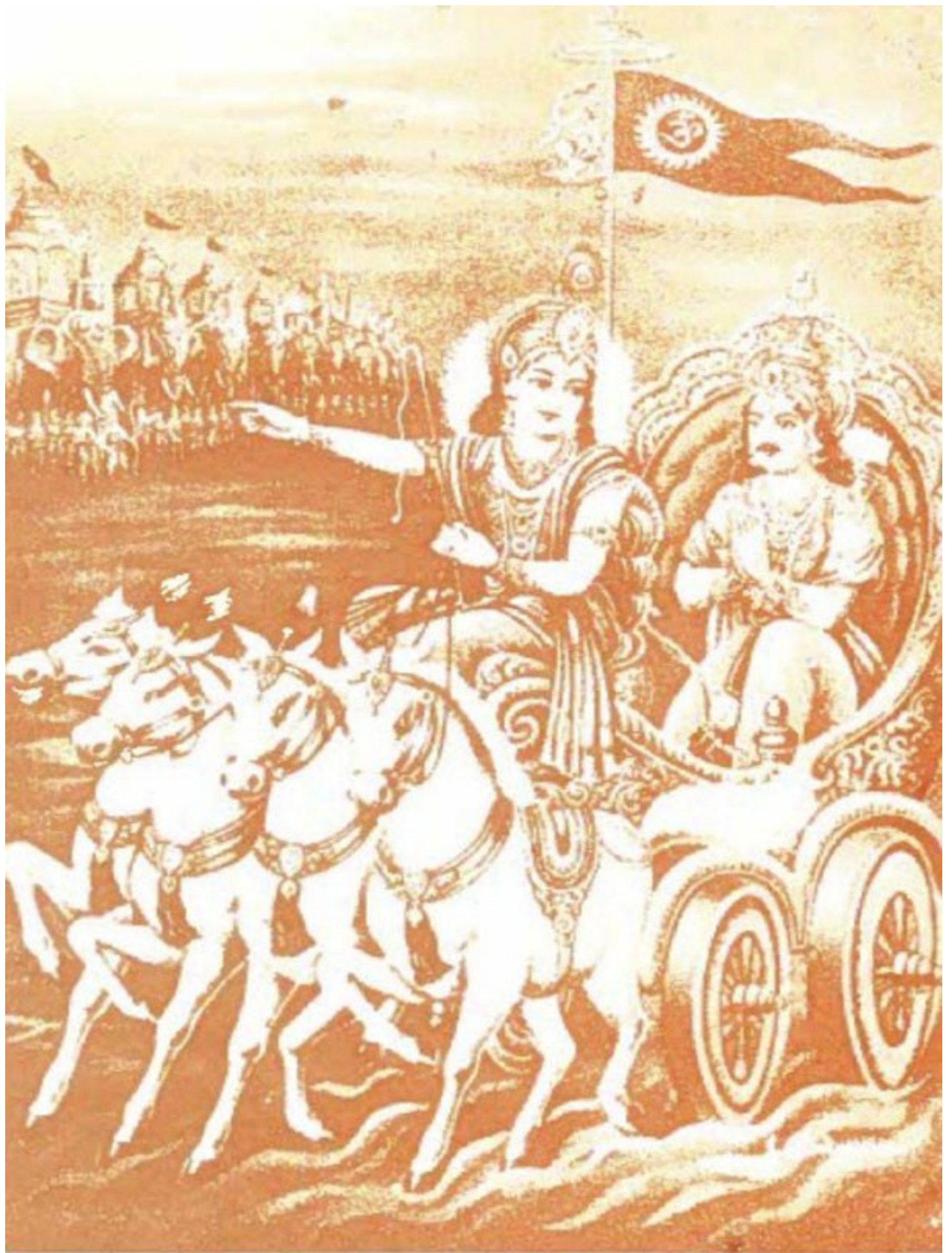
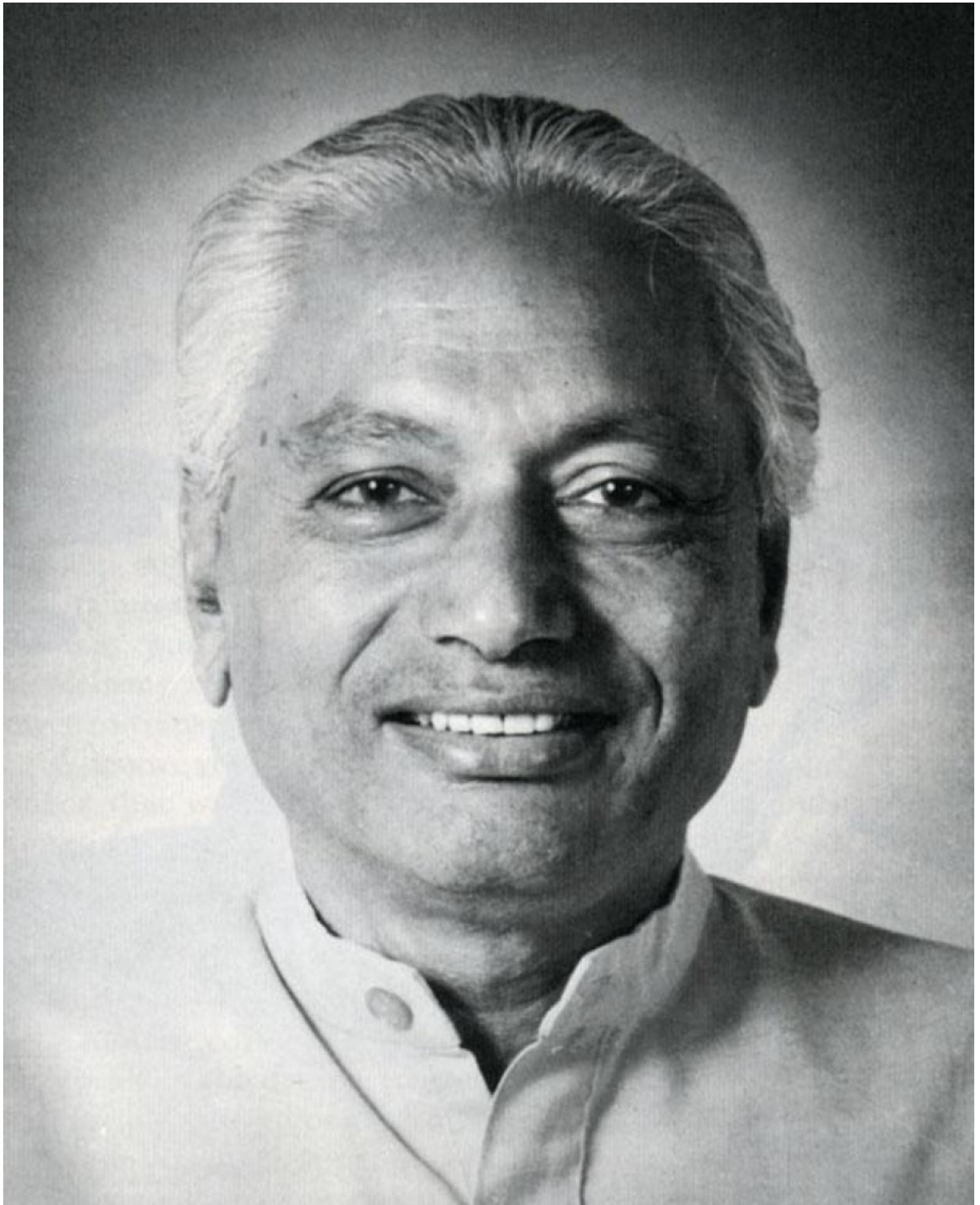


THE SONG OF GOD

(Bhagavad Gita)







The Song of God

Swami Venkatesananda

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Worshipful offering at the Feet of Gurudev Swami Sivananda

It has always bordered to 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 proces, 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 this light shine forever in our hearts.

Swami Venkatesananda

Preface

The Bhagavad Gita - Song of God - has captured the imagination of thinking men and women all over the world. It has been translated into many languages and has among its devotees people belonging to many religions and nationalities.

The uniqueness of the gospel of the Bhagavad Gita lies in the fact that its follower need not belong to a particular formal religion or sect. "Each man devoted to his own duty attains perfection", declared the Prophet of Cosmic Vision, Sri Krishna, who continues to explain succinctly how this perfection is attained. "He from whom all beings have evolved and by whom all this is pervaded - worshipping Him with due performance of his own duty, man attains perfection."

Here, then, is an unique gospel which does not tamper with your station in life, distract you from your duties, disturb your faith, nor lure you away from the path you have chosen, but illumines your path and strengthens your faith. Its proclaimed object is to free you from worry and anxiety, to protect you from yourself - your own lower self, full of unruly desires and unjustified prejudices, deluded by ageless ignorance and therefore haunted by meaningless fears of imaginary calamities.

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

Here is the story of the Mahabharata in brief. Two brothers, Dhritarashtra who was born blind, and Pandu who was born anemic, had a hundred wicked sons and five pious respectively. The wicked sons of the former were keen to 'take over' their cousins' share of the kingdom, and tried by all means, fair and foul, to achieve their ambition. God's Grace, however, rescued the sons of Pandu from peril to 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.

Sri Krishna, who was a friend of the pious five, made a last minute attempts to avert the armed conflict, which however became inevitable. The impartial Lord Krishna offered to help both the parties; they could choose between Himself and His vast army. The wicked hundred chose the army, and the pious five were happy that they could have Him on their side. Sri Krishna served as the charioteer of one of the pious five, Arjuna.

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

Now read on ...

Prayer at Begin - GITA DHYANAM

Om parthaya pratibodhitam bhagavata narayanena svayam vyasena grathitam purana munina madhye mahabharatam advaita 'mrta varsinim bhagavatim astadasa 'dhyayinim amba tvam anusamdadhmi bhagavad gite bhava dvesinim

1. Om. O Bhagavad Gita, with which Partha (Arjuna) was illumined by lord Narayana himself and which was composed within the Mahabharata by the ancient sage Vyasa, O divine mother, the destroyer of rebirth, the showerer of the nectar of advaita (oneness) and consisting of eighteen chapters - upon thee, O Bhagavad Gita, O affectionate mother, I meditate.

namo 'stu to vyasa visala buddhe phulla 'ravinda 'yata patra netra yena tvaya bhārata taila purnah prajvalito jnanamayah pradipah

2. Salutations unto thee, O Vyasa of broad intellect, and with eyes like the petals of full-blown lotuses, by whom the lamp of knowledge, filled with the oil of the Mahabharata has been lighted.

prapanna parijataya totravetra 'ka panaye jnana mudraya krsnaya gita 'mrta duhe namah

3. Salutations to Krsna, the parijata 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 nectar of the Bhagavad Gita.

sarvo 'panisado gavo dogdha gopala nandanah partho vatsah sudhir bhokta dugdham gita 'mrtam mahat

4. All the upanisad are the cows, the milker is Krsna the cowherd boy, Arjuna is the calf, men of purified intellect are the drinkers, the milk is the great nectar of the Gita.

vasudeva sutam devam kamsa canura mardanam devaki parama 'nandam krsnam vande jagad gurum

5. I salute lord Krsna, the world teacher, the son of Vasudeva, the destroyer of Kamsa and Canura, the supreme bliss of Devaki.

bhisma drona tata jayadratha jala gandhara nilotpala salya grahavati krpena vahani karnena velakula asvatthama vikarna ghora makara duryodhana 'vartini so 'ttirna khalu pandavai rana nadi kaivartakah kesavah

6. With Krsna as the helmsman, verily, was crossed by the Pandava the battle-river whose banks were Bhisma and Drona, whose water was Jayadratha, whose blue lotus was the king of Gandhara, whose crocodile was Salya, whose current was Krpa, whose billow was Karna, whose terrible alligators were Asvatthama and Vikarna, whose whirlpool was Duryodhana.

parasarya vacah sarojam amalam gitartha gandhotkatam nanakhya 'nakakesaram hari katha sambodhana 'bodhitam loke sajjana satpadair ahah ahah pepiyamanam muda bhuyad bhārata pankajam kali mala pradhvamsi nah sreyase

7. May this lotus of the Mahabharata, born in the lake of the words of Vyasa, sweet with the fragrance of the meaning of the Gita, 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.

mukam karoti vacalam pangum langhayate girim yat krpa tam aham vande parama 'nanda madhavam

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

yam brahma varune 'ndra rudra marutah stuvanti divyaih stavair vedaih sanga pada kramo 'panisadair gayanti yam samagah dhyana 'vasthita tad gatena manasa pasyanti yam yogino yasya 'ntam na viduh sura 'sura gana devaya tasmai namah

9. Salutations to that God whom Brahma, Varuna, Indra, Rudra and the Marut praise with divine hymns, of whom the Sama-chanters sing by the veda and their anga, in the pada and krama methods, and by the upanisad, whom the yogi see with their minds absorbed in him through meditation, and whose end the hosts of the deva and asura know not.

Om Namah Bhagavate Vasudevaya

Om Namah Sivanandaya

Om Namah Venkatesaya

Om Namah Shivaya

Om Tat Sat

Prayer at End - GITA MAHATMYA

gri ganesaya namah! sri gopala krsnaya namah! dhara 'vaca bhagavan paramesana bhaktir
avyabharini prarabdham bhujyamanasya katham 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?

sri visnur uvaca prarabdham bhujyamano hi gita 'bhyasa ratah sada sa mukta sa sukhi loke
karmana no 'palipyate

2. Lord Visnu said: Though engaged in the performance of worldly duties, one who is regular in the study of the Gita, becomes free. He is the happy man in this world. He is not bound by karma.

maha papadi papani gita dhyanam karoti cet kvacit sparsam na kurvanti nalini 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 Gita.

gitayah pustakam yatra yatra pathah pravartate tatra sarvani tirthani prayaga 'dini tatra vai

4. All the sacred places of pilgrimage like Prayaga, etc., dwell in that place where the book, the Gita, is kept and where the Gita is read.

sarve devas ca rsayo yoginah pannagas ca ye gopala gopika va 'pi narado 'ddhava parsadaih

5. All the gods, sages, yogi, divine serpents, gopala, gopika (friends and devotees of lord Krsna), Narada, Uddhava and others (dwell there).

sahayo jayate sikhram yatra gita pravartate yatra gita vicaras ca pathanam pathanat srutam
tatra 'ham niscitam prthvi nivasami sadai 'va hi

6. Help comes quickly where the Gita is recited and, O Earth, I dwell at all times where the Gita is read, heard, taught and contemplated upon.

gita 'sraye 'ham tisthami gita me co 'ttamam grham gita jnanam upasritya trimllokan palayamy
aham

7. I take refuge in the Gita and the Gita is my best abode. I protect the three worlds with the knowledge of the Gita.

gita me parama vidya brahma rupa na samsayah ardha matra 'ksara nitya sva 'nirvacya
padatmika

8. The Gita is my highest science, which is doubtless of the form of Brahman, the eternal, the ardhamatra (of the sacred monosyllable om), the ineffable splendour of the self.

cidanandena krsnena prokta sva mukhato 'rjunam veda tray! parananda tattva 'rtha jnana
samyuta

9. It was spoken by the blessed Krsna, the all-knowing, through his own mouth to Arjuna. It contains the essence of the three veda, knowledge of the reality. It is full of supreme bliss.

yo 'stadasa japen nityam nara niscala manasah jnana siddhim sa labhate tato yati param padam

10. He who recites the eighteen chapters of the Gita daily, with a pure, unshaken mind, attains perfection in knowledge, and reaches the highest state or supreme goal.

pathe 'samarthah sampurne tato 'rdham patham acaret tada go danajam punyam labhate na
'tra samsayah

11. If a complete reading is not possible, even if only half of it is read, he attains the benefit of giving a cow as a gift. There is no doubt about this.

tribhagam pathamanas to ganga snana phalam labhet sadamsam japamanas to soma yaga
phalam labhet

12. He who recites one-third part of it achieves the merit of a bath in the sacred Ganga, and he who recites one-sixth of it attains the merit of performing a soma ritual.

eka 'dhyayam to yo nityam pathate bhakti samyutah rudra lokam avapnoti gano bhutva vasesc
ciram

13. That person who reads one chapter with great devotion attains to the world of Rudra and, having become an attendant of lord Siva, lives there for many years.

adhyayam sloka padam va nityam yah pathate narah sa yati naratam yavan 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.

gitayah sloka dasakam sapta panca catustayam dvau trin ekaih tad ardhm va slokanam yah
pathen narah candra lokam avapnotii varsanam ayutam dhruvam gita patha samayukto
mrtomanusatam 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 ten thousand years. Accustomed to the daily study of the Gita, the dying man comes back to life again as a human being.

gita 'bhyasam punah krtva labhate muktim uttamam gite 'ty uccara samyukto mriyamano
gatim labhet

17. By repeated study of the Gita he attains liberation. Uttering 'Gita' at the time of death, one attains liberation.

gita 'rtha sravana 'sakto maha papa yuto 'pi va vaikuntham samavapnoti visnuna saha modate

18. Though full of sins, one who is ever intent on hearing the meaning of the Gita, goes to the kingdom of God and rejoices with lord Visnu.

gita 'rtham dhyayate nityam krtva karmani bhurisah jivanmuktah sa vijneyo deha 'nte paramam
padam

19. He who meditates on the meaning of the Gita, having performed a lot of good actions, attains the supreme goal after death. Such a man should be known as a jivanmukta (sage liberated while living).

gitam asritya bahavo bhuhhujo janaka 'dayah nirdhuta kalmasa loke gita yatah paratn padam

20. In this world, taking refuge in the Gita, many kings like Janaka and others have reached the highest state or goal, purified of all sins.

gitayah pathanam krtva mahatmyam naiva yah pathet vrtha patho bhavet tasya srama eva by
udahrtah

21. He who fails to read this Glory of the Gita after having read the Gita, loses the benefit thereby, and the effort alone remains.

etan mahatmya sahyuktam gita 'bhyasam karoti yah sa tat phalam avapnoti durlabharn gatim apnuyat

22. One who studies the Gita, together with this Glory of the Gita, attains the fruits mentioned above and reaches the state which is otherwise very difficult to attain.

suta uvaca mahatmyam etad gitaya maya proktam sanatanaatn gitante ca pathed yas to yad uktam tat phalarnlabhet

23. Suta said: This greatness or Glory of the Gita which is eternal, as narrated by me, should be read at the end of the study of the Gita and the fruits mentioned therein will be obtained.

iti sri varaha purane gri gita mahatmyam sampurnam

Thus ends the Glory of the Gita contained in the Varaha purana.

Om Namah Bhagavate Vasudevaya

Om Namah Sivanandaya

Om Namah Venkatesaya

Om Namah Shivaya

Om Tat Sat

Conclusion

This is a glimpse of the gospel of Lord Krishna - simple, direct, yet profound. It is not one of pessimism or escapism, but is full of robust common sense. And if it sometimes seems to be puzzling, it is because common sense is so uncommon in the complex world of today.

You may be quite certain that one direction is east and the opposite direction west. But, if you move a little, you suddenly discover that east and west meet you! You are the divider, and from another point of view, you are the meeting point. In fact, it is the mind that creates all this duality which multiplies into endless diversity, creating conflicts and confusion all the way through.

There is only oneness and cosmic unity. There just cannot be two infinities or two omnipresences. The origin of the perception of diversity is enshrouded in mystery - maya. But Krishna boldly assumes responsibility for even that! "I am seated in the hearts of all; from me are memory, knowledge, as well as their absence," says He.

The manifest universe is the body of God, and the supreme spirit is the indweller. Even this distinction was made to suit human analogy and to satisfy the duality-ridden intellect. We make an arbitrary distinction between our body and our spirit which seems to be justified because at one stage - death - the spirit leaves the body. This, obviously, does not apply to the Lord and His Body, for He is eternal and infinite, and does not leave His Body.

What a sublime vision! What a world-uniting doctrine! What a fountain of love! What a soft blow to shatter all distinctions and differences! What a divine cord of love to unite all mankind in oneness - divinity!

Swami Venkatesananda

Om Tat Sat

2 - Sankhya Yoga

The Yoga of Self-Knowledge

Virtue As A Fortress

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 honourable, 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 Krsna 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.

When Ignorance Is Bliss

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 Krsna.

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 philosophising 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.

Sreyas Or Preyas

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, 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-realisation. 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.

Duty, Impartially And Impersonally

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 Adharma.

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 Adharma! 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).

Ignorance And Delusion

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.

'Worrying' And 'Thinking'

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 Krsna 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!

There Is No Death For The Soul

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.

Tolerance and Equanimity

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 tranquillity 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.

The Dream Of Life

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 realise 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).

Identification

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 Nirayana 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.

Realisation 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.

Opportunity To Uproot Ignorance

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 sleep and lethargy (internal foes) 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 Krsna 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 of the belief is vital to self-knowledge, any controversy concerning it may at best be a diversionary waste of effort and psychological distraction.

The Self Is Unborn

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.

Krsna 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 realisation 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 realisation 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.

The Art Of Living

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 one (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 Krsna 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 realise 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.

Life Is Continuous

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, organised 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.

Assumed Knowledge

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 shouldst 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 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, rationalising their action with the lofty verse 'weapons do not cut the Self'. Such perversion of truth will only make self-realisation more remote.

Acceptance

II:26 - But even if thou thinkest of the Self as being constantly born and constantly dying, even then thou shouldst 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.

Krsna'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.

Possessions And Relationships

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 ships 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 Krsna, to one of the five pious sons, the warrior Arjuna, on the battlefield.

There are some who wonder: would it have been possible for Krsna 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 Krsna 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 Krsna 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 realised, there arises wisdom beyond experience and expression.

The Ultimate Experience

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-realisation. 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 realised 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.

Life Cannot Be Destroyed

II:30 - This self, the indweller in the body of everyone, is ever indestructible. Therefore, thou shouldst 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 'realisable'.

It is realized by the one in all.

Secular Duty

II:31 - Having regard to thy duty, thou shouldst 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, recognise the existence (relative and fleeting) of phenomena.

As we shall see, the Bhagavad Gita emphasises 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 aeroplane 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.

Honour And Dishonour

II:34 - People will recount your dishonour. 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 honour, knowing that its loss is worse than death.

When Krsna insists on equanimity in honour and dishonour (XII:19), why does he say here that dishonour 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 manoeuvre, more difficult than tight-rope walking!

Mental Modifications

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 Krsna.

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 here, what we need bear in mind 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.

Action And Knowledge

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.

Brahmacarya Is Concentration

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 vitalise 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-realisation. Such one-pointedness is brahmacarya.

Intelligence And Free Will

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.

Krsna 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), to protect (every father feels he is protecting the family) and 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.

Goodness

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, Krsna 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-realisation.

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-realisation would still use the veda and modern science in their own limited spheres of utility, realising that self-realisation 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).

Right And Duty To Act

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 realisation!

"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.

Success Is Duty Discharged

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.

Skill In Action

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 licence? 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.

A Practical Idealist

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! Krsna'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 fulfil 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.

When The Mind Is 'Shocked'

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-realisation.

The mind is filled with wrong thought-forms - the traditions, dogmas, preconceived ideas, prejudices - all from the dead past. We have dead, crystallised and fossilised ideas of good and evil. We want to do what is regarded as good, at least to win the favour 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, but 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!

Study

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, Krsna 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.

A Cell In The Body

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 fulfilment, 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.

Steady Wisdom

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-realisation. We shall then shine as sthitaprajna, sages of steady wisdom.

Happiness Is Its Own Prize

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, honour and dishonour, 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 thralldom. 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.

The Meditation-Current

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 visualise 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 Krsna 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 realisation of God's indwelling omnipresence. It is then that daily life becomes divine.

Sama And Dama

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 practise 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.

Meditation Of God

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 Krsna 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-realisation or to be established in the self?

'Dhyana' or contemplation is the channel by which the mind goes towards construction (integration or self-realisation) 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.

The Buddhi Of The Wise

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.

Inner And Outer Harmony

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 tranquillity 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.

Habit

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.

Krsna 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 favour 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.

Vision Of The Unconditioned

II:69 - That state which is night to all beings, to the selfcontrolled 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-realisation, 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 practising 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.

Desirelessness

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.

Krsna 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.

The Threshold Of Liberation

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 Krsna. 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 (Jada Bharata carried Rahugana's palanquin!) in this world.

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-realisation 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.

Delusion

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 it (the 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 (as Jada Bharata did), 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.

Om Tat Sat

Thus in the Upanishad of the Bhagavad Gita, the Science of the Eternal, the Scripture of Yoga, the dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna, ends the second chapter entitled: Sankhya Yoga - The Yoga of Self-Knowledge.