveal that immediate knowledge is vested only in God; only he really knows. To him the whole universe and the power and the intelligence in it are 'objects' of his own 'thought' - if there be such. The ego and the individual intellect are themselves objects and products of ignorance. Hence Krishna says: I will declare that which has to be known - first indirectly, from the lips of the guru, here Krishna himself, and knowing which one attains to immortality - i.e. having knowledge by identity.

That supreme subject of all can be described neither in positive nor negative terms. As our Master often said: To define Brahman is to deny Brahman. The intellect can grasp and speech express only finite entities. Yajnavalkya asks an extremely pertinent question in the Brhadiranyaka upanisad: With what shall one know the knower?

Here, the Lord reveals the great truth: 'that' is omnipresent. What you call the world is really God seeing through the eyes, ears, tongue, skin and so on. What you call a thought or an idea is God conceived, grasped by thought. So, there is nothing other than God here. Such is his glory that he himself appears as all this diversity. It all belongs to God, whether the immediately visible form be that of a saint or an ant.

XIII:14 - The super soul is source of all senses, yet He is without senses. He is unattached, although he is the maintainer of all living beings. He transcends the gunas, and at the same time he is the master of all gunas.

XIII:15 - The Supreme Truth exists both internally and externally, in the moving and nonmoving. He is beyond the power of the material senses to see or to know. Although far away, he is also near to all.

These verses are not for discussion or rationalization, but for meditation. When you say: I see that, pointing to an object, you are really singing the glory of God! The 'I' in you is God and he is in that object, too; and, the sight itself has been made possible by his power. Yet, he is not limited or conditioned by the senses. Because he is all-pervading, the soul of everything, he is not attached to anybody or anything. This apparent diversity is nothing but the manifestation of God's power and glory. Hence he supports them all in the sense that they do not and cannot exist but for him. He is free; yet all our experiences are possible only because he is the consciousness in them.

God is all-pervading, but because he is extremely subtle, being the one homogeneous essence when all names and forms are reduced to their fundamental homogeneity, he is intellectually unknowable. In other words, he is the supreme subject, and therefore can never be objectively perceived.

To those who realize him through intuitive knowledge, he is indeed near, for what can be nearer than our innermost self? Yet the ignorant man relates to the world in a distorted way, pursuing pleasure and avoiding pain and unhappiness. He is subject to endless misery and delusion, and in his state of ignorance God seems to be far away.

The Isavasya upanishad asks: If one realizes that the self - God - is all, how shall he ever experience grief or delusion? In that realization - not mere intellectual knowledge, the world is seen as it is and there is no attachment, hate or fear. With that vision the world and life are transformed into something very beautiful - you do not manipulate the world or try to revolutionize your life, yet everything flows.

XIII:16 - Although the super soul appears to be divided, He is never divided. He is one. Although he is the maintainer of every living entity, it is to be understood that he devours and develops all.

XIII:17 - That, the Light of all lights, is beyond darkness; it is said to be knowledge, the Knowable and the goal of knowledge, seated in the hearts of all.

If the ultimate reality, the supreme subject or Brahman is dismissed as indescribable, teaching and consequently realization would be rendered extremely difficult, and people undergoing varied experiences in this world, even if they see that all life is afire with sorrow, will not turn to God, but seek to quench that burning by resorting to remedies worse than disease. Remember that half-knowledge has always been used as the ladder to ascend to full knowledge. The mathematics teacher in a primary school is sure that a point is a point and a straight line is a straight line. If he told his little students that a point is only a concept and cannot be described on paper and that a straight line will curve when drawn long enough, their confusion would make it impossible to teach them mathematics. As Sri K.M. Sen says in his book on Hinduism: Statements about Brahman, to be intelligible, must be empirical forms. The wise recognize these forms to be necessities of concrete thought, but fools take them to be real truth.

Thus definitions like creator, supporter, destroyer or redeemer, light, and 'seated in the hearts of all' are to be taken figuratively. They are given to enable us to know that which is beyond the pale of rational knowledge. Krishna does not want to get lost in the maze of descriptions of the indescribable and reminds us that he is undivided, omnipresent. The previous verses, especially verse 12, might lead to a void; hence the hint here that God is beyond darkness, he is the light of lights. He is the soul of all - human, sub-human, super-human, animate and inanimate. He is the knower, known and knowledge. However, all these are mere pointers. Even so all teaching is a pointer; the guru's role, too, is to be a living pointer. They remind us that there is some kind of mist hiding the truth within. This truth is: God alone exists.

XIII:18 - Thus the Field as well as knowledge and the Knowable have been briefly stated. My devotee, knowing this, enters into My Being.

XIII:19 - Know you that matter and spirit are beginningless; know that their transformations and the modes of matter are products of material nature.

The genius of Krishna has compressed into just a dozen verses an inexhaustible wealth of knowledge and deep wisdom. Whole volumes can be written explaining each verse; but they would be hopelessly inadequate compared to deep meditation on each one.

But wait, there are some posers here! Such meditation is possible only to 'my devotee' - God's devotee, not only the devotee of the God-form Krishna. Without love, knowledge is hypocrisy, for true knowledge brings complete understanding and understanding engenders love. On the other hand, love, even of God, without knowledge may perhaps lead us to superstition, not to God-realization. Ramanuja Acharya holds that knowledge is one of the most essential aids to God-love.

So if God's devotee attains this knowledge, what becomes of him? He 'enters into my being' - he becomes one with God. No true seeker after God is interested in the academic disputation about whether he retains his individuality or becomes God himself. Perhaps we live in him as fish in the ocean - part of him and yet distinct.

What is significant, however, is the fact that such a devotee shares God's nature - mat-bhavam. He sees the world as God sees it; he does God's will. Hence, he does not remain inert and inactive, but joyously participates in the divine will.

He realizes that God and his nature are eternal; not distinct and separate, but related like fire and heat. The potentiality of manifestation is inherent in the spirit; and when this activates, nature becomes manifest, undergoes modifications and possesses qualities. But the wise devotee knows that even in and through such manifestation God alone exists.

XIII:20 - Nature is said to be the cause of all material activities and effects; the spirit is the cause of the various sufferings and enjoyments in this world.
XIII:21 - The living entity in material nature thus follows the ways of life, enjoying the three modes of nature, due to his association with that material nature. This is the cause of his birth in an evil or good womb.

Krishna's genius is synthesis and here is a synthesis of subjective idealism and materialism. There are those who say that the outside world is a projection of one's own mind; and others who assert that matter alone is real and that the spirit is the fermentation of matter. Krishna points out that both spirit and matter exist though of course not as two but as God and his nature.

Our experiences of 'pleasant' and 'unpleasant' are merely subjective. However, although butter and lime look alike, one is soothing and pleasant, the other caustic and irritating. There is a mysterious power in lime which distinguishes it from butter. That power is shakti or prakrti or God's nature. The entire universe is vibrant with life, prakrti, and that nature functions. The nature of water is to flow; the nature of fire is to burn. Counterpart to this mysterious power is a mysterious consciousness in us which experiences that nature - purusa or the individual soul. The two, prakrti and purusa, seem to understand each other very well indeed.

Since purusa was the experiencer, some philosophers accorded this a superior status and regarded nature as inert. Others saw that the qualities in nature were able to influence purusa and so declared that nature is para-shakti - supreme power, and purusa is powerless without her. You, the purusa, could not drink water and enjoy the sweetness of honey but for prakrti. Let us then accept both, together! For nature is God's nature - they are not two but one. A clear understanding of this indivisible-duality frees us from confusion, likes and dislikes, craving and aversion the 'ought to be' and the 'ought not to be'. Nature prevails in God's sight.

XIII:22 - Yet in this body there's another, a supernatural enjoyer, who is the Lord, the supreme proprietor, who exists as the overseer and permitter, and who is known as the super soul.

XIII:23 - One who understands this philosophy concerning material nature, the living entity and the interaction of the modes of nature is sure to attain liberation. He will not take birth here again, regardless of his present position.

It is good to have a clear idea of the two-in-one and their distinct functions, as that will enable us to undeludedly recognize their manifestations. In that light of clarity we shall not, like king Canute, order the waves of ever-changing phenomena to stop; nor shall we get entangled in the web of these changes, regarding them as inevitable.

The supreme soul 'in this body' is called the jiva, though on account of ignorance, this jiva considers himself limited. He is a 'spectator'; and that is when he is happy. He is the 'permitter'; having the prerogative to say Yes or No, and is not as helpless as he sometimes imagines himself to be. Recognizing this power of the soul, one is able to freely exercise his free-will. The jiva is the 'supporter'; it is sheer delusion which makes him feel dependent upon material phenomena. Yet he is also the 'enjoyer', and because of the fact that he enjoys the material phenomena, he may come to feel that they are indispensable for his happiness. Nevertheless he is the 'great lord and the supreme self', if only he wakes up from his slumber of ignorance!

He who knows this secret will neither resist nor cling to the world. He will not blame the world, or himself for living in such a world. He knows the depth of the ocean, but he also knows his own power to swim or float on its surface. He does not get drowned. Convinced of this, it does not matter what profession he is engaged in, he is a jnani. He is not born again for whatever may be his mode of living, such a yogi lives in God. (VI:31)

XIII:24 - Some by meditation behold the Self in the Self, others by karma yoga, and others through working without fruitive desire.

XIII:25 - Again there are those who, although not conversant in giant knowledge, begin to worship the supreme person on hearing about him from others; because of their tendency to hear from authorities, they also transcend the path of birth and death.

The goal was described in the previous verses; now the paths are pointed out. There is variety in creation; the infinite can be viewed from infinite angles and approached in infinite ways. Temperament and tradition are the main guiding, not deciding, factors here. The waters of the ocean are the same, whatever be the name given to the ocean at different points on the globe.

The man of mystic temperament 'beholds the self in the self by the self' in deep meditation. Note that Krishna cleverly avoids the subject-object experience in meditation, and the 'I see God' or 'I see a brilliant light' type of psychic phenomenon so widely confused with meditation and raja yoga. 'I' do not see the self, but the self itself sees the self in the self. Self-realization is merely seeing that what you and I previously regarded as the self, never existed!

Others, endowed with an intuitive temperament, may use reason to transcend itself, intellect to silence itself, and in the searchlight of their self-knowledge realize that the ego was never an entity. The whole universe shines as God and his nature.

Those of a dynamic temperament may reach the same goal by self-effacing, self-sacrificing and selfless service, feeling 'God serves God'.

Even devotees of the Lord who humbly worship him as they have been taught by their ancestors and preceptors, will reach God. This is a gentle rebuke for so many yogi and intellectual giants who sigh with grief that these devotees, 'ignorantly' worshipping God, are 'lost souls' whom it is their duty to 'save'! Leave them alone. The Lord whom they worship will look after them. Moreover, they must awaken themselves, save themselves. No-one else can do it for them. They must find and go their own way.

XIII:26 - O Arjuna, whatever you see in existence, both living and not living, is only the combination of the field of activities and the Knower of the field.

Creation itself involves both the subject - knower, and the object - the field. Creation can be viewed from two standpoints. 'I think; therefore, I am' is true; though not in the Cartesian sense of a division. For awareness or consciousness is consciousness's awareness of itself, which is the universe. 'I am, therefore, I think' is equally true. For, in order to be able to project a thought, the thinker should exist and the thought, as well as the thought-subject, must also exist. There is actually no conflict or contradiction between these two viewpoints; they are complementary to each other.

Here, again, it is obvious that the apparent contradiction springs from the fact that we regard matter and spirit as two eternally separate and distinct factors and, in accordance with our own bias, tend to exaggerate the importance of one over the other. In fact, God exists because God is you!

God and his nature, subject and object, matter and spirit, the field and its knower - are in truth one and indivisible. All beings that exist in the universe are the products of the perpetual union between the two - God and his nature. Creation is never ex nihilo; God's nature has ever been his, and its manifestation has always been in a potential state - even when all beings return to the state of formless dissolution during the 'night of the creator'. Once again, when consciousness - cit - actively engages itself in becoming aware of its own potentialities - shakti, the diverse beings are 'created'. Hence the universe is but cit-shakti made manifest. He who knows this lives in cosmic consciousness, and he realizes that animate and inanimate objects pulsate with cosmic life and float in cosmic consciousness.

XIII:27 - One who sees the eternal Lord accompanying the individual soul in all bodies, and who understands that neither the soul nor the super soul is ever destroyed, actually sees.

XIII:28 - One who sees the super soul in every living being and equal everywhere does not degrade himself by his mind. Thus he approaches the supernatural destination.

'Samam' has been translated 'equally'; but 'samely' would express it better. 'Equally' suggests quantitative similarity. 'Sameness' is much more than quantitative or qualitative similarity, for it expresses identity.

Some philosophers hold that this 'sameness' has in part been 'transformed' into the visible diversity; though they assert that the substratum of this diversity is the same. The fundamental hydrogen atom has combined and re-combined to produce the various elements; but it is clear that this reversible process suggests that the 'reality' of matter is the simple hydrogen atom - if that is the ultimate material particle which cannot be further reduced.

Another view is that this diversification of the one, this complication of the simple, is only apparent, not real. The 'sameness' has not actually been transformed into the diversity, but only appears to be so. What exists is just one thing, like space. There is infinite diversity that seems to exist in space merely because we think in terms of diversity. The popular simile is that of the snake in the rope. When in the darkness the rope appears to be a snake, the rope has not even in part been transformed into a snake. Thus, according to this view, the combination of atoms - which scientists themselves declare are ever independent of one another - is an idea; and the fusion of several simple atoms into more complex atoms is similarly an idea. Although a group of trees is called a forest, each tree is a tree and nothing more - 'forest' only being an idea in the mind. The elements are thus only a mode of thought, the reality being the Lord - and his nature which is forever one with him. Knowing this, one does not become egoistic. The egoist 'destroys' - veils - the self by his little self - the ego, and thereby destroys his wisdom, peace and happiness.

XIII:29 - One who can see that all activities are performed by the body, which is created of material nature, and sees that the self does nothing, actually sees.

The cause of sin and suffering is the self-hypnosis of the individual soul in feeling that he is somehow involved in the world and particularly in the body; that it is he who sees, hears, tastes, grasps with the hands, walks and works; and that it is he who enjoys and suffers. Suffering arises on account of isolation, and the purpose of yoga and all spiritual practice is to de-hypnotize the purusa, ultimately to lead him to the realization that the reality alone is, and that the manifest universe, including himself, and all the changes that take place in it are but the expression of the qualities of God's nature - neither good nor evil, neither pleasant nor unpleasant.

All self-isolation is sin, because it is inevitable that when you consider yourself an entity totally different from another, you must enter into some relationship. Then you begin to love one and hate another. Out of that, sin and sorrow arise. Death of a dear one is painful; but death of an enemy causes rejoicing in the heart! An earthquake in mid-ocean or unpopulated territory, which throws up fresh land or fertilizes the existing land, is a welcome event; whereas when it affects objects of one's self-identification, it is a great evil. One has to pass through the process of disentangling oneself from this web of illusory super-imposition of the not-self upon the self. Hence, as a sort of de-hypnotizing autosuggestion, the yogi is asked to assert and realize that his self does nothing at all, and that nature alone is ever active; thus making it look as though nature is an independent agent. Once this dissociation has been achieved, it will be clear to the enlightened soul that even this duality is only apparent, and that in reality God alone exists, the universe is his nature and the changing phenomena occur on account of the qualities inherent in that nature. Arriving at this wisdom, the enlightened one does not isolate himself and is ever happy, at one with nature.

XIII:30 - When a man sees the whole variety of beings as resting in the One, and spreading forth from That alone, he then becomes Brahman.

Taken literally, this verse can give rise to all sorts of misconceptions. The variety of beings does not rest in the one as, for instance, 'birds rest on a tree'. If we adopt the 'actual transformation' of creation - parinama-vada, a more apt simile would be the fish in the ocean - born in the ocean, existing in it and dissolving in it - truly part of the ocean, but with a distinct personality. It is possible to catch the fish and show that it is separate from the ocean only because ocean is not omnipresent. Since God is omnipresent this paradox does not arise in him.

If, however, we adopt the second view that there is only an 'apparent transformation' which is illusory - vivarta-vada, then this variety and the one bear the same relationship as the different oceans, seas and bays of the world bear to the one vast homogeneous mass of water that the ocean really is. It is not as though the Indian ocean, the Atlantic ocean, the Pacific ocean, and so on, rest in the one ocean that encircles the world, but there is in truth only one ocean - the variety being a mere idea.

'All beings' includes one's self, too. It needs no special emphasis that he who thus sees the one reality realizes that even his own individuality is but an idea, for in truth only God exists. He then becomes Brahman, in the same way as the Arabian sea becomes the ocean when the name and the limitation are removed.

Krishna, however, does not permit us a day-dreaming phantasm of oneness; that oneness is not exclusive of the diversity. The obvious - the diversity, in a manner of speaking, clothes the unobvious - the oneness, which is the reality. Nothing that is of value, of sense or of importance in our lives is obvious. He who has realized that unobvious oneness knows that the variety spreads forth from that alone, and shares the dynamism of the diversity, while inwardly enjoying the peace of the one.

XIII:31 - Being without beginning and devoid of qualities, the Supreme Self, imperishable, though dwelling in the body, O Arjuna, neither acts nor is tainted.

XIII:32 - As the ether is not tainted because of its subtlety, so the Self seated everywhere in the body, is not tainted.

The statement that the supreme self is devoid of qualities seems to suggest exclusiveness and a distinction between the self and (its) nature. This is not so. The difference lies in the viewpoint: a dark cloud hangs between earth and outer space. A man standing on earth says: The sky is dark; whereas a man flying above, in the sky, says: The earth is dark. The truth is, all of them are as they are. The cosmonaut flying aloft in outer space will not even notice the thick cloud covering our particular town. We see it because our vision is limited and circumscribed; his and God's vision is vast and unrestricted!

Smoke pouring out of a factory chimney taints that chimney with soot; but the sky remains untainted even after years of this sort of pollution. The chimney is gross and limited, hence it receives and keeps the taint. The sky is subtle and unlimited; no taint can stick to it.

From the empirical or individual standpoint, the qualities of nature exist in God; but from the absolute standpoint, the self is devoid of any quality. The yogi realizes the distinction between truth and viewpoint - truth being that which exists and viewpoint being the mental activity. Realizing this his mind and heart - the gross and limited, are totally surrendered to God - the subtle and infinite.

What a golden message of courage and hope! Your Soul is ever free and pure. Let not the 'past' depress you or dampen your spirit. Acquire the eye of wisdom and the ghost of sin and suffering will vanish. You are a sinner only so long as your own grossness and ignorant limitation make you believe yourself to be. Wake up! You are the ever-pure immortal self.

XIII:33 - Just as the one sun illumines the whole world, so also the Self illumines the whole Field, O Arjuna.

XIII:34 - They who, through the eye of knowledge, perceive the distinction between the Field and its Knower, and also the liberation from the Nature of being, they go to the Supreme.

The scientist tells us that the earth was part of the sun and broke away from it long ago. Even today, the same sun sheds light and life on the whole of the earth. Though apart, the earth is still 'part' of the sun - the solar system, enjoying the benefits of a close 'commonwealth' association.

In the same way, when consciousness remembered its own potentialities, the manifestation-potential was actualized into infinite combinations of atoms and molecules, giving rise to a variety of beings together called the 'ksetra' the field, the body of God. This body is not inert and useless but is indwelt and illumined by the light of God whose power dances in every atom of existence, inviting us to realize him and thus go beyond sin and suffering.

The common man's vision is so gross that only the grossness of diversity is visible to him. He is sense-limited, sense-bound and mind-enslaved. It is necessary for him first to acquire subtlety of vision, delicacy of understanding and freedom from the bondage of ideological slavery, before he can arrive at cosmic consciousness. Hence Krishna demands that the wise disciple should first acquire that sharpness of wisdom which will enable him to pare nature from God, by which process alone he can glimpse the universal substratum - God, and then proceed to liberate himself from the illusion of 'bhuta-prakrti' or elemental nature.

He discovers that he is not even part of the world, he is the world - if one point is removed from the circumference of a circle, there is no circle! There is one solid mass of awareness which is able to respond to every situation in life as it arises. We are all swimming in that ocean of awareness. Thus the wise disciple will know the supreme and realize that he and he alone exists - one without a second.

14. The Yoga of the Division of the Three Gunas

Indian mythology tells the story of the Lord Trivikrama who measured the heaven and the earth with two strides and placed his foot on the head of man as the third of three strides, thus bringing the three worlds together.

This allegorical story has been esoterically interpreted in different ways. He, the undying one, appears to be born, to live and to die, in all; he, the ever-wakeful one, wakes, dreams and sleeps in the individual's consciousness. He is the creator, preserver, redeemer, and that which transcends them all and exists as their underlying unity.

Here, in the 14th chapter of the Bhagavad Gita, we are granted a vision of that supreme being who forms the substratum:

(i) for all perishable beings,

(ii) for the imperishable divine spark that exists in them all, and

(iii) who, being free from all limitations of individualization and contact with ever-changing phenomena, transcends them all.

He is the supreme being, at once transcendent and immanent. He is the life-giving substance in the plant; he is the digestive fire in the human; he is the light in the sun. In fact, one who keeps his eyes and ears open, cannot fail to recognize this supreme being every moment of his life.

According to scientists, the entire universe will implode and become a singularity. Thus, in that singularity or single point is the whole universe - all one. This is the most intense mixture of all. We are all one. Realization of this divine mystery frees one not only from bondage but from grief, here and now.

XIV:1 - The Blessed Lord said : I will again declare to you that supreme knowledge, the best of all knowledge, having known which all the sages have gone to the supreme perfection after this life.

XIV:2 - They who, having taken refuge in this knowledge, attain to unity with me, are neither born at the time of creation nor are they disturbed at the time of dissolution.

Once again we are being prepared for a big surprise. The Gita is a blazing spiritual fire. It helps us light the torch of wisdom in our own heart. A lamp cannot be lighted except from another flame, yet, if the lamp to be lighted is not brought into heart-to-heart contact with the flame it is not lighted, however glorious and fierce the flame may be. Not proximity, but only intimate contact between the lamp and the flame can ensure lighting. That is what the words 'upasana' - usually translated into 'worship', and 'upanisad' mean; and that is the vital factor in guru-disciple relationship.

When you look at someone whom you love, the ignition of the torch of inner wisdom, saktipata, happens instantly. That look is saktipata - a non-verbal communication, even though it may be accompanied by some verbal utterance. Ramana Maharsi says very beautifully: 'When you learn to silence your mind and think with your heart, you can be a recipient of this saktipata.' In the realm of transcendental wisdom, the intellect can only act as the bridesmaid. The heart is the bride.

When devotion makes a direct approach to divinity, intellect follows and understands. Reality is not opposed to reason, but transcends it. Divinity is not subject to reason and logic - which are the playground of intellect born of ignorance, yet when the heart obtains a glimpse of it, the intellect is able to provide the rationale.

Krishna, therefore, announces dramatically that he is about to reveal a great truth which will free us from birth and death.

XIV:3 - The total material substance, called Brahman, is the source of birth; in that I place the germ, making possible the births of all living beings, O Arjuna.

XIV:4 - Whatever forms are produced, Arjuna, in any womb whatever, the great Brahma is their womb, and I am the seed-giving father.

This is a divine mystery, not because it has been hidden away by any sect or clan, but because it is beyond the reach of the intellect - hence incomprehensible, and of speech - hence indescribable. Only revelation is of any avail here; this revelation should be devoutly received and then intellectually understood.

God alone is the reality. That is the deep significance of the simple word omnipresent which all of us use in relation to him. This reality has with it, in an inexplicable way - maya, infinite energy - prakrti or divine nature, which is capable of either remaining latent or becoming patent. This is logically acceptable because it cannot be disproved!

That energy is called mahat-brahma. Visualize it as a cosmic mirror with infinite reflectors. The one being is immediately manifested in all these reflectors as infinite beings. Since the one being is all-consciousness, the reflected infinite beings, too, come to possess that consciousness, but in a reflected way; and it is this reflection we refer to as intelligence in the individual. Essentially is divine, but it is finite and shines in reflected glory. This perhaps is the meaning of the biblical expression 'Man is made in the image of God'. For the purpose of human comprehension, this divine act of reflection is expressed as impregnation. However, the inevitable duality of father and mother should not confuse us into super-imposing duality on the one being. Rather, the analogy should be modified to a curved mirror of horseshoe shape, with the two poles reflecting on each other thus producing infinite mirrors within mirrors. Since God is consciousness, these infinite reflections are endowed with intelligence.

XIV:5 - Material nature consists of the three modes - goodness, passion and ignorance. When the living entity comes in contact with nature, he becomes conditioned by these modes.

Even when the sky is clear, you know there is moisture in it. When there is pressure or depression somewhere, this moisture condenses into white clouds. If the atmospheric change continues, while cloud changes into black, rain-bearing cloud. That black cloud, though one, has hidden in it the potentiality of drop-formation - one yet many! In a few minutes the drops form and they do not linger in the sky but fall to earth.

In vedanta the clear sky is comparable to Brahman the absolute, with prakrti or nature hidden in it. The pressure is comparable to the original vibration - Om, or the word or logos. The white cloud, to Tsvara - the supreme personal God. The black cloud, to hiranyagarbha - the world soul, when you view it as a whole, and to virat - manifestation, when you view it as just an aggregate of individuals.

Rainwater in Australia, America and Africa, is all the same. The difference lies in what it falls on; then it becomes good, bad or indifferent.

The three qualities belong to divine nature. Take fire, for example. The mysterious power that burns in fire is God. The visible flame is divine nature. This flame has inherent in it three qualities: light, heat and smoke - comparable to sattva, rajas and tamas respectively. Similarly, the entire universe is composed of three strands of existence. One is the light. In every atom there is something luminous, and it is because of this inner light that we exist and are able to recognize one another. Then, there is something in every atom that is dynamic, which vibrates; and, in addition, every atom has something that the scientist calls inertia. This eventually makes up the mass of material, physical bodies.

The individual soul is pure; it is actually not different from God. However, it is caught in these three qualities of divine nature. Why? We do not conclusively know.

XIV:6 - O sinless one, the mode of goodness, being purer than the others, is illuminating, and it frees one from all sinful reactions. Those situated in that mode develop knowledge, but they become conditioned by the concept of happiness.
XIV:7 - The mode of passion is born of unlimited desires and longings, and because of this, the embodied living entity is bound to material fruitive actions.
XIV:8 - But know you Tamas to be born of ignorance, deluding all embodied beings; it binds the conditioned soul by heedlessness, sleep and indolence.

These are the fundamental characteristics of the three qualities of nature. A knowledge of these three qualities is extremely essential. Our Master often asked: 'Do you know which guna is operating in you at a particular time'? If we do, then we shall be able to adapt our life and activity in such a way as to utilize the operation of the particular quality, and prevent it from leading us away from our center - God. So long as one is embodied, one cannot completely disentangle oneself from these qualities of nature.

Social workers often delude themselves that the service they render is itself yoga. Deep meditation on these three verses will awaken them to the truth that their service is often rajasa - service that is accompanied by attachment and desire for worldly objects, name and fame. Introspection will enable them to retain the activity and eliminate attachment or desire.

A man who cares for nothing, who is not sincere enough to love anyone, or daring enough to hate, may pat his own back and think himself nearly a sage. Verse 8 reminds him that he is tamasa. He should remove the heedlessness and then maintain equilibrium.

Even knowledge and happiness, though sattvika, are only bondage. Knowing this, the aspirant is careful not to stop there. All the qualities must be transcended and the self realized here and now.

XIV:9 - Satva attaches to happiness, rajas to action, Arjuna, while tamas, shrouding knowledge, attaches to heedlessness negligence.

XIV:10 - Now satva prevails, O Arjuna, having overpowered rajas and tamas; now rajas, having overpowered satva and tamas; and now tamas, having overpowered satva and rajas.

The introspective spiritual aspirant is amazed, shocked and terrified when he discovers that in spite of himself his moods continuously change. Now he is happy; now he is restless; now he is lazy. Now he is wise; now he is passionate; now he is idle. 'How is it,' he wonders, 'that in spite of being one whole, I am sometimes holy, sometimes human and at other times beastly?'

When he is advanced enough in meditation and when he has developed the witness-consciousness, he will realize that these passing moods need not necessarily affect him, that they do not 'belong' to him, but that they are the triple streams of sattva, rajas and tamas - part of the divine nature - which merely cast their shadows on him as they march past.

What is a personality if the wisdom, the dynamism and the stupidity it has are all removed? All of us, the greatest of saints and the worst of sinners, are subject to these three qualities, though the proportion may vary, because we are part of nature. However, in ignorance we superimpose their effects upon ourselves.

Even though these qualities may obstruct the vision of the true self, they do not affect or alter it. The soul is ever pure, unaffected by any of the three qualities of nature. This is the fountain-source of the sage's strength. If a colored object is placed near a crystal, the crystal appears to undergo a complete change. In fact, it remains unchanged in its essential nature - it merely reflects the color of the object in front of it. A clear understanding of this truth frees man from fear, grief and delusion, and throws open the path to redemption.

XIV:11 - When, through every gate in this body, the wisdom-light shines, then it may be known that satva is predominant.

XIV:12 - Greed, activity, the undertaking of actions, restlessness, longing - these arise when the rajas is predominant, O Arjuna.

XIV:13 - Darkness, inertness, heedlessness and delusion - these arise when tamas is predominant, O Arjuna.

Here and in the 17th and part of the 18th chapter, Krishna classifies the three guna in great detail. Our endeavor should always be to keep clear of unnecessary tamas - sleep, for instance, may be necessary - and turn even rajasa energy sattva-ward. Even sattva is not the goal; but it is the quality nearest the center. It is a transparent veil and hence allows a full vision of the reality. In all that we engage ourselves in, if we avoid the tamasa category and increase the sattva in us, so that it will utilize the rajasa energy for our own and others' spiritual evolution, we shall soon discover the path to sattva-transcendence.

When sattva prevails, there is wisdom and light in all the senses. They do not distract the mind. Knowledge of this will help us utilize these periods for meditation on God - which will sustain the sattva, and for spiritual ministry.

When rajas prevails, there is restlessness within and the urge to be active. One may not be able to completely avoid this, nor is it always necessary to avoid it. Narada in his Bhakti Sutra assures us that even desire, egoism, and so on can be directed towards God. When there is longing for a worldly object, it is possible with good preliminary training, to turn the longing Godward!

When tamas prevails and there is stupidity in the mind, we should avoid its expression in actions and, by various methods like yoga asana, pranayama, a brisk walk, and so on, drive tamas away.

Knowledge of the guna for understanding of oneself is a great help.

XIV:14 - If the embodied one meets with death when satva has become predominant, then he attains to the spotless worlds of the knowers of the Highest.

XIV:15 - Meeting death in rajas, he is born among those who are attached to action; and dying in tamas, he is born in the womb of the senseless.

Krishna has already emphasized the great truth that one's subsequent birth is determined by the 'bhava' - state of one's inner being - at the time life departs from the body. Now he expands the idea.

If that bhava is sattvika, he will ascend to higher regions. Though in the literal sense the verse does imply that even if by accident the wicked man is in a sattvika state, e.g. he is in holy company, he will rise to a higher region; normally this is not possible. At the time of departure from the world that quality alone will prevail which has been predominant most of our life.

Two conclusions are derived from this:

(i) That we should endeavor to keep the heart and mind always sattvika, by remembering God constantly.

(ii) Whatever has been the biography of the dying man, those related to him would do him. The greatest service if they, at the slightest premonition of the end, surround him with a spiritual atmosphere, singing of God's names, recitation of scriptures, etc., and prevent any show of worldly affections and attachments that will effectively prevent him from rising higher in evolution.

The fact has been clearly stated here that it is not inevitable that the soul returns to this earth; it may do so, or it may ascend to the regions of pure souls or descend into the worlds of the senseless, human or subhuman.

In photography, the quality of the print depends on the state of the negative. Similarly with nature. Abandon the complacent attitude that once a human being, always a human being. If the heart and mind are subhuman, where is the injustice in earning a subhuman birth?

XIV:16 - The fruit of good action, they say, is harmonious and pure; the fruit of rajas is sorrow and pain, and ignorance is the fruit of tamas.

We should avoid the misunderstanding that these three qualities are gross material objects like fire or water. Their function is not as simple as the dictum: if you are hot, get into water; if you are cold, go near fire. They are subtle qualities of nature, being what heat is to fire and coolness is to ice. Heat and fire have no independent or cause-and-effect relationship, but an intimate and immediate relationship; for the distinction between them is purely academic. One depends on the other; because one is the other.

The fruit of good action is sattvika or pure; and the manifestation of the sattvika is good action. Similarly, the fruit of passionate activity is rajasa, manifesting pain. The quality of rajas, passionate activity and pain are three shades of the same factor. In the same way, ignorance is tamas; ignorance is the fruit of tamas, and tamas is the fruit of ignorance. One cannot draw a distinctive line anywhere.

This, however, should not lead us to a vicious circle. We must deliberately break through somewhere. We should endeavor, with the help of the categories given in detail in the 17th and the 18th chapters of the Gita, to increase the sattva in us. This will result in our actions being good, which in turn will result in greater increase of sattva.

Rajas, unless based on or directed towards sattva, is itself pain. Aimless dynamism will sooner or later result in disillusionment and the painful realization that all endeavors not directed towards the realization of God was waste.

We should beware of this, as also the complacent attitude - All is well, I don't care - that tamas or ignorance gives rise to.

XIV:17 - From sattva arises knowledge, and greed from rajas; heedlessness and delusion arise from tamas, and ignorance also.

XIV:18 - Those who are seated in satva proceed upwards; the rajasic dwell in the middle; and the tamasic, abiding in the function of the lowest guna, go downwards.

Krishna gradually unfolds the secret doctrine. When you carefully look at all your activities, you discover to your astonishment that they fall into one or the other of these three categories. They are part of the divine nature. Though the soul itself is independent of them, it vainly clings to them, identifies with them. Thereby, it appears to be colored by them. An example may be given of a man living in a house with wet paint of different colors on the walls and the doors. If he keeps away from the walls and the doors, he can still live in the house without being tainted by the colored paint. But, he admires some color, touches it, and is tainted. He dislikes some color, wants to rub it off, and is also tainted. In the dark, ignorantly, he leans against a wall or a door to rest, and becomes tainted.

In the same way, it is the ignorant soul, the slumbering soul, living in the darkness, that vainly imagines it is the doer of the actions, and the sufferer of the consequences.

It is the characteristic of these three qualities to go up - sattva, to go on - rajas, or to go down - tamas. The elevator in a building goes up and goes down. You will not, unless you sit in it!

However, in spiritual life, it is preferable to go up, rather than down. Hence it is said, 'cultivate sattva, and remain established in it at the time of death', so that you can have a better life next time from which to realize God.

Even in the case of going down, it is not the soul that is thus condemned. On account of its false identification, it only believes it has descended the ladder of evolution.

XIV:19 - When the seer beholds no agent other than the gunas, knowing That which is higher than the gunas, he attains to my Being.

XIV:20 - When the embodied being is able to transcend these three gunas, he can become free from birth, death, old age and their sorrow, and enjoy the nectar of immortality, even in this life.

When this dissociation of the self with the guna, or this disentanglement of the spirit from matter, or even this detachment is mentioned, modern man immediately jumps up and exclaims: 'That will lead to callousness and disruption of the social structure.'

The average man knows only three attitudes in personal relationship: intense clinging, hateful kicking, and indifference, which is often the worst of the three.

There is a fourth, and that is called non-attachment.

In non-attachment, love is not lost, but it is preserved from the corroding influence of selfishness and possessiveness. This love does not tire or overwhelm. Its soft touch does not hurt even a rose petal. It does not demand, but it gives. It does not cling to the personality, nor does it neglect the spirit that has made the personality its home. It is a wonderful relationship too sacred for words.

This extends to all activities of the sage. He does not identify himself with the three guna, but for that matter does not forcibly restrain them. They work; and he knows their workings. He is the ever-blissful witness. He is conscious of his self that is the self of all. This realization flows through the guna, thus directing their operations towards the welfare of all beings. He is freed from thralldom to the guna. He is immortal. The guna gave birth to the body. When the body is dropped the self remains as the universal self, infinite and all - blissful. When the body is living, the guna function on their own without his ego-interference, even as his breathing goes on! He is free.

XIV:21 - Arjuna said : What are the marks of him who has crossed over the three qualities, O Lord? What is his conduct and how does he go beyond these three qualities?

XIV:22 - The Blessed Lord said : He who does not hate illumination, attachment and delusion when they are present, nor longs for them when they disappear,

XIV:23 - He who, seated like one unconcerned, is not moved by the qualities, and who, knowing that the qualities are active, is self-centered and moves not, is a gunatita.

Once again we should remember we cannot sail in paper boats. Krishna's approach is entirely scientific:

(i) First, there is the theoretical exposition of a principle.

(ii) Then there is the 'model' - the exemplar - the illustration of that principle.

(iii) Then, practice - the model in real life, the application of the principle.

We can ennoble our lives only with the help of these three. Without the theory, we might misunderstand the example. We might interpret the theory in our own way, and reach nowhere near perfection. Without practical application we might make a business commodity of the principle and trade in the name of the example. It is only when all three are adopted in our own life, one following the other in the given order, that we reach the goal - and we shall, very soon.

The sage, yogi, samnyasi or gunatita - one who has gone beyond the guna, is not a sour-faced embittered personality who does not sleep - because it is tamas, does not talk or smile - because it is rajas, and does not study, discuss, or even enjoy a meal - because it may be sattva; such an attitude is tantamount to committing suicide. It is negatively associating the self with the guna. The wise seeker should be indifferent, but even then he is only 'like one unconcerned' - he is a witness and therefore in a position to direct the guna to a divine purpose, without foolishly and vainly trying to stifle their operation.

XIV:24 - Alike in pleasure and pain; who dwells in the Self; to whom a clod of earth, stone and gold are alike; to whom the dear and the unfriendly are alike, firm, the same in censure and praise,
XIV:25 - The same in honor and dishonor, the same to friend and foe, abandoning all undertakings - he is said to have crossed the qualities.

These verses refer to the inner attitude of non-attachment and non-identification with the world, body and senses, not to any physical activity or inactivity. Ignorance of this great truth will inevitably lead the aspirant to tamasa inertia, heedlessness, delusion and destruction. Cultivate the inner attitude; the activity will take care of itself.

'To whom a clod of earth, stone and gold are alike' has given rise to grotesque misinterpretations. People imagine that the sage sweeps away golden ornaments, treating them as dirt. Only mad men do so; sages are not mad even if their conduct is regarded eccentric by our perverted intelligence! To them a piece of gold, a stone and a clod of earth all have their own particular use and value none greater than the other. Hence they are all alike.

'Abandoning all undertakings' has also been taken to mean a life of automation or sheer laziness - a deliberate suppression of all urge to life and activity. However, the sage knows his body, vital sheath and even his mental frame are all products of matter together with the guna that govern all physical phenomena. He has crossed over them. It is only while one is crossing a stream that one tries to float along with the current or swim against it. Once on the other bank it matters not whether the current stops, flows or dries up. One who has thus crossed the guna will similarly not bother himself what matter does, including his body and mind. However, it is clear that he will not do evil, for the evil fuel of desire is absent. Through him the divine will works; it knows what to do with God's creation - clay and gold - and in his creation - what activities to undertake. In such a sage life flows in total harmony and bliss.

XIV:26 - And he who serves Me with unswerving devotion, he, crossing beyond the qualities, is fit for becoming Brahman.

XIV:27 - For I am the abode of Brahman, the immortal and the immutable, of everlasting Dharma and of absolute Bliss.

We should be careful and vigilant when we study the Bhagavad Gita. Krishna is discussing the sage who has crossed the guna - which suggests a great introvert and philosopher. But he does not want us to forget that that is only one aspect of the yogi's life. Even such an evolved yogi does not cease to 'serve'. When one attains the state of non-attachment to the guna, the guna that constitute the body still continue to operate, while the detachment directs them along useful channels to do the divine will. Peace and desirelessness ensure that that service is rendered as God's instrument to his omnipresence. But service itself is never given up, neither is single-hearted devotion to him. This synthesis of wisdom-action-devotion leads the aspirant to the absolute, Brahman.

Do not discuss Brahman. As our Master often said: 'To define Brahman is to deny Brahman.' Truth is indescribable. It is so indescribably simple that every description complicates it! But the vain human intellect cannot desist from attempting such description and definition. Krishna tells us here: 'All right, if you must say Brahman is absolute, infinite, existence-knowledge-bliss, supreme peace and eternal bliss, go on, but I am the abode of Brahman!'

If you are audacious enough to define Brahman, then he is beyond even that! Somewhere, at some time, the intellect has to stop in silence. When all this play of logic and reason, intellect and intuition, has ceased, when there is supreme silence, what is, is he! But do not mistake that silence itself for him.

May He guide us to Himself.

15. The Yoga of the Supreme Spirit

XV:1 - The Blessed Lord said : They speak of the indestructible peepul tree, having its root above and branches below, whose leaves are hymns; he who knows it is a knower of the Vedas.

XV:2 - Below and above spread its branches, nourished by the gunas; sense-objects are its buds; below in the world of men stretch forth the roots, originating action.

A picturesque description of the cosmos. Krishna had already described the peepul tree as one of his special manifestations. Those who have seen this tree will admit that it is truly majestic and grand. Its majesty and grandeur qualify it for this special mention. Its roots go deep into the soil. Hence Krishna takes it up once again to illustrate the cosmos.

All trees have their roots below; but this tree, which is the image of the cosmos, has its roots above - not literally, but allegorically. Strange but true it is, that this material universe has its roots in the transcendent reality. Nothing exists but that. The substratum of what appears to be, is that; and incidentally, even the power of illusion that makes the illusory appearance possible is in a way transcendent too, for it cannot be properly explained. The cosmos-tree has its roots above!

To the yogi, this tree might mean the susumna-nadi - the psychic counterpart of the spinal cord, which has its root in the medulla oblongata - known as the 'Tree of Life'. The trunk extends downwards, and contains the various chakra - on whose petals are the various letters - varna, which are here described as the chandas - hymns composed of those letters. The nadi - subtle counterparts branch out from this trunk with sense-objects as the buds. This inverted tree has a root again below, which generates actions; the muladhara and the other lower chakra are thus referred to.

The tree and its root are of one substance - God.

XV:3 - Its form is not perceived here as such, neither its end nor its origin, nor its foundation nor resting place. Having cut asunder this firmly rooted peepul tree with the strong axe of non-attachment,
XV:4 - Then that goal should be sought after, whither having gone none returns again. Seek refuge in that primeval Purusha whence streamed forth the ancient energy.

The cosmic tree, which has its root in the transcendental being, shares its characteristics. What is hidden in the root becomes manifest in the tree. It is all God and only God. Yet, whereas we are ready to admit that God is indescribable and imperceptibly subtle, we boast that we know what this world is!

That is a mistake. We only see what we wish or fear to see. The world outside is a cloud with forms and figures projected on to it by our mind. The cloud is real, but the forms are not. The substratum of the world is real, but the appearance is a manifestation and projection on to it of our own likes and dislikes, fears and delusions. These phantoms are the offspring of attachment. Non-attachment removes them, enabling us to perceive the underlying reality.

Think of a banana. The skin adheres to it and seems to encase it. Peel it, and the fruit is left perfect. Such is the spirit of non-attachment in the Bhagavad Gita. Do your duty but do not get attached. Neither must you let detachment make you neglect your duty. The banana is like the soul, not to be held and encased by its skin body. That must eventually be dropped, leaving the soul to attain moksha - liberation.

'I seek refuge' as said by Krishna is only initiation where he teaches Arjuna the formula: he who takes refuge in the supreme purusa returns not to this world. The mature seeker surrenders the idea that he is somehow distinct from the cosmos; the drop joins the ocean and becomes the divinity of the ocean. That oneness cannot be fragmented, it is indivisible.

XV:5 - Free from pride and delusion, victorious over the evil of attachment, dwelling constantly in the Self, their desires having completely turned away, freed from the pairs of opposites known as pleasure and pain, the undeluded reach the eternal goal.

How much wisdom can be compressed into a couplet! How careful, too, are the words chosen by the Lord! Attachment is the root of all evil - perhaps the only evil - not to be destroyed or annihilated, for that would be contrary to the law of nature, but definitely to be conquered.

However, attachment is deep in our very nature as love, which is a synonym for oneness. Some attachment is all right as long as it is attachment to God. Our Master used to say: 'Detach the mind from the world and attach it to the Lord.' Wean it from the gross impure attachments and let it incline to the subtle and pure attachments; from them lead it to God. One may or may not necessarily accept the conventional meanings of 'pure' and 'impure', but as one matures, this distinction becomes clear in one's own self. Purity is transparent and impurity is opaque, dense, dull and veiling.

Even so with desire. The gross impure desire must be weaned from sensual pleasures, refine itself until it is no longer 'desire' in the accepted sense and so incline towards God. Such desire is like fire which burns everything, but which burns itself out as soon as its task is over.

Pleasure and pain are in a way part of this world-process, samsara, like day and night. They may be there in the world, but one must free oneself from their sway. This is possible only if there is attachment to no object other than the self in which the yogi dwells constantly, witnessing the procession of the pairs of opposites without getting involved in them. The undeluded soul is thus well established in truth and reaches the great goal of self-realization.

One should meditate daily upon this verse.

XV:6 - Neither doth the sun illumine there, nor the moon, nor the fire; having gone there they return not. That is My supreme abode.

This is the favorite idea of the men-of-God. It is echoed in at least three principal upanisad. Our life is governed by the sun, the moon and fire. We see the world by their light. All our experiences are regulated and limited by them. Earlier, Krishna even made it look as though they concern our death too!

Going and coming, time, space and materiality do not operate in the absolute. Where shall that which is everywhere come or go to? In it everything is here and now. Matter is only the spirit perceived through material eyes.

Who can describe it? It is incomparable to even the grandest objects in the universe, which are perceived by the sun, the moon and the fire. The Kathopanisad reminds us that even these shine because of that self - 'sight' is possible not merely because the sun, the moon and the fire are there, but because 'I see'! The sun is reflected in a mirror, and not the mirror in the sun. With what then does one perceive the omnipresence? This supreme state of consciousness can only be found in its own light. Therefore, an aspirant should constantly resort to this inner light which is independent of external sources.

And who can describe it? For one who goes there - an expression used only to help our comprehension, not to suggest that there is an actual 'going' - returns not. This is not annihilation but fulfillment. The individual is not destroyed, but the limitation is removed. The part becomes one with the whole, is seen as the whole.

Some argue that, assuming all souls attain moksha, if God creates a fresh universe, they are bound to return. The answer is: the same individual cannot come back! If you pour a bucket of water into the ocean, then immediately plunge in another bucket and take out some water, that can never be the same water. The first bucketful has become one with the ocean; this is fresh ocean water. The whole argument is, however, fallacious; infinity minus infinity is infinity.

XV:7 - An eternal portion of my Self, having become a living soul in the world of life, draws to itself the five senses, with the mind for the sixth, abiding in Nature.

The jiva or the living soul is the Lord himself. It has a mysterious dual relationship with the supreme being, even as a cell in our body has a dual relation with 'us'. If the cells do not constitute our body, what else is the body? Yet do we not refer to them as being different from the body?

In its essential nature, the jiva is none other than God; yet in a mysterious way - which we call ignorance on account of the fact that the soul thus ignores its identity with the supreme being, it deludes itself that it is an independent particle.

This individual independent existence, however, is in a way willed by God himself - 'I am one, may I become many', for the purpose of his experiencing his own bliss nature. For this purpose the jiva or the living soul 'attracts to itself' the organs of perception and action, as well as their coordinating agent, the mind. Through these it objectifies its own natural bliss and tastes it. Yet such is the nature of ignorance that very soon the jiva is deluded into imagining that happiness is in the outside objects and not in its own nature, objectified for the purpose of a certain experience.

In the ultimate analysis, even sensual pleasure experienced in the external world is nothing but the bliss of Brahman; but it is veiled by ignorance and sustains the jiva's delusion of duality and plurality.

Whereas the bliss of meditation is unexciting and peaceful, sensual pleasure is preceded and accompanied by restlessness and excitement, and followed by exhaustion. All pleasure which disturbs the mental equilibrium and the calmness of the spirit is to be avoided. It is this disturbance which is the only risk in sensual pleasures. The pleasure inherent in the sense objects is also derived from the absolute, whose perfect expression can only be experienced in perfect tranquility. We do glimpse this state occasionally in our life; but the mind jumps in, enjoys it, labels it as pleasure and craves for repetition. This craving turns delight into pleasure and so into pain.

XV:8 - When the Lord obtains a body and when He leaves it, He takes these and goes with them, as the wind takes the scents from their seats.

The individual soul is, in biblical language, 'the image of God'. Now we should change the metaphor. It is the light of God reflected in buddhi, which is an extremely subtle form of matter.

The mirror is inert material; yet, when it is held in such a way that it faces the sun and is able to reflect sunlight on to your face, it dazzles your eyes. It is this reflection that moves from body to body, from mirror to mirror - not the self, which is God. Yet, does not the reflection in the mirror have the same brilliance as the sun itself? Hence, Krishna refers here to the jiva itself as the Lord - Isvara.

We do not deny the validity of genetic theories. We know that the foetus is the result of a fusion between the ovum and the sperm. But it is the jiva that brought them together and then, forming a nucleus with them, attracted more and more of other particles of matter, shaped the body of the baby, and finally 'entered into it' as the soul. Hence there are several theories regarding the time that the soul enters the foetus.

After birth, the process of cell-replacement carries on continuously, till the need arises for a wholesale abandonment of the worn-out body in exchange for a new one. When the old cloth has too many patches, the person finds a new one; when the 'surgeon', time, has performed too many operations on the body, nature steps in to help by providing a new one. The body and its organs were only the gross instruments with which the jiva performed its work and had its experiences.

Though the tools are worn out, the workman is not; he leaves with all his talents intact.

Taking them with him as air wafts fragrance, he enters a new body and begins to work with new tools.

XV:9 - Presiding over the ear, the eye, touch, taste and smell, as well as the mind, he enjoys the objects of the senses.

XV:10 - The deluded do not see him who departs, stays and enjoys; but they who possess the eye of knowledge behold him.

Such is the mysterious play of the divine that the Lord himself, in and through infinite beings, enjoys the bliss of his own nature in his own nature. That was the object of creation, according to some schools of thought. To illustrate this they paint a graphic picture: there, on an ocean of infinite existence, floats the little divine baby on a banyan leaf. It holds and sucks its big toe as if asking itself: 'How sweet is my toe that my devotees kiss?'

The relation between the senses and the sense-pleasure is such that when the former taste the latter they forget the Lord and the purpose of creation, deluding themselves that objective enjoyment is the goal and that pleasure is independent of the self or God. The Kathopanisad explains why: the very nature of the senses is to flow out towards the objective world, though supreme bliss is in the self - which is all pervading. When the senses thus flow out, the mind and intellect are externalized and consciousness moves away from the center. That is when one is said to be deluded. He does not realize that behind all these activities is the Lord himself, and he sees the world as a playground of havoc, passion, fear and hopes.

However, the senses of the undeluded are avenues of enlightenment and to them the world looks very different. Since they possess the eye of knowledge, they perceive the Lord alone within themselves and realize that all experiences serve him and are derived from his own nature spread throughout the universe.

Some of the mystifying passages in the scriptures which seem to sanction worldly pleasures can be understood in their right perspective only if we bear this great truth in mind. But to understand rightly demands great purity of heart and penetrating intelligence.

XV:11 - The yogis, striving for perfection, behold Him, dwelling in the Self; but, the unintelligent, even though striving, see Him not.

The outgoing tendency of the mind and the senses does not permit the ignorant man to turn his gaze within and behold the self. The Kathopanisad describes the supreme effort of the rare hero who averts his gaze from the objects of the senses in order to behold the self and thus attain immortality.

This introversion is exceedingly important, as otherwise total ignorance makes one mistake a rope for a snake, and suffer; or perceive silver in mother-of-pearl, and enjoy a phantom! It is an uphill task, like taking a river to its own source on the hilltop. This is not aversion to anything or anybody here, but an intelligent recognition of the source of all bliss, which is the self.

Once this introversion is truly achieved, life assumes a different meaning altogether. The yogi begins to see that the same self dwells in all. 'Pleasure' loses its tantalizing attraction for him and its power to titillate. Cravings cease, because what is outside can be found within. When the mind is purified by right living, right thinking, right meditation, service and so on, it becomes transparent and instantly abolishes the fictitious distinction between the inside and the outside. The yogi seems to live in two worlds simultaneously, because to his enlightened vision, their boundaries vanish.

His is the extremely subtle middle path like the razor's edge, which the gross vision of the unrefined and unintelligent cannot behold. In him there is neither attraction nor repulsion whereas in the deluded there is always either craving or disgust.

Krishna's is the yoga of intelligence. No amount of idle striving or abstinence from activity will lead to an expansion of consciousness, but refinement of the intelligence and purity of heart lead to the realization of the self.

XV:12 - That light which residing in the sun, illumines the whole world, that light which is in the moon, and that which is in the fire - know that light to be Mine.

The self-realized yogi is not a nose-gazer nor does he live a life confined to the cave, forest or monastery. God is the indwelling light, but he is also the light in the sun, the moon, the stars and the fire.

This and the following two verses establish an intimate relation between man and God. Man is filled with the light of God; he is surrounded by the light of God. Once the cataract of ignorance is removed, he shall see God everywhere - God and nothing but God.

Even so is it said in the Holy Bible: And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads. And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light; and they shall reign for ever and ever.

(Revelations 22:4,5)

When it is said that God gives them light, it does not mean that the scientist's discoveries are untrue. The scriptural testimony only provides a clue to the ultimate mystery which science has still to approach. Whilst accepting the validity of the scientist's explanations of the principle of combustion in the sun, its reflection in the moon, and the clash of gasses that keeps the fire burning, the scripture goes one step further, suggesting who ordained the law that all these obey, who limits their powers so that they do not cause a universal holocaust. All wise men admit that there is some law and an intelligent administrator of that law. To that power, that cosmic intelligence, the scriptures give an indicative name - God and its equivalent in other languages.

Read with verse 6, this verse reminds us that in the cosmos, the sun and heavenly bodies, and in the individual, the mind and intellect, are like mirrors reflecting God's light. God is not the subject projecting an object, nor an object which can be seen by the subject. God is the all. No part of the all can become aware of the totality - only the all can be aware of itself.

XV:13 - Permeating the earth by My energy, I support all beings; and, having become the watery moon, I nourish all plants.

XV:14 - Having become the fire in the body of living, breathing beings and, associated with the Prana and Apana, I digest the fourfold food.

'Soma' in the text has been variously interpreted, and in the context of the veda, it has been taken to mean a kind of intoxicating drink. The sense in which it has been used here makes it clear that 'soma' is 'watery' energy or some kind of an 'essence' - rasa, which the moon bestows on the herbs.

These verses bring God nearer home, explaining the daily function of our body. Krishna neither cancels the vitamin theory nor the herbalists' ecstatic belief in the miracle that herbs can work. He intensifies both! Mineral salts nourish plant life and plants nourish animals, but the power of nourishment is God's. Scientists have carefully analyzed the assessed mineral salts and described their composition in terms of different molecules. Krishna only expresses in another way the truth which scientists, in the glory of that intelligence which is the reflected light of God, have made clear. There can be but one answer to the questions: Who organized the molecules?, Who guided the scientists' intelligence? - God.

Within the human body, as the gastric fire, it is his power again that digests all kinds of foods. A study of the process of digestion is amazing indicator of the divine power that functions within our own body! It is good to cultivate the habit of feeling the presence of God in all these functions. It will promote the health of body, mind and soul.

It is also good to remember all the time that saying 'God' is not knowing him! When 'God' is given as the answer to our questions, the question is not answered, but the quest is intensified. The verbal answer is but a word. Truth eludes words.

XV:15 - And I am seated in the hearts of all; from me are memory, knowledge, as well as their absence. I am verily that which has to be known by all the Vedas; I am the author of the Vedanta, and the knower of the Vedas.

Here is a clear-cut statement of the sublime truth that all is God. Memory is from God; knowledge is from God; their absence is also from God! Good is divine, and that which men call 'evil' is also divine - though God does not call it evil.

If we wish to realize that the classification of good and evil are illusory and that they both are in God and from him, we should at the same time be prepared to regard, with equal eye, pain and pleasure which are extensions of evil and good! To one who has transcended the latter pair, the former does not exist.

Saiva siddhanta also declares that it is God who veils and it is he again who reveals. Why does he veil? In order that we may seek him, and then he unveils, in order that we may realize him. There is no further 'why'; this is the truth which has to be accepted.

It is this power to which the vedas offer their prayers. Its glory do they sing. 'Veda' might refer to all branches of knowledge, sacred and secular, including modern science. All of them will ultimately lead us to a realization of God's omnipresence. For, if we pursue with an incisive 'why', the acquisition of any knowledge, we shall ultimately end up confessing 'I do not know'. Only God knows why this unceasing and unquenchable thirst to know is there in the heart of man. Only he knows all knowledge - veda, and the end of all knowledge - vedanta. When knowledge as subject-object relationship comes to an end, it shines in its own light as pure awareness - God, in which there is no distinction between the knower, knowledge and the object of knowledge.

Thus, from a look at the sun in verse 12, Krishna has brought God-consciousness closer to our very self. In that process the object - the experience and the subject - the experiencer seem to merge into one. This is yoga.

XV:16 - Two Purushas there are in this world, the perishable and the imperishable. All beings are the perishable, and the Kutastha is called the imperishable.

'Kutastha' is the unchanging rock-like substratum of the individual personality, the unobvious. The perishable purusa (the para prakrti - VIII: 5) is the living soul, 'Adam' after the fall from the Garden of Eden, the raindrop that has disconnected itself from the cloud. The imperishable purusa is the substratum of this second personality - not different from it in the main, yet with a subtle difference. Like the raindrop in the process of formation. There is the potentiality of drop formation in the dark rain-bearing cloud; as the water is becoming effective as a drop, it is still one with the cloud. Just so is the imperishable purusa one with God, though the manifestation-potential is beginning to express itself. One, yet not exactly so!

A mysterious power called maya rules this manifestation-potentiality state in the infinite being. Mysterious indeed, only to be likened to the atmospheric disturbance which makes subtle water vapor visible to the human eye as cloud. Krishna calls maya 'my power' in order to prevent us vainly arguing about it. The human being's focus is too puny to comprehend the total working of this power of maya. In this limited vision, avidya or ignorance, changes are observed. We can, perhaps, at any given moment, only focus on one 'drop' and therefore feel that it is different from another - thus one being assumes independence from the rest.

This fictitious distinction which is jivahood - egoity, caused by avidya, only fades at the dawn of that knowledge which enables us to 'understand' maya. The vision becomes unconditioned and limitless and none of these changes are seen to be true. We realize that the self is, was, and will ever be one with the infinite.

XV:17 - But distinct is the Supreme Purusha, called the Absolute Reality, the indestructible Lord who, pervading the three worlds, sustains them.
XV:18 - As I transcend the perishable, and am even higher than the imperishable, I am declared as the highest Spirit in the world and in the Vedas.

The following analogy is inadequate, as most analogies are, but will enable us to grasp vaguely the distinction between the perishable and the imperishable purusa mentioned in the previous verse, and the supreme purusa mentioned in this.

The 'drop in the cloud' is superior to the drop let loose. The latter gets caught up in the process of samsara or world-play, whereas the former can still escape that fate if the rain does not fall.

The atma is the purest 'creation' of God: Adam was 'whole' till Eve was shaped from his own bone. The jiva - Eve is imperfect, the mother of Cain - possession or mineness in Hebrew, and Abel - vanity in Hebrew.

But even the 'drop in the cloud', and for that matter the dark cloud, too, is in perpetual danger of falling! Hence, that also is not the state of supreme felicity. There is a state higher than that - the state of being, untainted even by the possibility of becoming. That is the state of the supreme purusa. In the cloud analogy, it is comparable to the clear sky in which the least trace of a cloud is not visible; before the mysterious maya exerts her influence to generate the 'white cloud' - the Isvara-consciousness - the highest concept of a personal god.

God is the supreme purusa, and the name purusa is given only to show that prakrti - his nature is ever latent in him, just as water-vapor is latent in the clear sky.

God is the vital factor in all beings. Without him they have no life, no existence. That supreme self permeates every atom of existence enabling us to live and function. Forget all comparison and look within to discover the three planes of the perishable, the imperishable and the transcendent substratum, and to discover the truth that they are not three but one.

XV:19 - He who, undeluded, knows me thus as the highest Spirit, he worships me with his whole being and heart, O Arjuna.

XV:20 - Thus, this most secret science has been taught by Me. On knowing this, a man becomes wise, and all his duties are accomplished, O Arjuna.

He who knows the unobvious sustaining reality knows that God alone pervades all, and that he is beyond all limitations, beyond maya - illusion and avidya - ignorance. God is the substratum of the jiva, that living soul and perishable person, as well as of the atma, the imperishable person or purusa.

However, God is in neither jiva nor atma, for though the waves are part of the ocean, the ocean is not part of the waves. Such knowledge cures delusion, making evident the unreality of distinction between the three which is born of ignorance; and that the loss of jiva-hood is supreme gain, heralding the realization that the substratum of the immortal atman is the infinite being.

This infinite being is the all, the all-in-all. Bhakti yoga prescribes five attitudes that the devotee can adopt towards God. The attitudes of peaceful contemplation, mother-child or child-parent, master-servant, friendship, and lover-beloved.

Knowing that God is all, the devotee worships him in all the five bhava - attitudes, 'sarvabhavena'. He looks upon his parents or children, his master or servant, his friends, his beloved and the stranger as the manifestation of God, and he regards God as all these. 'Sarvabhavena' is the commandment of the Holy Bible, too: 'Love thy God with all thy heart'. In the heart of the devotee there is no room for finite, imperfect, selfish and sensuous love. He loves all; not the heterogeneous but the homogeneous God-in-all.

If we begin with the obvious and examine the not-so obvious sources of these obvious phenomena, then it is possible for us to be free from self-created problems and eventually arrive at the grand discovery of the profoundest secret.

16. The Yoga of the Division Between the Divine and the Demoniactal

XVI:1 - The Blessed Lord said : Fearlessness, purity of heart, steadfastness in Yoga and knowledge, charity, control of the senses, sacrifice, study of scriptures, austerity and straightforwardness,

XVI:2 - Harmlessness, truth, absence of anger, renunciation, peacefulness, absence of crookedness, compassion towards beings, uncovetousness, gentleness, modesty, absence of fickleness,

XVI:3 - Vigour, forgiveness, fortitude, purity, absence of hatred, absence of pride, these belong to one born in a divine state, O Arjuna.

All these qualities belong to the daivi-prakrti or divine nature. One born for a divine state seems to imply a fatalistic slant or determinism. Either one is born good or wicked! To some extent perhaps this is true. Those who have attempted to alter their 'nature' would testify that they are carried away by the hidden vasana - tendencies in spite of themselves. Yet, on the other hand, the born-good people formed their good tendencies by self-effort in a past birth; otherwise, if one's tendencies unalterably governed one's life, there could be no way out at all.

The Yoga Vasistha gives us abundant hope. 'Our previous and present efforts, in case they are in contrary directions, are like two arms fighting against each other. The more powerful of the two always overcomes the other.' Again, 'One should, therefore, overcome one's unfavorable destiny by greater effort in the present, gnashing one's teeth!' The last phrase recognizes the difficulty of the task, but the optimist treats difficulties as steps to achievement.

Our Master was very fond of these verses; he quoted them often. He recommended that we should systematically cultivate these virtues, selecting them one by one and deliberately tending them in ourselves. Special Lord Krishna's Birthday bonus reading!

XVI:4 - Hypocrisy, arrogance, self-conceit, harshness and also anger and ignorance, belong to one who is born in a demoniacal state, O Arjuna.
XVI:5 - The divine nature is deemed for liberation and the demoniacal for bondage. Grieve not, for you are born with divine properties, O Arjuna.

Krishna is very clever. As our Master often reminded us: Positive always overcomes negative. Instead of people worrying themselves over prohibitions, if they concentrated on positive injunctions, the world would be a better place and they themselves would move rapidly towards God.

In the whole of the Bhagavad Gita there are so few verses dealing with the evil side of life that one would have wondered if Krishna had forgotten all about it, had he not made mention of it here. After a full enumeration and repetition of the divine qualities, he now gives the essence of diabolical nature in one verse.

'Hypocrisy' is their chief quality, hence it is extremely difficult to recognize evil beings.

Even other qualities like arrogance, self-conceit and anger, when veiled by hypocrisy, can create the illusion of virtues! They masquerade as self-respect, righteous indignation and dignified bearing. The harsh man pretends that he is a strict disciplinarian, constantly striving for 'your own betterment'. The ignorant fool lets the devil in him quote scripture.

'Knowledge of scriptures is not necessary, only personal realization is' - a pious sentiment, but the illiterate fool who says so is not interested in personal realization either!

How wonderful of Krishna to re-assure Arjuna - and through him, you and me - that we are born with divine qualities. But for them, Arjuna would not have accepted him as his guru; but for them, we would not have turned our attention to his teachings contained in the Bhagavad Gita!

XVI:6 - There are two types of beings in this world - the divine and the demoniacal; the divine has been described at length; hear from me, O Arjuna, of the demoniacal.

The expression is extremely well guarded! This created universe has two aspects. Both good and evil are found in it, for that is the meaning of creation. One alone would be like painting a portrait in one color on identically colored paper. Good and evil differ in their destinations. The divine path leads to liberation or God-realization; the demoniacal path leads to bondage. Well, then, choose!

In spite of the warnings contained in our scriptures not to wrack the poor brain with transcendental questions like the origin of the world, of karma, or 'which came first - hen or egg', people do ask: 'How did the first man commit sin?' The answer is simple: 'God gave you intelligence and free-will - and you chose to taste the forbidden fruit! Why did you do it? Ask yourself!' Even in the biblical story we read that God, having created Adam and Eve, expressly warned them not to taste the forbidden fruit; yet, the 'snake' - obviously created by God himself - was able to tempt them. It was Adam's choice. There is no sense in arguing 'why'; it is a statement of fact concerning an event in history! Never argue beyond a certain point! If you demand an explanation, the Indian philosopher answers: 'It is because of avidya' - ignorance. Wisdom and spiritual maturity consists in being alert, inwardly aware and watchful so that at every step and in every circumstance the right choice is made.

We have seen that the entire nature is made up of three guna: sattva, rajas and tamas. Sattva is, of course, good; and tamas is evil. Rajas can be both good and evil: if it is based on sattva, it is good, and if it is based on tamas, it is evil. If we compare these three qualities to the three qualities of fire - light, heat and smoke, we realize that light is always good, and smoke, which blinds us, is always bad, and that heat can be either good or bad depending upon the use we make of it. Vice holds one down like a vice. Virtue liberates us.

XVI:7 - The demoniacal know not what to do and what to refrain from; neither purity, nor right conduct, nor truth is found in them.

The basic characteristics of the devil's disciple are detailed in this and the following verses. Krishna does not want to emphasize evil overmuch, and therefore gives briefly the qualities found in the evil ones.

Do you not detect a tone of sympathy rather than one of condemnation in this verse? 'They know not what to do' is an expression parallel to the famous words of Lord Jesus.

Much of the evil in the world is born of ignorance, for very few people know what to do and what to refrain from. They are ignorant. The light of true knowledge has not been lit in them. I do not suggest that such knowledge will at once lift them into the kingdom of righteousness; but, with the exception of those who deliberately choose to be wicked, the vast majority of people who grope in the darkness of ignorance and whose ignorance confuses them as to their duty, making evil appear as 'necessary in the circumstances', will definitely grow spiritually if more and more people take upon themselves the duty of educating their brethren in the art of right conduct. There has been grave and universal neglect in this regard, and hence the problems that face the world multiply daily.

Consequently, the world is rolling towards catastrophe after catastrophe.

Is that not the sole purpose of the Bhagavad Gita? To guide man aright in the daily battle of life, to direct him who stands at the cross-roads, to instruct him in right conduct and to reveal truth in his heart? The teaching is pure and the teaching is purifying. Thus, if every one who has understood this message undertakes to educate two more people, we shall all be blessed, and the future would certainly be bright. To 'educate' is to 'bring out' the truth which is present in the other man. Proselytisation destroys the faith, the vital spark in man. To reform is to give a new form to the old evil. Thus, we should educate, not reform or proselytize.

Here is a rather negative note! Evil is not absolute, but has a frightening ephemeral existence that it will not do to ignore. But it is also futile to waste our life lamenting over it. Krishna gives it just the status it deserves - as a pointer to the wrong road, as a warning sign, as a beacon to guide the navigator.

Where does this evil exist? What is sin? Now does one overcome sin? Does the Lord forgive us? Can we get the better of our fate? These questions have been discussed endlessly by both scholars and laymen.

One day I was explaining to a few students the law of karma, vis-a-vis the above problem and remarked: If you do not want a seed you have sown to sprout, you must pull it out. For this purpose you will have to dig down to the same depth as originally, to get hold of the seed. A member of the audience burst out laughing; that is exactly what she had done the previous day!

Rajas - activity based on tamas - stupidity is sin or evil. In order to cancel it, we should resort to rajas based on sattva - purity. The intensity and the depth should be at least the same in both cases. Should there be any difference, the latter should go deeper than the former.

Tapas or penance or austerity has always been resorted to for the purpose of absolution. What does tapas do? It 'burns' the veil - evil misspelt, reveals the truth and corrects the error of perception. We had taken the unreal body, senses and the world to be the reality; and hence had fallen into the trap of evil. That misconception must be replaced by the right knowledge of God as the self and sole reality. Not by merely uttering a set formula like aham brahmasmi but by affirming God as the only reality through our thought, word and deed. To make sure that there is no self-deception, we deliberately mortify the body and the senses. It is often the self-deluding ego that rebels against this, advancing a convenient philosophy in excuse. On the other hand, if repentance is done mechanically without burning the veil of ignorance, this very tapas may feed the ego!

The 'pain' thus self-inflicted in wise austerity also cancels the external karma. The karma which demands restoration of balance is thus faced, not evaded, and worked out willingly. It also removes the guilty conscience. Krishna gives a new meaning to tapas: a simple, austere life and goodness. You will readily see how this positively destroys the veil of ignorance by denying the mind and senses the delusion-fattening food of self-indulging pleasure.

However, evil done to another is not entirely rooted out by any amount of self-punishment. The offended must forgive the offender. The Holy Bible makes this clear.

There is an interesting incident in the life of lord Gauranga, which illustrates this.

Though he actually took upon himself the sins of a villain, the latter could not gain peace of mind till those whom he had offended had forgiven him.

God-realization or self-realization is like an earthquake compared to our feeble attempts to pull out the seeds sown. It destroys all sins, all sinful tendencies and that root of all sins - ignorance of God.

True atonement - at-one-ment - is when the self is realized to be one with God, and all evil realized as dream and non-existent. Even an attempt to realize the self frees one from great fear, says the Lord; and sincere prayer to the Lord can earn for us his all-forgiving mercy. When does one know that his forgiveness has been earned? When evil thought does not even arise in the mind.

XVI:8 - They say, this universe is without truth, without a moral basis, brought about without God, by mutual union, with lust for its cause; what else.

XVI:9 - Holding this view, these ruined souls of small intellects and fierce deeds come forth, as enemies of the world, for its destruction.

Even the devil's disciples have their own philosophy, for no one can live without philosophy, without an understanding, however crude, of the pattern of existence. There is just this difference, however: the 'deva' is one whose nature and hence whose philosophy is all light, in whom the light of self-knowledge shines brightly; while the 'asura', is one 'whose light is darkness' - in the words of the Bible. That is what is meant by 'asura' - he does not care to see. He blinds himself and revels in the darkness of ignorance. He is so thoroughly absorbed in the appearance, he does not care for the reality, for the truth. 'Asatyam', translated as 'without truth', is the opposite of 'satyam' and should mean 'based on falsehood'. There are thousands in the world today who are convinced that 'in this modern world, it is useless to be good,' and that 'one should move with the times, and nowadays untruth is the law.' They are incorrigible because their conscience sanctions untruth.

They have existed at all times in the history of the world. In ancient times they were called the carvaka or materialists, with an extremely simple philosophy: 'Man is born of the sexes coming together, he exists to immortalize this act and dies when it is no longer possible. All life centers around sensual pleasure.'

It is not so much the philosophy, but its application that is dreadful. Since pleasure, not loving service, is the goal, each man grabs as much of it as possible. From whom? From his own neighbor! The asura's love of darkness does not even recognize a friend. He is ruthless, relentless and remorseless, and it is dangerous to associate with him! Pursuit of pleasure ruins both society and the pursuer who is part of it.

XVI:10 - Filled with insatiable desires, full of hypocrisy, pride and arrogance, holding evil ideas through delusion, they work with impure resolves.

XVI:11 - Giving themselves over to immeasurable cares, ending only with death; regarding gratification of lust as their highest aim, and feeling sure that that is all,

XVI:12 - bound by hope, given over to lust and anger, they strive to obtain by unlawful means hoards of wealth for sensual enjoyment.

They are the living exemplars of the antithesis of lord Buddha's 'Noble Eight-fold Path'. The light within them is dark, their motives are impure, their ideas are delusion-ridden, their resolves are diabolical, and their thoughts and actions are governed only by lust for pleasure and power. Since 'falsehood' is their creed, they are not even true to their own self. This is the worst part of their personality make-up. With all their devilry, one should not be surprised if they assume an air of self-righteousness and quote the scriptures in their favor!

The 12th chapter of the Bhagavatam gives a graphic description of such people. By shouting aloud, they impress upon all that the untruth they utter, alone is truth. Their haughtiness frightens away the humble and prevents anyone from pointing out that such overweening pride is contrary to all scriptural teachings. Their arrogance grinds all opposition into submission.

But are they happy? No. Their cares are immeasurable and end only with 'pralaya' - translated as 'death', but it may also mean dissolution of the world. They have no God to turn to for solace; money is their only God and hence they earn money by all means - mostly foul - and thus ensure that there is no hindrance in their pleasure seeking life. They seldom realize that such life itself is hell here and now.

XVI:13 - 'This has been gained by me today; this desire I shall obtain; this is mine, and this wealth too shall be mine soon.'
XVI:14 - 'That enemy has been slain by me, and others also I shall slay. I am the lord, I enjoy, I am perfect, powerful and happy.'
XVI:15 - 'I am rich, born in a noble family. Who else is equal to me? I will sacrifice. I will give charity. I will rejoice. thus deluded by ignorance,
XVI:16 - bewildered by many a fancy, entangled in the snare of delusion, addicted to the gratification of lust, they fall into a foul hell.

Krishna even quotes their words - a rare honoree not accorded to the pious devotee - in order that we may not even mistakenly utter such words. Krishna does not dwell too much on the dark side of human nature, nor shall we. But he has succinctly given the very essence of this side of nature, and it is good to realize that extreme vigilance is needed not to let the devil masquerade in holy garb.

How often do religious leaders in the world indulge in expressions like the above! My Master often said: 'Spiritual pride is the worst enemy of the seeker after God.' The Zen masters emphasized that 'The ordinary life is Tao - truth. A saintly sister-seeker in South Africa, after pursuing much-publicized holiness, has discovered: 'In a strange way my life has become a very simple one - in the little things I see perfection and beauty and fulfillment.'

The spiritual path is regarded as the 'razor's edge', not because it may cut one's foot, but because it is the imperceptibly subtle middle path which cannot be seen by the naked eye. The holy ones tread this path of life with their inner eye, the insight, open. As long as this insight is allowed to function without distortion or diversion by the mind, so long holiness prevails. Holiness is as simple as that.

XVI:17 - Self-conceited, stubborn, filled with the pride and fuddle of wealth, they perform sacrifices in ostentation, contrary to scriptural ordinances.

XVI:18 - Given over to egoism, power, haughtiness, lust and anger, these malicious people hate Me in their own bodies, and those of others.

Three types of yajna - sacrifices are specially mentioned in the Bhagavad Gita:

(i) Jnana yajna - dissemination of spiritual knowledge, which is dear to the Lord .

(ii) Japa yajna - repetition of the divine name or mantra, which is the Lord's own special manifestation, and

(iii) Nama yajna which may mean either sacrifice merely in name, i.e. without the spirit or divine purpose behind it, or sacrifice for the sake of winning name and fame.

The last is diabolical.

It is not the action itself that counts in the eyes of the Lord, but the spirit that motivates it. Hence, the sacrifice and the charity that these demons perform do not please him, for even these are geared to the destruction of others. Their charity is like the 'free gifts' and 'prizes' offered by rival firms as part of their sales promotion programs, aimed at the destruction of others' business.

Elsewhere in the Gita it has been said that even they who hate God - and thus think of him constantly, also reach him. The hatred of the demons does not amount to that. They 'hate me in their own bodies and those of others'. The first takes the form of a reluctance to turn within and live for even a short while a day with one's own self; the second implies exploitation and cruelty shown to others, without recognizing that in them, too, there is the spark of God.

The description of the diabolical state comes to an end with these verses. May we never approach it in thought, word or deed!

XVI:19 - These cruel haters, the worst among men in the world, are cast by me into the ocean of material existence, into various demoniac species of life.
XVI:20 - Entering into demoniacal wombs, and deluded birth after birth, not attaining Me, O Arjuna, they sink down to an abominable existence.

Even the wicked ones have a human garb - let us not forget that. But their inmost personality is that of a demon. There, they deserve and desire only birth as demons. There is no injustice in this. Naturally, therefore, our next birth will be in accordance with the innermost nature of our being.

The 'wombs of demons' may very well mean 'houses of power and affluence'. The answer to the oft-asked question Why do wicked men prosper? is 'So that they may commit more crimes and descend into the lowest depths sooner - and so that eventually they may rise from there sooner, too, and be redeemed.' Injustice is man's invention. God is just.

'Cannot God avoid all this and directly redeem the sinner?' asks a friend. Yes, of course he can, as the exceptional cases in our legends prove, but having bestowed on man intelligence and free-will, God would rather let the soul lovingly, knowingly and deliberately choose to love him, even after some amount of painful wandering in lower births.

'A condition still lower than that' is what is popularly called 'hell'. This is not outside God's creation, but inside it. It is a state of being which is 'farthest from light', a plane of existence farthest from the divine. Such hell may be within the heart of man, in the darkest corners of a guilty conscience, in the vicious dens of modern living or in a far distant planet or star.

'Farthest' does not necessarily imply spatial distance; a person standing close to light but facing away from it with blindfolded eyes, is farthest from that light!

Hell may exist in all these forms; one need not necessarily cancel the other!

XVI:21 - Triple is the gate of this hell, destructive of the self; lust, anger, and greed; therefore, one should abandon these three.

XVI:22 - A man who is liberated from these three gates to darkness, O Arjuna, practices what is good for him, and thus goes to the supreme goal.

The expression used in the first verse is 'hell', while that used in the second verse is 'gate to darkness'. The significance of the synonym is clear. Hell is a state of ignorance: ignorance of the meaning and purpose of human birth, ignorance of the spirit encased in the physical body, ignorance of man's place and his duty in society.

These two verses do not exclude the idea of there being a heaven and hell in outer space, but just as feasible is the attitude that, since in our materialistic times spiritual ignorance has enormously increased the number of sinners, the great cities - those creations of materialism - are virtually our hells; and our heavens, so rare and few, are those places of retreat such as my Master's monastery in the Himalaya. The darkness of city life is the darkness of spiritual ignorance; and the contented harmony of such withdrawn groups of people who are consciously practicing the rules of the spirit, heavenly bliss.

From our position on this earth, there are four gates leading out. Three of them open out to hell. They are: lust - all sorts of desires, anger - hatred, and greed. The ignorance-blinded man goes out through one or other of these gates and arrives in hell where he suffers self-destruction. Has he not destroyed a precious opportunity to attain self-realization?

These three gates are open wider than the fourth that the ignorant man does not perceive at all. This gate leads to the heaven of redemption and is the gateway of goodness. In order to pass through this gate one should carefully lead a good life, willing to sacrifice temporary pleasure in favor of eternal bliss.

XVI:23 - He who, casting aside the ordinances of the scriptures, acts under the impulse of desire, attains neither perfection nor happiness nor the supreme goal.

XVI:24 - Therefore, let the scripture be the authority in determining what ought to be done and what ought not to be done. Having known what is said in the ordinance of the scriptures, you should act here in this world.

Narada in his Bhakti Sutras declares that supreme devotees of the Lord invest scripture with authority. Scripture itself has the sage for its author, the sage for its model and the sage as its goal. It is, therefore, reliable and serves not only as an indicator of the 'supreme goal', but as the only tangible trail - barring its living embodiment, the guru - of the intangible and subtle middle path. By telling us what to do and what not to do, the scripture simplifies the greatest problem, indirectly suggesting the solution; and by turning our disciplined gaze inwards, helps us rediscover the middle path ourselves. If the scripture itself creates problems, that is what it is meant to do; the solution should ultimately come from within. The navigator depends upon the charts; but the charts will not steer for him! In the sea of life, steering is trickier than in the field of navigation. The primary object of the scripture is to halt the waywardness of the mind and to curb the egoistic will and its determination to execute its diabolical intentions. To follow the scripture is freedom from slavery to the dictates of one's own ego - the worst of all slave drivers and tyrants. However, blind obedience will defeat the scripture's purpose; one should not cease to exercise one's own intelligence.

As the great master Shankaracharya has stated: the scripture is of no use to the enlightened one who is already wise, nor to the fool who is not going to change. Krishna asks those in between to 'know what is said' in the scripture, whatever it may be, and then act. Neither the ego, nor the scripture, nor an external being is your authority; only this 'knowledge' is your authority. The real seeker after truth will find the same message in the Bible, the Bhagavad Gita or any other scripture.

17. The Yoga of the Division of the Threefold Faith

XVII:1 - Arjuna said : Those who, setting aside the ordinances of the scriptures, perform sacrifice with faith, what is their condition, O Krishna? Is it that of Sattwa, Rajas or Tamas?

The Indian philosopher does not encourage evil, but he does recognize its inevitable presence in society. He aims at a perfect society, but realizes that this itself means taking note of the existing imperfections. He is a realistic idealist. He is like the wise schoolmaster who wants his students to pass the examination with distinction, but does not expect them to be brilliant on the day of their admission to the school, and is patient enough to correct their errors during their school career.

To adhere to the injunctions of a scripture is, of course, the simple, ideal course. However, there are those who do not; and whatever be the reason, not all of them are diabolical in their outlook on life. The revisions and editions of a scripture generate suspicion in the heart of some. The primitiveness of a scripture shocks others. A third group may well ask: When we have the open book of life in front of us, why need we waste our time on other scriptures? Still another group may be illiterate and hence cannot study a scripture and may, at the same time, not be able to enjoy the privilege of hearing the scripture from someone else, particularly someone who inspires their confidence.

Life teaches you, if you have faith. Faith is most important. Your own inner equipment will fit you into one or other of the three qualities of nature. Sattva-based activity will increase sattva; tamas-based activity will intensify darkness. The former, by bestowing peace and happiness, will confirm the faith into conviction; the latter, by bringing restlessness and misery in its train, will be detected by the inner faith as the path to be abandoned but only if there is genuine faith. This faith is not a religious cult or a doctrine or a dogma. It is light in the midst of darkness which leads you from falsehood to truth.

Even the most unorthodox are not barred from salvation!

XVII:2 - The Blessed Lord said : Threefold is the faith of the embodied, which is inherent in their nature - satvic, rajasic, and tamasic. Now hear about these.

XVII:3 - The faith of each is in accordance with his nature, O Arjuna. The man consists of his faith; as the faith is, so is he.

Faith exists in everyone in three stages: belief, faith and conviction. You believe in your neighbor's words; you have faith in what the guru says; but you are convinced of your own personal experience. Of these, belief is the weakest, conviction the strongest, but faith exists in the hearts of all. It is faith that forms the character of a person. If the person lacks character, it is not so much because his faith is weak, but because he has faith in his weakness!

One's own deeds of past births endow one with the type of faith that is inherent, innate to one's nature. The universal human weakness of self-justification might blur one's vision and lead to self-over-estimation; but the cautious man is easily able to detect the hidden springs of his character and determine which quality of nature is predominant in him. This, like the color of one's skin or eyes, is not a fault or disqualification; that is the most important thing to remember. There is no 'normal' person in this world; and, of course, each man is normal to his own nature!

The psychologist's 'sword' of 'abnormality' has ruined the life of many, stifling talents and compelling the psychologist-disapproved characteristics to commit suicide. Abnormality rarely exists in nature, but abounds in the psychiatrist's clinic, created and confirmed by him. Self-understanding will promote self-culture and self-realization. One need not fit into another's jacket, but one must be true to one's own self and grow in the image of God - that which one essentially is. Jealousy, envy and imitation are a waste of time and lead to psychological suicide.

XVII:4 - The Sattvic men worship the gods; the Rajasic men worship the demons; the Tamasic men worship the ghosts.

We should not commit the grievous error, here, of considering that the tamasa people deliberately choose to worship ghosts! Not at all. That is their idea of God.

Even the 'gods' are the reflections of different aspects of the supreme being in the medium of maya and therefore not really real. Consequently, they are classifiable into sattvika, rajasa and tamasa. The good or the benevolent gods are sattvika; wrathful and emotional gods are rajasa; and the semi-divine beings of malevolent nature are tamasa. They are not essentially different from him, the supreme being; for, let us not forget for a single moment that naught exists but he. Lord Krishna himself has pointed out that even they who worship these other gods worship him only, though the wrong way. They are the light of the divine looked at through different filters.

The word 'worship' is important here. No one worships any but God. The aspect of God 'visible' to the individual is that aspect which he is capable of perceiving. This capability is determined by his innate nature or the quality that is predominant in him.

A clear understanding of this doctrine enables us to grow. The child does not grow into an adult merely by throwing the doll away. The subtle inner transformation - growth continues steadily. Swami Sivananda used to say very often: 'I have sown the seed, it will germinate in its own time. Even if the man does whatever he likes, it will work.' Hence, Krishna warns us: 'Do not disturb anyone's faith, but help him grow inwardly.'

At each stage, it is God who is worshipped and who accepts that worship if it is offered in full faith.

XVII:5 - Those men who practice terrific austerities not enjoined by the scriptures, given to hypocrisy and egoism, impelled by the force of lust and attachment,

XVII:6 - Senseless, torturing all the elements in the body and me also, who dwells in the body, know you these to be of demoniacal resolves.

These two verses properly belong to the previous chapter! They contain enough food for a world of thought. Zimmer, in his book on The Philosophies of India, feels that 'The practice of tapas belongs to the pre-Aryan, non-Vedic heritage of archaic Indian asceticism.' When you bear in mind that Krishna is often regarded as of non-Aryan stock, the puzzle is even more puzzling. Zimmer rightly claims that the Gita represents the fusion of all the then-existing cultures and religious faiths - the scripture for the next age.

Spectacular asceticism is not unknown in other parts of the world. When emperor Constantine recognized Christianity, some of the 'faithful', fearing the evaporation of the true Christian spirit in its exposure to political heat, 'renounced' the world and lived an extremely austere life in deserts and forests. St. Anthony was one of them; and even when he eventually came out to preach, he preached extreme asceticism.

It has been said: 'With some of these men it is obvious that ascetic discipline had become perverted into an unpleasant form of exhibitionism.' And this is true of their kin in other religions, too. In Hindu mythology demons are often described as great men of austerity. Such ascetic practices as standing in freezing water or sitting on burning sands are against nature. As Krishna says here, they 'torture the body and me also who dwells in the body.' Instead of purifying the self, they strengthen the ego and are therefore a block to insight - the key to God-realization.

Asceticism on the one hand and sense-indulgence on the other are to be avoided; the middle path is the Gita's.

XVII:7 - The food also which is dear to each is threefold, as also sacrifice, austerity and alms-giving. Hear you the distinction of these.

XVII:8 - Foods which increase life, purity, strength, health, joy and cheerfulness, which are oleaginous and savoury, substantial and agreeable, are dear to the sattvic people.

XVII:9 - The foods that are bitter, sour, saline, excessively hot, dry, pungent and burning, are liked by the rajasic, and are productive of pain, grief and disease.

XVII:10 - That which is stale, tasteless, putrid, rotten and impure, is the food liked by the tamasic.

The classification of food is clear enough to need no comment.

There are two important points in these four verses that should not go unnoticed. The first is: Krishna mentions that certain foods increase life - which makes one wonder by what standard the life span is fixed. Krishna seems to have forestalled the modern biologist by recognizing the biological age and by formulating rules that will decelerate the speed with which death overtakes the living organism. This is the most effective answer to anyone who thinks we are fatalists.

The second is the assertion that only the tamasa or dull-witted, stupid people will like stale food. The refrigerator does the mischief here. While it arrests decay, it is unable to preserve the life-giving freshness of even fruits. It is worse with flesh, which develops toxic qualities. Furthermore it prevents charity! While the ancient villager distributed the surplus to poor people and animals, the modern housewife preserves it in the refrigerator.

Krishna does not condemn any, but he merely points out who likes what! It is for you to choose. If you choose the tamasa, you are at liberty to; but know where it leads you.

XVII:11 - That sacrifice which is offered by men without desire for reward, as enjoined by the ordinance, with a firm faith that to do so is a duty, is satvic or pure.

XVII:12 - The sacrifice which is offered, O Arjuna, seeking a reward and for ostentation, know you that to be a rajasic.

XVII:13 - The sacrifice performed in defiance of scriptural injunctions, in which no food is distributed, no hymns are chanted and mantras are recited, and no remunerations are made, and which is faithless, that sacrifice is tamasic.

This covers all forms of rituals and worships and could eventually be extended to embrace all departments of life itself.

It is easy to understand who performs the sattvika and the rajasa types of sacrifices, and why. But it is difficult to understand the true significance of the tamasa type. If I had not witnessed them, I would have refused to believe such a thing possible!

The ritual lacks scriptural sanction. No one concerned with its performance knows any mantra. The whole thing is a big farce and the carnival spirit prevails; and hence no one even thinks of charity, which might at least provide a relieving feature. On top of it all, the performer and those concerned have not the least faith in the ritual. Result: all sorts of sacrilegious words and deeds in the name of God and dharma. If all this had been done for the sake of earning name and fame, it would at best become rajasa. But no. It is done mechanically, prompted by a nebulous idea: My grandfather used to do something like this.

This carcass of a ritual is without justification for its existence. We should have the courage to revive the spirit of it, if at all possible, or bury it, replacing it by more meaningful rites. Rituals have great spiritual value. They can effect a spiritual revolution within, if correctly performed.

XVII:14 - Worship of the gods, the twice-born, the teachers and the wise, of purity, of straightforwardness, celibacy, non-injury - these are called the austerities of the body.

Tapas is 'heat, burning fire'. This fire has three functions symbolized in the three aspects of sakti - God as mother: Durga, Lakshmi and Sarasvati. The 'destructive' Durga burns impurities; the benign Lakshmi purifies; and Sarasvati the goddess of wisdom illumines. This classification is no gradation of importance! One is as important as the other. If illumination is regarded as the most important, it should be remembered that it can come only after the destruction of the baser nature - which is, therefore, more important! The practices mentioned here will effect this threefold miracle in the physical part of our being.

'Worship of the twice-born' might include those who are 'born again' in God, those who are God's devotees and saints, and need not necessarily be taken to refer to the higher castes. In India, even when the caste system prevailed, there were many 'low-caste' saints who were adored by people of higher castes!

When all our talents and faculties are God-ward directed, when they are restrained from wandering along the pleasure grooves of sense-enjoyments, the threefold inner transformation is effected. It should be remembered that while it is essential that the senses should be controlled, it is useless to waste one's inner powers foolishly suppressing their natural urges such as hunger. The impulse to suppress any natural urge is often a very strong ego. Once again, the invisibly subtle middle path must be clearly seen, by the grace of God, and carefully trodden. The only aids in this spiritual march to the goal are constant vigilance, faith and sincerity. Our Master always stressed the fact that if we take care of the positive side - e.g. worship of the gods, the negative aspects - e.g. lust, anger will die a natural death. Otherwise, vain is the struggle to eradicate evil.

The middle path cannot be seen physically or automatically. 'Constant vigilance' is needed, and that itself is the path, the march and the goal.

XVII:15 - Speech which causes no excitement and is truthful, pleasant and beneficial, and the practice of the study of the Vedas, are called austerity of speech.

Have you seen the mild and watery cucumber igniting, by its root, the grass hidden in rags? I have! There sits the cucumber, smooth tongued, smooth skinned, hand-picking his extra polite words to fulfill a double purpose: on the one hand to gain admiration for his 'saintliness' from the easily beguiled, on the other to inflame the heart of the person who sees through him. The picture he thus achieves is of a saintly man confronted by a vicious creature. But the Lord, seated in the hearts of both, knows that if the 'saint's' provocation is subtle, it is infallibly powerful and hence he shares the guilt with the roused. It is not that the other man is free from guilt! Fewer of such hypocrites would much enhance the peace of the world. If your speech is provocative, you share the guilt of the provoked.

The ideal of truth has been debated ad infinitum. It has been pointed out that tradition condones untruth in certain special circumstances. It has also been argued that if we soften truth to make it pleasant, we shall ruin discipline and promote villainy. No one expects us to be metamorphosed into saints overnight! Hence, here and there in 'scriptures', especially the legends, we find examples of half-truths. Life is not composed of ideals any more than a house is made of only the roof; but it is highly important to recognize what is not right, even if we yield to it, rather than elevate it to absolute rightness, because of the circumstances.

Only he who has even tried to practice the austerity of speech can realize the burning, purifying and illuminating power it has. When the lips close upon an unpleasant truth or a pleasant untruth, the switch is on and the fire of speech austerity consumes baser instincts; it can even be physically felt in the forehead!

XVII:16 - Serenity of mind, good-heartedness, purity of thought, self-control - this is called mental austerity.

With the passage of time and loss of practice, concepts change and words lose their meaning. Who can explain what serenity - prasada means? This word prasada has been used several times in the Gita, but in common parlance it refers to fruits and sweetmeats distributed after worship in temples. Who can fathom the depth of symbolism of the prasada? The sweetmeat given to us is only an external symbol of the sweetness of disposition that God's grace bestows upon the devotee's mind. Serenity is used for want of an accurate word. It is not the gravity of a corpse, nor the sour-faced dryness of a pessimist, nor even the unsmiling, worried look of the ascetic who expects the volcano of suppressed emotions to erupt any moment. Serenity is the radiant, glorious though unexcited joy that glows on the face from the presence of God within. It is difficult to define or to describe, but easily recognizable when seen.

Good-heartedness is not to be mistaken for mere freedom from blood pressure and palpitation. Krishna, you have caught us unawares - the heart cannot be good unless you and you alone reign supreme there! The godless 'good heart' is a hypocrite's haven, the devil's paradise. When God is enthroned in it, goodwill prevails; incidentally, 'goodwill' on earth is only God's will flowing freely through a pure egoless and divine heart. The ego's goodwill is what one pays heavily for in business!

Silence and self-control are disciplines of the mind. This verse is full of riddles. We usually associate silence with speech - the absence of speech. Real silence, however, is a desire-free, disturbance-free, peaceful mind. When there is peace of mind, the self is seen, and all ignorance born, self-imposed limitations come to light and therefore disintegrate. A mind that is thus ever peaceful, ever alert is itself meditation.

Practice these and the ego will go.

XVII:17 - This threefold austerity, practiced by steadfast men with the utmost faith, desiring no reward, is said to be static.

XVII:18 - The austerity which is practiced with the object of gaining good respect, honor and worship, and with hypocrisy, is said to be rajasic, unstable and transitory.

XVII:19 - The austerity which is performed foolishly, by means of self-torture, or to destroy or injure others, is said to be tamasic.

It is strange that even the three types of austerity - of body, speech and mind - can be practiced in a rajasa or tamasa way, though the words 'This threefold austerity' may apply only to the first verse and the other two may allude to other forms of austerity - in which case the meaning is abundantly clear and simple.

The most noble deeds can be performed hypocritically, but the effect will be the very opposite of what is desired. There is, however, a saving feature in such hypocritical good work and austerity - they are 'unstable and transitory'. Hypocrisy has been unequivocally condemned in all our scriptures, but it has always existed. Hypocrites have their little day! It is true that their magic spell ends soon, soon enough to minimize the havoc caused. The genius of the hypocrite uses a noble garb and sometimes it is impossible to detect him before he has achieved his purpose, though this is always a short-lived one. Let us be thankful for small mercies!

The third category is an allusion to the demoniacal type of austerity. It is difficult to see how it can satisfy the standards of the austerity of mind mentioned in verse 16. There is, however, no limit to the perversions of the tamasa or deluded mind that can always interpret scriptures in its own way!

XVII:20 - That gift which is given to one who does nothing in return, knowing it to be a duty to give in a fit place and time to a worthy person, that gift is held to be sattvic.

XVII:21 - And, that gift which is made with a view to receive something in return, or looking for a reward, or given reluctantly, is said to be rajasic.

XVII:22 - The gift which is given at the wrong place and time to unworthy persons, without respect or with insult, is declared to be tamasic.

The upanisad command us to give, to give with respect and love, and to give in plenty. That is the spirit. Our Master always gave and encouraged even indiscriminate giving. Giving is good; and if the gift is given with a good heart, even a vicious man's heart will be touched and in due course, such a deed may have the effect that one might plan by withholding the gift - the reformation of the wicked man - 'unworthy persons'. His conscience is awakened not so much by our denying help as by our giving it freely and making him feel: 'Here is one who trusts me and gives, though I am cheating him; I should ensure that I deserve it.' This transformation is not achieved in a day, however.

There are others who are always complaining that they do not find a person worthy of helping or giving to. They will never find one! Does God give us food only because we deserve it? Does the earth produce food only to be eaten by the deserving? Which one of us truly deserves all the blessings one enjoys? Moreover, what is ours in this world? We only give away in charity what belongs to the Lord himself present in the other man! Did we bring any wealth with us when we were born, or shall we take anything with us when we die?

Well, if you wish to do charity only to the deserving person, then keep that money and do not use it, or go and find the deserving person. Do not use it for yourself, but give it. You will immediately find there are many deserving persons in this world!

XVII:23 - 'Om Tat Sat', this has been declared to be the triple designation of Brahman. By that were created formerly the Brahmanas, the Vedas and the sacrifices.

The absolute needs no name! God has no proper names or improper ones. Incidentally, therefore, the names by which religions are known are also fictitious, man-made, faction-generating tools of the evil mind that perverts even truth for its false ends. All religion is the individual's path to God-realization; what need has one to distinguish it, and from what? It is when I wish to establish that 'my' religion is superior to 'your' religion, that I introduce names! It is when I wish to assert that 'my' God is real and 'yours' unreal that I begin calling him names.

'Om' has been declared to be the indicator of the infinite, absolute being. Its proper intonation suggests fullness, perfection, and a subtle transcendence that is indescribable. It is the simplest of all sounds, as simple as God himself. In sound it is comparable to the seven colors of the solar spectrum that blend to form the white color. When you listen to the distant noise of the market place or fair, when no particular sound is distinguishable, it is heard as one big roar of Om. It is a mystic symbol of the infinite. Meditation on Om and listening to the inner psychic Om-sound by closing the ears with the thumbs and listening with the right ear, are powerful tranquilizers of the wayward mind.

'Tat' is the word 'that'. Not this, but that; where all that is created - phenomenal, material and non-eternal - is included in 'this', and what remains when all 'this' is negated, is 'tat'. This 'tat' is not non-existence, a mere negation or void, it is 'sat' - the reality. That reality is not something that is opposed to non-reality, but it is the indescribable substratum of all existence. That reality alone exists and has nothing outside of itself; where is the need to call it by any name? Yet all names are God's.

XVII:24 - Therefore, with the utterance of 'Om' are the acts of gift, sacrifice and austerity, as enjoined in the scriptures, always begun by the knowers of Brahman.

XVII:25 - Uttering 'Tat', without aiming at the fruits, are the acts of sacrifice and austerity, and the various acts of gift, performed by the seekers of liberation.

XVII:26 - 'Sat' is used in the sense of reality and of goodness; and also, O Arjuna, the word 'Sat' is used in the sense of an auspicious act.

There is really no difference between the implications of one of the three words and those of another. All three have the same meaning and significance. 'Om tat sat' can roughly be translated into 'the infinite is that reality'. The orthodox Hindu may regard it as a great mantra and believe that the words themselves have spiritual, psychic and even magic power; but their real value is in the psychological effect of reminding ourselves of the infinite nature of the reality which is the substratum of all creation. It acts as a cleansing fire, purifying our heart of all impure, selfish motives and illumining the great reality within the inmost core of our being.

My Master used this formula frequently even during his routine office work.

The mantra silences the ego within and diverts the mind from 'the world' to God, making us realize that he is the omnipresent reality whom we are serving in all, to whom we are directing our sacrifice or gift. It has been said that this mantra has the power to transform all acts into holy ones; it is certain that one who keeps in mind the significance of the holy formula will never indulge in any unholy action.

It is good to cultivate the habit of thinking of God before, during and after the performance of every action. This formula, or any other such formula, will help us here, provided it does not become a mechanical, meaningless, dull repetition.

XVII:27 - Steadfastness, in sacrifice, austerity and gift, is also called 'Sat'; and also action in connection with 'Tat' is called 'Sat'.

XVII:28 - Whatever is sacrificed, given or performed, and whatever austerity is practiced without faith, it is called Asat, O Arjuna; it is naught, here or hereafter.

The discussion on faith is thus beautifully wound up. Adherence to the scripture is good. It presupposes faith in the scripture and in God. In the absence of a scripture it is permissible to pursue one's own nature, with faith in oneself. Here it is good to bear in mind the threefold classification. Whereas sattva is 'close to the sat or truth', tamas is also a quality of nature; even the tamasa man is not damned for ever.

Since 'sat' is the inner reality, remembrance of it helps us draw closer to it, thus increasing sattva. This is the purpose of repetition of mantra. Constant remembrance of God enables us to become godly: sattvika. 'Remembrance' here is not an act of memory, for it relates to the reality that has to be discovered from moment to moment; we should remember to discover it!

Not only meditating upon the word sat, but also upon its significance as the unchanging reality, will enable us to imitate that changeless-ness in our own life and actions. This results in steadfastness - a quality that is the exact opposite of the diabolical fickleness of the hypocrite. Steadfastness is the indication and the test of inner faith.

If there is no faith, however, the action is useless. It is good to remind ourselves repeatedly, that selfless action is not soulless action, and that the desireless man is not a robot, mechanically responding to stimuli in a preset routine fashion. He knows that action is nature's way of purifying itself, and thus life flows with no difficulty whatsoever.

Krishna's Gita is the very opposite of the gospel of inert and stupid activity. It is unselfish but supreme dynamism. Only the small ego stifles life; yoga is joyous participation in the divine will.

18. The Yoga of Liberation by Renunciation

XVIII:1 - Arjuna said : I desire to know the essence of renunciation and of abstinence.

XVIII:2 - The Blessed Lord said : The sages understand it to be the renunciation of action with desire. The wise declare the abandonment of the fruits of all actions as abstinence.

At the close of chapter 16, Krishna had emphasized the importance of following scriptural injunctions. The next chapter answered Arjuna's question: If one did not know the scriptural injunctions but was endowed with faith, what happens to him? Now in this chapter Arjuna asks the other question: If a man knew the scripture?

The scriptures emphasize the need for renunciation - tyaga. 'Without tyaga there can be no self-realization'. Renunciation meant abandonment of all that was considered worldly. Only a few could do this; they rose in public esteem and endeavored to preserve it by perpetuating an error! The more spectacular and beyond the reach of the common man they made this tyaga, the surer were they of their own position of prestige and power. It was conveniently ignored that one should renounce only what is one's own - the false ego and its vanity, prestige and possession - and that renouncing what does not belong to one - e.g. home, property, wealth - is meaningless!

Of course, the position corrupted their heart and their renunciation was a mockery, even by their own theoretical standards. But they had enough hold on society by now to make any renunciation unnecessary. We find this in all holy orders, whatever be the religion. Lord Krishna opens the door wider, so that all may enter the realm of renunciation. The swami engaged in self-willed desire-prompted action is no better than a business executive, except that the latter is more honest! The layman who performs the most prosaic task without egoism or selfish desire qualifies for self-realization. If he engages himself in the selfless service of humanity, but has not a single thought for the fruits of such service, he is a man of tyaga.

XVIII:3 - Some philosophers declare that all actions should be abandoned as an evil; but there are yet other sages who maintain that acts of sacrifice, charity and penance should never be abandoned.

XVIII:4 - Hear from me the truth about abstinence, O Arjuna. Abstinence has been declared to be of three kinds.

Society in those days was divided into two sections. There were those who followed the karma kanda - ritualistic portion of the veda, and to whom those rituals were too sacred ever to be abandoned. There were the others who followed the jnana kanda - wisdom portion of the veda, and were convinced that to do anything was to invite rebirth, to enjoy or to suffer the consequences.

The basic philosophy of the latter is sound; but how few can realize that renunciation of the world means total abandonment of all attachment, even to one's own body and the modifications of one's own mind? Krishna recognizes that that is the goal, though for its achievement no hypocritical abandonment of the world is necessary, but a revolution in the inner attitude, which he has already clearly stated: While doing all your actions, feel you are not doing anything. This necessarily implies that the samnyasi who realizes 'I am not doing' is incapable of withdrawing from life or activity. If, on the other hand, formal renunciation is overemphasized, then the evil pointed out on the previous page cannot be avoided. Such renunciation cancels out the spirit of the scripture.

Who but the Lord can conclusively tell us what the true spirit of renunciation is? Only he knows where and how the devil of human vanity quotes scripture to exploit the gullible. Arjuna had also prayed to the Lord to be definite and conclusive in his instructions. Hence, Krishna's declaration that what follows is the final truth.

XVIII:5 - Acts of sacrifice, gift and austerity should not be abandoned, but should be performed; sacrifice, gift and also austerity, purify the wise.
XVIII:6 - But even these actions should be performed leaving aside attachment and the desire for rewards. This, O Arjuna, is My certain conviction.

It has been said that Krishna's Gita is a synthesis of the best in Aryan and non-Aryan traditions. Krishna accepts the ancient Aryan yajna or sacrifice, the non-Aryan tapas or austerity, synthesizes them and shows that this synthesis is superior to either of its components. Then he rejects routine ritual and foolish tapas to give us buddhi yoga. This is indeed the highest statesmanship.

Tapas or austerity has already been dealt with in great detail. Suffice it to say here that simple life itself is tapas. Simplicity enables one to be free from slavery to the world and makes charity possible. Charity alters values. What is mine, becomes another's by charity; and freedom from attachment spares me the worry concerning it. Objects have value only on account of attachment! Realization of this deflates the value of even those objects that we retain out of necessity; then they can be given away without leaving a dent in our heart. Charity, too, has been dealt with earlier. It is really giving away what actually does not belong to one! But sacrifice, which to me sounds like making something sacred, something leading to self-knowledge, is self-sacrifice or the abandonment of all that one identifies one's self with. In the ritual yajna, when pouring ghee into the fire one utters the mantra svaha which literally means killing of the self. It frees one from the prison-house of the ego, to roam in the realm of the infinite. The ego is just an idea. The assumption that it is real is one's only possession that must be sacrificed. Then one sees that one's other possessions were not possessions at all and charity becomes natural.

All these should be performed without desire for rewards. Charity done with an eye to name and fame is only payment of advertisement charges!

XVIII:7 - The renunciation of obligatory action is improper; the abandonment of the same from delusion is tamasic.

XVIII:8 - He who abandons action on account of the fear of bodily trouble, he does not obtain the merit of renunciation by doing such rajasic renunciation.

Again, the razor 's edge of lord Krishna. Here he mentions that one should not renounce obligatory duties, including the scripturally enjoined rituals; earlier he said that the performance of all these would only gain for us a holiday in heaven; and later again he commands us: Abandon all dharma! Narada, in his Bhakti Sutra, also declares that the true devotee of the Lord has no use for worldly and scriptural duties. How does one reconcile all these?

By practicing buddhi yoga. Turn the mirror of buddhi - the value-giving discriminative faculty - towards God. Recognize only God as the stable value, and let his light be reflected through the buddhi. Let the mind and the senses function in that reflected light. There is no need to abandon any duties, for when the time comes they will drop away. When we go to sleep, we do not abandon the world; it fades into nothingness. Let that also happen to the duties of the world.

However, the deluded man, by prematurely abandoning the world and its duties, only strengthens egoism! I am a holy man; this I shall not do, for it is beneath my dignity - where is holiness in this trend of thought? It is the seed of immense inner conflict.

There is yet another type of renunciation. The man who cannot earn, renounces wealth. Even in the practice of yoga, what we feel is difficult for us, we renounce with a high-sounding philosophy to justify it. Man is unable to face the problems of family life, and so with great fanfare renounces it. That is not renunciation, but impotence, cowardice, and never leads one to the goal of life. This, again, should not be misunderstood; the man who refuses to renounce worldly life, even after realizing that it is painful, is attached to it! Let the inner light of wisdom decide!

XVIII:9 - Whatever obligatory action is done, O Arjuna, merely because it ought to be done, abandoning attachment and also the desire for reward, that renunciation is regarded as sattvic.

XVIII:10 - The man of renunciation, pervaded by purity, intelligent and with his doubts cut asunder, does not hate a disagreeable work, nor is he attached to the agreeable.

The wise man abandons what ought to be abandoned attachment and desire for reward. He may adopt what the popular mind regards as the monastic life, if he feels that that is his obligatory action. But that is not because he is attached to his own ideas of holiness, or because he expects honor and worship. We have already been told that these cravings are demoniacal. His stable value is God. In him God is awake, for the ego is in a comatose state. His life progresses smoothly because he sees that he does not determine his own destiny. With that enlightened understanding, what has to be done - God's will - is done without any thought of a reward or consequence. There is no egoistic pushing on his part. A word of caution here: we are again facing the razor's edge! It is foolish to camouflage our own desire-prompted egoistic activities on the pretext that it is God's will that we should continue them. The manifestations of the ego - lust, anger and greed, attachment and desire for reward, must be abandoned. Non-abandonment of these will revive and maintain the ego.

This philosophy seems to be easy to understand and apply, but actually it is difficult for the simple reason that it elevates us so much, we are confused as to both direction and path. If there is the least impurity of heart, delusion or non-intelligence present, and if there is the least doubt alive in the heart, the ego will once again play havoc in the garb of self-surrender. Only God can guide us; we must ensure that we deserve his grace.

We should constantly and vigilantly look within for the reality. Then attachment and possession are realized to be unreal and are dropped by the mind. When this happens, one lives in God, one realizes God.

XVIII:11 - It is not possible for an embodied being to abandon actions entirely; but he who renounces the rewards of actions, is verily a man of renunciation.
XVIII:12 - The threefold fruit of action - evil, good and mixed - accrues after death to the non-abandoners, but never to the abandoners.

It is God's will that has brought spirit and matter into being. It is his will that sustains this world-play by the projection of his apparent diversity. The universe dances to his tunes. The individual's own body and mind, being part of the universe, are caught up in this cosmic dance; who but God himself can stop it? One who tries to stop the dance is egoistic and, therefore, cut off from God. That kind of renunciation is delusion. The true man of renunciation, on the other hand, renounces the desire for reward. A little contemplation will reveal to us the utter stupidity of expecting a reward for something that is done by God's will, by his own instrument - each individual soul, with the help of objects of his own creation! It is as if 'I' expected a reward for some work you have done, which is entirely illogical. Abandonment of this delusion is true renunciation. We then let God's will flow through us, without egoistic motive, and this itself is liberation or God-realization. Karma binds only the deluded egoistic soul. It has no meaning in God's eyes; for he is the all-pervading, eternal being. He pervades heaven, hell and this world, but he also transcends them. It is only the deluded soul that believes it does something, expecting some reward. After death, it sometimes gets a good reward, sometimes an indifferent one and sometimes an evil one. To one who has abandoned egoism and does God's will without personal profit-motive, to whom the whole universe is God's own manifestation and this world-play is a solo act by God - there is no pain, no pleasure, no sin, no virtue, no hell, no heaven. Seen from that universal focus, which is God, all is divine harmony.

XVIII:13 - Learn from Me, O Arjuna, these five causes for the accomplishment of all actions, as declared in the Sankhya system:

XVIII:14 - the body, the doer, the various senses, the different functions of various sorts, and the presiding deity also as the fifth.

Look at it from any point of view you like; you cannot escape the conclusion that the self is not the doer or the enjoyer. However, the doubter says: But, I do feel the pain, or, But how can anything be done if I don't want to do it? That but is a dangerous conjunction, which muffles the voice of truth and amplifies the ego's alluring and deluding whisper. Here Krishna flashes the light of truth on the truth.

As he said to Arjuna, so he says to every man: You say you will fight or you will not fight. You want to do what is right and avoid what is wrong. You feel that that choice alone will determine whether you go to heaven or hell after death, whether you will have an auspicious or inauspicious birth. All these hinge upon a central fallacy: the feeling that you are the doer! Now listen to my analysis.

There are the five factors that enter the accomplishment of all actions: the body, which obviously seems to do and to enjoy, is of course the first. In that body itself we see the various subtle sense-organs which, to some extent, seem to be distinct from it. The sense organs of knowledge and of action are coordinated and they function - this is the third factor. Then we have the gods who preside over these functions - this may also refer to the jiva or individualized self, or to the light in which the senses function - deva means light. Finally, there is a mysterious principle of egoism, ignorance and delusion which identifies the functions and activities of all these with the self which is the silent witness, thus creating the idea of doer-ship.

If you look within, you suddenly discover that all your experiences are made possible by the intelligence that functions in you. That intelligence is not yours, it is a fragment of the cosmic consciousness. The ego, which arose with those experiences is also part of that consciousness; it, itself, does not exist.

XVIII:15 - Whatever action a man performs by his body, speech and mind, whether right or the reverse, these five are its causes.

XVIII:16 - Now, such being the case, he who, owing to untrained understanding, looks upon his self as the agent, sees not, because he is of perverted intelligence.

The body, senses and the mind perform their duties with the energy invested in them by the divine nature of the Lord. The Lord's own consciousness - apparently looked upon as the various deities, presides over the senses and carries on the activities of the world. His energy, as the sun, the celestial body, illumines the objects of the world; his energy as the sun within, perceives the world through the medium of the eyes. The self is but a silent witness of all these diverse functions. This is one view. From this view the daivam of the previous verse refers to the deities presiding over the various sense-functions.

The supreme Lord has willed this universe into existence and he himself dwells within each body inspiring the mind and the senses to function. 'I' does nothing at all! I do nothing, it is the Lord who does everything, feels the devotee of the Lord. This is another view.

Whichever be the attitude adopted, in accordance with one's own training and temperament, and one's own discovery, the 'I' is seen to be a shady imposter who belongs neither to the material side nor to the spiritual side of one's being.

A story is told of how a vagabond entered a village where a four-day wedding feast was in progress. Uninvited he entered the bride's house and received honor due to the members of the groom's party. He mingled with the latter pretending to belong to the bride's party. Then someone asked him: Who are you? At that he quietly slipped away. That is just what the ego does when confronted with the question, Who is 'I'? It is a mirage, a shadow, a robber seen in a dream. It is an uninvited guest, which can, however, cause a lot of havoc.

XVIII:17 - He who is free from the egoistic notion, whose intelligence is untainted, though he slays these people, he slayeth not; nor is he bound by the action.

This mysterious egoistic notion is the cause of all our sins and sufferings. In fact it is this notion that sins and that suffers, too. The 'I' creates its own ghosts desire and hatred, clings to them and fears them. In the one it sees many and gets bewildered. Forgetful of God, the supreme bliss, it is subjected to frustration. Frantically working for happiness, it loses it! Man walks the burning sands of the desert in order to quench his thirst at a far lake, only to find that the lake is a mirage. How can these unreal causes produce such real effects? Because in the darkness of unawareness the 'I' arises and thinks it is real, vainly imagining and creating evils and sufferings. This is the only sin.

Hence our Master insisted again and again: Turn the gaze. When you turn the searchlight of truth on this mysterious 'I', you will discover, not the 'I' nor its vanishing trick, but the substratum for the 'I' and for the whole universe, which is God, Brahman, the paramatman.

Even a dry blade of grass cannot be wafted by the wind except by God's will. This has been the unanimous verdict of all sages, saints and prophets. The whole universe is run by His will.

Actions do not bind; it is only the egoistic identification that binds. The hateful murderer is sent to the gallows, yet the executioner gets paid for a similar action. In war, the same action on a larger scale wins the hero a medal! Look within and you will know the difference. The understanding and knowledge, Thy will be done frees us instantly, enabling us to perceive the truth, to experience that God is good, that the universe is good, and that the soul is eternally good. The 'I' was but a bad dream. Forget it.

But, beware, let the 'I' not create a God for you to fear, to love, to worship and to realize. God here is the truth, the reality who is present when all thoughts march out, following the I-thought.

The goal is in sight. That is all even the most purified ego can independently achieve - though with the inevitable help of divine grace. The golden shackle still binds and the golden needle will still prick.

Goodness is good. To 'live' is to turn away from 'evil' (reverse spelling). But that is not enough, for live contains in it the seed of all evil (anagram of veil) - i (ego). When that 'i' is replaced by its self-negation 'o', 'live' becomes 'love' which is God.

This vowel is a constant: $o+o=o$; $o-o=o$; $oxo=o$; $o/o=o$. And, when looked at from any side, this 'o' is still a zero. It is beginningless and endless. Only total and complete self-surrender makes the seeker divine, perfect, and eternal - constant. That is the culmination of evolution - just as zero is full, complete and the fulfillment of the point, the arc, the semi-circle and even the straight line.

Strangely enough, such surrender is impossible without control - which perhaps implies the exercise of the ego in the right direction. We cannot consciously and deliberately surrender our body, mind and soul to God unless we know what they are! All ethical discipline, all moral codes, all psychophysical yoga practices aim at coming to grips with our personality; not in order to make it more powerful, but to affect the realization that all our moods and actions, whether dull, dynamic or divine, originate in God. With this realization the ego dissolves, humility arises and true surrender follows naturally.

'Renounce all, everything, to me', says Krishna. Lip service to surrender will not do.

Between conscious self-surrender and unconscious passivity, there is the same difference as there is between super-consciousness and sleep; between offering a fruit to God and, having forgotten its existence, allowing it to rot. When the egoistic self is surrendered, the higher self - God - shines in its own glory. That is our goal, nothing short of it will do.

May we reach it, here and now.

XVIII:18 - Knowledge, the knowable and the knower form the threefold impulse to action; the organ, the action and the agent form the threefold basis of action.
XVIII:19 - Knowledge, action and the actor are declared in the science of the gunas to be of three kinds, according to the distinction of the gunas; hear them also duly.

Krishna does not split hairs in philosophy, and consequently does not give us a splitting headache. On the other hand, fear of analysis often leads to vague generalizations. Krishna's teaching is entirely free from this, too. The word of God has the invariable characteristic of being clear, succinct and direct. I have seen this in our Master's approach to all problems. He could go to the root of any problem without beating about the bush and getting lost; and without dabbling on the surface and getting nowhere.

Self-purification is a delicate art. It is surgery without incision. It demands a subtlety of vision without magnification. What is the self and what are the components that should be purified? Ignorance of this might land us in semi-purification - which is not-purification. What constitutes an action? Listen to the wonderfully precise analysis. Action springs from knowledge - theory; we have an idea of the knowable, the experiencable, the object, the goal; and the knower is the subject. Subject-object-predicate - these are the three invariable constituents of an action. Purify them and all actions are pure.

The physical being, its activity, and the idea of agency - are the mechanics of action. Purify them, too.

These six are then reduced to three: knowledge, action - directed towards the right knowable or object, and actor - the self, the knower, the agent who identifies himself as the organ of action. These three are classified into the threefold division in the following verses.

XVIII:20 - That by which one sees the one indestructible reality in all beings, not separate in all the separate beings, know you that knowledge to be sattvic.

XVIII:21 - But that knowledge which sees in all beings various entities of distinct kinds as different from one another, know you that knowledge to be rajasic.

XVIII:22 - That which clings to one single effect as if it were the whole, without reason, without foundation in truth, and trivial, that is declared to be tamasic.

But that which clings to one single effect as if it were the whole, without reason, without foundation in truth, and trivial - that is declared to be tamasa. This doctrine can be applied to religion, speculative philosophy, sociology, human relations and ethics generally. One can meditate upon these three verses and derive a wealth of meaning and inspiration from them.

Since the ultimate reality is one, the wise man, the sattvika person sees the one reality in all; the perception of the all being the inevitable consequence of the perceiver's limitation as the individual. The eyes have neither microscopic nor telescopic vision and cannot, therefore, perceive the grand unity. Even if that were possible, there would still exist the distinction between the perceiver and the perceived 'unity'. The sattvika knower, however, intuitively feels the unity that underlies the diversity.

Rajasa knowledge confers on this diversity not an apparent but a real existence. It enables us to realize that there are others, other paths and so on, and leads us to a 'live and let live' policy.

Tamasa knowledge does not recognize any but its own point of view. It is the frog in the well. It is dogmatic. It is a wonder that people who call themselves knowledgeable assert that there is only one viewpoint! Have they actually ascertained that there are no others? How can one assert that his religion or concept of God alone is true, till he knows how many religions there are - which is of course impossible! Everyone's viewpoint is valid, but especially valid for himself. We should recognize the validity of others' viewpoints and ultimately the one that runs through all.

XVIII:23 - An action which is ordained, which is free from attachment, which is done without love or hatred by one who is not desirous of any reward, that action is declared to be sattvic.

XVIII:24 - But that action which is done by one longing for the fulfillment of desires or gain, with egoism or with much effort, that is declared to be rajasic.

XVIII:25 - That action which is undertaken from delusion, without regard to the consequences of loss, injury and one's own ability, that is declared to be tamasic.

That action which is undertaken out of delusion, without a regard for the consequences, loss, injury and one's own ability that is declared to be tamasa - dark. Lord Krishna's path is one of adventure with calculated risk. He does not encourage weak-heartedness or impotence. Nor does he encourage self-destructive foolhardiness. The third of the above verses warns us that we should calculate the consequences, not with pessimistic withdrawal but in order that the effort may be matched with the task, that unnecessary loss and injury may be avoided, and that we may not try to jump on to our own shoulders. It should not be misconstrued as cowardice. Many there are who waste precious talent and life battling with impossible situations. I have seen a young man whose only spiritual sadhana was to develop powers to endure the severe Himalayan cold! His motive: to be acclaimed by the public as a great yogi. He did not live long enough to enjoy that renown. What a waste! Our Master, on the contrary, gave such practices a lesser value, realizing their doubtful spiritual consequences. If your body cannot endure the cold, put on a coat. But then study the first of the three verses and act on it. Such action will promote sattva - divinity, purity or light within.

Gita-action is a fine art: finer than the best dancing, the most delicate painting or the most soulful music. We should know what to do - our duty, and what not to do - useless task; yet we should do what we do without an eye to its reward - usefulness, without attachment - which a sense of duty might lead to, and without egoism.

XVIII:26 - He who is free from attachment, non-egoistic, endowed with firmness and enthusiasm and unaffected by success or failure, is called sattvic.
XVIII:27 - Passionate, desiring to obtain the rewards of actions, cruel, greedy, impure, moved by joy and sorrow, such action is said to be rajasic.
XVIII:28 - Unsteady, dejected, unbending, cheating, malicious, vulgar, lazy and procrastinating, such an agent is called tamasic.

If the knowledge that illumines our life and the actions that proceed in that light are sattvika or pure, obviously the agent will also be pure. But no. Krishna does not let us take anything for granted. In the bloodless, weaponless inner warfare, a moment's non-vigilance might undo a lifetime's hard work. The ignorance born ego cannot be destroyed because it is a shadow. It has to be discovered.

In reality, the ego is not a devil, but God-asleep. The veil of ignorance or deep sleep has to be removed. This is achieved by sattva - the quality, va, of reality, sat. The agent with the veil on is the little self or ego; the agent minus the veil is the self identical with the supreme self whose thought is spread out as the universe and whose will maintains the cosmic play. Sun shines, earth revolves - but ignorance calls it the passage of time! There is a constant change of atoms in this universe; the ego superimposes on this an endless series of concepts - birth, death, success, failure, pain, pleasure, heat, cold, etc.

Thus deluded, the ego lives a completely isolated and self-centered life - tamasa. By evolution and effort it graduates to the passionate life - rajasa. Then, through deliberate avoidance of the nature of the above two, and by the conscious cultivation of the sattvika attitude, the ego becomes non-ego, joyously surrendering to the divine, participating in God's Will and enjoying the Bliss that He is.

XVIII:29 - Hear you the threefold division of the intellect and firmness according to the gunas, as I declare them fully and distinctly, O Arjuna.

With unambiguous clarity, the dynamics of action have been dealt with. We have been told what our inner self should be like, what the characteristics of our actions should be and in what light they should be performed. Yet Krishna is not satisfied!

Knowledge itself is often classified as superior and inferior. The superior aspect of this knowledge was described in verse 20. A novice seeker, not very spiritually evolved, might not find that description quite satisfying; and even in the case of an intelligent seeker whose ego still revels in the deep slumber of ignorance, that description might be misinterpreted to the ego's own advantage.

The compassionate Lord comes down to the level of the seeker and analyses this factor still further. Here we have the classification of knowledge as the discriminating principle, buddhi. This buddhi itself can also be either pure, passionate or dull. A clear understanding of the classification makes it possible for one to ascend the ladder and attain a sattvika state.

In following verses, another wonderful truth unfolds itself. In order to reach our destination, we need three things: a light outside - the sun, the moon, a lamp, etc.; the sense of sight within; and the spirit of perseverance. The last is what has been called firmness in this verse. Firmness is a quality, neither good nor bad - as is everything in this universe. All too often we tenaciously cling to childish ideas and ideals, resisting all good influences that endeavor to guide us, in the false belief that it is the devil tempting us and that we should tenaciously stick to our own ideas and practices. Degenerate forms of idolatry, patriotism, a sense of social and domestic responsibility - are some instances where tenacity might mean bondage.

It is good to remember that any theory or idea that distracts the attention from the simple truth is to be discarded, while one which leads towards the center, towards the simple truth within, is useful.

XVIII:30 - That understanding which knows the path of work and renunciation, what ought to be done and what ought not to be done, fear and fearlessness, bondage and liberation, that understanding is satvic, O Arjuna.

XVIII:31 - That by which one incorrectly understands dharma and adharma, and also what ought to be done and what ought not to be done, that understand, O Arjuna, is rajasic.

XVIII:32 - That understanding which, enveloped in darkness, views adharma as dharma and all things perverted, that intellect, O Arjuna, is tamasic.

No one can lay down a universal do's and don'ts code in great detail. The guiding light, knowledge, is universal but the code of morals is not. It is based on the divine law, but adopted to time, place and circumstance. This is what we call tradition, or dharma in its restricted sense. The tradition concerning the path of work - household life, and that concerning the path of renunciation are different. One should know them. Tradition has great use: it keeps a society together and organized, thus freeing each one from the unnecessary task of carrying another's burden and from being weighed down by little cares and petty anxieties. A sage rises above tradition, but does not willfully abandon it. The man with the middling intellect, in the heat of passionate dynamism, misunderstands the moral law and the tradition, but can be taught and trained to give up these wrong notions.

But not so the last category! The man of tamasa buddhi is not so much a sinner as an unevolved brute stupid and ignorance-ridden. His permitted actions are deluded actions, thus he deliberately violates moral law and tradition. It is in this respect that laws which approve of exploitation of man by man, divorce and so on, on the plea that they are in conformity with changed times, are immoral. Even if all of us tell lies, it is still unrighteous. Recognition of this leaves the door open for the abandonment of these notions.

XVIII:33 - The unwavering firmness by which, through Yoga, the functions of the mind, the life-force and the senses are restrained, that firmness, O Arjuna, is sattvic.

XVIII:34 - But that firmness, O Arjuna, by which, on account of attachment and desire for reward, one holds fast to Dharma, enjoyment of pleasures and earning of wealth, that firmness, O Arjuna, is rajasic.

XVIII:35 - That by which man does not abandon sleep, fear, grief, despair and also conceit, that firmness, O Arjuna, is tamasic.

The classification and the description of each category is very explicit. But a great thought is hidden in a simple expression in the last verse. It leads us once again to a puzzling paradox.

The word paradox means something that is beyond teaching, something that cannot even be caught, but glimpsed - like the beauty of a flower. Once caught, the flower is broken into a thousand pieces; truth that is caught is destroyed instantly.

Thus, we should know our own limitations. We should know what to fear, but should not cling to fear - it is tamasa. Neither should we cling to despair. That, too, is tamasa. Millions in the world today waste their lives in hiding, through sheer despair and morbid fear. They do not realize how illogical they are. Would it not be better to face the situation and either die, or live happily? We should not throw away life by valuing life itself more than the living of it.

Rajasa firmness is also not very highly commended and is not our goal. However, it is better to be functional with a doubtful motive or even in selfishness, than to crouch under a blanket of fear and despair. This dynamism will in due course lead us to the firmness of a yogi described in the first verse. We should be firmly rooted in contemplation of the Lord and carefully avoid clinging to anything else. Attach your mind to the Lord and detach it from the world, sang our Master.

XVIII:36 - Now hear from me, O Arjuna, of the threefold pleasure, in which one rejoices by practice, and surely comes to the end of pain.

Whatever a man does, he seeks happiness through it. In fact, this pursuit of happiness is one of the fundamental motive-forces of evolution. Intuition of this truth has given rise in sages to the vision that the self-experience and self-expression by the supreme self of its own bliss-nature, is the reason underlying this mysterious process of becoming - creation and evolution. Consciousness locked in the mineral grows as a plant, moves about as an animal with a simple consciousness, thinks and contemplates as man with self-consciousness, till it arrives at the destination, which is self-realization where bliss is experienced as one's own essential nature.

Man, the crown of creation, is a complete picture of this world-process. He bears within himself the impressions of the beginningless struggle to attain self-realization - the impressions left in him by the mineral, vegetable and animal kingdoms, and the impressions left in him by his own past lower-human incarnations. Hence, he is torn - as no plant or animal is - between the higher aspirations and the lower appetites.

It is good to know, therefore, when our pleasure seeking promotes our evolution and when it halts it. Man, with a self-consciousness and a will of his own, can choose between sagehood or beasthood. Few would knowingly choose the latter but it is possible in a state of ignorance to knock at the wrong door. The pleasure-seeking mind has a tendency to grab the nearest pleasure-source. Yet, if the nature of the choice is clearly defined, the wise man might be saved from error, and discover that moments of happiness or pleasure generally lie in the interval between two experiences of excitement or craving. When a craving subsides, we think we are happy!

Hence, the following clear-cut classification of pleasure or happiness.

XVIII:37 - That which is like poison at first, but in the end like nectar, that pleasure is declared to be sattvic, born of the purity of the Self.

XVIII:38 - That pleasure which arises from the contact of the sense organs with the objects, which is at first like nectar, and in the end like poison, that is declared to be rajasic.

XVIII:39 - That pleasure which at first and in the sequel is delusive of the self, arising from sleep, indolence and heedlessness, such pleasure is declared to be tamasic.

There is a declaration in the upanisad that all the pleasures of this universe are a drop in the ocean of bliss that is God.

Yet, tamasa pleasure is delusive of the self, i.e. it prevents us from arriving at our destination - that bliss which is the essential nature of the self. Like smoke which compels us to close our eyes and thus prevents us from utilizing the light and heat also generated by fire, tamasa pleasure blinds our vision to the light of truth and to the energy within us which could be put to good use.

Rajasa pleasure is all that falls under the heading of happiness in the civilized man's dictionary - wife, children, property, position in society, good food and drink, amusements and pastimes. These are all better than tamasa pleasure, because they give us temporary pleasure. The saving feature here is the impermanence of this pleasure, which might awaken an intelligent man to look for its sattvika counterpart. The unintelligent man, however, might switch from one type of rajasa pleasure to another and discover the truth about them too late.

It is difficult for embodied beings to be completely free from the taint of rajasa pleasure. Even in the seeker the taste for pleasure remains long after he has begun to restrain the senses. The recognition of true sattvika pleasure - bliss of self-absorption - is the fruit or reward of self-realization. That alone is sattvika pleasure which is born of, leads to and enables us to remain established in the self.

XVIII:40 - There is no being on earth or in heaven, among the gods, that is liberated from the three gunas, born of material nature.

All motion and manifestation are subject to the three qualities of nature that have been described so vividly by lord Krishna. Not only the gross, but the extremely subtle objects of nature are subject to them. Gross and subtle, heaven and hell, earth and the beyond are all relative terms, one serving as the frame of reference for the other. They are not absolute. The absolute - the subject, unknowable by the intellect and hence not a concept - is intuitively realized, in an indescribable transcendental experience, as beyond the qualities. This should not lead us to the absurd position of regarding the qualities as something outside the one. God, who is pure existence, is unsullied and unaffected by anything that happens in this universe, because whatever happens, happens not because of His Will or His Grace -these are imperfect, inadequate human expressions, but because that is His nature. The one is unaffected by the qualities, even as the cobra is unaffected by its venom. Through the veins and arteries of our body run impure and pure blood; together they form one system and we do not regard the arteries as good and the veins as injurious to our physical well-being.

The three qualities constitute divine nature which is indistinguishable from the supreme reality. Even the sage's body and mind are subject to the qualities, though sattva preponderates in them. But the sage resting in the self witnesses the play of the guna without identifying himself with them. Hence, in our approach to them we should beware of judging them by our ignorant and intellectual standards.

Krishna also warns us here that we can grow in sattva only by consciously choosing the sattvika in all things and, eventually transcending sattva by his grace, we passively offer ourselves in total surrender to him.

XVIII:41 - Of Brahmanas, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas, as the Sudras, O Arjuna, the duties are distributed according to the qualities born of their own nature.

At each incarnation we bring forward with us our nature. This nature manifests the preponderant quality which determines our caste. This is nothing more than a cast - a mould for casting. The Oxford dictionary's definition of it as 'any of the E.Ind. Hereditary classes with members shunning intercourse with the other castes' is plain mischievous mis-statement.

The 'nature' that is brought forward undergoes incessant change. It is true that the basic aspects do not change, e.g. one who is born a male dies a male, but a great degree of change in other aspects is possible. After all, the brought forward nature was the cumulative effect of the continuous interaction of the self and environment, of aspiration and limitation, of the upward pull of spiritual evolution and the downward pull of animal urges.

If that nature determined the caste in which we were born, the latter, too, would undergo the same change as the former. As we shall presently see, the gulf that separates one caste from the other - the gulf of fundamental nature - is wide enough to make it difficult for one to jump from one to the other. But we should bear in mind:

(a) that it is impossible to assert that any human being falls entirely within one category - he always has some element of the other categories, and

(b) that the transfer, though difficult, is not impossible, as is demonstrated in the legendary heroes who achieved it, and also in modern sex-change experiments.

What is perhaps more difficult and vitally important is to be efficient and diligent in the righteous expression of one's own essential nature, without the presumption that one is superior or inferior to another - which is false and artificial.

So, dharma can be looked at from two extremely simple angles. Firstly, your own essential nature and secondly, a certain built-in balance that sustains the entire universe and the human personality - a universal vibration.

XVIII:42 - Serenity, self-restraint, austerity, purity, forgiveness and uprightnes, knowledge, realization and belief in God, are the duties of the Brahmanas, born of their own nature.

XVIII:43 - Prowess, splendour, firmness, dexterity, fearlessness, generosity and lordliness, are the qualities of work for the Ksatriyas, born of their own nature.

XVIII:44 - Agriculture, cattle-rearing and trade are the duties of the Vaishya, born of their own nature; and action consisting of service is the duty of the Sudra, born of their own nature.

Where is it said that the mere accident of birth or erudite scholarship are the qualifications of a brahmana? Elsewhere, the word brahmana has been defined as one who knows Brahman or the absolute. Shankaracharya defines pandit as one who knows panda or knowledge pertaining to self-realization.

It is said in the Bhagavatam that in this kali age, members of the three castes are mostly converted into sudra (12.II:4). Even here, it is not because people value service or realize the dignity of labor, but because the qualifications for belonging to the other three are absent. This moral degeneration and ethical apathy often assume strange roles; the brahmana and the ksatriya fight to stay as such, not because they are qualified to, but because such fighting is easier than the acquisition of the qualifications. Even the vaisya do not produce wealth or food in the right spirit, but in order to become wealthier and stay wealthier than the others. Wealth is the god of the present kali age. Says the Bhagavatam: 'In the kali age, wealth alone will be the criterion of pedigree, morality and merit' (12.II:2). All people, including the sudra, serve - not one another, not the neighbor, not God, but wealth. Thus they are not even sudra in the real sense!

The caste system is gone - though a new caste or class system has taken its place. Has this led to real unity and understanding? Oh, yes, in one way - for we are all worshipping wealth as the only god. But wealth engenders hatred, jealousy and enmity, not love. God is love, and it is God we should worship.

XVIII:45 - Each man, devoted to his own duty, attains perfection. How he attains perfection while being engaged in his own duty, hear now.

XVIII:46 - By worship of the Lord, the source of all beings and who is all-pervading, man can, in the performance of his own duty, attain perfection.

In our day to day activity, this truth that God pervades everything in the universe is not reflected. Our cravings, our hate, our fear, our jealousy, our envy and the competitive spirit which characterizes all our thoughts, words and deeds, are the direct denial of the reality we seem to understand intellectually.

With what green eyes the poor brahmana looks at the rich farmer or trader! With what envy the ksatriya, with all his pomp and power, views the status that the brahmana enjoys! What would the trader not do to buy the political boss or the pandit! And, lastly, how fervently members of the workers' union wish to assert their superiority over everyone else!

All this is unnecessary. Is salvation the exclusive privilege of men of only certain castes or professions? An emphatic No is the reply, for the simple reason that (a) all are born of God and (b) God dwells in all of us. If it can be asserted that one born in a low caste cannot attain God-realization, then it should also be proved that God does not dwell in him!

This eternal oneness already exists between God and every man; no one can cancel it. All that is needed now is to realize that relationship. The man is asleep in his own house. All that he has to do is to wake up, to realize that fact. You cannot say: Unless you become somebody else the house cannot be yours.

Do your own duty - whatever that work be. But adopt this wonderful life-transforming inner attitude: treat that work as worship of God. Who is that God? He who created all beings and who further pervades all of them. He and he alone exists. You are not serving anybody here, but God. Service of fellow-men, service of all creatures is worship of God. Realize this and be free - that freedom from ego and desire is perfection.

The second of the above two verses should be inscribed on the tablet of our heart. It is the heart of the Gita.

XVIII:47 - Better is one's own duty, though destitute of merits, than the duty of another well performed. He who does the duty, ordained by his own nature, incurs no sin.

The word svadharma in the text, translated into 'one's own duty', can be extended to cover everything that a man is expected to do - expected not only in the obligatory, but in a more natural sense, e.g., you expect a dog to bark at a stranger. That single word is difficult and delicate to translate; it is capable of triggering bitter controversy.

The tiger killing other animals incurs no sin. Perhaps the savage cannibal incurs no sin either, for he is still on the animal plane. A butcher carrying on his family trade incurs no sin. They can attain God-realisation by realising that all these activities pertain to their physical nature and that the self is the witness-consciousness.

It is 'desire born of rajo-guna, passion-quality' that holds man in bondage, not the performance of his duty whatever that may be. The detached performance of his duty will ensure, in the case of a butcher, that it will drop away in God's good time; but its willful abandonment by him in favor of a more esteemed occupation will only strengthen his ego and fulfill its desire for respectability.

The due performance of one's own duties, even mechanically, will gain for the man a natural promotion on the path of evolution, but a wise performance of the same duties, ascribing them to nature, whilst the seeker stands by as witness-consciousness, will secure self-realisation for him.

Where the expression of one's nature involves antisocial activity, society will curb it; and that again is lawful.

The verse also unequivocally affirms Krishna's firm view that proselytization is a spiritual crime. One who is converted, and one who converts, blasphemes against the omnipresence of God.

XVIII:48 - One should not abandon, O Arjuna, the duty to which one is born, though faulty; for, all undertakings are enveloped by fault, as fire by smoke.
XVIII:49 - One can obtain the results of renunciation simply by self-control, by becoming unattached to material things and disregarding material enjoyments. That's the highest perfectional stage of renunciation.

The previous injunction is reinforced. The goal of Gita yoga is detached dynamism, egoless activity. Dynamism and detachment, efficiency and egolessness are possible only if one applies oneself to one's innate talents and faculties, if one discovers oneself, instead of struggling to imitate someone else. Abandoning them and looking for something else decreases efficiency and feeds the ego.

With the exception of those who are born, for unknown reasons, into the wrong families, the vast majority of human beings find it easier to carry on the professions natural to them. It is in the blood, as we say. Hence, the carpenter's son has great chances of shining as a skilful carpenter. Barring exceptions, if he attempts to become a singer,

(i) his natural talents are suppressed and lost to the world,

(ii) he has to work against too many odds - upbringing, environment, etc., and so is constantly frustrated and worsted by those who are 'born to sing', and

(iii) the unnaturalness of the situation makes him vain over little successes and the least defeat hurts his vanity deeply.

Krishna tells us: All beginnings, all undertakings are enveloped by evil; why are you anxious to abandon what is natural to you and struggle to achieve the unnatural? Your goal is to make your life so easy and smooth-flowing that you can rise above the idea of 'I am the doer', so that you may rest in the supreme state of actionlessness. When you begin to do something strange and new, the desire that goads you, the effort that accompanies it, and the expectancy or fear of the consequences will conspire to keep you away from your own center, i.e., witness-consciousness.

The correct understanding of this makes life clear and enables you to live in total harmony and bliss.

XVIII:50 - Learn from me in brief, O Arjuna, how he who has attained perfection, reaches Brahman, the supreme state of knowledge.

XVIII:51 - Endowed with a pure intellect, controlling the self by firmness, relinquishing sound and other objects, and abandoning both hatred and attraction,

What does the one who wants to realize God abandon? Not any particular occupation or form of life. There is no purpose in jumping from frying pan to fire. When someone approached Ramana Maharsi for permission to take samnyas, the latter significantly remarked: So long you have identified yourself with a householder's life and status, and now you wish to identify yourself with a swami's life and status. What is the use? Remove all such identifications by self-realisation.

Indian history and legend contain countless illustrations of this vital truth: God-realisation does not depend upon learning or upon particular professions or accidents of birth, but solely upon self-discipline which is elaborated upon in the three verses 51 to 53.

One should have an extremely pure intellect - visuddha in the text does not mean merely pure, but exceptionally pure. Only that exceptionally pure intellect - the perfect mirror - will be able to reflect the true glory of the self.

The self must be controlled. We can effectively do that only by making the self obey the dictates of the divine within and not by acceding to the self's demands. It is the self that clamors for recognition; the will of the divine will naturally and inevitably assert itself. The latter requires no special effort or endeavor. The former involves self-aggrandizement, with love of those who promote it and hatred of those that thwart it - these are the factors to be abandoned.

How does one's birth or the expression of God-given innate talent hamper this self-discipline?

XVIII:52 - Dwelling in solitude, eating but little, with speech, body and mind subdued, always engaged in concentration and meditation, taking refuge in dispassion,

XVIII:53 - Having abandoned egoism, strength, arrogance, anger, desire, and covetousness, unselfish and peaceful, he is fit for becoming Brahman.

The three verses 51 to 53 may indicate what we should do after establishing ourselves in the perfection mentioned earlier! They may also be construed to indicate the symptomatology of perfection itself: perfection and 'becoming Brahman' being two sides of the same coin.

The practice of seeing God in all and serving and loving all as the manifestation of the supreme reality, which was described in previous verses, is an essential preliminary and auxiliary to what is taught in these verses. The seeker who shuns the world will only drive it into his subconscious and revive it in solitude. His world hatred may appear to be a qualification for retiring into seclusion. If he is sincere, however, he will soon discover that isolation is a function of thought, it is not a feat, and therefore he has no control over himself, and his speech, body and mind are not subdued but suppressed.

Again, to be always engaged in meditation demands the use of mighty intelligence.

Whereas this is easy for the man who has perfected himself by the method of worshipping God with every action, it is impossible for others. Any forced egoistic attempt towards this end will only dig the pit of tamas from which it is extremely difficult to rescue oneself!

Our Master insisted that the seeker should intelligently combine a number of spiritual practices to prevent this. In all cases, one should be honest with oneself, never yielding to hypocrisy and showiness. All this may take a lifetime, but then the reward is well worth the effort. If yoga is made extremely unpleasant, the mind will revolt; if it is made too pleasant, it will be caught. The middle path alone is good.

XVIII:54 - Becoming Brahman, serene in the Self, he neither grieves nor desires. The same to all beings, he attains supreme devotion to Me.
XVIII:55 - By devotion he knows Me in truth, what and who I am; knowing Me in truth, he enters into the Supreme.

The more one knows, the better one knows how little he knows. The fool is complacent; the sage is ever peaceful; but the sincere - sin-seer - seeker is acutely conscious of his own imperfection and so is dissatisfied. The closer to perfection he gets, the more magnified the defects appear. In a market-place even a major explosion is mild: in a sound-proof studio, the dropping of a pin sounds like thunder.

There is an ever-present danger in reading a textbook on yoga: one becomes intellectually conscious of a 'goal' on the authority of the author of the text. This often tempts one to imagine having reached the goal or to despair of ever getting there!

To us even the yoga prescribed in verse 46 looks like the ultimate goal! The one who has reached it discovers that the goal is further on. The perfected seeker (verse 46) acquires fitness for becoming Brahman (51 to 53). Becoming Brahman is still a state of becoming, not being! He sees his own self in all and he realizes that the same God dwells in all beings, but still there is a subtle and hence powerful sense of individuality. There is no selfishness or vanity; there is no grief or desire. The mind is serene and the heart is filled with supreme devotion to the Lord. 'Me' in the text is not a reference to the personalized Krishna, but to the impersonal omnipresence. Inferior devotion leads one to the threshold of this state of 'becoming Brahman that generates supreme devotion, enabling the seeker to know, to realize God by identity: I am Brahman. There is just a trace of the 'I' now and by God's grace, the seeker forthwith enters the supreme. That is the supreme fulfillment of human life, the goal of all evolutionary process.

Do not mistake this for idle reverie! For...

XVIII:56 - Doing all actions always, taking refuge in Me, by My Grace, he obtains the eternal, indestructible state or abode.

XVIII:57 - In all activities just depend on Me, and work always under My protection. In such devotional service, be fully conscious of Me.

Egoistic action and selfishness are incompatible with this yoga. But not activity in itself. Our Master emphasized he who would aspire to become one with God will be as busy as God himself! More active than the worldly man, he will, unlike the worldly man, be utterly unselfish.

He who takes refuge in God naturally shares God's nature - his compassion for all creatures - even as he who takes refuge in a motor car, railway train, ship or airplane moves as fast as these vehicles. One does not have to run within the railway compartment and even so, the spiritual aspirant does not exercise his egoism to do his duty. His body and mind move within the Lord and as the Lord wills that they should.

In such complete self-surrender he obtains the grace of the Lord. Once more Krishna reminds us that that the goal is not to be reached by individual self-effort but only by the grace of God. The ego has no admission there: and if the ego is surrendered, who enters? The aspirant's highest and only duty is again clearly stated in verse 57. The word 'renouncing' is a poor equivalent for the word 'samnyasya' in the text. How does one describe the action of flying in an airplane? You may say: I flew to South Africa; but what do feel inside you? When you realize your error, how do you express the truth? That is samnyasya. Meditate upon this with keen discrimination. I flew. No, the plane flew me. But I flew too. Silence! That is samnyasya.

The ego is absent in all yoga activity. But the ego has never been present, never been real. How did it appear to be, and who asserts that it is absence now? Again, silence.

XVIII:58 - Fixing your mind on Me, you shall by My Grace overcome all obstacles; but if from egoism you will not hear Me, you shall perish.

The word maccittah in the text is one of Krishna's favorites. The translation 'fixing thy mind on me' is rather weak. It is not like fixing a stamp on an envelope, but more like fixing a pot of water over a fire - the water is converted into vapor which shares with the fire its energy and heat. A closer similarity is coal thrown into fire: it becomes fire - it is fire now. However, no comparison is valid, because the duality thus presumed is not there in reality. When the devotee's mind is thus fixed on God, he no longer remains a man but becomes a divinity, sharing the Lord's power and glory.

But he must not test or measure that power or that glory. The yogi, being tempted to test his psychic power, loses contact with God.

Psychic powers, mental distractions and physical ailments are all regarded as obstacles on the spiritual path. If the seeker remains fixed in his devotion to God, calmly and patiently awaiting the descent of his grace, that grace itself will remove all the obstacles for the seeker and enable him to realize God. What form this grace takes, one cannot say. Our Master used to say that God removes the pleasure-centers of those whom he wants to bless. If wealth, wife and children are the obstacles, God will remove them. If psychic powers are the obstacles, his grace will take them away. Whatever stands in between God and the seeker, his grace will remove, if the seeker sincerely and perseveringly applies himself to yoga.

'Thou shalt perish' is only a dramatic juxtaposition of ideas. If you are truly devoted to the infinite and if you have discovered that whatever be your pursuit and whatever blessings you derive from your life, they all come from the one infinite being, then your heart is wedded to the infinite and you merge in the infinite. If you are devoted to egoism, you will waste this precious life.

XVIII:59 - Filled with egoism, you think, I will not fight; but your resolve is vain; nature will compel you.

XVIII:60 - O Arjuna, bound by your own karma, born of your own nature, that which from delusion you do not wish to do, that you shall do helplessly.

These verses may sound fatalistic and seem to sanction predestination - perhaps justifiably so. Man has striven day and night to conquer nature, yet he has not succeeded in making the sun rise in the west nor in making the apple fall upwards. At great trouble and expense, he pumps water up, but it quickly flows down. Death freezes all individual into a pleasant memory. Time bulldozes civilizations into non-existence, creating a pastime for archaeologists. Hunger and thirst, illness and death, heat and cold, and numerous other forms of suffering inherent in earthly life always have the last laugh.

Nature, whether cosmic or personal, cannot be cancelled. A nature law is inviolable, eternal; and all the realities of nature are constant. Thus, nature can only be understood. If such understanding creates the impression that we can defy nature, it is a delusion. Nature will continue her play. The ego standing in front of her and defying her will be crushed the ego pushing her from behind will frustrate itself. We can neither desire nor desist egotistically.

This nature includes what we call 'my' body and mind. All these function. It is natural. But where is the ego, the self? Who or what is it? Why does it wish to desire or desist? And, what does the egoistic man achieve?

Sin is neither in God nor in nature, but is hidden in the defiance and the desire. Knowing this, the wise one does not incur sin. Yet, repressed desires still remain within the ignorant man, indicating that he is only clinging to illusion and turning what seems to be valid knowledge into a tool of this illusion. Whatever one does in ignorance is sinful. Even egoistic virtue is only postponed vice. Egoism born of ignorance is the sinner - thank God it is only born of ignorance and hence not real.

XVIII:61 - The Lord dwells in the hearts of all beings, O Arjuna, and is directing the wanderings of all living entities, who are subject to the mechanics of time and material energy.

God and his inscrutable illusive power maya constitute the entire universe. God's real nature is veiled by this illusive power which cannot even be understood, because the understanding power in us is also a manifestation of maya. Our own intuition and the direct realisation of the great sages confirm the truth which has been beautifully expressed by Tulasides, the author of Ramayana in Hindi; thus: I realize that the whole universe is Sita-Rama; Sita representing maya and Rama representing the Lord.

Though Isvara and maya are two-in-one - symbolized in the beautiful picture of Siva and Parvati sharing the two halves of one body, they are the opposite poles. In the text, the word used for dwells is tisthati - stands firm. So, the Lord stands firm in all beings; but maya is dynamic and makes everyone revolve. Thus, when we are at peace within ourselves, we may understand that we are in the light of the Lord: and when the mind is restless, it is caught in maya.

We can learn a wonderful lesson by watching a merry-go-round. The children farthest from the center whirl wildly. Those midway move more slowly, and the one at the center is at peace. You have the free-will to choose where you wish to be.

God dwells in the hearts of all beings; these beings are part of nature. The infinite reflections of God in his own nature are misunderstood as there is naught else which you may hold up as ego!

Another great lesson is alluded to here. Anything that leads us to our center is the grace of God. Anything that tempts us away from there is the work of maya. Thus, pleasure, prosperity and success make us extrovert: they are the tempting baits of maya. Pain, adversity and failure bring us back to ourselves. Obviously they are the signs of the grace of God!

XVIII:62 - Fly to Him for refuge with all your being, O Arjuna. By His Grace you shall obtain supreme peace and the eternal abode.

Saranam in the text means asylum, refuge. Until we take refuge or seek asylum in the center of our being, we shall be whirled helplessly on the wheel or the merry-go-round of birth and death. We can take birth again and again, experiencing newer joys and suffering up-to-date agonies, but we shall remain where we were ages ago, bound to individuality and the fleshy tabernacle.

The centre, referred to as the heart in the previous verse is equated to God in this verse. The heart of all beings neither confines God to a limited space - though the physical heart has been used as the focal point for meditation by all devotees, nor cancels his omnipresence. It is the heart of each cell in living beings, of each atom of existence. Science indirectly admits of the existence of a mighty intelligence within the nucleus of an atom - which it calls 'nuclear power', where, contrary to all known laws of electromagnetism, several protons live in unity - yet having positive charge which should normally compel them to repel one another, and which at the same time keep the electrons vibrating around the nucleus. That intelligence is God or God's. In him all disharmonies are harmonized all opposites are integrated. By taking refuge in him man shall be able to transcend the puzzling and tormenting pulls of the extremes; in him alone can one find lasting and unalloyed peace.

Sarvabhavena in the text has been translated with all thy being. It can also mean: Convert all your emotions into devotion and direct that to God. Love him as your master, your friend, your parent and your lover: seek him in all these attitudes. At every turn it is good to remind ourselves that all this is not ego-activity, but its dissolution in the light of knowledge, in the light of love.

With the descent of this light of knowledge into your heart, a perception of the truth arises which transforms the world into the love of God without touching it. And this perception transforms your life, too, without changing it, so that established thus in God's supreme love, you will know no sorrow nor will you ever be subject to sin.

XVIII:63 - Thus has wisdom more secret than secrecy itself been declared to you by me. Having reflected over it fully, then act, as you wish.

XVIII:64 - Hear again My supreme word, most secret of all. You are dearly beloved of Me and steady, I will tell you what is for your benefit.

In verse 63 above, we are given a hint of the divine Law. Having bestowed intelligence and free-will upon man and having revealed the greatest of all secrets to him, the Lord does not make a mockery of that gift by depriving man of its use! 'Reflect over what I have said fully and then act as thou wishest.'

This exercise of the individuality and its concomitant free-will is the fundamental principle in the law of karma. God created Adam and warned him specifically not to taste the forbidden fruit: yet, the serpent - also God's creation - was able to lead him astray! Why did the first man choose to subject himself to evil? asks the wiseacre. Why do you make a wrong choice? It is impossible for the limited human understanding to unravel this mystery.

The problem of right or wrong action is guided by the act of vigilant observation. What is needed is insight. There is absolutely no guidance except the kindling of this inner light - the awakening of the insight. If this is there, it is able to take care of life's problems as they arise. The problem is not what you should do or if you should do something, but to remain aware of the source of the impulse to act. In the light of the insight, that source is revealed, and then the necessary changes in one's personality are brought about in order that one's actions are proper.

As lord Buddha said, instead of worrying our poor little head with these transcendental questions, we should listen to God's supreme word, the greatest secret, in the full knowledge and faith that God loves us dearly and that he has revealed this knowledge to us because it is good for us. Listening is our foremost duty! This listening implies neither acceptance nor rejection, but a tuning in. When we thus tune in to the song of God, the truth unveils itself.

XVIII:65 - Fix your mind on Me, be devoted to Me, sacrifice to Me, bow down to Me, then you shall come to Me. I promise you, you are dear to Me.

Krishna sums up the yoga of the Bhagavad Gita in this single verse. It is integral yoga. It is the yoga of synthesis. It carries out a concerted attack against the worst human enemy - ignorance, and its offspring - the individualization of consciousness. As our Master often warned us, one-sided development is no development at all. It is like trying to empty the ocean with a bucket. The ego will withdraw itself from the point of attack and build itself up elsewhere, only to return and reassert itself when the seeker is non-vigilant. The meditator, the devotee of God, the selfless worker - can all fall into the great error of developing atrocious spiritual vanity. The exclusive meditator might shun the world' and even devotional practices as well as service; the devotee might look down upon the non-devotee; the selfless worker might feel that he is the saviour of mankind - these attitudes are more dangerous than plain wickedness. They were quartered in the human personality by the urge to specialize by an eagerness to shine above all others. Hence Krishna adds here: Practice all these - meditation, devotion, selfless service - and at the same time bow down to me, the omnipresent. True humility is born of the realisation of God's omnipresence and the unreality of the ego.

When the head, the heart and the hand are all offered to God when the thought, will and emotion are all sublimated into holiness, there is less chance of vanity creeping in. But complacency here is dangerous. While practicing all these, observe the arising of an evil or distracting thought or a temptation. That is the 'me'. Push it out. Bow down to all feeling the presence of God, so that you will not even mistakenly feel you are superior to anyone. Then you will become pure, self-controlled and therefore divine.

XVIII:66 - Abandoning all duties, take refuge in Me alone. I will free you from all sins; so do not grieve.

Dharma here can be interpreted variously. Let us look at it in two ways:

(1) Narrow, sectarian and organized religion is often confused with dharma. To an extent it is true that organized religion supports the masses thus shielding them from degradation: it unites and keeps them together. But when foolishly clung to, it strangulates the very people whom it kept together. Abandonment of all dharma, however, does not mean that we should egoistically and deludedly give them up, but we should not cling to them as if they were an end in themselves, as if they were the truth. The various religions were created by man, not by God; they were born after God and man. They can help man find God but should never be substituted for God.

(2) The inherent nature of the body, mind, etc., is often designated as their dharma. Its abandonment implies a vigilant non-identification of the divine with the functions of the body, mind, etc.

This renunciation, however, is not possible unless we are rooted in God and we take refuge in him. Taking refuge in him itself is freedom from all sin and sorrow. In him there is no darkness.

God is bliss. Bliss is not something he possesses and which he therefore gives us in answer to our prayer. Even the happiness we derive from prayer is merely the fruit of contact with him. We should surrender ourselves to him, to bliss. As long as our ego separates us from him, so long shall we continue to be unhappy. All the gross and the subtle manifestations of this ego - selfishness, love of the individualized existence, private desires, one's own philosophy, sectarianism, bigotry, a superiority complex, an air of holiness - should be vigilantly avoided, so that nothing stands between us and Him. Then this very world becomes the playground of the spirit, and everything connected with it - whether it was previously called pleasure, pain, happiness or sorrow, is instantly transformed into bliss - the play of God.

XVIII:67 - This is never to be spoken by you to one who is devoid of austerities, to one who is not devoted, to one who does not render service, who does not want to listen, nor to one who cavils at Me.

XVIII:68 - He who teaches this supreme secret to my devotees, shall without doubt come to Me.

XVIII:69 - There is no servant in this world more dear to me than he, nor will there ever be one more dear.

Krishna obviously knew that his instructions to Arjuna would live for ever as the spiritual guiding light for humanity. In the present day context, when the printing machine, public address system radio, television and tape recorder have to some extent replaced personal tuition, the admonition of verse 67 above, seems to be out of place. Yet one cannot fail to notice that they who fall within the qualifications of this verse do not care to visit assemblies where the Gita is taught; and the teaching is so sublime that even if they went but once, out of curiosity, they would not go for more, unless, by God's grace, there came a change within them.

The message of the Bhagavad Gita will not produce a lasting impression upon the mind of one who has no devotion, who is given to sense-indulgence, who is selfish or atheistic. Hence, if one with these qualifications comes to discuss the Gita with you, keep quiet! In a public meeting, your words are received eagerly by the devout. In private conversation, give the knowledge only to those who are faithful, eager to learn, unselfish and full of devotion to God.

Spreading the knowledge of the Gita itself can build an inner fortress of divinity into which we can retire when assailed by temptations; and an outer fortress, too, in as much as worldly-minded people will not bother us and we shall have excellent company of the devout all the time.

Even they who at first think we are mad, will, in God's good time, get the infection and be happy that they are mad, too - mad for God.

XVIII:70 - And he who will study this sacred dialogue of ours, by him I shall have been worshipped by the sacrifice of wisdom; such is My conviction.

XVIII:71 - And one who listens with faith, and without envy, gets free from sinful reactions, and attains to the planets where the pious dwell.

And he who will study this sacred dialogue of ours, by him I shall have been worshipped by the sacrifice of wisdom - worship) - such is my conviction. The man also who hears this, full of faith and free from malice, he, too, liberated, shall attain to the happy worlds of those of righteous deeds. Jnana yajna - sacrifice through wisdom - is a form of worship. It is worshipping God as the light of knowledge. The Gita is God's word, uttered by his lips. In days of yore, fire was produced by rubbing two pieces of wood together. The divine fire of the Gita has been produced by the rubbing together of the two lips of the Lord. It is of the Lord, it is he himself. A lamp lit from another is a lamp, too.

Jnana yajna is dissemination of spiritual knowledge, which was dear to our Master, too. You study the Gita with others. You are benefited and so are they. Krishna uses the symbolism that was familiar to Arjuna - yajna, in which a priest, surrounded by devotees, offered clarified butter into the sacred fire. In jnana yajna the article offered is wisdom. The priest does not create clarified butter: the lecturer does not create wisdom. If the fire is dull, the clarified butter will augment it: but if it is dead it is wasted. The audience is the fire here. If it is eager, though not wise, the discourse will augment the wisdom in the members. But if the audience is totally disinterested then the wisdom falls on deaf ears - it is wasted.

Hearing is the first part of jnana yoga - the yoga of wisdom, if the heart of the hearer is pure, the wisdom blossoms in it quickly and the seeker is liberated from this world of pain and death. The hearer is not asked to accept everything blindly, but to listen, to reflect over it and to meditate on it, so that the knowledge becomes one with him.

XVIII:72 - Has this been heard with one-pointed mind, O Arjuna? Has the delusion of your ignorance been fully routed out?

XVIII:73 - Arjuna said : Dear Kriskna, routed out is my illusion. I have gained my memory through Your grace. I am firm. My doubts are gone, and I will act according to Your word.

If one-pointedness of mind is not gained, we shall not understand or profit by even the word of God. There are many in this world that ask but will not hear! There are others who sit in front of the master, but only physically their mind is elsewhere. They merely nod their heads at the truths, but the heart is untouched and the gut-level, where the action is, is completely untouched. There are still others whom, while listening, mentally carry on an argument, accepting some ideas and rejecting others. This multi-activity only tires them, preventing them from grasping the real meaning of the lesson imparted. They might hear the words, but unless they are supermen, they will miss their depth and complain that the explanations are not satisfactory.

Whilst we do not advocate slavish blind acceptance of any teaching, we do assert that it is better and less strenuous to do the hearing first, receive - not necessarily accept - the ideas and reserve judgment. Once rapport has been established by the teacher and the taught, it is more profitable to self-hypnotize ourselves, in order that our finite little egoistic intellect may not interrupt the free flow of supreme wisdom from the lips of the master to our heart. Only then will we be able to declare with Arjuna that my delusion has been destroyed and I have regained the knowledge which was there always - the knowledge that the body is not the self. The mark of enlightenment is given as doubtlessness - a heart in which there is no doubt at all, and I am firm reminds us of the state of the sage of firm wisdom mentioned at the end of the second chapter.

Where does this lead to? We do God's will, joyously participating in the dynamism of nature, egolessly.

XVIII:74 - Sanjaya said : Thus have I heard this wonderful dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna, which causes the hair to stand on end.

XVIII:75 - Through the grace of Vyasa I have heard this supreme and most secret Yoga, declared by Krishna Himself.

XVIII:76 - O King, remembering this wonderful and holy dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna, I am thrilled with joy all over.

XVIII:77 - And remembering again and again that most wonderful form of Hari, great is my wonder, O King. And I rejoice again and again.

How could Sanjaya hear this dialogue direct from God? How could Sanjaya see the divine cosmic form when he was seated in the palace and was not on the battlefield? These questions would have been valid in the last century, not in this. Radio and television have enabled us, even in this totally materialistic age, to hear someone's voice over thousands of miles and to see someone as if in person. Even if we are reluctant to accept the validity of psychic phenomena and the possibility of a psychic communion between Sanjaya and Krishna - initiated by sage Vyasa himself, what prevents us from accepting the possible existence of radio and television in that remote time? One may ask why these things did not exist in India a hundred years ago. But consider this: should a nuclear war destroy modern civilization, the generation that will live in this world a couple hundred years hence might ask the same question and doubt the richness of the present civilization. If we cultivate the necessary faith and the necessary power of inner communion, we can still experience the thrill that was Sanjaya's privilege. Throw away the books and commentaries; dive within your self and listen to the Gita direct from God's lips. To foster that spirit within you is the only purpose of any commentary.

XVIII:78 - Wherever Krishna, Lord of yoga is, wherever Arjuna the archer is, are prosperity, happiness, victory, firm policy, and righteousness. That is my conviction.

This simple verse has attained the high status of being regarded as Gita in one verse, yet on the face of it, it does not seem to contain the least portion of the Gita's message! Moreover, the condition prerequisite is frighteningly impossible. Krishna and Arjuna lived thousands of years ago. May be, what Sanjaya said applied then - how does it help us now?

The answer is: look within. Let your whole soul become Arjuna, the seeker. Mentally repeat the famous verse in the second chapter: Lord. I seek refuge at thy feet. I am thy disciple. Instruct me. But you should also be an archer-Arjuna! The Kathopanisad compares the self with the arrow, in relation to Brahman the absolute - the target. Om is the bow. String the bow by the utterance of Om. Fix the self to it, firmly. With intense concentration of mind, let the arrow - the self - fly towards that supreme being who is the self of your self. Then you are the true archer-Arjuna.

When you seek God thus, you shall discover him within the innermost chambers of your being. He who is dark to the worldly man's eyes will shine as the light of lights for you, as if a thousand suns arose simultaneously. There within you, you will 'see' both Krishna and Arjuna, once again, as they have always been - together, as one. This is self-realisation: this is the goal of all human life: this is the truth that all the scriptures point out.

In self-realisation alone is there true prosperity and victory, for so-called worldly prosperity is adversity only, leading you away from the goal. In self-realisation alone is there ever-lasting happiness all else is only non-happiness. In self-realisation alone is there firm justice: only the sage of self-realisation is established in truth. May you reach this goal in this very birth, nay here and now, as our Master used to say.

Om Tat Sat

GĪTĀ MĀHĀTMYA **THE GLORY OF THE GĪTĀ**

(To be read at the end of the day's Gītā study)

śrī ganeśāya namaḥ! śrī gopāla kṛṣṇāya namaḥ!

dharo 'vāca:
bhagavan parameśāna bhaktir avyabhicāriṇī
prārabdhaṁ bhujyamānasya kathaṁ bhavati he prabho

1. The Earth said: O Lord! The Supreme One! How can unflinching devotion arise in him who is immersed in his worldly life, O Lord?

śrī viṣṇur uvāca:
prārabdhaṁ bhujyamāno hi gītā 'bhyāsa rataḥ sadā
sa muktaḥ sa sukhī loke karmaṇā no 'palipyate.

2. Lord Viṣṇu said: Though engaged in the performance of worldly duties, one who is regular in the study of the Gītā, becomes free. He is the happy man in this world. He is not bound by karma.

mahā pāpādi pāpāni gītā dhyānaṁ karoti cet
kvacit sparśaṁ na kurvanti nalinī dalam ambuvat

3. Just as the water stains not the lotus leaf, even so, sins do not taint him who is regular in the recitation of the Gītā.

gītāyāḥ pustakaṁ yatra yatra pāṭhaḥ pravartate
tatra sarvāṇi tīrthāni prayāgā 'dīni tatra vai

4. All the sacred centres of pilgrimage like Prayāga, etc., dwell in that place where the book, the Gītā, is kept and where the Gītā is read.

sarve devās ca ṛṣayo yogīnaḥ pannagās ca ye
gopālā gopikā vā 'pi nārado 'ddhava pārṣadaiḥ

5. All the gods, sages, yogī, divine serpents, gopālā, gopikā (friends and devotees of lord Kṛṣṇa), Nārada, Uddhava and others (dwell there).

sahāyo jāyate śīghraṁ yatra gītā pravartate
yatra gītā vicāras ca paṭhanaṁ pāṭhanaṁ śrutaṁ
tatrā 'haṁ niścitaṁ pṛthvi nivasāmi sadai 'va hi

6. Help comes quickly where the Gītā is recited and, O Earth, I dwell at all times where the Gītā is read, heard, taught and contemplated upon.

gītā 'śraye 'haṁ tiṣṭhāmi gītā me co 'ttamaṁ gṛhaṁ
gītā jñānam upāśritya trīmllokān pālayāmy ahaṁ

7. I take refuge in the Gītā and the Gītā is my best abode. I protect the three worlds with the knowledge of the Gītā.

*gītā me paramā vidyā brahma rūpā na saṁśayaḥ
ardha mātrā 'kṣarā nityā svā 'nirvācyā padātmikā*

8. The Gītā is my highest science, which is doubtless of the form of Brahman, the eternal, the ardhāmātrā (of the sacred monosyllable Om), the ineffable splendour of the self.

*cidānandena kṛṣṇena proktā sva mukhato 'rjunam
veda trayī parānandā tatvā 'rtha jñāna saṁyutā*

9. It was spoken by the blessed Kṛṣṇa, the all-knowing, through his own mouth to Arjuna. It contains the essence of the three vedā, the knowledge of the reality. It is full of supreme bliss.

*yo 'ṣṭādaśa japeṇ nityam nara niścala mānasaḥ
jñāna siddhim sa labhate tato yāti param padam*

10. He who recites the eighteen chapters of the Gītā daily, with a pure, unshaken mind, attains perfection in knowledge, and reaches the highest state or supreme goal.

*pāthe 'samarthaḥ saṁpūrṇe tato 'rdham pāṭham ācaret
tadā go dānam puṇyam labhate nā 'tra saṁśayaḥ*

11. If a complete reading is not possible, even if only half is read, he attains the benefit of giving a cow as a gift. There is no doubt about this.

*tribhāgam paṭhamānas tu gaṅgā snāna phalam labhet
ṣaḍamśam japamānas tu soma yāga phalam labhet*

12. He who recites one-third part of it achieves the merit of a bath in the sacred river Gaṅgā, and he who recites one-sixth of it attains the merit of performing a soma-ritual.

*ekā 'dhyāyam tu yo nityam paṭhate bhakti saṁyutaḥ
rudra lokam avāpnoti gaṇo bhūtvā vases ciram*

13. That person who reads one chapter with great devotion attains to the world of Rudra and, having become an attendant of lord Śiva, lives there for many years.

*adhyāyam śloka pādam vā nityam yaḥ paṭhate naraḥ
sa yāti naratām yāvan manvantaram vasundhare*

14. If one reads a quarter of a chapter or even part of a verse daily, he, O Earth, retains a human body till the end of a world-cycle.

*gītāyāḥ śloka daśakam sapta pañca catuṣṭayam
dvau trīn ekam tad ardham vā ślokānām yaḥ paṭhen naraḥ
candra lokam avāpnoti varṣāṇām ayutam dhruvam
gītā pāṭha samāyukto mṛto mānuṣatām vrajet*

15, 16. He who repeats ten, seven, five, four, three, two verses or even one or half a verse, attains the region of the moon and lives there for 10,000 years. Accustomed to the daily study of the Gītā, the dying man comes back to life again as a human being.

gītā 'bhyāsam punaḥ kṛtvā labhate muktim uttamām
gīte 'ty uccāra samyukto mriyamāṇo gatim labhet.

17. By repeated study of the Gītā he attains liberation. Uttering 'Gītā' at the time of death, one attains liberation.

gītā 'rtha śravaṇā 'sakto mahā pāpa yuto 'pi vā
vaikuṅṭham samavāpnoti viṣṇunā saha modate

18. Though full of sins, one who is ever intent on hearing the meaning of the Gītā, goes to the kingdom of God and rejoices with lord Viṣṇu.

gītā 'rtham dhyāyate nityam kṛtvā karmāṇi bhūriśaḥ
jīvanmuktaḥ sa vijñeyo dehā 'nte paramam padam

19. He who meditates on the meaning of the Gītā, having performed a lot of good actions, attains the supreme goal after death. Such a man should be known as a

jivānmukta (sage liberated while living).
gītām āśritya bahavo bhūbhujo janakā dayaḥ
nirdhūta kalmaṣā loka gītā yātāḥ param padam

20. In this world, taking refuge in the Gītā, many kings like Janaka and others reached the highest state or goal, purified of all sins.

gītāyāḥ paṭhanam kṛtvā mähātmnyam naiva yaḥ paṭhet
vr̥thā pāṭho bhavet tasya śrama eva hy udāhṛtaḥ

21. He who fails to read this Glory of the Gītā after having read the Gītā, loses the benefit thereby, and the effort alone remains.

etan mähātmnyam samyuktaṁ gītā 'bhyāsam karoti yaḥ
sa tat phalam avāpnoti durlabhām gatim āpnuyāt

22. One who studies the Gītā, together with this **Glory of the Gītā**, attains the fruits mentioned above and reaches the state which is otherwise very difficult to attain.
sūta uvāca:

mähātmnyam etad gītāyā māyā proktaṁ sanātanam
gītānte ca paṭhed yas tu yad uktaṁ tat phalam labhet.

23. Sūta said: This greatness or **Glory of the Gītā**, which is eternal, as narrated by me, should be read at the end of the study of the Gītā, and the fruits mentioned therein will be obtained.

iti śrī varāha purāṇe śrī gītā mähātrnyam etad sampūrṇam.
Thus ends the **Glory of the Gītā** contained in the Varāha purāṇa.