

Chapter 2: Sankhya yoga

The second chapter of *Gita* constitutes a brief summary of the entire discourse between Krishna and Arjuna, and enumerates a number of approaches for the purpose of showing that they are actually all parts of the great science of yoga. Specifically, Krishna connects the idea of action with the ideas of devotion and renunciation, offering the key to the proper understanding of dharma and yoga.

The indologists' view, heavily influenced by the western academic mentality, presents a relativistic scenario of different schools of thought as if they were in competition to each other and not aimed at integrating each other in the Greater Picture. So we sometimes see people claiming they are following "Raja yoga" or "Kriya yoga", or "Bhakti yoga", as if they were different products on the market vying for the endorsement of the consumers, or different political parties demanding exclusive ideological allegiance from their members.

A student of Philosophy in mainstream western academia is presented with a so-called objective history of "the evolution of human thought", or better, of human speculation, as opposed to the dogma enforced by Christianity for several centuries on the entire western society. Inevitably, the student develops a cynical vision and the belief that Reality does not exist or at least it cannot be known.

This cannot satisfy a sincere seeker, who aspires to actually understand Reality as it is. Sankhya is the analysis of Reality to establish the various categories or factors, such as *atman*, *brahman*, *shakti*, *maya*, etc. Without this basic power of discrimination (*viveka*) it is very difficult to understand what dharma is. We can overcome duality only after we have understood what duality is... For example, before learning in algebra that you can actually subtract 5 from 1, you need to learn in elementary arithmetic that it is not possible to subtract 5 from 1. Similarly, before learning how to see beyond good and bad on the level of Transcendence, we need to learn to distinguish between *sat* and *asat*.

In connection to Sankhya, Buddhi Yoga constitutes the "second step" by which we begin to transcend the categories and duality itself. To the knowledge and experience offered by Sankhya, we add the memory or the natural awareness of our real Self, that does not need to be acquired from outside.

सञ्जय उवाच ।

sañjaya uvāca ।

तं तथा कृपयाविष्टमश्रुपूर्णाकुलेक्षणम् ।

taṁ tathā kṛpayāviṣṭamaśrupūrṇākulekṣaṇam ।

विषीदन्तमिदं वाक्यमुवाच मधुसूदनः ॥ २-१ ॥

viśīdantamidaṁ vākyaṁuvāca madhusūdanaḥ ॥ 2-1 ॥

sanjayah: Sanjaya; *uvaca:* said; *tam:* to him; *tatha:* then; *kripaya:* by compassion; *avistam:* overwhelmed; *asru:* tears; *purna:* full; *akula:* swelling; *ikshanam:* eyes; *visidantam:* lamenting; *idam:* this; *vakyam:* speech; *uvaca:* said; *madhu:* Madhu; *sudanah:* the killer.

Sanjaya said:

Madhusudana (Krishna) thus spoke to him (Arjuna), who was overwhelmed by compassion, depressed and with eyes filled with tears.

As we have seen in first chapter (1.29), depression is usually caused by a sense of horror, fear or guilt in front of a very difficult situation, especially when one is not sure about the course of action to be chosen. Arjuna has amply explained that he is unable to see a good solution to the crisis - he has come to the battlefield to do his duty and defend the kingdom from the evil government of Dhritarashtra and Duryodhana, but the price to pay seems too high. Even considering that only willing fighters will be involved in the war - unlike modern conflicts, nothing outside the battlefield will be touched, no civilians will be harmed, no property and no resources will be destroyed - still the extent of the loss of valuable lives and its consequences on society is devastating, and Arjuna's compassion is taking away all his energy.

In such a dilemma, when no clear path is visible, it is natural to feel confused and to refrain from action until a proper solution is found.

Madhusudana: this name of Krishna, "killer of Madhu", refers to the destruction of doubts that create confusion and prevent from the proper performance of one's duties.

Here Krishna responds to Arjuna's sorrow and starts to clear his mind.

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।

śrībhagavānuvāca ।

कुतस्त्वा कश्मलमिदं विषमे समुपस्थितम् ।

kutastvā kaśmalamidaṁ viṣame samupasthitam ।

अनार्यजुष्टमस्वर्ग्यमकीर्तिकरमर्जुन ॥ २-२ ॥

anāryajuṣṭamasvargyamakīrtikaramarjuna ॥ 2-2 ॥

sri: divine; *bhagavan:* Lord; *uvaca:* said; *kutah:* from where; *tva:* you; *kashmalam:* impurity; *idam:* this; *vishame:* in (this) dangerous (time); *samupasthitam:* arrived; *anarya:* non civilized; *jushtam:* followed; *asvargyam:* not leading to Svarga; *akirti:* infamy; *karam:* making; *arjuna:* o Arjuna.

The Lord said:

"O Arjuna, from where such contamination is coming to cover your consciousness at this critical time? It is unworthy of an Arya: it does not lead to the higher planets but is the cause of infamy."

The correct definition of “*arya*” is fundamental for a proper understanding of the teachings of *Gita*. It means "civilized person" and refers to any person who has the proper knowledge of the rules of dharmic society and follows them loyally.

The misleading Aryan Invasion Theory, formulated by the colonial regime ideologue Max Muller, distorted the actual Vedic concept of Arya by giving it a completely artificial racial meaning to justify the colonial oppressive and exploitative domination and the intrinsic racial superiority of white people over people of darker complexion, and hoping to create a new half-breed Indian-born middle class who would support the white domination. This absurd theory claimed that a race of nomadic marauders with “Caucasian” racial features like white skin, blue eyes and blond hair, descended from the Caucasus into India massacring and enslaving the original and primitive black populations and “civilizing” India. According to this theory the white invaders introduced Sanskrit and the Vedas, iron and horses, as well as the birth caste system based on various genetic mixtures, where a higher percentage of the aryan DNA was found in the higher castes, while the *sudras* were the enslaved black dravidian natives of India. Writing for the *Anthropological Review* in 1870, Mueller classified the human species into seven categories on an ascending scale - with the Aborigines on the lowest rung and the “Aryan” race type supreme. He also fixed the date of the Aryan invasion and subsequent “civilization” of India in 1500 BCE, using the Christian Bible references that stated that the entire universe had been created precisely on 23 October 4004 BCE. This theory, later utilized by the German Nazi regime to justify “racial cleansing”, has long since been proven wrong. Vedic culture was not brought to India by the so-called “Aryan invasion”, as the colonialist scholars affirmed.

In fact by reading Vedic literature we can easily see that the Aryan peoples of Vedic civilization had never been “nomadic” at all. Vedic peoples had great cities filled with palaces and temples, permanent villages and hermitages, a very prosperous system of permanent agriculture, and a very refined way of life. Something that better fits the picture of the Sarasvati and Sindhu civilization.

The mainstream academic establishment has at least partially recognized the historical findings at Mohenjo Daro, Harappa and many other archeological sites in the Sarasvati and Sindhu valleys, that reveal an extremely rich, advanced and refined culture that flourished over 5000 years ago: large cities with a complex sewage system that ran under the streets and served all houses with private bathrooms, rounded street corners to facilitate the turning of fast vehicles, systematic street lighting, swimming pools, and so forth. Among the seals found in Harappa, one features an image of the earth globe, with lines that clearly represent latitude and longitude lines on the planet.

Vedic literatures also speak of airplanes, nuclear weapons and other weapons that still remain mysterious (based on the properties of sound, on weather control etc), electricity, calculation of atomic time, biotechnology, and especially of the immense potential of the human mind and body... and a careful and honest translation by open minded scholars will reveal many more wonders that are now becoming understandable to modern people thanks to the simultaneous progress of mainstream science.

Apart from this gross manipulation of history, we need to debunk the pseudo-scientific myth of the white race as being more "genetically evolved" than races with a different skin color. There cannot be an “Aryan race” as the genetic patrimony of the human race

only refers to physiological traits and can never determine an individual's development on the ethical, social, spiritual or professional level. Of course there are limitations caused by diseases or malformations impairing the physiological functions of the brain and nervous system, but this is found in individual of all different races and it depends more on environmental and dietetic factors than on the skin color. All human beings become civilized by education and training only.

क्लैब्यं मा स्म गमः पार्थ नैतत्त्वय्युपपद्यते ।

klaibyaṁ mā sma gamaḥ pārtha naitattvayyupapadyate ।

क्षुद्रं हृदयदौर्बल्यं त्यक्तवोत्तिष्ठ परन्तप ॥ २-३ ॥

kṣudraṁ hṛdayadaurbalyaṁ tyaktvottiṣṭha parantapa ।। 2-3 ।।

klaibyam: impotence; *ma*: not; *asma*: there be; *gamaḥ*: taken; *partha*: o son of Pritha; *na*: not; *etat*: this; *tvayi*: to you; *upapadyate*: is befitting; *kshudram*: petty; *hridaya*: heart; *daurbalyam*: weakness; *tyaktva*: giving up; *uttishtha*: rise; *parantapa*: o scorcher of the enemy.

“O son of Pritha (Arjuna), do not allow yourself to fall into (such as state of) impotence, because such state is not befitting you. Give up such petty weakness of heart and get up, o Parantapa.”

Krishna is surprised to see Arjuna's behavior because Arjuna has always demonstrated a very strong and brave mind in front of all the personal difficulties that he and his family had to face.

In the previous verse, Krishna already dismissed Arjuna's confusion as *kashmalam*, an "impurity" that would only bring him infamy, something that is unworthy of a wise person who knows the purpose of life.

The first point in Krishna's analysis is that the time for second thoughts and for seeking alternatives is over. The battle has already started, and there is no way to go back: Arjuna cannot think about making other choices now, because Duryodhana has already chosen for him and for everyone else, and that's final. The critical time is the moment when the battle is going to start: making the wrong choice at this time can have disastrous consequences for the kingdom. Arjuna cannot afford to become distracted or confused, especially at this time. This is a time when extreme measures are called for. The usual requirements of respect for the elders and support for family members become secondary in front of their criminal aggression against the kingdom.

The Dharma sutras explain that there is a provision for "emergency dharma" (*apat kal dharma*) that overrules the "ordinary dharma". In times of great danger, distress or calamity, the usual concerns become secondary and the wisdom of the lesser evil remains the only reference. This is why we need wise people (the genuine *brahmanas*) to guide society in understanding the science of dharma in all its different levels. For example, truthfulness and honesty are the basic principle of Dharma, but they can be temporarily

overruled in a situation of emergency, as when a small lie to a wicked criminal who has violent plans can enable us to save the life of a good and innocent person, or to avert a major disaster for the entire society.

The second consideration offered by Krishna is that we need to widen our perspective on life and include the next world as well: human beings who are faithful supporters of Dharma in this world become qualified to enter the exclusive group of the powerful beings who are in charge of governing the universe - the denizens of Svargaloka. It is said, *yatobhyudaya nisreyas siddhih sa dharmah*: "Dharma is that from which you progress in life both materially and spiritually and not only now but also lifetime after lifetime." If Arjuna leaves the battlefield now, the supporters of Dhritarashtra will continue to create great sufferings for the innocent subjects, thereby accumulating bad karmic reactions they will have to suffer in a next life; by stopping them now Arjuna will actually protect them from a disastrous situation in the future.

The third point raised by Krishna is *akirti*, "infamy", that is the opposite of *kirti* or "glory". The so-called non-violence that allows criminals to continue undisturbed in their degrading and disastrous activities is certainly not glorious. When the situation so requires, one should be ready to save a family by giving up a family member that is opposed to Dharma, and similarly one should be ready to expel one bad family in order to save a village, or to lose a village when the safety of the entire kingdom is at stake. Now in this verse Krishna continues the sharp analysis, clearly telling Arjuna that a *kshatriya*'s duty is to stand firm and fight to protect the kingdom. He cannot fail such duty out of compassion for the families of the criminals, because that would be weakness of heart only. Arjuna is not going to kill, harm or persecute such families, and he is not touched by the consequences of the bad choices of the criminals: they are actually responsible for the maintenance and protection of their own families, and they have chosen to put their women and children at risk with their own adharmic choices. So the *kshatriya*'s duty is just to oppose the criminals on the battlefield, not to bask in his own compassionate feelings about their wives and children.

Such compassion would be misinterpreted as sentimentalistic weakness by society, and by the criminals as well, who would certainly take advantage of it to increase their bad activities - in this way we will become responsible for the sufferings of their victims.

Parantapa, the name by which Krishna calls Arjuna, suggests that a certain amount of violence and suffering is inevitable when we face aggressors in battle.

अर्जुन उवाच ।

arjuna uvāca ।

कथं भीष्ममहं सङ्ख्ये द्रोणं च मधुसूदन ।

katham bhīṣmamahaṁ saṅkhye droṇaṁ ca madhusūdana ।

इषुभिः प्रतियोत्स्यामि पूजार्हावरिसूदन ॥ २-४ ॥

iṣubhiḥ pratyotsyāmi pūjārhāvarisūdana ॥ 2-4 ॥

arjunah: Arjuna; *uvaca*: said; *katham*: how; *bhishmam*: Bhishma; *aham*: I; *sankhye*: in

the fight; *dronam*: Drona; *ca*: and; *madhusudana*: o Madhusudana; *ishubhih*: by arrows; *pratiyotsyami*: I will counterattack; *puja*: of worship; *arhau*: worthy; *ari*: enemy; *sudana*: killer.

Arjuna said:

“O Madhusudana, o Arisudana, how will I engage in fighting against Bhishma and Drona, throwing arrows against them, who are rather to be worshiped by me?”

The name Madhusudana, "killer of Madhu", refers to the destruction of demons, whose nefarious activities will be clearly described later in *Gita* (16.7-19): "Taking shelter of insatiable lust and greed, deluded by arrogance, pride and false prestige, they are attached to what is impermanent, and sworn to dirty actions. They are always full of worries and fears and prone to destruction. They consider greed and sense gratification as the supreme goal of life, always making hundreds of plans based on lust and anger, and accumulate wealth illegally for the purpose of their own enjoyment. The demoniac person thinks, I have so much wealth today, and I will get more according to my schemes. All this belongs to me now, and my possessions will increase always. I have killed that enemy of mine, and I will also kill others. I am the controller, I am the enjoyer, I am perfect, I am powerful, I am happy, I am wealthy and I have a lot of followers. Who can be compared to me? I shall perform rituals and I shall distribute charity for my own pleasure/benefit." From this description, we find that, in the Vedic perspective, a demon is not characterized by horns or other strange physical features, and that in fact he may even make a show of religious and charitable activities to foster his own plans aimed at expanding his power, possessions and control over others. A very important point here is that the demon is eager to kill his "enemies", i.e. those who might obstruct his arrogant plans of domination and power games, so in his perspective they are somehow standing in his way.

Arisudana: this name of Krishna means “killer of the enemy”.

It is extremely important to understand this verse correctly, because foolish and ignorant people can easily be misled by clever manipulators who present demons as good people or even as saints, criminals as victims, friends as enemies, and the other way around.

For those who are afflicted by a materialistic vision, the enemy is simply someone who seems not to belong to our camp: "he who is not with us, is against us." This perspective gives no space for consideration of dharma, justice, or even decency or common sense.

For example, for a hardened rapist, the "enemy" will be a child who finds the courage to subtract him/herself from his predatory clutches, and who might expose his violent habits - therefore in the distorted mind of the criminal, the child "should be killed". Anyone else who may protect the child from him will also become his "enemy".

Similarly, a witness to a heinous crime will be considered as an enemy by a mafia boss, and in totalitarian regimes anyone who does not subscribe with the government dogma becomes an "enemy of the State" by that very reason, even if he does not take any aggressive action.

Can the mere fact of existing independently be considered an aggressive crime punishable by death? Can asking questions about obviously incorrect actions and conclusions be considered an aggressive crime punishable by death? Can the mere fact of having different religious/spiritual beliefs be considered an aggressive crime punishable by death? Or in other words, is freedom of thought a crime?

According to the demoniac mentality, it is. According to the divine mentality, it is not. An opinion is dangerous only when it presents violent aggression as a legitimate (or the only legitimate) way of life, but bad opinions must be counteracted by opinions only - by discussion/debate, preferably public. This is the Vedic system.

In this regard, out of humility one could feel hesitant in entering such a debate against great personalities - heads of famous religious institutions, teachers with many followers, or powerful social figures. But if these people are taking an adharmic position, no matter what their reasons are, they must be counterattacked by debate.

गुरूनहत्वा हि महानुभावान्

gurūnahatvā hi mahānubhāvān

श्रेयो भोक्तुं भैक्ष्यमपीह लोके ।

śreya bhoktum bhaikṣyamapīha loke ।

हत्वार्थकामांस्तु गुरूनिहैव

hatvārthakāmānstu gurūnihaiva

भुञ्जीय भोगान् रुधिरप्रदिग्धान् ॥ २-५ ॥

bhuñjīya bhogān rudhirapradigdhān ।। 2-5 ।।

gurun: teachers; *ahatva:* not killing; *hi:* certainly; *maha:* great; *anubhavan:* personalities; *sreyah:* better; *bhoktum:* to eat; *bhaikshyam:* by begging; *api:* even; *iha:* this; *loke:* in the world; *hatva:* by killing; *artha:* benefit; *kaman:* desired (things); *tu:* but; *gurun:* teachers; *iha:* here; *eva:* certainly; *bhunjiya:* it should be enjoyed; *bhogan:* pleasures; *rudhira:* by blood; *pradigdhan:* tainted.

“Killing teachers, who are such great personalities! It would be better to maintain myself by becoming a mendicant in this world. Even if they are victims of blood lust/ ready to kill to get what they want, they are still my teachers, and any benefit or pleasure from this (killing) will be tainted with blood.”

Guru means "teacher". The definition applies to all those who have learned or realized something and are able to pass it to others - it could be music or dance, or mathematics, yoga or any other subject, in the material and in the spiritual fields. There are many levels of teachers, but all of them are extremely important for the progress of human society, and they should all be respected for their role and their knowledge and skills.

The qualification for a genuine guru is explained as, *adhigata tattvah, sisya hitaya udyatah satatam*, "One who has personally realized the goal/truth, and who is always acting for the benefit of the disciple". So even if the teacher's knowledge and understanding are limited, if s/he is honest and sincerely transmits whatever s/he has

actually learned and realized (without pretending to be what he is not), and is always motivated only by the benefit of the disciple (not by selfish desire for personal benefits of any kind or by political/institutional motivations), s/he is worthy of respect and gratitude. A Sat Guru is something more than an ordinary guru. Sat means "spiritual, eternal" and refers to a teacher who has attained the level of liberation (*moksha*) while still in a body (*jivan mukta*) and is able to take his/her students to the same level (*brahma bhuta*). The parameters to recognize a liberated person are clearly described in the scriptures, and have nothing to do with institutional certification or number of followers, or with similar considerations.

A Sat Guru does not need to be a *brahmana* by occupation. The position of a *brahmana* requires a particular set of official ritualistic activities and a number of duties towards family and society, some of which are performed daily and others on special occasions. A *brahmana* is not just a teacher (of whatever subject he chooses to teach, even in the material field such as martial arts etc), but a priest as well. On the other hand, a Sat Guru could be a *sannyasi* (who has no duties to family or society), an *avadhuta* (who has no duties or rules to follow) or even be engaged in a more modest social occupation, down to the position of *sudra*. The only true necessary qualification is having realized what s/he is supposed to teach - i.e. that we are atman/Brahman and not the material body we live in and its relations in this world. In other words, s/he must be completely free from *ahankara* and *mamatva*. S/He considers him/herself simply the servant of the Supreme Guru Tattva, Antaryami.

Anyone, even a teacher, may commit mistakes or temporarily fall into illusion or confusion: we should not allow one of such mistakes committed by a great personality to make us forget all the good things he has done for society, and the good things he can still do if he improves his act and reforms himself. A teacher or a *brahmana*, or even a relative of a *brahmana* who is not (yet) qualified, should not be killed if that can be avoided. Of course if he commits some disgraceful action or spreads false or immoral teachings he should be stopped and exposed, so that he will not be able to confuse and mislead the general public with wrong conclusions and a bad example, but he should not be sentenced to death. He can only be faced with the appropriate weapons in self defense if he becomes an aggressor as per previous description.

This particularly applies to one's teachers, one's elders and superiors, who should be respected for the sincere help and support they have given us so that we could progress in life. Even if their understanding and behavior are not perfect, or if they make mistakes or fall into delusion or degradation, they can still reform themselves and they are entitled to our gratitude as Arjuna is explaining in this verse. Ungratefulness towards those who have selflessly and lovingly worked for our benefit is a very great sin.

However, protecting the kingdom from criminals has nothing to do with one's personal relationships or the benefits we personally received in the past or we could receive in the future from a particular person. We should be ready to oppose even our own teachers, friends and family members if they become criminals and their actions endanger the peace, progress and prosperity of the persons entrusted to us.

न चैतद्विद्मः कतरन्नो गरीयो

na caitadvidmaḥ kataranno garīyo

यद्वा जयेम यदि वा नो जयेयुः ।

yadvā jayema yadi vā no jayeyuḥ ।

यानेव हत्वा न जिजीविषामः

yāneva hatvā na jijīviṣāmaḥ

तेऽवस्थिताः प्रमुखे धार्तराष्ट्राः ॥ २-६ ॥

te'vasthitāḥ pramukhe dhārtarāṣṭrāḥ ॥ 2-6 ॥

na: not; *ca:* and; *etad:* this; *vidmah:* we know; *katarat:* which; *nah:* for us; *gariyah:* better; *yat va:* or rather; *jayema:* we should win; *yadi:* if; *va:* or; *nah:* us; *jayeyuh:* they will win; *yan:* they; *eva:* certainly; *hatva:* killing; *na:* not; *jijivishamah:* we will desire to live; *te:* they; *avasthitah:* are situated; *pramukhe:* in front (of us); *dhartarashtra:* the (supporters) of Dhritarashtra.

"We do not know which is better, whether to win over them or to let them win over us. We should not desire to live after killing these followers of Dhritarashtra, who are standing in front of us."

Arjuna's mind is attacked by depression and doubts creep and grow and expand at various levels, so he is even starting to feel uncertain about the possible outcome of the battle. What if, after a fierce battle where so many people will be killed - with the consequences that he has already contemplated - Dhritarashtra's side will win anyway, and the kingdom will continue to be oppressed by his bad governance? It would be a total loss.

It is true that a *kshatriya* should not flee from the battlefield out of fear, but it is also true that he should be wise and engage in battles that offer a reasonable chance for success. Desperate battles are justified only as a last stand, when there is no hope for another opportunity in the future, otherwise it is advisable to withdraw strategically and live to fight another day.

The two armies are not of equal force, and Arjuna is now starting to think that maybe the battle could have been postponed until the chances for success were better. Maybe in the meantime things would change and more lives could be spared.

Arjuna wants to be reasonable, and analyze all the possibilities before venturing into an action from which he will not be able to get out, once started. A *kshatriya* is a very responsible and wise person, not a war mongering gangster, a violent and mindless hooligan, a fanatic marauder fueled by sectarian hatred, or a trigger-happy madman who just likes to kill people. For a genuine *kshatriya*, war is not a mercenary business career

with pleasurable perks, an exciting game, or an opportunity to vent his personal emotional imbalance, frustrations and unresolved inner conflicts, or to get some adrenaline stimulation.

To make *kshatriyas* it is not sufficient to give weapons to immature or psychotic people, or to indoctrinate them with inflammatory rhetoric on the greatness of a religious or cultural tradition.

In the traditional *gurukula*, a *kshatriya* boy needs to study and train just a little less than a *brahmana*, learning to use his brain properly, acquiring the proper self-control and discipline, exploring the subtleties of strategy and politics, and especially understanding the science of *dharma* and its applications. Unless he has truly become proficient in all this, as well as in physical training, he must not be endorsed as a qualified *kshatriya* by the Guru.

कार्पण्यदोषोपहतस्वभावः

kārpaṇyadoṣopahatasvabhāvaḥ

पृच्छामि त्वां धर्मसम्मूढचेताः ।

pricchāmi tvāṁ dharmasammūḍhacetāḥ ।

यच्छ्रेयः स्यान्निश्चितं ब्रूहि तन्मे

yacchreyaḥ syānniścitaṁ brūhi tanme

शिष्यस्तेऽहं शाधि मां त्वां प्रपन्नम् ॥ २-७ ॥

śiṣyaste'haṁ śādhi mām tvāṁ prapannam ।। 2-7।।

karpanya: of pettiness; *dosha*: defect; *upahata*: afflicted; *svabhavaḥ*: natural inclination; *pricchami*: I am asking; *tvam*: you; *dharma*: Dharma; *sammudha*: confused; *cetaḥ*: consciousness; *yat*: that; *sreyah*: (real) good; *syat*: would be; *niscitam*: without any doubt; *bruhi*: tell; *tat*: that; *me*: to me; *sishyah*: disciple; *te*: to you; *aham*: I; *sadhi*: instruct; *mam*: me; *tvam*: you; *prapannam*: surrendered.

“My nature is now afflicted by weakness. (Therefore) I am asking you (to clarify) the confusion of my mind about dharma, to tell me without a doubt what is the best thing to do. I am your disciple and I take shelter in you: (please) instruct me.”

A *kripana* is a narrow-minded person who identifies with the body. *Bhagavata purana* (1.13.25) says, *deho 'yam krpanasya jijivishoh*, "desiring to continue life in this body", (4.28.6) *kripanah vishaya-atmakah*, "attached/identified to the objects of sense gratification", (6.9.49), *na veda kripanah sreyah*, "he does not know the real benefit (of human life)", (7.9.45), *yan maithunadi grihamedhi-sukham ... kripanah*, "(attached) to all types of family pleasures, starting from sex life", (11.21.27).

This does not refer to the selfless love and dutiful service that one should give to the

members of one's family - it's about the attachment to the idea of getting pleasure from them. Ignorant people who are attached to the lust of sense gratification, exploitation, possession and domination usually condemn genuine love and affection relationships, mistaking *dharmā* for *adharma*, and *adharma* for *dharmā*.

In fact *Gīta* (9.49) pinpoints the description of the *kripana* by saying that he acts selfishly, with the purpose of getting a personal benefit: *phala-hetavah*.

Another famous quote about the meaning of *kripana* comes from *Bṛhad aranyaka Upanishad* (3.8.10): *yo va etad aksaram gargy aviditvasmal lokat praiti sa krpanah*, "O Gargi, a *kripana* is one who leaves this world without knowing Brahman ("that which never changes")".

Svabhava means "natural inclination", and more specifically it refers to the natural *guna* and *karma* of each individual by which he is instinctively attracted to some activity as he has the natural talent to perform it: Arjuna is a *kshatriya* by nature, therefore his *svabhava* is to protect the kingdom and the subject from Adharma. But what is dharmic in a circumstance can be adharmic in another, so things are not so easy.

Arjuna recognizes that his previous arguments were faulty, poor and narrow minded, and he wants Krishna to dispel his doubts for him, and explain the actual meaning of Dharma. The concept of Dharma is often translated as "religion", but this can be misleading because the western concept of religion is shaped on the abrahamic mentality, where blind allegiance to an exclusive system of belief is the only thing that matters. Abrahamic religions do not give much importance to objective ethical considerations, individual responsibility, personal evolution, or reconciliation of apparent differences or opposites into a greater picture of Reality.

The word Dharma comes from the root *dhr*, meaning "to support", and it refers to the intrinsic, characteristic and positive quality of being that supports existence. So just like the fire's intrinsic quality is to radiate heat and light, the *kshatriya*'s intrinsic quality is to defend society from aggressors and support its progress. In this way, each human being directly participates to the divine activities of creation, maintenance and dissolution of the world, and constitutes a cell in the body of the Universal Person, the Virat Purusha.

However, sometimes the consciousness of the human being can become confused due to various factors, and therefore his natural duty can be covered by other considerations.

Niscitam means "beyond all doubts". It is true that doubt is a function of intelligence, but they are only meant to make us think thoroughly and verify things before making a choice. They are never intended to keep us from doing what is right and necessary, therefore after clarifying them we need to move on.

The word *śishya* means "disciple": here Arjuna recognizes that Krishna knows better than him, and he surrenders himself as a humble disciple, ready to accept instructions and to follow orders.

The word *sreya* ("best thing to do") is the opposite of *preya* ("pleasurable thing to do"). They could be defined also as the "hard but right thing" and the "easy but wrong thing" to do.

न हि प्रपश्यामि ममापनुद्याद्

na hi prapaśyāmi mamāpanudyād

यच्छोकमुच्छोषणमिन्द्रियाणाम् ।

yacchokamucchoṣaṇamindriyāṇām ।

अवाप्य भूमावसपत्नमृद्धं

avāpya bhūmāvasapatnamṛddham

राज्यं सुराणामपि चाधिपत्यम् ॥ २-८ ॥

rājyaṁ surāṇāmapi cādhipatyam ॥ 2-8 ॥

na: not; *hi*: certainly; *prapasyami*: I can see; *mama*: my; *apanudyat*: can send away; *yat*: that; *sokam*: depression; *ucchoshanam*: that dries up; *indriyanam*: the senses; *avapya*: obtaining; *bhumau*: on earth; *asapatnam*: without equal; *riddham*: prosperous; *rajyam*: kingdom; *suranam*: of the Devas; *api*: even; *ca*: and; *adhipatyam*: supreme control.

“I do not see how I could dispel this sadness that is drying up my senses, even if I achieved, on this earth itself, the unchallenged position of a prosperous ruler over the heavenly planets.”

The word *sokam* indicates the feeling of depression, that is expressed as sadness and lamentation, and that takes away any interest, happiness and enthusiasm in life. Arjuna has come to the point where one is fed up with the complications and difficulties of life, with the uncertainty of the outcome of his activities, no matter what choices he makes. In a previous verse (2.2) Krishna mentioned that weakness and sentimentalism that distract from the duty of defending society from criminals will not take one to Svarga, the heavenly planets that are the residence of the virtuous and godly administrators of the universe.

In this verse, Arjuna is clearly replying that he is not interested to go there - not even if he could obtain such heavenly position without having to leave his present body, while continuing to live on this planet.

Abrahamic faiths teach that the highest possible destination for a human being, after death, is paradise or heaven, that is characterized by prolonged and lavish sensual pleasures that belong to the same materialistic category of the pleasures of this world - food, drink, sex, beautiful clothing and ornaments, nice housing, gardens, flowers, music and dance, etc. However, such position is still material. Even the heavenly beings who live in paradise (Svarga) have a material body, and although it is a beautiful and very powerful body, and will continue to exist for a very long time (making them almost immortal), still at the time of the dissolution of the universe, at the end of the cycle of the

cosmic manifestation, such position will be destroyed. The *suras* are constantly fighting against the *asuras*: the entire universe is their kingdom and they are also responsible for the protection and progress of their *prajas* that are periodically threatened by evil aggressors who have a demoniac mentality. Even Brahma, the highest and most powerful living entity of this universe, is subject to such harassment. Besides, he only lives for 100 of his years, and at the end of his life the entire universe (including heavens) is withdrawn into the non-manifested state.

Here Arjuna says that he will not find happiness in such a condition, because true happiness can be found only on another and higher level of reality, that is truly eternal, and he wants Krishna to talk about that.

The transcendental level of Brahman, called *akshara* ("not subject to change") is the real eternal existence. Such level is also called Vaikuntha, "free from anxiety", and it is described as the spiritual world where Sadashiva Vishnu exists eternally. Anyone who attains the liberated stage, the Self realization of Atman, Brahman, Paramatma and Bhagavan, will instantly be established on that transcendental level - that will not be disturbed or touched at the time of the dissolution of this universe.

Krishna will therefore explain *Gita* to clarify this all-important knowledge of Atman, Brahman, Paramatma and Bhagavan. By this knowledge, one will attain a level that is much higher, permanent and happier than paradise.

सञ्जय उवाच ।

sañjaya uvāca ।

एवमुक्त्वा हृषीकेशं गुडाकेशः परन्तपः ।

evamuktva hr̥ṣīkeśam guḍākeśaḥ parantapaḥ ।

न योत्स्य इति गोविन्दमुक्त्वा तूष्णीं बभूव ह ॥ २-९ ॥

na yotsya iti govindamuktva tūṣṇīm babhūva ha ॥ 2-9 ॥

sanjaya: Sanjaya; *uvaca*: said; *evam*: like this; *uktva*: having said; *hrishikesam*: to Hrishikesha, "the master of the senses"; *gudakesah*: Gudakesha, "the master of sleep"; *parantapah*: Parantapa, "who burns the opponent"; *na*: not; *yotsya*: I will fight; *iti*: this; *govindam*: Govinda, "who gives pleasure to the senses, the earth and cows"; *uktva*: having said; *tushnim*: silent; *babhuva*: became; *ha*: certainly.

Sanjaya said:

“After thus speaking to Hrishikesha (Krishna), Gudakesha Parantapa (Arjuna) said, “O Govinda, I will not engage in battle”, and then became silent.”

Arjuna has already presented himself to Krishna as an obedient disciple, ready to be instructed. This, however, does not mean he should have stopped thinking, or presenting his views or problems.

The first duty of the Guru is to listen to the disciple, so that s/he can get a clear picture of

the actual position of the disciple and offer the appropriate and personalized instructions. Although everyone is on the same path, each individual has a different story, different qualities and tendencies, different problems, different realizations, and different capabilities. Such differences do not pertain only to the material level, but also extend to the spiritual sphere, creating a wonderful variety of *rasas* or transcendental sentiments and service moods, that multiplied into the great number of different Personalities of Godhead - who have unlimited names, forms, qualities and activities - constitute the amazingly immense and varied world of *bhakti*.

Some foolish people, in the name of being "personalists", totally disregard the actual *guna* and *karma* of the individual as well as his/her particular sentiment (*rasa*) that awaits to be developed, his/her attraction towards a particular form of the Godhead, and the specific potential s/he can develop in the area of devotional service.

All their followers are therefore expected to become blank slates, washed clean of all previous individuality and personality, rejecting all their memories and capabilities including the spiritual realizations or aspirations they may have had before "being initiated". They are told that all such previous things are *maya*, "illusion" or material lies: anything that existed before the moment of "joining the movement" is unreal and intrinsically bad and dangerous.

Even later, communication remains one-way only: the "guru" speaks, and the disciple can only listen. The disciple is expected to turn into an impersonal lump to be shaped into the only type of standardized personality that is acceptable for the institution. Everyone is expected to develop the same type of *rasa* for the same form of the Personality of Godhead, to follow exactly the same process, to develop the same abilities, tastes, and mannerism in speaking, walking, moving, etc.

Thinking and questioning are strongly discouraged, and the result is some kind of trance-like sleep in which one remains unable to see the facts as they are. Sometimes this process is described as "brainwashing".

On the other hand, in this verse Arjuna is called Gudakesha, one who has vanquished sleep and therefore is very alert. He is speaking to Hrishikesha, whose mastership over the senses leaves ample space to the exercise of the individual's free will and personal evolution.

Another meaning of the name Gudakesha is "who has knotted hair", referring to the practical way of tying up one's hair when preparing for battle.

The two names Parantapa and Govinda are also poetically juxtaposed in the verse: Arjuna's nature, or *svabhava*, is to fight *adharma* with great determination, skill and power, opposing even the greatest enemies on the battlefield, while Govinda is the source of pleasure and progress for the senses of all beings and for the Earth, too. These two apparently opposite necessities perfectly summarize Arjuna's dilemma.

It is to be noted, however, that after presenting all the proper information and discussion with the teacher, the student should become silent and listen carefully at the teacher. This is precisely what Arjuna is doing here: after fully expressing what he had to say, he becomes silent and ready to listen to what Krishna has to say.

तमुवाच हृषीकेशः प्रहसन्निव भारत ।

tamuvāca hr̥ṣīkeśaḥ prahasanniva bhārata ।

सेनयोरुभयोर्मध्ये विषीदन्तमिदं वचः ॥ २-१० ॥

senayorubhayormadhye viṣīdantamidam vacaḥ ।। 2-10 ।।

tam: him; *uvaca:* said; *hrishikesah:* Hrishikeshsha; *prahasana:* smiling; *iva:* like; *bharata:* o descendent of Bharata; *senayoh:* the two armies; *ubhayoh:* both; *madhye:* in the middle; *vishidantam:* to him who was depressed; *idam:* this; *vacaḥ:* speech.

“O Bharata, Hrishikeshsha smiled and spoke these words to him, the depressed (Arjuna), while they were between the two armies.”

The word *hasan*, "smiling", shows that Krishna is not worried by Arjuna's display of despair and dejection. Krishna has all the right answers, and he is soon going to present them for the benefit of all those who will hear the wonderful conversation between the two friends on the battlefield. This also includes us, of course.

The second chapter of *Gita* is called Sankhya or Samkhya Yoga. Sometimes the term *sankhya* is translated as "enumeration", or "analysis" of the various components of Reality. However, *sankhya* or *samyak* also refers to the correct understanding of the Knowledge that reveals (*khyayate*) Reality.

This second chapter is a general overview on the contents of the entire *Gita*, including Jnana (11-46), Karma (47-60), Bhakti (61-70) and Sannyasa (71-72).

These are all integral parts of the process of Self realization, that is aimed at understanding and living our real nature of spiritual souls, temporarily encased within a material body. Of course when we have fully realized our real identity and nature we can still engage in playing the roles that are required in society and to fulfill our duties, but with a huge difference - we will not be confused and afflicted by illusion and suffering. This is precisely the definition of "*lila*": like God, all truly self-realized souls engage in a dramatic story, playing a role required by the plot, but they never become attached to it, and they never really suffer or become confused.

Arjuna is only pretending to be confused, and that's why Krishna is smiling. He is greatly enjoying the play.

Of course, we can also interpret Krishna's smile at many other levels: it is first of all a smile of love and compassion, as Arjuna is offering him the opportunity to benefit all the confused conditioned souls and help them out of their sufferings. So Krishna feels love and affection for Arjuna, who is his eternal friend and companion and as such is cooperating with him in this great mission. Krishna also feels love and affection for all those who will benefit from such teachings.

Another reason why Krishna is smiling is that he wants to show to Arjuna, and to us as well, that he does not disapprove of Arjuna's arguments, and he is not upset because of his statements.

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।

śrībhagavānuvāca ।

अशोच्यानन्वशोचस्त्वं प्रज्ञावादांश्च भाषसे ।

aśocyānanvaśocastvaṁ prajñāvādāṁśca bhāṣase ।

गतासूनगतासूंश्च नानुशोचन्ति पण्डिताः ॥ २-११ ॥

gatāsūnagatāsūṁśca nānuśocanti paṇḍitāḥ ॥ 2-11 ॥

sri: glorious; *bhagavan:* Lord; *uvaca:* said; *asocyan:* not worthy of lamentation; *anvasocah:* you are lamenting; *tvam:* you; *prajna:* wise; *vadan:* words; *ca:* and; *bhashase:* you speak; *gatasun:* those who have gone; *agatasun:* those who have not gone; *ca:* and; *na:* not; *anusocanti:* they lament; *panditah:* the learned (persons).

The glorious Lord said:

“Although you speak wisely, you are lamenting for something that should not make you suffer. Those who really know the truth do not grieve for the dead or for the living.”

This is the first verse that opens Krishna's teachings to Arjuna and all of us, and it is dense with meaning and worthy of being learned by heart. It would be very nice to memorize all the verses of the entire *Gita*, but since not many people are able to do so, it is advisable to memorize at least a collection of the most famous verses.

As we focus our attention on the glorious Lord Krishna, we may spend some time on meditating on the word "Sri" that always accompanies his name. Sri is the Mother Goddess, the personification of glory, beauty, opulence, and perfection. There is no "Bhagavan" without "Sri", as Bhagavan means "one who has *bhaga*", where *bhaga* specifically means "opulence" or "fortune" - and all forms of opulence or fortune are personified in Sri, or Lakshmi, the Mother Goddess.

Traditionally, such opulences are listed as six: beauty, wealth, strength, fame, knowledge and detachment. The theological meaning of the name Bhagavan thus implies a form and attributes, and a personality including sentiments, feelings, thoughts, desires and intentions.

Therefore it is said that Bhagavan is the "personal" aspect of the Godhead, while Paramatma is the "localized" aspect of the Godhead that is present within the heart of all living beings (and within each atom of the creation as well) and Brahman is the "impersonal" aspect of the Godhead, that is all pervading.

Bhagavata purana (1.2.11) clearly explains that these three aspects of the Godhead are one and the same: *vadanti tat tattva vidas tattvam yaj jnanam advayam, brahmeti paramatmeti bhagavan iti sabdyate.*

However, one can really understand Bhagavan only after realizing Brahman and Paramatma - otherwise one's *bhakti* would just be materialistic devotion, a sentimentalistic affection that can only encourage the devotee towards a preliminary

attraction for the Lord. Such realization of Brahman and Paramatma is not subject to the official approval of some institution or religious lineage.

Brahman realization simply consists in actually realizing the spiritual nature that is the true identity of God and of the individual soul as well. As long as we remain deeply convinced that we are the material body/mind and we are defined by its attributes - in terms of race, nationality, gender, caste, etc - we will only be able to see God as a statue made of material elements, or as a historical figure born in a particular period.

Paramatma realization simply consists in actually feeling the presence of God in our heart, and realizing that we are nothing but emanations of the Godhead, therefore our only function is to relate to the Godhead in a positive sentiment. Without this realization, our actions will remain disconnected from the universal plan and plagued by selfishness - even if such selfishness expands beyond the limits of the single individual to identify one with one's family, one's community, one's nation, or one's particular cultural or religious tradition, and therefore make him exclusively attached to them.

Thus, *pandita* or “knowledgeable and wise”, is a person who has overcome the bodily identification and attachments. We will see more of this definition later in the text. On the other hand, *prajna* means “aware, conscious, conscientious”.

Krishna observes that Arjuna is speaking sagely about the protection of *dharma* within the family, and the effects that family degradation can have on society, and he praises him for that. This clarifies that Krishna does not reject Arjuna's previous arguments per se: they were perfectly dharmic and appropriate, but they only constituted a level of dharma that is intended to be followed in normal circumstances.

Another interesting point is that Krishna says that knowledgeable persons do not "grieve either for the dead or for the living", implying that often carrying on with life in certain circumstances can be more difficult than dying.

Bhishma, Drona and the other great personalities are not to be pitied because they will simply obtain the result of their own choices and activities, just like everybody else.

न त्वेवाहं जातु नासं न त्वं नेमे जनाधिपाः ।

na tvevāhaṁ jātu nāsaṁ na tvam̐ neme janādhipāḥ ।

न चैव न भविष्यामः सर्वे वयमतः परम् ॥ २-१२ ॥

na caiva na bhaviṣyāmaḥ sarve vayamataḥ param ।। 2-12 ।।

na: not; *tu*: but; *eva*: certainly; *aham*: I; *jatu*: at any time; *na*: not; *asam*: exist; *na*: not/neither; *tvam*: you; *na*: not; *ime*: these; *jana*: of people; *adhipah*: leaders; *na*: not; *ca*: and; *eva*: certainly; *na*: not; *bhaviṣyamah*: we will be; *sarve*: all; *vayam*: us; *atah*: now; *param*: after.

“Certainly there was never a time when I did not exist, and you and all these chieftains of men have always existed as well. Also, none of us will cease to exist in the future.”

In the previous verse, Krishna has stated that there is no need to grieve for those who are dead, and in this verse he explains why: because we never actually die.

We disappear from the eyes of the people around us because we leave the body, the material form that we manifested is no longer visible, as the atoms composing it will disperse. All material bodies are composed of atoms of matter that aggregate and disaggregate constantly, so much that every 7 years all the cells/atoms of our body have been replaced by new ones. During one lifetime the "magnet" of the material consciousness called *ahankara* keeps attracting material atoms and the disaggregation is a slow process by which fresh atoms are attracted through food etc and old atoms are lost through the biological functions. At the time of death the disaggregation process becomes more dramatic as the *ahankara* "magnet" completely leaves the body and this does not attract any fresh atoms - so only the decay and dispersion of the old atoms is visible. In subsequent verses Krishna will explain this process more specifically.

In this verse Krishna includes himself (*aham*), as well as Arjuna (*tvam*) and the other warriors (*jana adhipah*), in the eternal and transcendental category of spirit.

This verse states the inconceivable individual nature of Brahman, the Atman, that is simultaneously One and Many. The *aham* and *tvam*, the individual nature and consciousness, continues also after liberation from material identification, just like each molecule of water continues to exist individually with a precise shape and nature even after the droplet has dissolved into the ocean. What disappears is just the temporary shape of the drop, not the inherent nature of water (H₂O).

Some commentators state that this verse refers only to the bodies and not to the Atman, but such an idea is clearly rejected in the subsequent verses of *Gita*, where Krishna explains how the body is never eternal, while the soul is. So when Krishna says that "none of us will ever cease to be" he cannot possibly be speaking about the bodies.

The misunderstanding is probably caused by the intermediate level of identification of the embodied soul - the subtle body or mind, that is also material - that continues to exist from one lifetime to the next, carrying the karmic seeds and the root of material identification (the *ahankara*). But that is not eternal, either, because it will dissolve at the time of liberation. If we consider that Krishna is on a transcendental, liberated level, we cannot think that he is talking about the subtle material body - the material mind characterized by material bodily identification.

The eternal individuality of which Krishna is speaking refers to the Atman/Brahman, and is therefore on the pure transcendental level. It is a fact that in the process of spiritual evolution in this world, the material mind is gradually substituted by spiritual intelligence, as the spiritual body (*siddha deha*) grows and manifests more and more in our personality. Such spiritual body or spiritual form is the natural expansion of the *anu-atman*, and is developed in the association of the spiritual form of the Godhead and everything that is divine in nature - the transcendental names, qualities, activities, teachings, companions, abodes, etc of the Godhead.

The living entity emanates from the Godhead as a seed (*bija*), an atomic (*anu atman*) spark of the Fire, as a minuscule cell of the body of the Parama Purusha, but it contains the "spiritual DNA" by which he will be able to perfectly develop into a fully fledged spiritual form and personality like Bhagavan. This is also called *sarupya mukti*, the liberation that consists in developing the same form of the Lord.

When we recognize that Vishnu is transcendental and not material, then his names,

qualities, activities, teachings, companions, abodes, etc must also be transcendental. And in order to be able to approach Vishnu for worship and service, we also need to develop a transcendental body, that will gradually manifest in this world in the course of our *sadhana* and will be perfectly self-sufficient at the time at death when we leave our material body.

देहिनोऽस्मिन्यथा देहे कौमारं यौवनं जरा ।

dehino'sminyathā dehe kaumāram yauvanam jarā ।

तथा देहान्तरप्राप्तिर्धीरस्तत्र न मुह्यति ॥ २-१३ ॥

tathā dehāntaraprāptirdhīrastatra na muhyati ।। 2-13 ।।

dehinah: one has a (material) body; *asmin*: in this (world); *yatha*: as is; *dehe*: in the body; *kaumaram*: in childhood; *yauvanam*; in youth; *jara*: in old age; *tatha*: like that; *deha*: of the body; *antara*: end; *praptih*: attained; *dhirah*: one who is sober; *tatra*: there; *na*: not; *muhyati*: is confused.

“The embodied soul who lives in this body (passes from one form to the other) as from childhood to youth to old age, and similarly at the end of this body (he passes on). A wise person is not confused by this (passage).”

Each person knows there is a continuity of individual existence through childhood, youth and old age, although the body undergoes great changes, to the point we could say those are totally different bodies. To understand this point, it is sufficient to see a number of photos of the same person taken at 7 to 10 years intervals from each other.

It is said that almost all the cells of our body are naturally replaced in a cycle of 7 years. We can compare the spirit soul to a magnet that can modulate its power of attraction according to the particular identification. When the Atman identifies with the transcendental nature he becomes instantly attracted to it, but when he identifies with the material existence he remains stuck there. The magnetic power continues to exist, but the attraction mode changes.

The material elements can be compared to iron dust that becomes attracted and sticks to the magnet. Due to the inherent nature of iron, the particles of iron will oxidize and become rusty, thus losing the power to stick to the magnet. As they fall off, fresh iron particles are attracted and replace the old ones, although the fresh iron becomes oxidized more quickly because of the presence of already rusting particles around the magnet: this is called old age.

Eventually the entire crust of variously rusted iron particles can be broken apart easily, especially because of a strong shock, and then the magnet rolls away towards a more suitable stock of fresh material and again starts attracting particles to form a new body. However, there is continuity of consciousness for the owner of the body. The *aham* ("I") has no doubt about his own progressive identity.

But material identification plays tricks and creates confusion. Who am I? Am I a child, a young man or woman, or a "senior citizen"? So as soon as he becomes convinced of the new specific material identification pertaining to that present material form, the embodied soul forgets his previous specific material identification - a young man or woman will say "I am not a child (any more)", and an old man or woman will say "I am not young (any more)". In this confusion, the embodied soul tends to attach itself more anxiously to other identifications that appear to be more permanent - such as the gender (male/female), the race, the caste, the social position, the religious affiliation, the political views, the job/occupation, personal interests or even liking and disliking such as wearing a particular type of clothes and ornaments, a passion for gourmet food, for camping or hiking, for practicing a sport, and so on.

Some of such identifications may seem more reliable and other flimsier and more subject to change due to external circumstances (such as the loss of a job, a reverse of fortunes that destroys one's social position, an accident that leaves us handicapped, etc), but the more one is afraid of evolving, the more s/he will be attached to such definitions of one's identity.

This is why many people feel threatened in their own self-identification by seeing others who change religious affiliation, gender identification, nationality, social identification, or other conventions based on external appearances such as the way of dressing etc.

These attached people will be the ones who suffer most when the inevitable changes of material nature will force them to let go of their attachments - for example, when they become old, or when they die. These people are not sober as they are plagued by endless anxieties and fears, that manifest as greed and lust and anger, but they pretend to be the only sober or "normal" people around because they think of themselves as the "defenders of the permanent" because they desperately try to oppose change. But as change is the nature of the world, they cannot avoid defeat.

Old age and death are the greatest fears for these so-called "guardians of normality". Thus they try to create an artificial world where old age and death are not visible and therefore they can delude themselves into thinking they have prevailed over change.

Death becomes a taboo topic, a disgrace to be avoided at all costs, or at least to be hidden and forgotten, something unjust and cruel that does not make any sense. Society conventions also condemn old age and all the bodily modifications that generally accompany it - such as wrinkles, white hair, reduced sexual activity, changes of shape in the body, complexion irregularities, slower metabolism, etc. People who do not "keep fit" are treated with contempt or victimized, made the subject of spiteful jokes, or forced out of sight. If they want to go around freely they must lose weight, go to a gym, diet, undergo plastic surgery, dye their hair, dress in a flattering way, and even take medication against menopause and other normal symptoms of ageing.

All this is intended to defend the "last stand" of bodily identification against the inevitable changes of nature that harbingers death, the final and irreversible change.

मात्रास्पर्शास्तु कौन्तेय शीतोष्णसुखदुःखदाः ।

mātrāsparsāstu kaunteya śītoṣṇasukhaduḥkhadāḥ ।

आगमापायिनोऽनित्यास्तांस्तितिक्षस्व भारत ॥ २-१४ ॥

āgamāpāyino'nityāstāṁstitikṣasva bhārata ॥ 2-14 ॥

matra: instrument; *sparsah*: touch; *tu*: but; *kaunteya*: o son of Kunti (Arjuna); *sita*: winter; *ushna*: summer; *sukha*: joy; *duhkha*: distress; *dah*: that give; *agama*: coming; *apayinah*: disappearing; *anityah*: temporary; *tan*: them; *titikshasva*: you should tolerate; *bharata*: o descendent of Bharata (Arjuna).

“O son of Kunti, the contact of the senses (with the sense objects) causes joy and distress just like (cold in) winter and (heat in) summer. Such feelings are temporary: they come and go, o descendent of Bharata, and you should just try to tolerate them (without being confused and distracted from your duty).”

It is always important to study a concept within its proper context, and Krishna's teachings to Arjuna should also be considered as a discussion that follows a logical thread, and not as a random collection of aphorisms that have no connection with each other. In the previous verses Krishna answered Arjuna's doubts, saying that one should not be distracted from his duty by the idea of death, because the Atman is eternal. Each *jivatma* exists eternally, passing from one body to another in the course of one lifetime and also from one life to another.

Now Krishna is saying that such passages or changes are part of the natural cycle of life, like the seasons of the year, and they are just as temporary. Birth, life in a material body and death are temporary conditions, and it is this impermanence that disturbs the attached mind. But how do we notice such changes? Through the information that is supplied to our mind by the five senses of knowledge acquisition.

How can we ascertain whether a man is dead or alive? By looking at him, by listening to his breathing or other sounds he may produce, by touching his body, and so on.

Our senses enable us to carry on the desired interactions with the people we are attached to, and when we cannot perceive the face or the voice or the touch of a loved person, we feel something is missing: we miss his/her presence.

The contact between our senses of perception and the *tanmatra* relative to the bodies of a person we are attached to produces pleasure, while the lack of such contact produces suffering. The example offered by Krishna is thus particularly appropriate: the pleasure of the presence of a person we are attached to "warms" our heart, while his/her absence produces a sense of coldness and solitude. When the attachment is strong enough, the presence or absence of such *tanmatra* can produce respectively a fire of passion that is as hot as any torrid summer, and a freezing despair that is as cold as any Himalayan winter. However, it is impossible to remain always in the physical presence of our near and dear ones, because we have a duty to perform. A child will have to leave his mother to go to school, a husband will have to leave his wife to go to work, a parent will have leave his

grown-up children and grandchildren in order to embrace the renounced order of life, and ultimately we all have to leave each other when life or death forces separation on us.

Matra is "something that can be measured". The sense objects are measured by the senses to evaluate the various types and levels of pleasure or suffering that the contact with such objects can give.

There is a difference between *matra* and *vishaya*: both terms apply to the "objects of the senses", but *matra* is the subtle matrix of sense perception that remains within the subtle body of the perceiver, while the *vishaya* are the objects that are perceived externally.

Thus the *pancha tanmatra* are the modes of sense perception, or the matrixes of the five objects of the senses: the *sabda tanmatra* is the sound vibration, the *sparsa tanmatra* is the touch, the *rupa tanmatra* is the form, the *rasa tanmatra* is the flavor, and the *gandha tanmatra* is the smell.

We should be careful not to confuse the *matra* or *vishaya* with the actual person whose body's form, sound, or touch we contemplate as *matra* or *vishaya*. Foolish people are in the habit of blaming the sense objects for their own lust or disappointment, but that is only due to ignorance.

The word *sparsa* can refer to the contact or to the object that is contacted. The meaning of the verse is that the contact between the organs and the objects produces the feelings we know as heat and cold, joy and sorrow, etc in their various measures. Sometimes cold produces pleasure and sometimes it produces suffering, depending on various factors, and even within the same category of feeling, heat and cold, joy and sorrow can be milder or stronger depending on various factors.

For example: people pay top money to get a sauna treatment in the winter, but during the summer they can hardly tolerate the same temperature and humidity in their bedroom when they are trying to sleep.

Naturally all the changes of the material body - birth, growth during childhood, the passage through adolescence, the process of ageing, and death itself - cause a various mixture of joy and sorrow, because they imply the association or separation between bodies and between the bodies and the material things and surroundings. The real cause of such joys and sorrows is the contact or lack of contact between the senses and the objects of the senses.

Normally the embodied being runs after joys and away from sorrows, but no matter how far we try to run, we will always meet with joys and sorrows, because we are carrying them around in our subtle body as *matra*. So the real solution to the problems of existence is to perform our proper duty: doing the right thing without being confused or deterred by selfish considerations. Both joy and sorrow need to be tolerated in the discharge of our duty.

Krishna does not say that one should not experience joy or sorrow, but simply that we need to tolerate them as mere temporary disturbances, like excessive cold in winter and excessive heat in summer. As long as we have a material body we will feel them.

The names Kaunteya and Bharata are significant here. Krishna wants to remind Arjuna that he is the descendent of great personalities, who tolerated much in their lives without ever neglecting their duties.

यं हि न व्यथयन्त्येते पुरुषं पुरुषर्षभ ।

yam hi na vyathayantye te puruṣam puruṣarṣabha ।

समदुःखसुखं धीरं सोऽमृतत्वाय कल्पते ॥ २-१५ ॥

samaduḥkhasukham dhīram so'amṛtatvāya kalpate ॥ 2-15 ॥

yam: one who; *hi*: certainly; *na*: not; *vyathayanty*: are causing disturbance; *ete*: these; *puruṣam*: a person; *puruṣarṣabha*: o best among persons; *sama*: equal; *duḥkha*: suffering; *sukham*: joy; *dhīram*: sober; *sah*: he; *amṛtatvaya*: for immortality; *kalpate*: thinks about.

“O best among men, one who is not distracted by all these (feelings) and is always equally balanced in suffering and in joy, is a sober person and he can aspire to immortality.”

Krishna has been speaking about the death of the body and the immortality of the soul, and how the joys and sorrows connected to the changes of the material body are due to the contact with the objects of the senses. The attachment to the joys and sorrows originating from the contact with the sense objects is the real cause of death and rebirth. What is death? It is the force that separates us from the sense objects to which we are attached. Since we are still attached to the sense objects, rebirth is inevitable because we need another material body to contact them again.

As death only refers to the material body, it must only apply to what is pertaining to the material body - precisely the joys and sorrows created by the contact of the material senses with the material objects of the senses. Once a person overcomes the identification with the material senses and the attachment to the material objects of the senses, death disappears. In fact, death does not really exist because, as Krishna has already explained, the embodied being constantly passes from one body to another but remains always the same in spite of all such passages.

Amṛitva means “immortality” and is a synonym for *moksha* or liberation.

Many people have strange and confused ideas about liberation: they tend to believe that *moksha* is some kind of ticket for a journey from a particular place (the "material world") to another particular place (the "spiritual world"), that can be won in a lottery, purchased or received as a gift.

This idea mostly comes from the abrahamic concept of "salvation" (a word that is sometimes used to translate the Sanskrit term *moksha*), in which allegiance to a particular religious affiliation gives the immediate and automatic right to "go to heaven" even to the most unevolved and gross materialist. But such an idea is very foolish, and those who entertain it are in the terrible danger of wasting the valuable opportunity of the human birth, because they will refuse to make any effort in personal development, believing that they are already "saved".

The true facts are very different. As *Gita* (8.6) clearly explains, at the time of death we will only be able to attain whatever level of consciousness we have actually developed

during this lifetime. If we do not live the realization that we are already in the spiritual world now, in this very body, there will be no divine airplane coming to take us to Vaikuntha at the time of death.

We cannot pay or bribe, beg, trick or sneak our way to liberation, because liberation is just about our own consciousness – our being able to remain on the transcendental level without being deluded and confused by material identification, attachment and conditions of life. This is only possible if we become truly *dhira*, or “sober”.

The word *kalpana* means "desire, intention, determination", and as such it is used during rituals to describe the declaration of intents for the ceremony. By using the word *kalpate* in this verse, Krishna is saying that liberation can be achieved by a sober (unattached) person who is steady in determination: this makes him/her fit or eligible for immortality. Some commentators link this verse with the need for the formal acceptance of the order of *sannyasa*, by which one officially detaches himself/herself from the pursuance of sense enjoyment. This is all very good when the *sannyasi* or *sannyasini* has already attained the level of self realization and utilizes the position to give a good example to the society in general, but it can be disastrous when the candidate is not ready and follows the very adharmic and stupid principle "fake it till you make it". In later chapters (3.6, 6.1) Krishna will very clearly explain that a person who simply restrains his senses but has still some attachment for the senses objects in his mind is a fool and a cheater, and that real *sannyasa* is not about rules and regulations but about performing one's duties selflessly.

In Kali yuga there is no need to take formal *sannyasa*. *Brahma vaivarta purana* says, *asvamedham gavalambham sannyasam pala paitrkam devarena sutotpattim kalau pancha vivarjayet*: "In the age of Kali five acts should be avoided: the *asvamedha yajna*, the *gomedha yajna*, the acceptance of the order of *sannyasa*, the offering of oblations to the forefathers, and a man's begetting children in his brother's wife."

नासतो विद्यते भावो नाभावो विद्यते सतः ।

nāsato vidyate bhāvo nābhāvo vidyate sataḥ ।

उभयोरपि दृष्टोऽन्तस्त्वनयोस्तत्त्वदर्शिभिः ॥ २-१६ ॥

ubhayorapi dr̥ṣṭo'ntastvanayostattvadarśibhiḥ ।। 2-16 ।।

na: not; *asatah*: of what is *asat*; *vidyate*: is known; *bhavah*: existence; *na*: not; *abhavo*: non-existence; *vidyate*: is known; *satah*: of what is *sat*; *ubhayoh*: of the two; *api*: certainly; *drishtah*: seen; *antah*: the conclusion; *tu*: but; *anayoh*: either of them; *tattva*: of *tattva* (truth); *darshibhih*: those who see.

“Those who see the truth know that what is illusory/temporary/bad will not (continue to) be, while what is real/eternal/good will never be destroyed. They have carefully observed both things and reached this conclusion.”

Krishna is still speaking about the constant changing of the body and the impermanent

nature of the contact of the senses with the sense objects.

Sat and its contrary *asat* are extremely important concepts in the philosophy of *Gita*. *Sat* means “existence, reality, goodness, permanence, spirit”, or in its adjective form means “actual, real, true, good, right, eternal, spiritual, transcendental”.

Its opposite *asat* therefore means “non-existent, illusory, false, wrong, impermanent or temporary, material”.

All these definitions can be applied to this verse to expand its layers of meanings. The general picture we get from the combination of all such meanings is that even the material world is a manifestation of the compassion of God, and everything “bad” is simply a temporary and illusory experience, similar to a vivid dream or virtual reality, meant to help us in our learning and development. Anxiety (*kunta*) dissipates when we actually realize that illusion cannot last long, while what is real is never subject to change as it exists beyond transformation.

However, we need to carefully understand that *asat* as "non-existent" or "false" is a relative meaning, as it refers to the transformation and not to the void. There is no void or *sunya* anywhere in this universe. What appears to be void is actually full of invisible particles... molecules of gases in the air or of cosmic dust in space, atoms of elements, photons of light and other radiations, and especially the omnipresent existence of the energy of Brahman.

The example is often given of water. On our planet water is everywhere, even in the deserts: there is no place on earth where there is 0% moisture in the air. The percentage may be very low, but still it is not absolute zero. Invisible to our eyes, this moisture rises up in the atmosphere and condensates in clouds, that are more or less visible, then it precipitates as rain or snow, that is very much visible. Rain and snow feed streams and rivers, that are even more permanently visible than rain, and rivers flow down to the oceans, that are even more permanently visible than rivers, although even oceans are not eternally manifested and can disappear, too.

From there, molecules of water evaporate again and are carried around by the air in a constant cycle. Clouds and rain are the most temporary form of water, yet their temporary manifestation enables the growth of the bodies of plants and animals and human beings as well. And the human body affords the priceless opportunity of striving for liberation or immortality.

Contemporary science is now helping our understanding by showing that solid matter is actually nothing but vibrating energy - matter does not exist in the sense that it is not what it seems. However, a ton of bricks falling on your head certainly have the tangible and real effect to destroy your human opportunity, although the contact between your senses and the bricks as objects of your senses will be very temporary.

A *tattva darshi* is "one who sees Reality", a person who has the direct and real perception and experience of truth - not because he "heard" about it or because he "believes" it.

A *darshana* is a perspective or vision of Reality - both in knowledge (as in *Sat darshana* - Vedanta, Karma, Yoga, Sankhya, Nyaya, Vaisheshika) and in worship (as in the *darshana* of the Deities in the temple). The concept of *darshana* is different from "opinion", because an opinion is simply a mental elaboration that may be right or wrong and therefore it needs verification, while a *darshana* is the genuine, true and clear experience of a consistent vision. Between the two there is the same difference that separates hearing the description of an elephant and actually seeing the elephant in the flesh. The word Tat

is a *sarvanama* or pronoun, meaning "that", the same Tat of the *mahavakyas* such as *Tat tvam asi*, *Om Tat sat*, etc. There is also a grammatical explanation of the absolute meaning of the word, as *sarvanama* ("pronoun") is "a name that applies to everyone" (or everything), and that is precisely what Brahman or Reality is: everything and everyone.

अविनाशि तु तद्विद्धि येन सर्वमिदं ततम् ।

avināśi tu tadviddhi yena sarvamidam tatam ।

विनाशमव्ययस्यास्य न कश्चित्कर्तुमर्हति ॥ २-१७ ॥

vināśamavyayasyāsyā na kaścitkartumarhati ॥ 2-17 ॥

avinasi: that cannot be destroyed; *tu*: but; *tat*: that; *viddhi*: know; *yena*: by him; *sarvam*: all; *idam*: this; *tatam*: pervaded; *vinasam*: destruction; *avyayasyasya*: of what is imperishable; *na*: not; *kascit*: any; *kartum*: to do; *arhati*: can.

“Know that it is an imperishable (spirit) that pervades all this (universe of bodies). And no one will be able to destroy what is imperishable.”

Krishna has been speaking about Tat, or Tattva, the Reality that is always existing (Brahman/Atman) as opposed to the temporary and illusory relative non-existence of the material body. The word *viddhi*, "know", is particularly important in the verse, indicating that the purpose of knowledge is the experience of the imperishable Brahman.

This is also the open invitation of the *Vedanta sutra* (1.1.1): *athato brahma jijnasa*, "now is the time to search the knowledge of Brahman". Brahman is eternal and imperishable, but our human form of life is not, so we should take full opportunity of this small window of time. Now, without any further hesitation or delay.

Here spirit is stated to be present in all bodies and in the entire universe, as the expression *sarvam idam tatam* ("pervading all this") can be applied at various levels - the body, the sum total of all prana, the universe, the entire reality.

Even bodies that may appear dead are actually teeming with life in the form of micro-organisms that break down the organic matter by eating and digesting it. Microscopic living entities are found in water, in air and in earth, and there are also souls that carry a body made of subtler material elements that can be seen or perceived only through subtle senses. As cutting-edge contemporary science has already shown, the parameters of life on this planet among the species we know may become stretched by different conditions where life can develop in completely different ways that may appear alien to our daily experience and may even not be easily recognized as such.

Krishna is speaking of the "*aham*", or individual consciousness, and therefore the description specifically applies to the individual aspect of Brahman called Atman.

The simultaneous oneness and individuality of the Brahman and Atman is said to be inconceivable, therefore when we hear people speaking about different perspectives - called monism, dualism, etc - we need to understand that they are just indicative

suggestions of the One Reality and not sectarian dogmas that are competing against each other. Trying to ascertain which perspective is "the correct one" over the others is foolish and just demonstrates that one is not a *tattva-darshi*. One who can directly see the Great Picture of Reality immediately understands how apparent opposites are reconciled: this is called *prakasha*, or "illumination".

Also indicative are the "dimensions of the soul" mentioned in the *Svetasvatara Upanishad* (5.9) as "one ten-thousandth of the tip of a hair". The spiritual soul has no material limitations in time or space, and the indication of its atomic "size" is only intended to give us the idea that souls are everywhere, even in the tiniest bodies of microbes. Yet, the power of the soul expands and pervades even huge bodies, such as those of whales.

It is also said that the soul is situated in the heart of the body of a living entity: this is also an indication only, as the spirit soul is transcendental to the gross matter and is not tied to an internal organ. For example, in the case of heart transplant, we should not think that the soul of the donor passes into the body of the person who receives the organ.

The *Mundaka Upanishad* also explains that the presence of Brahman/Atman is carried in this world by *prana*: in the human body *prana* takes the 5 forms of *prana*, *apana*, *vyana*, *samana*, *udana* - the five heads of the Kundalini snake. But *prana* does not exist only within the human body: it exists in water, in air, in the sunshine, even in the apparently empty space. What is *prana*? *Prana* is simply "energy", therefore applies both to Atman and Brahman.

Another definition of *prana* is *prabha* or "power". Just like the sunshine particles or rays are the *prabha* of the Sun, the *prana* in our body is the *prabha* of the Atman manifested at the material level.

अन्तवन्त इमे देहा नित्यस्योक्ताः शरीरिणः ।

antavanta ime dehā nityasyoktāḥ śarīriṇaḥ ।

अनाशिनोऽप्रमेयस्य तस्माद्युध्यस्व भारत ॥ २-१८ ॥

anāśino'prameyasya tasmādyudhyasva bhārata ॥ 2-18 ॥

antavanta: that will have an end; *ime*: all these; *dehah*: bodies; *nityasya*: of the eternal; *uktah*: said; *saririnah*: of he who owns the bodies; *anasinah*: that will not be destroyed; *aprameyasya*: that cannot be measured; *tasmāt*: therefore; *yudhyasva*: engage in battle; *bharata*: o descendent of Bharata.

“All these (material) bodies are destined to end, while he who is in these bodies is said to be eternal, because he cannot be destroyed or measured (materially). Therefore, o descendent of Bharata, you should fight.”

The logic is crystal clear: all bodies are temporary, so they should be used in the best possible way, for the progress of the eternal soul. Sacrificing or utilizing one's body for the benefit of the soul is actually a good bargain, the proper purpose for which it was

created in the first place.

The apparent contradiction of the need for progress and evolution for the soul, that is described as unchangeable and untouched by temporary conditions, can be reconciled when we understand that the individual soul is *anu atma* (atomic soul) at the beginning of its evolution. It already contains all the “spiritual DNA” for its full perfection because it is an *amsa*, or “part” (“cell”) in the spiritual body of God – comparable to the “stem cells” of the human body that will eventually differentiate and grow into the different limbs of a fully developed body.

The *anu atma* is already *sat-cit-ananda*, or “made of” eternal existence, conscious knowledge and perfect happiness, but it is very small and as such can be blown around by the mighty wind of Mahamaya. When covered by the *ahamkara* or identification with matter it is called conditioned, while it becomes liberated when such covering is dissolved. Although unchangeable in nature, and eternally made of knowledge and bliss, the soul grows, evolves and develops through learning, experience and realization towards a perfect form called *siddha deha*, a spiritual body that is not subject to the limitations of gross or subtle matter. During this process of evolution the soul retains its subtle body through the repeated passages from birth to death to rebirth in many lifetimes, with a continuity of conscious existence that gradually expands into all the layers of the mind, including the superficial level. At that point, with the full realization of one’s eternal and transcendental nature, the subtle body also dissolves and only the spiritual body remains. The support for the growth of the sapling becomes unnecessary when the plant is strong enough.

Another interesting thought about the concept of *avyaya* or *avinasi* (“imperishable, indestructible”) is that the imperishable does not always and necessarily continue to exist in a visible form for the practical purposes of people who have a material body.

The Sanatana Dharma will never cease to exist, but it is very much possible that its correct understanding and practice will become lost in human society, and even that it will be banned legally and persecuted by adharmic governments and powers. It is even possible that the temples and sacred places in the world will be destroyed and/or covered by other buildings, or even by garbage dumps. In this universe manifestation, preservation and dissolution continue to follow each other, and this also applies to the visible manifestations of Sanatana Dharma in human society. The Devas are those who constantly work to protect Dharma, while the Asuras are those who constantly oppose it. At times the Devas win, at other times the Asuras win, albeit for a relatively short time...

य एनं वेत्ति हन्तारं यश्चैनं मन्यते हतम्

ya enam vetti hantāraṁ yaścainaṁ manyate hatam

उभौ तौ न विजानीतो नायं हन्ति न हन्यते ॥ २-१९ ॥

ubhau tau na vijānīto nāyaṁ hanti na hanyate || 2-19 ||

yah: s/he; *enam:* this; *vetti:* knows; *hantaram:* one who kills; *yah:* s/he; *ca:* and; *enam:* this; *manyate:* thinks; *hatam:* killed; *ubhau:* both; *tau:* they; *na:* do not; *vijanitah:*

knower; *na*: not; *ayam*: this; *hanti*: kills; *na*: not; *hanyate*: is killed.

“One who knows this (Atman/Brahman) does not consider himself to be killing or being killed, in both (positions) he knows that one does neither truly kill nor is truly killed.”

The word *enam/ayam* in this verse refers to Atman/Brahman, that in previous verses was described as Tat ("that"). On another level, *enam/ayam* also refers to the knowledge of Atman/Brahman, to the spiritual consciousness and identification. In fact, Knowledge/Consciousness is non-different from Atman/Brahman, because awareness is the fundamental symptom of the spirit soul as opposed to the material bodies. When the body is inhabited by the Atman, there is awareness - knowledge, perception, consciousness - and when the Atman moves out, awareness disappears. The pointless controversy of the "personalists" against the "impersonalists" aims at demonstrating that Atman is eternally individual, but it is misguided because there is no contradiction in Atman and Brahman being simultaneously one and distinct (*bheda-abheda tattva*). So when we speak of Tat (or *enam/ayam* as in this verse) we refer to Brahman as the Soul of all individual souls. Aggressive "personalists" thus end up embarrassing themselves in trying to demonstrate that God's spiritual body (constituted by the *jivas*, who are parts and parcel of God) is different from God - precisely the offensive mentality they ascribe to the "impersonalists". In reality there is never separation between Atman and Brahman: the variations of consciousness/awareness are only due to the particular variation of the power of consciousness - Shakti, also called Maya. Aggressive "personalists" offensively use the term "Mayavadi" to refer to Advaitins, but they forget they are also expected to worship Maya/Shakti in the form of Yogamaya.

Some might misinterpret these verses to mean that one could indiscriminately kill anyone else legitimately without any consequence, claiming that in any case all bodies are illusory (or “vanity”) and people would eventually have to die. This is not a good conclusion. All actions have consequences. It is true that all bodies are ultimately meant to die, but in the course of their manifestation they are meant to offer the opportunity for the evolution of the Jivatman, just like rainclouds and rain are temporary but their action on the land and on the bodies of plants, animals and human beings is instrumental for the perpetuation of the cycle of life. All actions, omissions, words and thoughts have consequences that reach far beyond the time and space where they manifest, and we have, through our actions, the power to increase or decrease the joys and sorrows we will have to experience in the future. Since joys and sorrows are the inevitable consequence of our past good and bad deeds, by increasing our good deeds (*punya*) and decreasing our bad deeds (*papa*) today we are building a better future for ourselves and for everybody else, even if we need to sacrifice bodies for it. Generally living entities maintain their bodies by consuming the bodies of other living entities – carnivores kill animals, vegetarians and herbivores kill plants. Any life that we take for the survival of our own body is a debt we contract and that we will have to pay eventually, so we should move around in this world with the least possible negative impact, creating as much positive impact as possible. The ideal diet, observed generally during the fasting periods, consists of the most non-violent foods, such as filtered water, leaves fallen from plants, the flesh of fruits fallen from plants, and the surplus milk of a cow treated affectionately like a grateful child treats a mother. Very advanced yogis are able to subsist on air, sunlight, or just on the

prana that pervades the entire universe, without even breathing. However, it is unlikely that all the members of human society will be able or willing to restrict their diet to the above mentioned totally non-violent foods, therefore for more ordinary people there is a license to kill a reasonable number of vegetable living entities, either in the form of seeds or as entire plants. In ordinary circumstances, a vegetarian diet is more acceptable than a non-vegetarian diet for several reasons: first of all, for health reasons, because it is the most suitable for the human body and mind. There is ample scientific literature that shows how the digestive system, teeth, and general bodily structure and functions of human beings are engineered for a "fuel" consisting of fruits, vegetables and grains. The mind - that is, the subtle body of the human being - also finds greater benefits from fresh, clean, luscious, sweet-smelling, pure and attractive vegetarian foods. On the other hand, non-vegetarian foods are nothing but corpses and therefore they need to be disguised by a lot of cooking and other ingredients in order to become attractive, and even so they become quickly putrefied and toxic for the body and mind of those who consume them. However, it is important to understand that even plants have life, and life should be taken only when strictly necessary and without selfish motivations. We have the right and duty to maintain our bodies with the share that has been allotted to us, as long as we pay back our debt by working with selflessness and dedication for the benefit of the entire universe. This dutiful consciousness in playing one's allotted role in the administration of the universe elevates the human being to a level of affinity with the Devas, but if we want to achieve liberation - that is even more elevated than the heavenly planets - we need to situate ourselves on the level of Brahman consciousness. According to Krishna (18.54) attaining such Brahma bhuta is the platform from which one can develop true *bhakti* rather than the delusional and childish sentimentalism based on mental fantasies that is sometimes passed for genuine devotion to the Supreme Lord. This means that we should always remember our true nature and remain above the material level of nature - where a body requires food and kills another body to procure it, as confirmed by *Bhagavata purana* (1.13.47). Later in *Gita* (5.8-9), Krishna will clearly confirm that a self-realized soul remains untouched by these natural activities of the body, because the consciousness is always fixed on the pure spiritual nature.

न जायते म्रियते वा कदाचिन्

na jāyate mriyate vā kadācin

नायं भूत्वा भविता वा न भूयः ।

nāyaṁ bhūtvā bhavitā vā na bhūyaḥ ।

अजो नित्यः शाश्वतोऽयं पुराणो

ajo nityaḥ śāśvato'yaṁ purāṇo

न हन्यते हन्यमाने शरीरे ॥ २-२० ॥

na hanyate hanyamāne śarīre ॥ 2-20 ॥

na: not; *jāyate*: takes birth; *mriyate*: dies; *va*: or; *kadacit*: any time; *na*: not; *ayam*: this; *bhūtvā*: once having been; *bhavitā*: will become; *va*: or; *na*: not; *bhūyaḥ*: again to

become; *ajah*: unborn; *nityah*: eternal; *sasvato*: permanent; *ayam*: this; *purana*: ancient; *na*: not; *hanyate*: kills; *hanyamane*: is killed; *sarire*: in the body.

“(The soul) never takes birth and never dies at any time. It eternally exists, without beginning or end. This (soul) that is in the body is unborn, eternal, imperishable, immensely ancient, and cannot kill or be killed.”

Krishna is still talking about the soul - *jivatma*, *atman*, *brahman*. These three concepts are inconceivably one and different from each other, as we have already mentioned, and they are defined by the term *ayam* or "this" as in this verse, or *tat* or "that" as in the famous *mahavakya* "*tat tvam asi*". This verse specifically refers to the six changes of the body - that takes birth, grows, lives for some time, produces offshoots (offspring or byproducts), dwindles and dies. The soul is not really affected by such changes, although in its conditioned state it certainly goes through all of them and identifies with them because of ignorance and illusion. So when Krishna says that the soul does not take birth, this means that the soul exists before the birth of the body. Saying that it never dies means that it continues to exist after the death of the body. However, we know that the *anu atma* becomes manifested (*bhutva*) at the beginning of its evolutionary journey. *Bhutva* means "having once been".

Here the apparent beginning of the existence of the *jiva* is simply its manifestation from the spiritual body of God, where it exists eternally. When we speak of something that is eternal and beginningless, and yet has a beginning, logic and words become insufficient as instruments: this will be clearly confirmed by Krishna later (2.29). However, this is not a justification for avoiding all efforts to understand and help others to understand Reality, as much as intellect and words can grasp it. Another level of explanation that can help us understand the subject is the distinction between *anu atma* and *vibhu atma*: they are both *atma*, but the *anu* is "atomic", while the *vibhu* is "powerful". Of course a *jivatma* will never be able to become the Supreme Lord Narayana - no matter how much effort or realization he can muster - but even among *jivatmas* there are differences depending on the degree of evolution or development that the *atma* has attained.

The word *sasvata* means "not decaying and not subject to change", while *purana* means "ancient" - not new or recent. Yet, the soul has no past, present or future, because it is not limited by time and space.

The issue of the eternity of the individual soul as inconceivably compatible with its beginning in existence, when it is generated by Sadashiva Mahavishnu, has been debated rather hotly in the group of the followers of Chaitanya, so for those who wish to analyze it in greater depth, it is advisable to refer to those writings.

वेदाविनाशिनं नित्यं य एनमजमव्ययम् ।

vedāvināśinaṁ nityaṁ ya enamajamavyayam ।

कथं स पुरुषः पार्थ कं घातयति हन्ति कम् ॥ २-२१ ॥

kathaṁ sa puruṣaḥ pārtha kaṁ ghātayati hanti kam ।। 2-21 ।।

veda: knows; *avinasinam*: of the indestructible; *nityam*: eternal; *yah*: s/he; *enam*: this;

ajam: unborn; *avyayam*: imperishable; *katham*: how; *sah*: s/he; *purushah*: a person; *partha*: o son of Pritha; *kam*: whom; *ghatayati*: causes to be killed; *hanti*: kills; *kam*: who.

“O son of Pritha, when one knows that this (soul) is imperishable and eternal, unborn and unchangeable, how (one can kill another) and who will kill whom?”

The description of *enam* ("this") continues. This verse introduces the concept of *purusha*, "a person", meaning the active principle of *atman/brahman* - in a sense, the "masculine" side of Being. Later in *Gita* (15.7) Krishna will say that the *jivatma* are eternal particles of the Parama Purusha that are situated within Prakriti. But in 7.5, Krishna says that the *jivas* are Prakriti - a form of Prakriti that is superior to the manifestation of the inert matter of the bodies. Is there a contradiction? Is the *jivatman purusha* or *prakriti*, male or female? In fact it is both, and continues to be, irrespective of the material body it is wearing... so even "women" in this world are actually *purushas*, and even "men" in this world are actually *prakriti*. The nature of the *jiva* as "child of God", includes both the nature of *prakriti* and the nature of *purusha*. We may give the example of the "genes" a child receives from both parents and that remain within the DNA even if only one of the characteristics, either male or female, will be apparent externally. In fact each human being has both a male and female side, not only on the subtle level of the mind (characterized respectively by logic and intuition, or practicality and emotionality etc) but also at a physical level. The question posed by this verse is also interesting and it can be studied at several levels. For example, the use of the name Partha, "son of Pritha", reminds us that as children of Mother Earth (Prithvi) we should understand the way she deals with all her children - sometimes killing them when it is necessary for the greater good. The use of force, even up to lethal levels, should never be confused with violence, exactly like a necessary surgical operation properly performed by a skilled and ethically motivated doctor cannot be described as a crime. Another level of meaning of this verse goes beyond the act of killing, and includes all kinds of actions. Later on Krishna will extensively speak about Karma yoga, or the union with the Absolute through the art of Action, but this verse already introduces the topic. The crux of the discussion is the apparent difference between the path of ritualistic duties on one side, and the path of renunciation on the opposite side. But if we carefully examine both we find out they are actually not opposed: this will be clearly revealed later in *Gita* (6.1). This particular issue has been subject to many debates and questioning. Some have even suggested that the verse refers to a dead person, i.e. one who does not have a material body, or that the inconceivable position of the soul is beyond the scope of knowledge. Such ideas have been amply refuted by the traditional commentators.

वासांसि जीर्णानि यथा विहाय

vāsāmsi jīrṇāni yathā vihāya

नवानि गृह्णाति नरोऽपराणि ।

navāni gr̥hṇāti naro'parāṇi ।

तथा शरीराणि विहाय जीर्णा-

tathā śarīrāṇi vihāya jīrṇā-

न्यन्यानि संयाति नवानि देही ॥ २-२२ ॥

nyanyāni saṁyāti navāni dehī ॥ 2-22 ॥

vasamsi: clothes; *jirnani*: torn/worn out; *yatha*: just like; *vihaya*: after leaving; *navani*: new; *grihnati*: accepts/takes; *narah*: a man; *aparani*: other; *tatha*: similarly; *sarirani*: bodies; *vihaya*: giving up; *jirnani*: torn/worn out; *anyani*: different; *samyati*: unites; *navani*: new; *dehi*: the embodied (living entity).

“Just like a man abandons clothes that have become torn or worn out and acquires other and new clothes, in the same way one leaves the damaged body and accepts another new body.”

This metaphor is particularly suitable as the embodied soul is covered by a number of layers of identification, just like a person can wear various layers of undergarments. The *anandamaya* core is covered by *jnanamaya* or intellect, *manomaya* or mind, *pranamaya* or energy body, and *annamaya* or gross physical body.

In this verse the word *jirnani* is particularly important. Death occurs because the material body is torn or worn out, or in other words either because of a violent injury or because of old age. In certain cases and by certain practices we can delay the death of the body but we cannot avoid it completely, because the body itself is engineered in such a way that it must decay, in order to push the conditioned soul in the direction of evolution.

Another important word in the verse is *samyati*, "unites", indicating a connection that is stronger than the mere "wearing" of a dress: it seems more appropriate to some kind of prosthetic limb, or an interactive device as in virtual reality computer games. In fact the material body of the human being is infinitely more complex and wonderful than any dress we may have seen in ordinary life. It grows and diversifies according to the need, has a limited ability to fix itself, and interacts with the identification of its owner through the complex "software" that comes together with it. We can compare the gross material body to the hardware of a computer, while the mind is comparable to a very advanced software system that can be programmed and reprogrammed if we learn to.

The atman is the computer operator: the more knowledgeable and skilled he is, the better the system will work.

This example can help us understand better the idea of "uniting" with the body: a computer must be properly "connected" in order to function. In fact, the comparison of

the body/mind with a computer could go even further beyond the present technological complexity and functionality of computers as we know them, into a field that many could see as science fiction.

The word *dehi* is used in this verse to specifically qualify the *jiva* that "unites" with the material body/mind: it is a conditioned living entity, one that identifies with a body and therefore needs to get a new one when he loses the old one. A computer operator cannot remain without a machine as long as he identifies himself with the activity of working on a computer. Sometimes we get so used to using machines that we become unable to make simple additions without using the electronic calculator.

Similarly, an "embodied living entity" cannot remain without a material body for a long time, even when he is forced out by death.

नैनं छिन्दन्ति शस्त्राणि नैनं दहति पावकः ।

nainam chindanti śastrāṇi nainam dahati pāvakaḥ ।

न चैनं क्लेदयन्त्यापो न शोषयति मारुतः ॥ २-२३ ॥

na cainam kledayantyāpo na śoṣayati mārutaḥ ।। 2-23 ।।

na: not; *enam*: this; *chindanti*: cut; *sastrani*: weapons; *na*: not; *enam*: this; *dahati*: burns; *pavakah*: fire; *na*: not; *enam*: this; *kledayanti*: moisten/soak; *apah*: waters; *na*: not; *soshayati*: dries; *marutah*: the wind.

"This (soul who is in the body) cannot be cut by any weapon, or burned by fire, moistened/soaked by water or dried by the wind."

The nature of the soul is spiritual and transcendental, therefore it cannot be killed or even affected in its essence by anything material.

In this world, we have the constant experience of things being dissolved by water, burned by fire and dried and ripped apart by the wind. Actually the inherent power in these elements can also be channeled and used in very sophisticated weapons, according to an ancient knowledge that was taught to the *kshatriyas* of the Vedic times. For example, today the great majority of the people have heard about the laser, that is a very concentrated form of light capable of cutting through hard and dense materials. Similarly, sound can be modulated and concentrated in order to modify matter in dramatic ways. All the ancient Vedic weapons were based on mantras, that are sound vibrations combined with the magnetic field created by the mind; in particular circumstances such specific mantras acted on fire, water or wind, creating exceptional weaponry that could destroy the bodies of the enemies. But they were never able to destroy the soul.

Water (in the sense of liquidity) has the power of dissolving earth and therefore also all the solid elements that are derivations of the earth element. The ancient art of alchemy was based on dissolving materials into liquid, heating them with fire, purifying/evaporating through air by distillation etc. The process was not only practical

for the discovery of many important and useful chemical products, such as gunpowder, solvents, extracts, etc, but it was also highly symbolical because it trained the mind in the search of the "quintessence" that could not be dissolved in water, burned by fire, or dried by air - the representation of the soul itself.

At a more symbolical level, water is separation or detachment, air is knowledge or inspiration, and fire is the passion that can both condensate and expand. All these elements of *sadhana* are utilized to purify the soul from the material contamination. The topic of the soul that cannot be cut to pieces has also been discussed with reference to the separation or non-separation of the individual soul from the Supreme Soul. The debate again leads to the *dvaita/advaita* controversy, and it should be solved in the same light we have explained before. Vedic scriptures offer the example of a spark that emanates from fire, or a drop of water from the ocean.

Now on the material level a spark can be separated from the fire, although it will become extinguished or create another fire if it falls on suitable materials, and a drop of water can remain very far from the ocean for an extremely long time - possibly, even forever.

This is because the fire and the ocean have a precise and limited position in space. A fire or an ocean are not everywhere. However, we know that God is omnipresent and eternally residing within the heart of the living entity as well. How can the soul ever be separated from God then? It is not possible.

The Atman is separated from the Brahman only in the confused perception of the *jiva*. Such confusion can be material - as due to Mahamaya - or spiritual - as due to Yogamaya. In the first instance, it helps the living entity to forget God and the divine reality to become immersed in material identification and attachment, while in the second instance it helps the living entity to better connect with God through a more intimate and deeper feeling and relationship.

Such separation it is not factual. Yet, at the same time each individual soul remains an individual eternally, as Krishna has already clearly established in 2.12. In this way each individual soul can offer a personal relationship of love and devotion to the Supreme and interact with other individual souls on the transcendental platform. In fact, individuality even exists among the Personalities of Godhead that are direct emanations or *svamsas*, such as the different forms of Vishnu. If there were no spiritual individuality, the entire concept of *lila* would be meaningless, and so would the concept of *bhakti*.

अच्छेद्योऽयमदाह्योऽयमक्लेद्योऽशोष्य एव च ।

acchedyo'yamadāhyo'yamakledyo'śoṣya eva ca ।

नित्यः सर्वगतः स्थाणुरचलोऽयं सनातनः ॥ २-२४ ॥

nityaḥ sarvagataḥ sthāṇuracalo'yaṁ sanātanaḥ ।। 2-24 ।।

acchedyah: that cannot be broken or cut; *ayam*: this; *adahyah*: that cannot be burned; *ayam*: this; *akledyo*: that cannot be dissolved; *asoshyah*: that cannot be dried; *eva*: certainly; *ca*: and; *nityah*: eternal; *sarva-gatah*: omnipresent; *sthanur*: fixed; *acalah*: that does not move; *ayam*: this; *sanatanah*: eternal.

“This (spirit) cannot be hacked to pieces or burned, or desiccated. Actually it is eternal, omnipresent, permanent, and does not go away. It is everlasting.”

In Vedic culture the repetition of a concept indicates its great importance, so instead of skipping the verses that seem boringly repetitive, we should take the opportunity to exercise some humility and put greater attention in their study.

Krishna is talking of the weapons that will be used on the battlefield, but the same considerations apply to the basic elements that we can encounter in daily life and at the dissolution of the universe as well. At the time of the cyclic destruction of the world the planets are consumed by fire, submerged by a cosmic flood and battered by violent winds. Still the individual souls are not destroyed, rather they are re-absorbed into the transcendental body of Sadashiva Mahavishnu, where they remain inactive, immersed in a blissful state of sleep called *brahmananda*, until the next cycle of manifestation.

We have already mentioned that Atman/Brahman is omnipresent, beyond time and space. Here the concept is confirmed and expanded, with the addition of new information: the Atman/Brahman does not move, because it is already everywhere and thus there is no "other place" to go.

This also applies to the time of dissolution and to the time of liberation or *moksha*. The body of Mahavishnu and the spiritual world Vaikuntha are not "places" or in a place, because they are transcendental to time and space. They are states of consciousness, and as such they can be instantly attained anywhere and at any time, without having to "go somewhere".

Another meaning of the expression *sarva-gatah* indicates that living entities can survive in all conditions within the universe, even in places where mainstream scientists believe that life is not possible. Actually modern science has only a limited understanding of life, and its beliefs are shaken again and again by unexpected discoveries. Living entities can survive and prosper in air, in water, in earth and even in fire. Some microbes and viruses are killed by high temperatures, but that does not mean that all micro-organisms will. Absence of proof is not proof of absence.

It is very much possible that the serious limitations of the present instruments of research make it impossible for modern scientists to perceive what is beyond them. After all, even the most sophisticated and advanced instruments of science - electronic microscopes and telescopes, etc - are nothing but powerful extensions of the fundamental senses of human beings, and have the same conceptual flaws.

For example, human beings do not have a sense that enables them to deeply investigate what is in fire except seeing the light and heat that it emanates, so modern scientists have only been able to find out the existence of infrared rays within the spectrum of light and measure the intensity of heat. Even so, the present instruments to observe infrared radiation are very primitive as they are used generally to detect moderate temperatures such as the body warmth of human beings and animals. Above a certain temperature, infrared goggles and cameras only see a "bright light".

अव्यक्तोऽयमचिन्त्योऽयमविकार्योऽयमुच्यते ।

avyakto'yamacintyo'yamavikāryo'yamucyate ।

तस्मादेवं विदित्वैनं नानुशोचितुमर्हसि ॥ २-२५ ॥

tasmādevaṁ viditvainaṁ nānuśocitumarhasi ॥ 2-25 ॥

avyaktah: non-manifested; *ayam*: this; *acintyah*: inconceivable; *ayam*: this; *avikaryah*: unchangeable; *ayam*: this; *ucyate*: is said (to be); *tasmat*: therefore; *evam*: like this; *viditva*: knowing well; *enam*: this; *na*: not; *anusocitum*: to worry; *arhasi*: you should.

“It is said that this (soul) is invisible to material eyes, inconceivable to material intellect, and not affected by change. Therefore, knowing this (soul), you should not worry.”

Krishna has already stated these characteristics of the soul, but the repetition highlights their importance. The definition *avyakta* means "non-manifest" or "invisible".

The technically advanced microscopes of modern science are able to see atoms, yet they are not able to see the soul because by its nature, the soul is not manifest to the material eyes. It is not merely a matter of size.

The Upanishads compare the "atomic size" of the soul to 1/10,000 of tip of a hair, but considering an average thickness of hair (about 100 microns, or 1/10 of a millimeter), the size of the soul should be about 1/100,000 of a millimeter. Modern scanning tunneling and atomic force microscopes allow scientists to see atomic particles that are measured in picometers (1/1,000,000,000 of a millimeter), and that are used in nanotechnology.

If the calculation of the Upanishads were to be taken literally, such objects would be 100 million times smaller than the soul, but still they are visible to material microscopes.

This apparent imprecision should not discourage our faith in the knowledge offered by the *shastra*: we just need to make some extra effort to understand its meaning and purpose. In this particular case, the measurement offered by the Upanishads is merely an indicative example, just like the statement (11.12) that says that the radiance of the universal Form, the Virat Rupa, is comparable to hundreds of thousands of suns.

Similarly, the radiance of the *jiva* is compared to a similar number of suns.

Observing even one single sun for a brief period with a naked eye is sufficient to damage our retina, what to speak of a light that is hundreds of thousands of times stronger.

If the soul could be observed through the material senses of perception and their extensions, the instruments of perception used by modern scientists, we would be blinded constantly because souls are everywhere - and many of them moving around as ghosts are not even shielded by a thick covering of gross matter. Yet, with so many wandering disembodied souls going around in the night, we still need street lighting and flashlights... In fact, Krishna confirms that our material eyes will never be able to see spirit: for that we need divine eyes (11.8) because such souls are in another dimension, the spiritual dimension.

Each individual soul is capable of such divine or transcendental eyesight: it only requires the proper consciousness disposition. At times, this may happen in particular circumstances, such as in NDE or Near Death Experience, or during some types of meditation, in which bright "lights" are seen.

अथ चैनं नित्यजातं नित्यं वा मन्यसे मृतम् ।

atha cainam nityajātam nityam vā manyase mṛtam ।

तथापि त्वं महाबाहो नैवं शोचितुमर्हसि ॥ २-२६ ॥

tathāpi tvam mahābāho naivam śocitumarhasi ॥ 2-26 ॥

atha: if; *ca*: and; *enam*: this; *nitya*: eternally; *jatam*: born; *nityam*: eternally; *va*: or; *manyase*: you think; *mritam*: dead; *tatha*: then; *api*: even; *tvam*: you; *maha-baho*: o mighty armed; *na*: not; *enam*: this; *socitum*: to worry; *arhasi*: you should.

“Even if you think that this (soul) always continues to take birth and to die, in any case you still should not be aggrieved, o mighty-armed (Arjuna).

One may object that, although the soul is always untouched by material circumstances, the body and the mind still suffer, so we should avoid creating such sufferings. This is a very good point, but we need to understand that the only true way to avoid creating sufferings is to act in accordance to Dharma, even if it seems that such action will cause sufferings. The fact is that birth and death are inevitable due to the inherent temporary nature of the material world, and all joys and sorrows come to us as a consequence of our own past actions. We should not allow these temporary considerations to stop us from doing the right thing.

The expression *maha-baho*, "o mighty armed", is offered jokingly, as the inevitability of death and rebirth cannot be kept at distance by the strength of bodily arms - in fact it is actually the opposite: the more focused we are on the material body, the more likely we are to take another birth.

This verse demonstrates one of the main differences between the ideology of *Gita* and the abrahamic ideological system. Krishna has very clearly and repeatedly stated the facts, and illustrated them with examples and other logical processes, but in the end, the matter of believing or not believing is something that is totally left to the individual. God does not get upset if we do not believe him, if we do not love or respect him, or even if we do not listen to him. God is not revengeful and jealous: those are very bad qualities that characterize a demoniac mentality, not a godly mentality.

God does not send people to hell because they are atheists and materialists, and does not punish them for their "offenses", because he is happy to allow everybody to have their own beliefs. There is no mention of "crimes of opinion" in God's law books.

Each living entity reaps the good and bad results of his own good and bad actions, but that refers to the benefits and damages that he has caused to other living entities, not to his faith in God or in some particular dogma. In fact in this verse Krishna even uses the

arguments of atheists and materialists to console Arjuna, saying that even if we consider that the soul is actually subject to birth and death (at each body's birth and death or in a greater cycle of manifestation and final dissolution of the individuality), or even if there is no soul and life is simply a combination of chemicals, there is still no cause for sorrow or worries, because it is an inevitable cycle just the life and death of plants and the passing of seasons. It's the nature of life.

जातस्य हि ध्रुवो मृत्युर्ध्रुवं जन्म मृतस्य च ।

jātasya hi dhruvo mṛtyurdhruvaṁ janma mṛtasya ca ।

तस्मादपरिहार्येऽर्थे न त्वं शोचितुमर्हसि ॥ २-२७ ॥

tasmādaparihārye'rthe na tvam śocitumarhasi ।। 2-27।।

jatasya: of (one) who has taken birth; *hi*: certainly; *dhruvah*: established/determined; *mṛtyuh*: death; *dhruvam*: established/determined; *janma*: birth; *mṛtasya*: of one who has died; *ca*: and; *tasmāt*: therefore; *aparihārye*: in what is unavoidable; *arthe*: for the purpose; *na*: not; *tvam*: you; *socitum*: to worry; *arhasi*: you should.

“Because one who has taken birth must necessarily die, and one who has died will again be reborn. There is no point in despairing over something that is inevitable.”

Not many people have the correct information or vision on the mechanism of death and rebirth. Some people believe that only a few "special" people get the opportunity to reincarnate, or that one can become the receptacle for another person altogether (thus losing one's own identity or "soul"), or that when we take a new birth we become a totally different person. Actually, the basic principle is very simple. As Krishna has already explained very clearly, all the embodied souls constantly reincarnate through childhood, maturity and old age. The key to understanding this mechanism is identification. When we identify with a material body - any material body - we need to have one. The natural tendency of the body is to grow old and decay, so the conditioned soul gradually identifies as a child, a young person, and an old person. There is a trauma at the passage into a totally different body through death and rebirth, because for a relatively short time the conditioned soul remains in a disembodied state, and this causes a serious disorientation, leaving a relatively "blank slate" on the conscious level of identification. The sum total of the karmic results and mental impressions, desires, attachments, and unfulfilled tasks determines the circumstances of the next birth of the conditioned soul, and from the time of birth one starts building again his/her material identification at the conscious level. However, all the previous identifications and memories remain at the subconscious level to be accessed, consulted and utilized to foster one's evolutionary progress.

So we can see how death and rebirth are actually a very important and useful part of the process, because they create a hiatus where material identification can be modified in the learning and evolution process of the soul. If there were no death and rebirth, one's material identification with a particular body (or apparently uninterrupted growth of one

body) would become sclerotized and stop the evolutionary progress of the soul. As a result, the individual would become unable to learn new things, to change his self-perception - only getting more and more tired and cynical and desperate because of the feeling of being trapped as if in a prison cell.

Probably the greatest disservice that abrahamic faiths have done to the global culture was outlawing the concept of evolutionary reincarnation, which was previously normally accepted as a fact of life by all cultures. Active persecution against this knowledge, carried on by the church for centuries, was sided by the enforcement of the nonsensical dogma of an eternal paradise/hell earned during the very short time allotted to human life, generally in very unequal and unjust conditions. For example, a hopeless child born in a destitute family of thieves and robbers, who had no other option but resorting to the same activities, if killed at a young age after a few miserable years of degraded life would be condemned to eternal torture in hell, while a truly evil person born in a rich and powerful family would take advantage of plenty of opportunities to cause sufferings and damage to countless innocent and helpless people, indulge in extravagant and selfish sense gratification, and still "go to heaven" by the paid blessings of a greedy priest.

The purpose of the dogma enforcement was clear: taking away the individuals' personal power and putting them at the mercy of the church, that presented itself as the sole representative of God, "legally authorized" by the government to change the sentence at their convenience.

Contrarily to what one may think, the knowledge of the cycle of death and rebirth does not support unnecessary murder, slaughter and war. In fact, it gives the utmost importance to life because every moment is considered a valuable opportunity for evolution, through self-improvement and dharmic choices in properly performing one's duty. On the other hand, rejection/banning of such knowledge has historically created unnecessary murder, slaughter and war in unprecedented measure, because human life on this earth came to be considered a trifle compared to the eternal existence in paradise promised to anyone who is willing to sacrifice his own life and the life of others for the aggrandizement of the religious hierarchy itself. We can still observe this mechanism in the mentality of the suicide bombers who call themselves martyrs.

अव्यक्तादीनि भूतानि व्यक्तमध्यानि भारत ।

avyaktādīni bhūtāni vyaktamadyāni bhārata ।

अव्यक्तनिधनान्येव तत्र का परिदेवना ॥ २-२८ ॥

avyaktanidhanānyeva tatra kā paridevanā ।। 2-28 ।।

avyakta: non manifested; *adini*: originally; *bhutani*: the (living) beings; *vyakta*: manifested; *madhyani*: in their intermediate stage; *bharata*: o descendent of Bharata; *avyakta*: non manifested; *nidhanani*: at destruction; *eva*: therefore; *tatra*: in that; *ka*: what; *paridevana*: lamentation.

“O descendent of Bharata, all the living entities/states of being are initially non-

manifested, then they become visible in an intermediate stage and then again disappear in the end. What is the point of lamenting about that?"

Krishna has already clearly and definitively established that the Atman is eternal, while the bodies are destined to die. The word *bhuta* literally means "being", and thus applies both to the individual living entities in their conditioned state of life, as well as to the "state of being" that defines the conditions of his life.

Such circumstances constantly change too, like the seasons of the years that follow each other (2.14), and are detected only through the contact of the senses with the sense objects. The human condition is defined by a particular set of senses and objects that are perceived by the senses, and the same applies to the conditions of life in the various other species - each of the many different animal bodies, the plant species, as well as the superhuman species such as the Devas, Rakshasas, Gandharvas etc.

The sense objects that are suitable for a human form of life are governed by a mixture of *sattva* (goodness) and *rajas* (passion). This applies to food, clothing, living environment, life habits, interactions with other individuals, way of earning a livelihood and so on. These are different, for example, from the sense objects of a dog or a pig, who have different tastes, habits and different dietary needs.

The degrading influence of the age in which we live tends to drag the human beings towards lower states of being, and therefore it is possible that during their lifetime, men can develop tastes and habits that are more suitable to animals or plants. In that case, at the time of death the conditioned soul will be naturally attracted to the particular situation where he will be able to create a body that is best suited for the tastes and habits in which he previously indulged.

For example, a human body can have only a moderate number of sex intercourses, due to natural biological limitations. Such limitations can be artificially stretched through medication or other methods, but that is not suitable for psycho-physical balance and health. If a human being becomes overly attached or addicted to sex, in order to better enjoy such tendency he should develop the body of a rabbit or a rat, who can have sex almost continuously in a natural way. If a human being becomes overly attached to an irresponsible behavior he can develop a dog's body, that is better equipped for a wandering life, with a keener sense of smell, a sense of hearing that can even perceive ultrasounds, and a spontaneous ability for social interactions.

Similarly, if a human being becomes overly attached to eating all sorts of foods, with a preference for tamasic tastes, he will have the opportunity to develop a pig's body, whose ability to perceive and enjoy these is much greater than a human being's.

After fully enjoying such pleasures without the heavy responsibilities that come with the human body, the soul will have the opportunity to resume his evolution, because in any case all states of being are temporary.

This particular perspective is confirmed by an alternative reading to the original text, *karya-karana-sanghata*, "due to association/contact with the cause/origin of the duties to be performed".

आश्चर्यवत्पश्यति कश्चिदेनम्

āścaryavatpaśyati kaścidenam

आश्चर्यवद्वदति तथैव चान्यः ।

āścaryavadvadati tathaiva cānyaḥ ।

आश्चर्यवच्चैनमन्यः शृणोति

āścaryavaccainamanyaḥ śṛṇoti

श्रुत्वाप्येनं वेद न चैव कश्चित् ॥ २-२९ ॥

śrutvāpyenam veda na caiva kaścit ।। 2-29 ।।

ascarya-vat: amazing; *pasyati*: sees; *kascit*: someone; *enam*: this; *ascarya-vat*: amazing; *vadati*: speaks; *tatha*: also; *eva*: certainly; *ca*: and; *anyaḥ*: another/someone else; *ascarya-vat*: amazing; *ca*: and; *enam*: this; *anyaḥ*: another; *śṛṇoti*: hears/listens; *śrutva*: having heard; *api*: even; *enam*: this; *veda*: knows; *na*: not; *ca*: and; *eva*: certainly; *kascit*: someone.

“Some see this (Atman) as amazing, some others describe it as amazing. Some hear (of it) as amazing, and some remain unable to understand it even after hearing about it.”

This verse is also very famous and should be memorized.

The search for the knowledge and realization of the Atman/Brahman is the most important pursuit in life, because it puts everything else into perspective, clarifying our priorities and the meaning of our existence. In Vedic civilization, this study was central to the education of the individual, while in contemporary global academia it is sorely neglected, or even worse, when it is studied through the history of philosophy, it is presented as a hopeless series of theoretical mental speculations on something that cannot even to be proven to exist.

As an alternative, contemporary academia offers theological "divinity" studies, presenting the dogmas of Christianity as indisputable yet constantly changing according to the political needs of the Church. And in the end, such doctorates still remain unable to explain how an all-merciful, all-loving, omniscient and omnipotent God needs to have his only son tortured and killed to pay for the mindless sins of countless generations of his creatures who can therefore continue with their meaningless lives.

Catechism taught to children in Sunday schools is not much better, as it consists of a series of definitions that students are discouraged to probe through open discussion.

Difficult questions are liquidated with the "mystery of faith" label, or with overt or covert persecution of the "heretic tendencies" of the students who dare to express them.

On the other hand, the study of the divine science in Vedic civilization is based on a process of open and free discussion, and questions are considered not only legitimate, but

are encouraged as well.

It is also important to understand that the real qualification to understand the Atman/Brahman is not academic study. It's not about a curriculum requirement with a credit value calculated on quiz-type exams in which the student only needs to please the personal or institutional beliefs of the teachers. It is not a theoretical pastime for armchair philosophers. It is a deep personal quest for one's true identity, and success is measured by the individual's change of priorities in life.

Another danger in the exploration of the spiritual science is the tendency to sensationalism, that transforms self realization and religion into a form of entertainment. Of course the entertainment component is important when trying to attract the interest of the simple-minded masses who can't handle deep philosophical concepts, but that's just the sugar coating on the pill: it shouldn't be the only ingredient in the medication.

Traditionally people gather to hear stories from the *Itihasas* and *Puranas* - especially the *Bhagavata Purana*, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* - but at these gatherings very few people actually listen, follow or understand what is being narrated. The general idea is that the mere recitation will do, because the *mahatmya* or *phalashruti* (glorification of the results of the act of listening) promise great benefits.

However, mere mechanical recitation and hearing can be compared to eating only the sugar from the pills coating and throwing away the actual medicinal principle. We need to become sincere enough to let our misconceptions go, to renounce our material identifications and attachments.

This is the real difference between the beautiful and inspiring stories of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* or *Puranas* on one side, and equally beautiful and inspiring stories created by the fantasy of fictional writers - for example, the adventures of Harry Potter, Luke Skywalker, or Frodo Baggins the Hobbit.

देही नित्यमवध्योऽयं देहे सर्वस्य भारत ।

dehī nityamavadhyo'yam dehe sarvasya bhārata ।

तस्मात्सर्वाणि भूतानि न त्वं शोचितुमर्हसि ॥ २-३० ॥

tasmātsarvāṇi bhūtāni na tvam śocitumarhasi ।। 2-30 ।।

dehi: the (soul that lives in the) body; *nityam*: eternal; *avadhyo*: immortal; *ayam*: this; *dehe*: in the body; *sarvasya*: of all/everyone; *bharata*: o descendent of Bharata; *tasmāt*: therefore; *sarvani*: all; *bhutani*: beings; *na*: not; *tvam*: you; *socitum*: to worry; *arhasi*: should.

“O descendent of Bharata, this eternal (soul) that lives in the body can not be killed and is present in all bodies. Therefore you should not be aggrieved for all these living beings.”

In the previous verse Krishna stated that the Atman/Brahman is a wonderful topic for discussion, very important and also very difficult to penetrate. Here the oneness of Atman

and Brahman, present in all bodies, is highlighted by the use of the singular pronoun *ayam* ("this"), equivalent to the *tat* ("that") that is used more often in Vedic literature. Each *jivatma* or individual soul cannot be present simultaneously in all bodies, although he can tap into the collective consciousness and God's consciousness to perceive the other *jivatmas*. However, the *jivatma* or Atman is part and parcel of the Brahman, the transcendental spiritual Reality that is present everywhere, in all bodies and in all atoms. This is the meaning of omnipresent.

Another interpretation of the expression "*dehe sarvasya*" is that there is a *jivatma* in each one of all the bodies of the innumerable living entities in the universe.

Another interpretation is that the Brahman, or the sum total of the individual souls present in the universe, constitutes the spiritual component of the universe, as *jagat* is a synonym of "*sarva*" referred to the Virat Rupa, the universal or cosmic form.

At all these levels, the fundamental meaning remains the same: the bodies are subject to change and dissolution, while the spiritual presence within them is immortal.

Therefore there is nothing to worry about. We, as spirit souls, can never be killed (*nityam avadhyah*) in any circumstance. Therefore there is nothing that can really stop us from properly performing our dharmic duties or from progressing towards perfection. They can be difficulties and delays, there can be adjustments of plans, but the journey will continue.

One of man's greatest fears is the idea of total dissolution and nothingness, that implies the futility of life and action. This fear makes people do many stupid things that in their minds are intended to "leave a mark" on this world, even if it means to do something very bad, or pushes them into the depths of hopelessness and ignorance through intoxication, cynical materialism or existential nihilism.

Bhagavad Gita radiates like a beacon of light in the darkness, assuring us that we will all continue to exist, and that loss is only a temporary change that makes space for better things to come.

स्वधर्ममपि चावेक्ष्य न विकम्पितुमर्हसि ।

svadharmamapi cāvekṣya na vikampitumarhasi ।

धर्म्याद्धि युद्धाच्छ्रेयोऽन्यत्क्षत्रियस्य न विद्यते ॥ २-३१ ॥

dharmyāddhi yuddhācchreyo'nyatkṣatriyasya na vidyate ।। 2-31 ।।

sva: one's own; *dharmam*: duty; *api*: also; *ca*: and; *avekshya*: considering; *na*: not; *vikampitum*: to hesitate; *arhasi*: you should; *dharmyat*: according to dharma; *hi*: indeed; *yuddhat*: in the battle; *sreyah*: better; *anyat*: other; *kshatriyasya*: of a *kshatriya*; *na*: not; *vidyate*: is known.

“Considering your own dharmic duty you should not hesitate, because for a *kshatriya* there is nothing better than fighting a dharmic battle.”

Often Dharma is translated as “religion” and thus mistakenly assimilated to the concept of exclusivist theocratic monotheism characteristic of the Abrahamic faiths. But Dharma

has nothing to do with personal beliefs, faith, devotions and religious practices, or with the choice of the name and form or non-form of the Divine that one worships. One's personal beliefs and religious/spiritual practices are a private matter, of course as long as the choices made in one's personal lives do not violate the freedom or dignity of someone else. Dharma is not about any racial or ethnic identification or family tradition, nationality, or any other sectarian allegiance that opposes a group of persons against the rest of the world. Dharma is not even about professionalism, social requirements or conventions. Dharma is about the universal principles of religion and ethics – truthfulness, compassion, cleanliness, justice, goodness, enlightenment and cooperation among all to support society and the universe.

Thus one's specific Dharma, or *sva-dharma*, consists in doing one's duty in the best possible way according to one's abilities and particular position in time and space. The definition of *kshatriya dharma* is the protection of the *prajas* and the kingdom to guarantee the proper environment for material and spiritual progress. When there is a need to fight to ensure this protection, the *kshatriya* has the opportunity to fully utilize his particular skills, qualities and tendencies: he is like a perfectly honed instrument that finally engages in a highly specialized task. His fighting aggressors - external or internal enemies - is the climax of all his existence, his proper place in the order of things, not unlike a planet that is properly running within its right orbit. We could really say that he has all reasons to be happy, because he has attained the perfection of his particular nature. It may be useful to remember here that Arjuna is not on the battlefield to conquer a kingdom for himself or for his family or kinsmen or race, to convert people to a particular faith/ideology or way of life, or to eliminate rivals or opponents.

Like any other *kshatriya*, Arjuna needs to sacrifice himself to his duty in protecting the people from a bad ruler (Duryodhana) who has repeatedly demonstrated his disrespect for ethical principles and his callousness to the subjects' well being and to the benefit of the kingdom. A *Dharma yuddha* is a battle conducted according to strict ethical rules of engagement and to protect the good, harmless and innocent people from the attack of aggressors and evil doers. It is purely defensive, never offensive or imperialistic, colonialistic or exploitative in any other way.

Therefore it should not be confused with the idea of “holy war” or “crusade” intended to subjugate people or nations in order to impose a particular type of belief, religious tradition, mode of worship, culture, values, legislation, or to acquire the control of resources for selfish purposes, by taking them away from other people.

यदृच्छया चोपपन्नं स्वर्गद्वारमपावृतम् ।

yadṛcchayā copapannaṁ svargadvāramapāvṛtam ।

सुखिनः क्षत्रियाः पार्थ लभन्ते युद्धमीदृशम् ॥ २-३२ ॥

sukhinaḥ kṣatriyāḥ pārtha labhante yuddhamīdṛśam ॥ 2-32 ॥

yadricchaya: by its own accord; *ca*: and; *upapannam*: obtained; *svarga-dvaram*: the door to the heavenly planets; *apavritam*: opened; *sukhinaḥ*: happy; *kshatriyah*: the *kshatriyas*;

partha: o son of Prtha; *labhante*: attain; *yuddham*: battle; *idrisam*: like this.

“O son of Pritha, happy are the kshatriyas to whom such opportunity comes unsought. For a warrior, engaging in such a battle is like having the doors of heaven open in front of him.”

The word *yadricchaya* (“that has come by itself”) further clarifies that a Dharma yuddha is never a war of aggression, invasion or occupation. A *kshatriya* is not a war-mongering brawler eagerly searching for the opportunity to pick a fight or even creating such opportunity by attacking innocent and harmless people who are just engaged in their own honest and harmless business. A *kshatriya* is called to defend his land (*kshetra*) and the creatures of his land (*prajas*) from all attacks: this is the dharmic fight.

The rules of engagement for a dharmic warrior are clear: only aggressors can be targeted, and even an enemy must be spared if he surrenders and renounces his aggressive ways. In a dharmic society there are no jails or corporal punishments of unharmed prisoners, no courts, judges or lawyers and no judicial errors, as the genuine *kshatriyas* are capable and active enough to catch a criminal red-handed and either kill him in battle or see him out of the kingdom to be banished forever if he does not accept to reform himself sincerely, atone and repay his victims suitably.

The only other dharmic opportunity for a fight is a challenge coming from another *kshatriya* warrior, to establish who is stronger and more skilled in battle, and therefore more capable of defending the *prajas* from possible aggressors.

In this regard, we need to understand the tradition of the Rajasuya/Asvamedha yajna celebrated by a king who wishes to rise to the level of “emperor”. The concept of empire in the Vedic tradition has only administrative purposes, aimed at strengthening communication and cooperation between regions through building roads, encouraging trade, creating a common front against outside invaders and aggressors, and providing emergency support to tributary kingdoms in case of need – famine, natural disasters, etc.

The aspiring emperor celebrated the Rajasuya yajna to verify the qualifications of the local kings and rulers; if they accepted his superiority they would offer some gifts as tribute. A local ruler admitting defeat was not killed or replaced by the emperor and did not have to change his personal or tribal/social beliefs or way of life. He would continue to rule his own *prajas* as always, but he knew that there was a man greater than him, to whom he could turn for alliance in times of need.

This verse states that a good *kshatriya* will attain the heavenly planets. Such a statement may appear to be similar to the promise of the pleasures of paradise for those abrahamic men who engage in the “holy war” of eliminating or subduing those who are considered “infidels”, but there is a radical difference.

The concept of *svarga* is substantially different from the idea of paradise. The Devas who live in *svarga* may also have great opportunities to enjoy life, but their main occupation is to manage the universe and ensure that all living beings are properly taken care of. The Devas are the equivalent of the *kshatriyas* on Earth, only on a cosmic scale. Whenever the balance and the progress of the universe is threatened by the Asuras, the Devas do not hesitate to leave their beautiful residences to get into battle to protect their *prajas*.

Therefore a good and honest *kshatriya* that properly executes his duty in fighting against aggressors who endanger the *prajas* is automatically qualified to become a Deva.

He does not get paradise as a reward for his loyalty or faith, for his allegiance to a particular sectarianism, or because he has destroyed the holy places and scriptures of other peoples.

अथ चेत्त्वमिमं धर्म्य संग्रामं न करिष्यसि ।

atha cettvamimam dharmyam saṅgrāmaṁ na kariṣyasi ।

ततः स्वधर्म कीर्तिं च हित्वा पापमवाप्स्यसि ॥ २-३३ ॥

tataḥ svadharmam kīrtim ca hitvā pāpamavāpsyasi ॥ 2-33 ॥

atha: therefore; *cet*: if; *tvam*: you; *imam*: this; *dharmyam*: duty to support the universe; *sangramam*: engaged; *na*: not; *kariṣyasi*: you will do; *tataḥ*: then; *sva-dharmam*: the particular duty (based on guna and karma); *kirtim*: good reputation; *ca*: and; *hitva*: giving up; *papam*: sinfulness; *avapsyasi*: you will get.

“Therefore, if you do not engage in this dharmic (action), you will lose your good name of *kshatriya*. (What) you will obtain (is) *papam* (the stain of sin).”

The word *papa* is often translated as “sin” but its meaning is quite different from its counterpart in Abrahamic religions that do not accept the idea of reincarnation. Rather than a transgression against God’s orders (that constitutes sin in the Abrahamic faiths), *papa* is the karmic burden of a selfish choice that goes against the basic ethical principles (*dharma*) that support the universe. It is a failure, a symptom of imperfection, a stain on one’s character, a contamination, but it does not condemn the individual to eternal hell.

Sometimes in Puranic literature we find some mention of paradise and hell, and those who do not have a deep understanding of the Vedic civilization may remain confused and superimpose similar concepts they have acquired from the abrahamic stories, that developed many centuries after the compilation of the Vedic literature and its corresponding versions in other pre-abrahamic civilizations. Abrahamic mythology picked some elements here and there, and added the particular jewish and christian dogma, producing descriptions that had the specific objective of emotionally controlling the masses and subjugating them to the institutional authority.

In the Vedic perspective, hell - like heaven - is a temporary condition of life where a conditioned soul may remain in his/her evolutionary journey, in order to learn some specific lessons. However, each individual is expected to learn and progress in a personal path of development or evolution, where committing mistakes is part of the process, so *papa* can be purified and counteracted.

In this verse the word *kirtim*, “fame, reputation, good name” refers to Arjuna’s immaculate record in performing his dharmic duties as a *kshatriya* and to his personal behavior as a human being, but also to the extraordinary recognition and blessings he received from great personalities, such as Shiva Mahadeva and Indra.

Fame and good reputation are considered useful assets, because they are needed in order

to properly perform one's duty in society.

Losing one's good name - because of actually committing some misdeeds or just being defamed by envious people - may even disrupt one's occupational duties in a very serious way, thus causing distress and damage to the entire society that becomes deprived of our good service.

There is a clear line between such legitimate desire for a good name and the vainglory of false identification with a material position - also called "false ego". It is called "false" in opposition to the real ego, that is self-realization of *atman/brahman* in a sentiment of service to the Supreme. We should not think that this verse of *Gita* is encouraging *ahankara* and *abhimana*. *Gita's* teachings, just like the teachings of all other Vedic scriptures, focus on giving up one's material identification and attachments and attain the level of Brahman realization. Later on Krishna will clearly say that only fools are caught in the trap of *ahankara*.

अकीर्तिं चापि भूतानि कथयिष्यन्ति तेऽव्ययाम् ।

akīrtim cāpi bhūtāni kathayiṣyanti te'vyayām ।

सम्भावितस्य चाकीर्तिर्मरणादतिरिच्यते ॥ २-३४ ॥

sambhāvitasya cākīrtirmaraṇādatiricyate ॥ 2-34 ॥

akirtim: bad reputation; *ca*: and; *api*: also; *bhutani*: all people (living entities); *kathayishyanti*: will speak; *te*: of you; *avyayam*: eternally; *sambhavitasya*: of a respectable person; *ca*: and; *akirtir*: bad name; *maranat*: than death; *atiricyate*: is more.

“Everybody will speak of your infamy forever. For a respectable person, a bad name is worse than death.”

This verse further elaborates on the problems caused by a bad reputation, especially when it is not based on factual reality. The next two verses will clearly bring up the issue of slandering, both the bad reputation created by uninformed people who foolishly misinterpreted our actions, as well as by the deliberate calumny and rumors circulated by enemies.

Krishna is clearly telling Arjuna that for a *kshatriya* it is better to die on the battlefield, on the line of duty of protecting society from evil doers, than to take the dubious path of so-called non-violence or passive resistance, often presented in the name of "being positive", "being a better person", and "opposing love to hatred".

Such abstentionism is an incorrect understanding of the principle of non-violence. Ahimsa means "absence of hatred", and applies to the level of self-realized consciousness in which we see all beings as non-different from our own selves. This means that we should work for the benefit of all beings as a whole, compared to a body: when an infection appears in the body, refusing to take the appropriate action in the name of non-violence and love is simply stupid. However, action must be appropriate and intelligent,

aiming at achieving a specific and precise purpose, and performed according to the required dharmic /ethical modalities. This means that we must engage in battle only against combatants, and not against innocent and non-harmful people, even if these are easier to target.

The purpose of fighting is not about retaliation or revenge or venting one's own anger, but about stopping an attack and protecting the innocent and good people.

If our application of the dharmic principles of protective fight is not sufficient to carry us to victory, it is better for us to die on the battlefield, serving society through our death, because we will get another, and better, opportunity in a next life. When we sacrifice ourselves to a greater good we obtain a greater reward, in this life or in the next.

A respectable person is a person who one who has earned the respect of people through impeccable performance of his/her duties, good character and qualifications. Such a person is naturally playing an important role in society, because of the example s/he sets for the rest of the people, and the support s/he can rally for good causes.

भयाद्रणादुपरतं मंस्यन्ते त्वां महारथाः ।

bhayādraṇāduparataṁ maṁsyante tvāṁ mahārathāḥ ।

येषां च त्वं बहुमतो भूत्वा यास्यसि लाघवम् ॥ २-३५ ॥

yeṣāṁ ca tvāṁ bahumato bhūtvā yāsyasi lāghavam ।। 2-35 ।।

bhayad: out of fear; *ranad:* from the battle; *uparataṁ:* given up; *mamsyante:* they will think; *tvam:* you; *maha-rathah:* the great generals; *yesham:* them; *ca:* and; *tvam:* you; *bahu-mato:* highly respected; *bhutva:* having been; *yasyasi:* you will become; *laghavam:* of much less weight.

“The great generals will think that you have left the battlefield out of fear; those who used to keep you in such a high esteem will not take you seriously any more.”

Arjuna has always been deeply respected and loved by many great personalities and by the general people as well. Many times he has demonstrated his great valor, courage, spirit of self-sacrifice, loyalty, and endurance, so naturally he is held in great esteem by all the elders, starting with Shiva Mahadeva who personally wrestled with him to test his valor, and king Indra of the heavenly planets, who honored him as his worthy son.

He is Drona's favorite disciple, and Bhishma, at the end of the fight, will declare that for him it is an honor to die by the hand of Arjuna. Draupadi's father honors him above all the Pandavas, and everybody feels that King Yudhishthira owes his glory and power to Arjuna only, because it was Arjuna who followed the horse of the *rajasuya* sacrifice as his champion and gained vassals and tributes to the King.

It was Arjuna who, helped by Bhima, rescued Duryodhana from the hands of the Gandharvas, and it was Arjuna who defended Virata's palace from the attack of all the Kauravas, as he was the only one present at that time.

Yet, if Arjuna leaves the battlefield now, some people may still think that he has become

weak and fearful due to some mysterious reason, and that his days as a famous warrior are over.

Arjuna's spiritual realization may have carried him to the level where he does not identify with his social role as a *kshatriya*, but that does not mean that he can refuse to fight a dharmic battle. Krishna will explain very clearly that we should renounce the enjoyment of the fruits of the action, not the action itself, because proper action is our duty. Some people may question whether we should care about what other people say, since we are supposed to be situated on a transcendental level, and we should always be humble and tolerant.

However, there is a difference between being personally humble and tolerant (which is good) and allowing humiliation towards one's duty or service (which is bad).

Actually our duty or service is not about ourselves, but about society and to Supreme, so when an offense is made against our duty or service, it is not done to us and therefore there is no scope in being humble about it.

Showing one's "personal humility and tolerance" in front of offenses made against society - against dharma, against the service to the Supreme - is merely cowardice.

अवाच्यवादांश्च बहून्वदिष्यन्ति तवाहिताः ।

avācyavādāṁśca bahūnvadiṣyanti tavāhitāḥ ।

निन्दन्तस्तव सामर्थ्यं ततो दुःखतरं नु किम् ॥ २-३६ ॥

nindantastava sāmartyam̐ tato duḥkhataram̐ nu kim ॥ 2-36 ॥

“Your enemies will circulate many bad rumors about you, offensively demeaning your valor. What could be more painful for you?”

avācyā: indecent; *vadam*: speeches; *ca*: and; *bahun*: many; *vadiṣyanti*: they will tell; *tava*: your; *hitāḥ*: enemies; *nindantah*: offensive; *tava*: your; *samarthyam*: value; *tatah*: than that; *duḥkhataram*: more painful; *nu*: surely; *kim*: what (can there be).

Avācyā means "something that should not be said", and plainly refers to gross insults, falsities and vulgar allusions, stuff that decent people should never utter.

It is regularly observed that low-class and unqualified people, who do not care for dharma, easily become envious of the success and good reputation earned by more qualified persons, and being unable to prove their greater value through positive and constructive action, resort to gross and vulgar or even obscene slandering, venting their own frustration and anger in the only way they can.

Unfortunately, there are many who will listen to them, as they are hungry for garbage and eager to find a target for their own personal frustrations, too. This type of behavior is very widespread among politicians, for example. Instead of focusing on the real issues of policies, ideologies, and legislation, they try to cast aspersions on their enemies' birth or private lives - in matters that have absolutely nothing to do with governance.

However, when dharmic or even just decent people come across vulgar slandering about

a person, they will neither utter nor listen to such garbage. If someone has actually committed some crime or bad action, let it be properly investigated and ascertained, and let the repercussions on society be evaluated objectively and counteracted with appropriate measures. Vulgar gossiping is unworthy of decent people. *Hitah*, or “enemy”, literally means “one who hates”, and comes from the same root of *himsa*. A hateful person breeds intentions of unnecessary and unprovoked violence, and schemes on how to cause sufferings to others. It is important to make a distinction between the application of force (necessary) and violence (unnecessary), as the first is motivated by an objective defensive purpose and the second by negative subjective sentiments such as selfishness, greed, lust, envy and hatred.

हतो वा प्राप्स्यसि स्वर्गं जित्वा वा भोक्ष्यसे महीम् ।

hato vā prāpsyasi svargam jitvā vā bhokṣyase mahīm ।

तस्मादुत्तिष्ठ कौन्तेय युद्धाय कृतनिश्चयः ॥ २-३७ ॥

tasmāduttiṣṭha kaunteya yuddhāya kṛtaniścayaḥ ।। 2-37 ।।

hatah: being killed; *va*: or; *prapsyasi*: you will obtain; *svargam*: Svargaloka; *jitva*: being victorious; *va*: or; *bhokshyase*: you will enjoy; *mahim*: the Earth; *tasmad*: therefore; *uttistha*: rise; *kaunteya*: o son of Kunti; *yuddhaya*: in the battle; *kritah*: determined; *niscayah*: without doubts.

“If you are killed (in battle) you will attain the higher planets, if you win the battle you will enjoy the pleasures of this world. Therefore get up, o son of Kunti, and abandoning all doubts, fix your mind on the battle.”

The higher planetary system in this universe, called Svarga or Svargaloka, is sometimes defined as “heaven” or “paradise”, but the Vedic concept is quite different from the Abrahamic concept, and the two should not be superimposed as such artificial identification would create confusion and misunderstanding.

Svarga is still within this immanent universe although the residents live much longer and enjoy a much higher quality of life and pleasure than the people of the earthly planets. But it is not the final destination of the liberated soul, it is not the spiritual world. Even in Svarga bodies are temporary and eventually they have to die. Paradise is therefore not "eternal", just like hell. Both are simply temporary positions where individual souls can obtain joys and sufferings that exceed the range of the human condition.

Svarga will eventually be destroyed at the time of the annihilation of the universe, and it will become manifested again at the beginning of a new cycle.

सुखदुःखे समे कृत्वा लाभालाभौ जयाजयौ ।

sukhaduḥkhe same kṛtvā lābhālābhau jayājayau ।

ततो युद्धाय युज्यस्व नैवं पापमवाप्स्यसि ॥ २-३८ ॥

tato yuddhāya yujyasva naivaṁ pāpamavāpsyasi ।। 2-38।।

“If you fight this battle while remaining equally disposed (unattached and prepared) to joy and sadness, gain and loss, victory and defeat, you will never be touched by sin.”

sukha: in happiness; *duhkhe*: in sorrow; *same*: equally (balanced); *kṛtvā*: making; *labha*: in obtaining, *alabhau*: in not obtaining; *jaya*: in winning; *ajayau*: in not winning; *tatah*: there; *yuddhaya*: in the battle; *yujyasva*: engage; *na*: not; *evam*: (like) this; *papam*: sinful result; *avapsyasi*: you will get.

This is one of the most important verses in *Gita*, where Krishna starts explaining the new topic of karma yoga, or proper action. In fact, this is the logical development of the discourse: after explaining that we are all eternal spirit souls and not the material body, it is logical to understand that we should not identify with our specific position in society (determined by the qualities, tendencies, skills and abilities afforded by our body-mind). So an intelligent student would certainly ask what the meaning of duty in such context is, considering that Krishna is goading Arjuna into battle by appealing to his sense of duty as a *kshatriya*.

The great commentator of *Gita*, Adi Shankara Acharya, explained that this is an "incidental instruction", and in fact it makes perfect sense. "Incidental" refers to the particular external situation in which a person finds himself at a given time, and "incidental instruction" brilliantly conveys the idea of a temporary duty that does not apply to the inner identity but to one's temporary position in society, that is also very important. This concept is repeated innumerable times all along the *Gita*, expressed from all possible angles of perspective. We have also seen Krishna very clearly encouraging Arjuna to perform his duty as *kshatriya* faithfully and without hesitation: such idea will be repeated again and again in the subsequent chapters in unequivocal terms.

Some foolish people, however, have misinterpreted this idea of "incidental instruction" and stated that Krishna's instruction in this verse is not about combining spiritual knowledge with active work in the world. In their illusory contemplation of illusion, they claim that Krishna is not really encouraging Arjuna to properly perform his duty, but he is just talking about "the realization of the Supreme Reality"... something that in their clouded mind implies that such pursuit has nothing to do with properly performing one's duty in society under the guidance of spiritual and material knowledge.

These people are known as "*mayavadis*" because they claim that everything is illusory and therefore unworthy of our attention, so that as soon as a person attains the proper spiritual knowledge and realization, he should stop all actions in this world.

Such an idea is openly and clearly condemned by Krishna in many passages of *Gita*, but these foolish people claim that Krishna means to say exactly the opposite of what he is

clearly and repeatedly stating.

Unfortunately such faulty interpretation has created generations of useless, lazy and irresponsible people who falsely pass themselves off as religious or spiritual teachers and leaders, causing social disasters at many levels. It is because of these people's delusional ramblings encouraging pathological withdrawal, that India was invaded and conquered - while those who were supposed to act as the teachers and guides of the entire society kept repeating that everything is illusory, and that Knowledge is necessarily opposed to Action.

They believe and preach that "those who know, do not speak, and those who speak, do not know"... and yet they all keep speaking and writing volumes, and more recently cluttering bandwidth on the Net, too. They should show some consistency with their own ideology: if they believe that speaking is useless, they should stop speaking altogether and spare us their nonsense. If they want people to withdraw from action, they should give the example and get out of the way instead of trying to manipulate others for their own aggrandizement, fame, position, profit and material power.

It is true that intellect and speech are not sufficient to understand Transcendence, but they should not be dismissed or underestimated, otherwise there would be no meaning and no use for the vast expanse of the Vedic literature and the extensive preaching of the genuine self-realized *acharyas*, from Vyasa to Adi Shankara.

Another trend of commentaries, mainly Vaishnavas, focus on "God's order" as the basis for the instruction given in this verse; according to this logic, whatever we do "in the name of God" does not entail any bad reaction and cannot be considered a sin. The devotee is expected to surrender completely - including his intelligence, ethical sense, common sense, duties to society and to family - and this will free him from all obligations or responsibilities. This is all well when one is actually following God's direct instructions through the medium of a genuine spiritual guide, because most people may have misconceptions or some confusion about the actual meaning of intelligence, ethical sense, common sense and duties to society and to family, so in spite of their best intentions, their judgment might be faulty.

However, this "total surrender" approach can also be misinterpreted by unqualified and unrealized people to support deviations into adharma similar to those applied by the abrahamic ideologies, when sincere but clueless people who want to engage in genuine selfless service to God become manipulated by ruthless and cynical cheaters who claim to be the sole representatives of God, empowered to speak in God's name and give instructions to his devotees.

Bhagavad gita is the best guidance in this dilemma, because Krishna is explaining everything very, very clearly and thoroughly.

In this verse Krishna does not say that one who has knowledge should not act, or that one should act only on God's orders: he says that one should act selflessly, out of duty. We should listen to Krishna first, and only by keeping his actual words very clear in our mind, we can expand our study by reading commentaries.

Guru is not 100% God: a Guru who wants you to worship him only, neglecting the worship to God, is a fake and a cheater.

एषा तेऽभिहिता साङ्ख्ये बुद्धियोगे त्विमां शृणु ।

eṣā te'bhihitā sāṅkhye buddhiryoge tvimāṁ śṛṇu ।

बुद्ध्या युक्तो यया पार्थ कर्मबन्धं प्रहास्यसि ॥ २-३९ ॥

buddhyā yukto yayā pārtha karmabandham̐ prahāsyasi ॥ 2-39 ॥

“I have explained this (point) to you by the (analytical method of examination called) Sankhya. Now listen to this (concept) as (observed from the perspective of) (the practice of intelligence, called) Buddhi Yoga. O Partha, through this Buddhi Yoga (application of intelligence and correct understanding) you will be released from the bondage of *karma* (actions and reactions).”

esha: this; *te*: to you; *abhihita*: explained; *sankhye*: by analysis; *buddhih*: intelligence/wisdom; *yoge*: by engagement; *tu*: but; *imam*: this; *srinu*: listen; *buddhya*: by intelligence; *yuktah*: engaged; *yaya*: by which; *partha*: o Partha (son of Pritha); *karma*: of action; *bandham*: bondage; *prahasyasi*: you will be liberated.

In this verse Krishna introduces the distinction between Sankhya and Buddhi Yoga. The divisive mentality of westernized academia presents the various "philosophies" as relative truths facing each other in a sort of competition to be "right" instead of "wrong", and in the process it gets so confused that students end up concluding that there is no real truth, or that the real truth is whatever one believes, or whatever the majority of the people believe. The implicit conclusion is that all truths are only hypothetical theories devoid of intrinsic value.

This is called "relativism" and is considered the height of free thinking, because it is opposed to the dogmatic approach of abrahamic ideologies, according to which the real truth is whatever the religious authority officially says from time to time.

Such dogma are, by definition, not subject to questioning or discussion, and whoever cannot in good conscience believe they represent the absolute truth, is punished or persecuted. The "faithful" are required to pledge blind allegiance to the dogma in order to be "right" and "saved", or "in good standing".

Both approaches are faulty because of their partiality. They cannot integrate a healthy and working vision of Reality and enable different people to communicate and understand each other, and cooperate for the benefit of the entire society.

The solution to the dilemma is extremely simple, but requires a broad mind (*mahatma*) to understand it, because it's about becoming able to see the Great Picture, in a multi-dimensional vision that goes beyond the dualistic and sectarian approach.

For example, we may travel around a great mountain and take pictures of its beautiful slopes and valleys from various localities. All the pictures are portraying the same mountain, but they appear to be "different" from each other. Which photo is the "right" image of the mountain? Usually the one we like best. Are all the other photos "wrong"? Certainly not.

Should we try to get a "complete picture" of the mountain, by superimposing

transparencies of all the pictures, we will just get a confused mess, because we keep thinking in two dimensions, while the mountain has three dimensions. What we need is a paradigm shift that will enable us to see Reality in a much better way.

Similarly, the various approaches presented in *Gita* - *sankhya*, *karma*, *jnana*, *bhakti*, *buddhi*, *dhyana*, etc - are not theories opposed to each other, but distinct dimensions or perspectives from which we can contemplate the same Absolute Truth. They complement each other, they are all required to understand Truth. *Bhakti* (devotion) without *jnana* (knowledge) and *karma* (action) is empty and foolish sentimentalism. *Jnana* without *karma* and *bhakti* is useless, dry theoretical academicism. *Karma* without *jnana* and *bhakti* is a waste of time, energy and resources.

One who wants to be exclusive and rigid in following a particular yoga cult as opposed to other limbs of yoga is as stupid as a man trying to use only his hands, or head, or feet in daily life to perform his activities. No wonder they remain impotent in attaining the results of Yoga, and they only make a mockery of it.

The dimension mentioned by Krishna most often is *Buddhi* Yoga: the engagement of intelligence and wisdom. This Yoga is not very popular with institutional "religious authorities" because it helps people to see Reality from a place of wisdom that is already within the heart of each human being. The other perspectives can somehow be controlled by external agents, but *Buddhi* Yoga is a natural, spontaneous and independent function, that enables each one of us to actually see the facts beyond the trumped up appearances and the political propaganda.

As the definition of *Buddhi* Yoga itself is rarely reflected in the various translations of *Gita*, it appears that "masters" are not interested to talk about *Buddhi*, as they might feel that it may be a hindrance to the exclusiveness in the practice of their school of thought (names, labels, paths and organizations)... yet this is the definition used most frequently by Krishna, and the conclusive teaching in the text of *Gita*.

Sankhya ("counting, enumerating") scientifically describes the categories of Reality, distinguishing the characteristics of matter and spirit, darkness and light, ignorance and knowledge. By exclusively following this approach, one may fall into the illusion of ontological dualism, and therefore Krishna brilliantly introduces the next perspective to broaden our vision.

The word *karma* applies simultaneously to action and reaction, and to the connection between action and reaction. Some people may conclude that the purpose of Knowledge is to become free from action, in the sense that they may stop performing their duties, but this is a mistake.

नेहाभिक्रमनाशोऽस्ति प्रत्यवायो न विद्यते ।

nehābhikramanāśo'sti pratyavāyo na vidyate ।

स्वल्पमप्यस्य धर्मस्य त्रायते महतो भयात् ॥ २-४० ॥

svalpamapyasya dharmasya trāyate mahato bhayāt ॥ 2-40 ॥

“On this (path) no effort goes to loss and there is no failure/harm. Even a little (effort) in

the direction of this Dharma liberates one from the greatest fear."

na: not; *iha*: here; *abhikrama*: effort; *nasah*: loss; *asti*: there is; *pratyavayah*: diminution/harm/bad effects/opposition; *na*: not; *vidyate*: is known; *su-alpam*: very little; *api*: although; *asya*: of this; *dharmasya*: of Dharma; *trayate*: liberates/protects; *mahatah*: great; *bhayat*: from the fear.

The path of Buddhi Yoga, the Yoga of action enlightened by intelligence and wisdom, is perfect. Even a small effort in this direction is eternally valuable, because it stimulates the personal growth of the individual on a deeper level.

The journey of self realization is transcendental, and continues on a subconscious level when our conscious mind is not ready to follow it through properly. As Krishna will explain later in the text, whatever progress one has made on this path will remain to his credit, even if he falls from the practice of Yoga: whenever he will be ready to resume the journey, in this or in a next lifetime, the fallen Yogi will bank on the results of his previous work, obtaining better facilities and breezing through the lessons that he had already learned.

The work done in self-realization is always beneficial. There are no bad side-effects. Some other ventures may require one to sacrifice and renounce one's family life, health, resources, social position, or other valuable assets, but Buddhi Yoga is about engaging one's intelligence and wisdom in the performance of proper action, so it can be applied to all aspects of life and in all circumstances. Arjuna does not have to renounce his duties as a *kshatriya*, husband or father: he just needs to act with wisdom, supported by the knowledge and consciousness of the true transcendental nature of Brahman, and detached from the fruits of his actions.

Another level of meaning is that through intelligence and wisdom engaged in the search for self realization, even loss and failure become opportunities and pillars of future success. It is said that experience is always worth the price we pay, even if it was very expensive.

The actual purpose of Buddhi Yoga is the individual's spiritual growth, so even if from the material perspective one's efforts have not produced much visible result, the learning process will create a higher level of consciousness and a wider view of the purpose of life. The entire text of the *Gita* will explain how.

The word *pratyavayah* has many layers of meaning, and each of these meanings offers the basis for a different angle in meditating on the extraordinary characteristics of Buddhi Yoga.

Here Krishna equates Buddhi Yoga with Dharma: this is a very important concept, because intelligence without ethical principles can be extremely dangerous.

Even a small step in support of Dharma is eternally valuable, because it will follow us lifetime after lifetime and create even more and better opportunities, while temporary material things such as money, property, relations, and social position, will inevitably be lost - if not during this lifetime, at its end.

What is the greatest fear? Having misused the valuable opportunity of a human life.

व्यवसायात्मिका बुद्धिरेकेह कुरुनन्दन ।

vyavasāyātmikā buddhirekeha kurunandana ।

बहुशाखा ह्यनन्ताश्च बुद्धयोऽव्यवसायिनाम् ॥ २-४१ ॥

bahuśākhā hyanantāśca buddhayo'vyavasāyinām ।। 2-41 ।।

“O beloved descendent of Kuru, the intelligence/understanding that is constantly focused on the Atman is the only true one in this (world). Those who do not concentrate (on the soul) disperse their intelligence in innumerable minor ramifications.”

vyavasaya: determined; *atmika*: with the self; *buddhih*: intelligence; *eka*: one; *iha*: here; *kuru nandana*: o son/descendent of Kuru; *bahu*: many; *sakha*: branches; *hi*: certainly; *anantah*: endless; *ca*: and; *buddhayah*: of the intelligence; *avyavasayinam*: of those who are not determined.

Like other passages of *Gita*, this verse offers many layers of meanings. The most immediate meaning is that, in order to be able to achieve a goal, one needs to seriously concentrate on it and follow through with determination, enthusiasm and patience, and making the necessary sacrifices of time and energy. The search for Self realization is not a hobby, something that one does in leisure time, to enjoy a sense of personal value, or to kill time after retirement. It is not a practice to improve relaxation and digestion, to become fit and trim to better enjoy material pleasures. And neither is it an academic pursuit to get a doctorate, a teaching job, social prestige, or some mental stimulation, like one does with a crossword puzzle. This path must be walked with both feet, with all one's heart and soul, controlling one's mind to keep everything else in the back seat or better, properly engaged in the main mission of life. Otherwise, the process will stretch in time and the desired results will be delayed, possibly to a next lifetime. Of course, as Krishna just said in the previous verse, there is no loss even if one does not succeed as quickly as expected, but why should we linger in ignorance and suffering?

Another level of meaning is that we must accept the idea that our understanding of Reality could need improvement. Many people are very attached to their own theories and opinions, which are endless. An old proverb says, "so many heads, so many opinions". Innumerable branches, endless ramifications.

This happens because of the attachment to one's false ego - *ahankara* and *abhimana*. We "like" an idea and we become attached to it, as if it were the truth, and we fight over it with other people who are similarly attached to their ideas, or the second-hand ideas (originally formulated by someone else) they have decided to espouse for some reason. Such an approach is encouraged by the westernized academic system, that aims to divide "schools of thought" as mere theories on an abstract object of speculation.

But Knowledge and Reality are not relative, they do not depend on anyone's opinion. There is a famous story in this regard, involving an elephant and a number of men who were born blind - and therefore had never had a direct visual experience of the animal. The blind men were brought to the presence of the elephant and asked to describe it. Of

course they could only touch the body of the animal, and as they did not expect it to be very large, each one of them groped a particular part of the body, getting a different impression. So the one who grasped the tail said the elephant was "something like a big rope", while the one who found a leg said the elephant was "like a tree trunk". Different opinions were given by those who had touched the belly, or the ear, or the tusk... and they were so engrossed in their personal opinions that they started to fight and beat each other over who "was right" and who "was wrong". So our intelligence or understanding must be "single", strongly focused on Reality itself and not on our attachment to theories. There is no place for sectarianism here, no place for institutional loyalty or political allegiances. As long as we fail to put Reality and the Supreme Self in the focus of our entire life, we will not achieve the goal. This is why we need to get Knowledge from the proper source - the original scriptures, the genuinely Self realized *acharya* who does not see real differences between the various genuine paths. It is only from the peak of the mountain, when we have reached our goal, that we can all get the same view of the slopes and valleys below. Only a person who has a direct vision of the Absolute (*tattva darshi*) can instruct us on how to get up there.

यामिमां पुष्पितां वाचं प्रवदन्त्यविपश्चितः ।

yāmimāṃ puṣpitāṃ vācaṃ pravadantyavipaścitaḥ ।

वेदवादरताः पार्थ नान्यदस्तीति वादिनः ॥ २-४२ ॥

vedavādaratāḥ pārtha nānyadastīti vādinaḥ ॥ 2-42 ॥

“O son of Pritha, those who do not have a full understanding preach/recite about these things with many flowery words, and those who are attached to the letter of the Vedas are unable to recognize anything else.”

yam: that; *imam:* this; *puspitam:* flowery; *vacam:* speeches; *pravadanty:* preach/recite; *avipascitah:* those who have less understanding; *veda:* the Knowledge of Vedas; *vada:* followers/reciters; *ratah:* attached; *partha:* o Partha (son of Pritha); *na:* not; *anyad:* other; *asti:* there is; *iti:* like this; *vadinah:* those who follow/recite.

Vedic scriptures present Knowledge in a well-designed way, with a deep sense of poetry and symbolism that is meant to attract the minds of educated people and give full intellectual satisfaction. We need to remember, though, that education and intellectual power do not equate with Self realization: they are just a preliminary platform from which one must further progress. According to the texts themselves and to the universally accepted tradition, the present version of the Vedas was compiled about 5,000 years ago - around the time of Krishna's appearance - to be utilized by the people of Kali yuga, the present age that is characterized by a decrease in mental power, longevity, and good fortune. This miserable age started gradually and became more and more degraded to an intolerable level, developing just like the seasons on Earth. In India, summer starts with slightly warmer days and nights after the pleasant spring weather, then the heat increases

gradually, sometimes in waves, and finally there is no respite even during the coolest hours of the night. When the situation has become extreme, the natural cycle of life moves the masses of air of different temperatures and rain clouds are formed. A cyclonic storm breaks out, with lightning and thunder and strong winds, and the summer heat is broken. The dust and the garbage are swept away by sudden floods, and while most of the small plants are killed and rot in the fields, the great trees with deepest roots survive for the next season. Similarly, when the Kali yuga becomes intolerable and there is no more place for Dharma, destruction will come to sweep away the debris. Then a new compilation of Vedic knowledge will be in order, to suit the understanding and the requirements of the renewed human kind.

For the time being, however, the present compilation is our basis of reference and we should use it. Vedic scriptures are meant to train human beings to become *aryas*, "civilized people", and this is done by scientifically cultivating and regulating the useful and progressive natural talents and inclinations (*guna*) of each individual. Intellectuals, warriors, entrepreneurs and unskilled laborers exist in all societies, but in Vedic society they are carefully trained to understand and practice their respective rights and duties (*karma*). The three most intelligent categories of society (intellectuals, warriors and entrepreneurs) are also trained in personal life requirements, so that they can become perfect and progressive human beings, achieving full success in the four goals of human life: *dharma* (ethical living), *artha* (acquisition of valuable assets), *kama* (satisfaction of sense gratification) and *moksha* (liberation from conditioned attachments and identifications).

In this verse Krishna explains that the Knowledge he has been speaking about - the spiritual nature of the living entity as atman (rather than the temporary material body) and the science of action guided by intelligence and awareness - is contained in Vedic scriptures, but in a very elaborated, symbolic and poetic way (*pushpita vacah*).

This corpus of elaborated knowledge is sometimes called *karma kanda*, or "section about action", and comprises the four Vedas - *Rig*, *Yajus*, *Sama* and *Atharva* (called *samhitas*) as well as their *brahmanas* or ritualistic commentaries, explaining the meditation that goes with the mantras, the story of the ritualistic version of the knowledge and the reason to perform the sacrifices, and the requirements for the priests who conduct the sacrifice. Other extremely important parts of the core Vedic scriptures (called *sruti*) are the *aranyakas* and *upanishads*, explaining the innermost meaning of Vedic instructions. Later in the text of *Gita*, Krishna will explain the meaning of sacrifice (*yajna*), that is certainly not limited to the ritualistic offerings to the fire - the *agnihotra* being just a symbol for the sacrifices ("sacred actions") that a civilized human being is expected to perform. However, those who study, apply and especially teach Vedic knowledge need to be highly intelligent and evolved human beings - the *brahmanas*, those who "know Brahman" and "live as Brahman". Less intelligent and less educated human beings, who are not *brahmanas* but *brahma bandhus* or even *mlecchas* (those who do not follow the Vedic rules), are doomed to remain "outside the door" of the actual meaning of Vedic literature. These unqualified persons are described by Krishna as *apaviscitah*, "devoid of sufficient understanding", and therefore unable to actually grasp the meaning and purpose of the Vedic system. Like a person who is incapable of opening the lid of a honey jar and can merely lick the glass outside, these incapable people remain attached to the mere recitation of Vedic mantras, "as if there were nothing else" to get from them. In Kali

yuga, such recitation is often done with very little understanding, sometimes even without the basic meaning of the verses or without recognizing the names of the Deities invoked. Of course less qualified people become attached to such a practice, because it gives them some appearance of nobility. In fact they do not know any better, and when trying to pass themselves off as genuine *brahmanas* they may even preach that there is nothing else to be gained by Vedic *shastra* except for the habit of muttering a litany nobody can understand and burning some *ghi* and grains in the fire.

Some commentators, presenting themselves as followers of Adi Shankara, argue that this verse wholly condemns the ritualistic aspects of Vedic knowledge, and teaches to renounce its worldly karmic pursuits in favor of the theoretical cultivation of philosophy, but this is not the real point. It is true that Adi Shankara criticized the degraded brahmins of his times, but he never dismissed the authority of Vedic scriptures - quite the contrary, he came to restore the authority of the Vedas.

The reform brought about by Adi Shankara was meant to bring back the original and deeper meaning of Vedic knowledge, as explained in this verse by Krishna: to shift from the attachment (*rati*) of the mere external recitation (*vada*) of Vedas and come to the platform of real understanding of their inner meaning.

कामात्मानः स्वर्गपरा जन्मकर्मफलप्रदाम् ।

kāmātmānaḥ svargaparā janmakarmaphalapradām ।

क्रियाविशेषबहुलां भोगैश्वर्यगतिं प्रति ॥ २-४३ ॥

kriyāviśeṣabahulāṁ bhogaiśvaryagatiṁ prati ।। 2-43 ।।

“They aspire to the pleasures of the higher planets (considering them as the most desirable purpose) and to the fruits of their actions to be reaped in a next lifetime, therefore they perform a great variety of complicated rituals to achieve the purpose of a high position and sense gratification.”

kama: lust; *atmanah*: self (mind/identification); *svarga*: heaven; *para*: aspiring/focusing; *janma*: birth; *karma*: action; *phala*: fruits; *pradam*: giving; *kriya*: duties/ procedures/ rituals; *visesa*: different; *bahulam*: many; *bhoga*: sense gratification; *aisvarya*: domination; *gatim*: destination/goal; *prati*: towards.

In the previous verse, Krishna criticized those who remain attached to the mere recitation of the Vedic mantras, thus forgetting their true purpose, i.e. the realization of the true spiritual nature of the Self and the science of action guided by intelligence.

The flowery words that accompany such supreme Knowledge are the bait to attract people, and the most attractive part of all is known as the *phala sruti*, the final stanzas that accompany most important *stutis*, and that promise all sorts of material benefits to the reciter, including fulfillment of desires in this world, absolution from the consequences of bad actions, acquisition of good qualities, a better birth for the next life, and even liberation (*moksha*).

For this reason, some people get the impression that *moksha* is a kind of valuable asset offered as a blessing by God to "good people", or that it can be automatically achieved through the celebration of some ritual, or for the intercession (or blessing) of some saint, without any extra effort from the part of the candidate.

In fact, liberation is the most valuable goal of human life, but it is not something to be acquired like a property or a title. It is a personal and intimate realization of one's real spiritual nature, and the detachment from all material identifications, desires and attachments. Therefore people who still have a lusty mentality (*kama-atmah*) remain totally unable to even start to understand what it is, just like people who insist to remain in a dark cave instead of going out in the daylight cannot even begin to understand what the Sun looks like. No amounts of pious acts or good wishes or rituals will show the Sun to these people: they just have to get up and walk out of the cave into the sunlight, leaving behind all the rest.

Vedic knowledge has a universal character, therefore it describes different planetary systems, especially those called Svarga, or heaven, where life is much pleasurable than on this planet. It comes to no surprise that among the goals desired by materialists, access to Svarga constitutes the highest and the most popular. Most of the rituals described in the *sruti* and in their commentaries, the *smriti*, are meant to form a personal relation between the worshiper and the Devas, thus developing a strong affinity and familiarity that will take him to the abode of the Devas at the time of death.

In that position, the worshiper will have a greater dominion (*aisvarya*) over sense gratification (*bhoga*) - exactly the opposite of what we need when we are seeking for liberation. In a sense, it is true that we can achieve liberation also through the path of sense gratification, exhausting the desires and realizing that the satisfaction of material senses does not really give that happiness we were looking for. But this is possible only for intelligent people, for those who have been thoroughly trained in healthy sense gratification. Unhealthy sense gratification, that does not follow the dharmic principles, is so dangerous that it can eat away our intelligence, good qualities and intentions, and throw us into a hellish existence, to the level of demoniac beings, animals and plants. Certainly this is not the *kama* described by the Vedas as a major goal of human life. *Smriti* scriptures were compiled by great personalities such as Yajnavalkya, Parasara, Brihaspati, Daksha, Gautama, Kanada, Bharata, Yama, Angira, Pracheta, Yogeshvara, Atri, Jaimini, Panini, Kautiliya, Nandi etc, and include instructions about the correct pronunciation of mantras, the intonation and metrics, and the practical proceedings of the rituals both for public and private purposes. This accounts for the *kriya visesa bahulam*, or "many different procedures" mentioned in this verse, all described for the same purpose of achieving some material benefit.

The trick here is that in order to properly perform all these different and complicated procedures, a human being needs to constantly exercise his intellect and understanding, self-discipline (and therefore detachment from sense gratification and laziness), cleanliness (and therefore purity of mind), determination in following through a difficult task, and so on - elevating him to the enlightened platform of *sattva guna*.

These qualities will gradually take him to a platform, called *visuddha sattva* ("pure *sattva*") where he will become able to understand the transcendental Knowledge for its actual meaning and purpose.

The drinking of the *soma rasa* is probably the most famous ritual practice for the

worshiper to gain a place among the residents of the higher planets. Unfortunately, due to bad biased translations produced by anti-Hindu propagandists during the British colonial period, many people have come to believe that *soma rasa* is nothing more than an alcoholic fermented beverage similar to wine or beer, and they use this idea to justify their lust for ordinary booze - intoxicating beverages that are connected to the degrading lower *gunas* of *rajas* and *tamas* and are definitely not conducive to the basic ability to drive a vehicle or walk straight, what to speak of an increased longevity or the contemplation of the highest and subtlest truths of the transcendental science.

This interpretation of *soma rasa* goes against the very purpose of the Vedic system. In fact, the *soma rasa* was not a fermented alcoholic beverage but a fresh herbal juice that boosted brain power and general health: an ancient version of the endless range of “health drinks” that people buy and consume to keep themselves going today in “civilized” societies. Otherwise it would not be associated with “immortality”, a definition that should at least imply some good health and longer life expectancy.

The texts of Ayurvedic medicine have never stopped identifying the Soma Lata with the ubiquitous genus *Ephedra*, known not only in India (in its variety *Ephedra gerardiana*) but also in Asia and Europe as well as in America, where it is called Mormon Tea or Squaw Tea. Ephedra is also used as an extract for a number of food supplements and tonic preparations because it contains a mildly stimulant alkaloid called Ephedrine, comparable to the “good caffeine” contained in the south American plants known as Guaranà and Yerba Matè. Ephedra has been used all over the world for thousands of years to treat headaches, asthma, hay fever, rashes of allergic origin, and rheumatism. It is described as stomachic and diuretic, and useful to counteract hypotension associated with anesthesia. It is also famous for its properties as energy booster at mental, physical and even sexual levels, and therefore has been catalogued by FDA in the USA as enhancer of athletic performances, as a concentration help for students under exams and even as stimulant of metabolism for those who want to lose excess weight. Such qualities and uses clearly set Soma very much apart from all sorts of alcoholic beverages that are universally known to have precisely the opposite effects, just like poison compared to nectar.

भोगैश्वर्यप्रसक्तानां तयापहृतचेतसाम् ।

bhogaiśvarya prasaktānām tayāpahṛtacetasām ।

व्यवसायात्मिका बुद्धिः समाधौ न विधीयते ॥ २-४४ ॥

vyavasāyātmikā buddhiḥ samādhau na vidhīyate ॥ 2-44 ॥

“Because they are attached to pleasure and a high position (of power and opulence), and their minds are confused by such things, they remain unable to focus their understanding on the Self and to attain *samadhi* (balanced consciousness).”

bhoga: sense pleasure; *aisvarya*: domination; *prasaktanam*: those who are attached to;

taya: by these; *apahrta:* covered; *cetasam:* consciousness; *vyavasaya:* focused; *atmika:* mind/self; *buddhih:* intelligence; *samadhau:* in the samadhi; *na:* not; *vidhiyate:* becomes.

This verse clarifies that sense gratification and control are not bad in themselves: it is the attachment to them that confuses the mind, and distracts one from the actual mission of human life. These two causes of confusion - *bhoga* and *aisvarya* - can be transformed into valuable instruments for one's true progress by applying Krishna's instructions on Sankhya and Buddhi Yoga, that is, constantly remembering one's true spiritual transcendental nature, and working sincerely in a selfless service spirit.

Bhoga, or sense gratification, is necessary for the body and mind to function properly, but should not be pursued as the goal of life, to satisfy the innermost craving for true happiness - because such deep happiness is not found in the body or in the mind. Only the strictly necessary amount of sense gratification, obtained through dharmic means, should be applied to keep the body and mind functioning properly.

It is said that sense gratification is like salt: a small pinch is required for health and to give a good taste to food, but if we start to increase the quantity because we like the taste, it creates addiction and we end up using too much, to the point that we become sick. Similarly, *aisvarya*, the sense of control and domination, can be properly used to get things done properly in the rightful performance of our duties. We need to keep our body and mind under control, and survey the extensions of our body and mind - our working instruments, our personal effects such as clothing and eating utensils, and our living quarters. We must be responsible for their proper upkeep and orderly functioning, and this is done through the principle of *aisvarya* - control and domination. When required and legitimate for our occupational duties, this control can extend to plants, animals and human beings who need to be directed and supervised in their work in order to function properly: for example, young children and unskilled laborers.

Again, such control must be strictly limited to what is required for the smooth performance of one's occupational responsibilities, and not pursued for the sake of its taste, otherwise it will create addiction and we end up trying to control too much, to the point that we become sick with power hunger.

In both cases, when we become attached to *bhoga* and *aisvarya*, we lose sight of their actual purpose and especially of the mission of human life, that is attaining Self realization.

The word *samadhi* appears many times in *Bhagavad gita* and is a very important concept in the practice of all types of yoga. It means "balanced consciousness", "constant intelligence", and "constant meditation".

Such level is the purpose of Yoga and can be attained through any genuine yoga method under the guidance of a person, or persons, who must have already achieved that level.

Another meaning of the word *samadhi* in this context is applied to the constant preoccupation of the conditioned soul to procure sense pleasure and dominion over things or others, thus changing the translation of the verse into "Because they are attached to pleasure and a high position (of power and opulence), and their minds are confused by such things, constantly thinking of them, they remain unable to focus their understanding on the Self."

त्रैगुण्यविषया वेदा निस्त्रैगुण्यो भवार्जुन ।

traiguṇyaviṣayā vedā nistraiguṇyo bhavārjuna ।

निर्द्वन्द्वो नित्यसत्त्वस्थो निर्योगक्षेम आत्मवान् ॥ २-४५ ॥

nirdvandvo nityasattvastho niryogakṣema ātmavān ॥ 2-45 ॥

“The Vedas (books of knowledge) deal with the various manifestations of the three gunas. O Arjuna, you should rather become detached from (all) these three *gunas*, and situate yourself in that pure goodness that is not subject to changes. One who knows the Atman becomes free from all dualities and finds protection in detachment.”

traiguṇya: of the three gunas (qualities) (of the material world); *vishaya*: in the matter; *vedah*: the Vedas; *nistraiguṇyah*: without the three gunas; *bhava*: become; *arjuna*: o Arjuna; *nirdvandvo*: without duality; *nitya*: constantly; *sattva*: in sattva; *stha*: situated; *niryoga*: free from connection; *kshema*: and protection; *atmavan*: one who is (focused on) the Self.”

The four main Vedas deal mainly with the knowledge of this universe, its archetypal principles, its cosmology, and the proper way to live and work in it, establishing a mutually beneficial relationship of cooperation among the residents of the various planets. This is the realm of the three *gunas*: all of them interact together to produce results to cyclically create, maintain and destroy the material manifestation.

Rajas brings about creation, *sattva* preserves and maintains, and *tamas* dissolves. Although the Devas are situated in *sattva*, as long as one remains in the material identification and attachment, *sattva* can not remain pure and is therefore subject to become mixed with the other two *gunas* - *rajas* and *tamas*. For example, we can see that the influence of *sattva* brings peace and contentment, but our bodies and minds regularly need food and care, thereby pushing us out of peace and contentment, either into the *rajas* (the active search for the food and care we need) or even worse, into *tamas*, the lazy oblivion of starvation, inertia and uncleanliness leading to destruction. Sometimes *tamas* is mistaken for *sattva*, because the two opposites may look similar to the eyes of a person who does not have the proper knowledge.

We see that even the residents of the heavenly planets sometimes become confused by *rajas* and *tamas* - arrogance, anger, lust, delusion, fear, loss, lamentation - and eventually die, losing their position and having to take another birth. The mission of human life is to rise above the play of the *gunas* and to become situated in *nitya sattva* or *suddha sattva*, the level of goodness that remains constantly pure because it does not see any separation or duality between the Self and Reality, and it does not depend on anything external. In this context, yoga refers to the union or connection between persons, and is mentioned together with *kshema*, "protection". The need for connection, company or love and protection is a natural feeling for the conditioned soul that still sees oneself and the world in terms of duality. Connection or relationship and protection make sense only when there is a distinction between persons, when there is something to seek "outside the Self".

Similarly, in this context yoga can also mean "acquisition", to indicate the natural impulse to acquire and achieve, to leave one's mark on the world, to give a meaning of fulfillment to one's life. At various levels, this can be as basic as the animal needs of eating, sleeping, protection, pleasure and perpetuation of the species, as distorted as the endless accumulation of material possessions, or as lofty as the highest intellectual and scholarly pursuits.

The Self realized soul finds all its necessities, including achievement, protection (both to protect oneself and protect his possessions and relationships), love and company within the Self (*atma*). But such Self is not about the lower material identification, that is illusory and can only create a delusional sense of egotistic arrogance and selfishness.

A healthy amount of self-reliance and self-esteem are required to perform our duties in society, but these remain healthy only when they are used as instruments and do not become a goal in themselves, just like sense gratification and the sense of control.

The teachings of Sankhya and Buddhi Yoga explained by Krishna show that there is a big difference between the Self and the ego,

Another level of meaning of the expression *niryoga-kshema* is that detachment itself, or lack of selfish attachment, is the best protection. Everything in this world is temporary, and bound to be lost sooner or later, therefore attachment is foolish and hopeless in any case. This does not mean that one should reject everything or abstain from all relationships and activities; rather it means that in all relationships and activities we should be acting out of duty and not for our personal *bhoga* and *aisvarya*, sense gratification and sense of dominion and ownership.

The most wonderful thing is that this approach is also the most conducive to a healthy life of good relationships and a successful career, because attachment to one's selfish pleasure and power hunger inevitably create havoc in our lives, dooming all our attempts to failure.

यावानर्थ उदपाने सर्वतः सम्प्लुतोदके ।

yāvānartha udapāne sarvataḥ samplutodake ।

तावान्सर्वेषु वेदेषु ब्राह्मणस्य विजानतः ॥ २-४६ ॥

tāvānsarveṣu vedeṣu brāhmaṇasya vijānataḥ ।। 2-46।।

“Whatever value is found in a pond is also found, for all purposes, also in a large lake, and similarly whatever is contained in the all the Vedas can be found in a person who has realized the knowledge of Brahman.”

yavan: whatever; *artha*: value/benefit/purpose; *udapane*: in a small water reservoir; *sarvataḥ*: everywhere; *samplutodake*: a large expanse of water; *tavan*: that same (value/purpose); *sarveshu*: in all; *vedeshu*: Vedas; *brahmanasya*: of the (genuine) brahmana; *vijanataḥ*: who has the complete/ realized knowledge (of Brahman).

In this verse Krishna continues to explain that Vedic knowledge is meant to lead us to fully realize the Supreme Reality, Brahman. All the elaborate rituals aim at attracting us towards the level of *sattva*, from which we become able to understand Transcendence. A good birth, good intelligence, wealth, health, and whatever we need to live happily in this world, are simply instruments that help us to attain Self realization.

It is very difficult to engage in transcendental studies and practices when we struggle with the basic necessities of life for ourselves and our family, therefore all the material blessings offered by the Vedic rituals are special facilities to help us in the task.

There is no need to give up the basic comforts of life to pursue Self realization: the only thing we need to give up is attachment to them, and this is done by training ourselves in dharma. Therefore the Vedic system starts the training and education of the individual even before his birth, with the *samskaras* performed by the responsible men of society. When a child is ready, he is sent to the Gurukula to be trained in dharma first and foremost, and incidentally in all the duties and principles, practices and skills that he will need in his adult life as a member of the *varna* for which he has manifested a natural talent and inclination. A rigorous dharmic training, both in the family of origin and in the family of the Guru, ensures that the individual becomes able to pursue *artha*, or the acquisition of valuable assets, in an ethical way and without becoming a victim of material attachment and identification. With the proper acquisition of *artha*, it becomes possible to pursue dharmic *kama*, or sense gratification. After a regulated life of healthy and ethical sense gratification, the individual enters the phase of old age, when the senses become more peaceful and it is easier to let go of everything that belongs to the mundane platform. At this point the individual is able to totally devote himself to *moksha*, or liberation from material conditionings. This is the beneficial and stress-free path traced by Vedic scriptures for the conditioned soul that takes birth in this world under the strong desire of enjoying and controlling it.

Unfortunately, in Kali yuga there is a strong tendency to mess up with everything. Unqualified people can fail to understand the civilized - i.e. intelligent, scientific, comfortable and pleasurable - Vedic system and misuse it, creating unnecessary sufferings and confusion at the individual and collective level.

Krishna knows that Kali yuga is going to start soon, and therefore he is clearly stating the purpose of the entire system, to help us remain focused on what is really important.

We can make the example of a train station or airport, where you can find so many useful facilities - from comfortable sitting lounges to bathrooms to snack bars and restaurants, to a number of shops that sell items that may make your journey more comfortable...

reading material, mosquito repellent creams, inflatable pillows, etc. Some may even have private rooms for sleeping, public TV screens, post office counters, bank counters, internet centers, specialized bookshops, apparel shops, gift shops, souvenir shops, and so many other things to entertain the transiting travelers while they are waiting between one train and another, or one flight and another, to continue their journey to destination.

However, the entire purpose of all these facilities and even of the train station or airport, is for you to catch the train or airplane you need to go from this place to the next. If you forget the actual reason why you have come to the railway station or airport in the first place, you may have a lot of fun for some time but you will not attain your actual destination - something that will actually cause you a lot of problems.

A truly realized *brahmana* is a sober person who is able to remain focused on the actual

purpose of the various facilities offered by the Vedic system, and has the all-important duty to guide the other travelers. By definition, "*brahmana*" is one who actually knows Brahman, who has realized Brahman and acts as Brahman (transcendental spiritual consciousness). A person who does not fulfill such requisites cannot be called *brahmana*; attempting to present an unqualified person as a *brahmana* is as disastrous as presenting an unqualified person as a surgeon. This has absolutely nothing to do with DNA: the foolish son of a great surgeon cannot be allowed to operate if he has not undergone the proper training and does not possess the proper knowledge of anatomy and medicine. His favorable birth is just an opportunity, not a qualification in itself.

To foolish people, the work of a surgeon can seem easy: get a scalpel and cut through the skin and flesh of a patient to extract something that hurts. Similarly, to foolish people the work of a *brahmana* can seem easy: sit and eat, mumble some litany and burn some ghi and grains in the fire. But don't expect any good results from the procedures!

The key word in this verse is *artha*: it means valuable asset, valuable result. A superficial imitation of the real thing will have no real value, because it will not give the desired results. Superficial and ignorant people will think that you just need to go through the external moves, like a simpleton will believe that switching the computer on like a TV set is all you need to do to get the full operating value of a very sophisticated machine.

Another important word in this verse is *vijanata*, that belongs to the same root of *vijnana*. Theoretical knowledge, or *jnana*, is merely a preliminary step towards applied knowledge or *vijnana*.

कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा फलेषु कदाचन ।

karmaṇyevādhikāraṣte mā phaleṣu kadācana ।

मा कर्मफलहेतुर्भूर्मा ते सङ्गोऽस्त्वकर्मणि ॥ २-४७ ॥

mā karmaphalaheturbhūrmā te saṅgo'stvakarmani ॥ 2-47 ॥

"You certainly have the right to perform actions but never (the right) to enjoy the fruits of your actions. Do not (try to) become the cause of the fruits of the action, but do not become attached to inaction."

karmani: in the actions; *eva*: certainly; *adhikarah*: legitimate (legal/moral) right; *te*: of you; *ma*: not; *phaleshu*: in the fruits; *kadacana*: never; *ma*: not; *karma*: (of the) action; *phala*: result; *hetuh*: cause; *bhuh*: become; *ma*: not; *te*: of you; *sangah*: attachment; *astu*: there should be; *akarmani*: abstaining from action.

This is one of the most famous verses of *Gita*, summarizing its entire message. In the previous verse Krishna explained that one should remain fully aware of the ultimate purpose of all the various teachings of Vedic scriptures, in order to achieve their *artha*, or the valuable asset that constitutes their aim and objective. Here Krishna further defines the subtle balance between action and non-action: we need to keep in mind the result, but out of duty only, not because we want to enjoy the fruits of our work.

The natural tendency of uncivilized people is to act only when they see a personal benefit coming from the action - money, possession, sense gratification, or even just a sense of pride and accomplishment. The Vedic system is quite different: the observance of dharma requires totally selfless action performed out of duty only. Each member of society works to benefit the entire social body, just like the limbs of our body work selflessly to benefit the entire system. The most wonderful thing is that this is the only working way to ensure that everyone is properly taken care of.

Granted, the Vedic system is designed for progressive people and in Kali yuga it is difficult to follow it in the proper way, to the point that it can become a very degraded and disastrous mockery of itself. However, its principles remain most effective and progressive, when they are followed properly. Such responsibility lies square on the shoulders of the leaders of society - as Krishna will declare later (3.21, etc) - who must teach and practice the genuine method, and organize society in that direction.

By applying the instruction of this verse, we will ensure that each position in society will be occupied only by a genuinely qualified person. Contrarily to what ignorant people believe, the higher one is in a social position, the less rights and the more duties he has. In uncivilized societies, those who are in the higher classes do not hesitate to take personal advantage of their influence on society, and accumulate money and properties and other benefits for themselves and their associates, neglecting their actual duties and responsibilities.

In the genuine Vedic system the highest *varnas* are trained in the utmost selflessness and nobody can amass material wealth beyond their strict functional/ occupational needs.

A *brahmana* lives in a very modest and simple manner, without any luxury and ostentation, and without saving wealth "for the future", because he knows (and needs to show others by his personal example) that the real value of life is not about materialism and sense enjoyment. He does not charge for his teaching or consultancy, either, because he is just performing his duty - rather, he takes the maintenance of his students as his responsibility. When a student enters the Gurukula, he factually becomes a son in the family of the Guru, and is treated exactly as such.

A *brahmana* can enjoy a comfortable livelihood that will keep his body and mind fit for his work by using the spontaneous gifts of *kshatriyas* and *vaisyas* who appreciate his good work. In case of need he can even approach them to ask for donations to support himself and his family, but he must always remain independent and detached.

A *kshatriya* can amass wealth by accepting tributes from vassal kings and taxes from the *vaisyas* who prosper under his good administration, but he knows he is only a fiduciary for the people: he must distribute this wealth in charity to the needy and meritorious (who can easily approach him directly every day) and sacrifice his own comfort and even his own life in the line of duty. He can enjoy a comfortable livelihood that will keep his body and mind fit for his work, but he must at all times be ready to leave everything behind or even give everything up, whenever his protection and help are required by the *prajas*.

A *vaisya*'s job requires him to pay taxes to the *kshatriyas* and finance the religious and educational work of the *brahmanas*. He must also take care to properly feed all his dependents - family and workers, household animals as well as beggars and even stray animals - before he sits at his meals. The task of the *vaisya* is to generate wealth, not to accumulate it or freeze it in a non-productive way. He can enjoy a comfortable livelihood that will keep his body and mind fit for his work by utilizing a reasonable portion of the

wealth he produces, but he should never try to gain power in society, influence *kshatriyas* or *brahmanas* with his gifts, or directly usurp their position in society, because that is considered sinful. Of course, in Kali yuga it is difficult to find a qualified and capable *vaisyas*, what to speak of qualified and capable *kshatriyas* and *brahmanas*, so we are in a permanent state of social emergency and anyone, from any background, should try to fulfill such higher duties in society if he is willing to work in that capacity, even without being fully qualified. In Vedic society a *sudra* has no duties or responsibilities other than sincerely and honestly executing the work he is asked to do by his dharmic employer. In exchange, he has the absolute and lifelong right to get everything he needs to live a comfortable life for himself and his own family - abundance of good food, clothing and ornaments, free decent housing, medical care, opportunities for education and social mobility for his children, and is regularly entertained in the religious and cultural festivals financed by *vaisyas* and *kshatriyas* and conducted by *brahmanas* on the numerous holiday occasions afforded by the calendar. In short, he gets whatever the present-day mass of people would love to get from a job - and he cannot be fired, as he is considered a member of the family that employs him. Even when he becomes unable to work due to sickness or old age, he is still taken care of in the same way. Vedic society has no homeless people - nobody starves, nobody goes without proper medical assistance, nobody is neglected, especially the *sudras*. This system was difficult to understand for the early indologists, that confused the position of a *sudra* with the apparently similar position of a slave, who had no rights whatsoever and could not leave the family or establishment where he was working. In Vedic society a *sudra* is free to leave at any time if he wants to find a different employer and he can certainly take his family with him to the new place, although he should not whimsically desert his employer and suddenly leave him in difficult times without help. A *sudra* certainly has more rights than duties: he can eat and drink whatever he likes and whenever he likes, while *brahmanas* must follow a very strict diet and lifestyle rules, *kshatriyas* must keep fit and trim, and *vaisyas* must take care of all others first. A *sudra* can happily spend or waste whatever money or valuable property he gets, to enjoy whatever sense gratification he wants and to live carefree from day to day. He pays no taxes and does not need to "save money" for his future, because he knows he will be properly taken care of, no matter what will happen.

योगस्थः कुरु कर्माणि सङ्गं त्यक्त्वा धनञ्जय ।

yogasthaḥ kuru karmāṇi saṅgaṁ tyaktvā dhanañjaya ।

सिद्धयसिद्धयोः समो भूत्वा समत्वं योग उच्यते ॥ २-४८ ॥

siddhyasiddhyoḥ samo bhūtvā samatvaṁ yoga ucyate ।। 2-48।।

“Firmly situated in Yoga, perform the (required) activities giving up the attachment/ connection to them. This equanimity in success and failure is called Yoga.”

yoga: in Yoga; *sthah*: situated; *kuru*: do; *karmani*: in the actions; *sangam*: attachment; *tyaktva*: giving up; *dhanañjaya*: o Dhananjaya ("conqueror of wealth"); *siddhi*: in perfection/success; *asiddhyoh*: in imperfection/ failure; *samah*: equally (balanced);

bhutva: becoming; *samatvam*: equanimity; *yoga*: Yoga; *ucyate*: is called.

It is very difficult to achieve actual perfection in one's actions in this world. In fact, this should not even be our purpose. Contrarily to what most people believe, our purpose in life is not to become the perfect king or teacher or entrepreneur, husband/wife or son/daughter or parent, or achieve excellence in whatever we do. The purpose of life in this world is to attain Self realization, to understand Reality and to progress to the next level. Life is a school: the purpose of a school is not to get high marks, but to learn and become able to properly understand things, so that we can progress to the next stage - real life. Yoga is here described as the Buddhi, the knowledge, wisdom and intelligence that enable us to remain equally balanced in all circumstances, because we constantly remain aware of our duty. And what is this duty? It is the service to the Supreme, the action performed for pleasing God in all the various forms and manifestations, from the Virat purusha embodying the social structure (see *Purusha sukta*) to God's representatives as the king and the teacher, to the Antaryami Paramatma that resides in everybody's heart and guides us with the voice of our conscience, to the Isvara form of the Supreme Brahman that offers us guidance through the *shastra* and is the actual proprietor and beneficiary of the entire universe (5.29).

The word *karmani* includes all activities and actions, but is particularly intended as duties towards society and ritual performances, because these are the prescribed actions. The definition of karma applies to prescribed, useful and beneficial actions, while *vikarma* refers to prohibited, destructive and negative actions in general.

The word *siddhi* has several meanings, including perfection, success, powers, benefits, results, even proper understanding. Each of these meanings gives a fresh perspective on the overall significance of the verse.

Thus, we learn that the purpose of Yoga is not about achieving the mystic *siddhis*, and the purpose of embarking into an enterprise is not to acquire money or benefits, or even to successfully complete it. And, most intriguing of all, that we should try our best to perform our duties even if we do not have a complete understanding of the procedure and purpose of it all. This is exactly what happens in a school: a student learning the multiplication table does not need to question its purpose, value or origin in order to be able to apply it properly, and the problems he faces in his studies are just intended as a practice. A student's solving (or not solving) a particular mathematical problem is not likely to affect society, and similarly the success or failure of a particular enterprise - a factory, a service organization, the building of a house, or even the building of an empire - will not have a permanent effect on Life. It will be important only if, through its success or failure, it will change the consciousness of people, thereby helping them in the true mission of existence.

Another interesting definition used in this verse is *sanga*, that includes the meanings of attachment, proprietorship, identification, as well as the basic meaning of "association". *Sanga* can be of two types - *sat* and *asat*. *Sat sanga* is the "eternal, true, good, virtuous" association that is characterized by the quality of *sattva*, or even better, *visuddha sattva*, or transcendental goodness. *Sat sanga* liberates us from the narrow-minded material attachment and identification, because it offers us a higher taste and attachment to our spiritual and eternal identification. *Asat sanga* is whatever temporary and material association takes us away from Sat; usually it is divisive, selfish, and concerned about

pursuing delusional temporary objectives.

It is also important to understand the meaning of *samatva* - equanimity or balance. This definition does not imply indifference or neglect in the performance of one's duties; it is about being equally ready to face any situation, good or bad, with the same good will, sincere work, ethical behavior, loyalty, and honesty. Even if success in a very difficult but necessary enterprise seems unlikely, we should do our duty anyway: some battles deserve to be fought even if there is no hope for victory, because the results of our sacrifice will build the foundations for our successors to complete the task.

Krishna here calls Arjuna by the name Dhananjaya, "conqueror of wealth": a title that had brought Arjuna glory and fame when he had conducted the Rajasuya campaign collecting tributes for his brother Yudhisthira. This is not intended as sarcasm: Krishna is Arjuna's dear friend and he is just teasing him a little bit, to help him understand that no matter how successful one may have been in his efforts, still the purpose of the action is higher than mere material acquirement.

Also, on a more serious level, Krishna is confirming to Arjuna that the success of an enterprise is indeed a good thing, and should still be pursued - not for selfish reasons, but for the benefit of the entire society. There is nothing wrong in becoming successful.

दूरेण ह्यवरं कर्म बुद्धियोगाद्धनञ्जय ।

dūreṇa hyavaram̐ karma buddhiyogāddhanañjaya ।

बुद्धौ शरणमन्विच्छ कृपणाः फलहेतवः ॥ २-४९ ॥

buddhau śaraṇamanviccha kṛpaṇāḥ phalahetavaḥ ।। 2-49 ।।

“Therefore, o Dhananjaya, keep far away from all bad activities by engaging in Buddhi Yoga. (Always) take shelter in this intelligence. Those who work because they are interested in the fruits of the action are pitiable.”

durena: far distance; *hi*: therefore; *avaram*: inferior/ abominable; *karma*: actions; *buddhi-yogat*: from the engagement of intelligence; *dhanañjaya*: o Dhananjaya (Arjuna); *buddhau*: in (this) intelligence; *saranam*: shelter; *anviccha*: reaching for; *kripanah*: pitiable people; *phala*: the fruits; *hetavah*: because of.

The expression *avaram karma* includes all bad actions, the low and mean or abominable activities as well as those that do not have real value or importance. All such actions constitute a waste of valuable time and energy that should rather be utilized for the proper purpose of life. Further light on the parameters to evaluate actions is offered by the second part of the verse, that clarifies that all actions performed for the sake of one's profit (personal or collective) should be considered bad actions. Selfishness or miserliness may be restricted to one's immediate personal advantage or extended to the advantage of a particular group of beings with whom we personally identify – family, community, nation etc. But no matter how much we expand the concept of selfishness, as long as it is based on dualistic/divisive considerations, it remains a symptom of

miserliness.

An inferior or abominable action is any action that is contrary to the principles of Dharma, i.e. truthfulness or honesty, compassion, cleanliness and self-control, and similar ethical principles. Such an action is not truly beneficial to society, and although it may appear to bring some material advantage to its performer, it creates bad reactions that will ultimately outweigh any short term gain.

Narrow-minded people will perform such bad action anyway, because they are only interested in their immediate and selfish benefit, even if it damages others and society in general, and certainly does not enable them to progress spiritually towards the realization of the true Self. A *kripāna* is a miserable and ignorant person who should be pitied.

It does not matter if he has amassed fabulous wealth or possessions in this life: he will have to leave all such properties behind at the time of death, but he will have to pay for what he has illegally taken for himself. It may seem that he pulled off the trick and evaded the punishment in this world, but he is not really going anywhere: death is the gate that everyone has to face, just like the cashier's counter at a supermarket, where shop lifters are stopped by the security guards

Another meaning of the word *kripāna* is "miser", one who does not know the actual value and purpose of what he has, and therefore misuses it or fails to use it in the proper way. Such a person can only be pitied, because in spite of possessing great wealth, he lives in very poor conditions, often suffering unnecessarily.

Again, here Arjuna is called Dhananjaya to reaffirm the validity of work intended to procure wealth for the proper functioning of society, especially if such wealth is collected by acting within the parameters of Dharma.

The expression *buddhau saranam anvīccha*, "strive to take shelter in this intelligence", suggest that sometimes this is a difficult or painful choice to make. Rarely the right thing to do is the easiest thing to do. Nonetheless, we need to stick to what is right and beneficial for everyone, and find consolation and shelter in the proper vision of things. It is said that Dharma will protect those who protect it, and destroy those who are bent on destroying it. This is because Dharma is the universal and eternal law of the universe, that goes beyond the immediate circumstances. Any action that goes against Dharma creates a reaction, a ripple in the smooth functioning of the universe that will eventually come back with its negative results, even if it is not immediately visible in the apparent field of time and space.

बुद्धियुक्तो जहातीह उभे सुकृतदुष्कृते ।

buddhiyukto jahātiha ubhe sukṛtaduṣkṛte ।

तस्माद्योगाय युज्यस्व योगः कर्मसु कौशलम् ॥ २-५० ॥

tasmādyogāya yujyasva yogaḥ karmasu kauśalam ॥ 2-50 ॥

“Through Buddhi Yoga one can become free already in this life from both bad and good (actions/reactions). Therefore you should engage in yoga, the best way to deal with actions.”

buddhi: intelligence; *yuktah*: engaged through; *jahati*: becomes free; *iha*: here; *ubhe*: in both; *sukrita*: good action; *dushkrite*: bad action; *tasmat*: therefore; *yogaya*: in the Yoga; *yujyasva*: become engaged; *yogah*: Yoga; *karmasu*: in actions; *kausalam*: the most beneficial way.

The word *kausala* includes a variety of meanings, such as “well-being, welfare, good fortune, prosperity, skillfulness, cleverness, experience, respectful salutation”. When the verse explains that yoga is the *kausala* in all activities, it implies all these intrinsic benefits and good qualities.

In this verse, Krishna introduces another and subtler point: sometimes in the performance of one's selfless duty it may be necessary to do things that superficially can appear to be bad. For example, a *kshatriya* needs to use physical force to stop aggressors, something that can cause pain and even death. Also, the aggressor may not have been totally responsible for the attack - for example, a tiger is compelled by hunger to attack its prey, and a human being that is endangering the life or possessions of others may not be in good mental health or aware of the results of his actions, so we may say that killing these living entities is a bad action. However, the *kshatriya*'s primary duty is to stop the aggression, no matter what circumstances motivated it. When the immediate danger has been averted, the *kshatriya* can investigate into the matter and redress any wrongdoing that may have originally caused the problem, but order and security must be addressed first. When this duty is performed without personal attachment or selfish motivation, there is no karmic involvement and one becomes free from the bondage to the action itself and its reactions. This, however, does not mean that in the course of one's life one will not get joys or sorrows, happiness or distress, because these are inevitable. Simply, it means that one will remain detached from such joys and sorrows, and experience them merely as temporary distractions related to the body and mind, and not to the real self - the platform from which the dutiful decision is made. So at the time of death one is not bound to take another birth to follow such reactions and the consequent actions and reactions in the endless cycle of *samsara*.

It is foolish to presume that at the time of death we will automatically attain liberation and be transferred to the "spiritual world" if we have not attained liberation and the spiritual world of transcendental consciousness and identification already in this lifetime. If we still maintain material attachments and identifications, these will inevitably pull us back to take another birth in this world, no matter what *sadhana* we have practiced, what rituals we have performed, what pilgrimages or pious actions we have executed, or what assurances we have obtained from religious institutions.

Death is a crucial moment: it is the time when the door opens to a new stage of our journey of existence. If we are ready and determined to proceed, and we are qualified to access the destination we aspire to, all is good. But if we have not qualified ourselves suitably during life in this body, we will simply not be able to enter the proper gate and will have to content ourselves with something that is more accessible from our particular position.

कर्मजं बुद्धियुक्ता हि फलं त्यक्त्वा मनीषिणः ।

karmajam buddhiyuktā hi phalam tyaktvā manīṣiṇaḥ ।

जन्मबन्धविनिर्मुक्ताः पदं गच्छन्त्यनामयम् ॥ २-५१ ॥

janmabandhavinirmuktāḥ padam gacchantyanāmayam ॥ 2-51 ॥

“The wise people give up the fruit born from their actions by engaging in this Buddhi Yoga and thus become free from the bondage of rebirth, attaining a position that is free from all sufferings.”

karma: from the action; *jam*: born; *buddhi-yuktah*: engaged through intelligence; *hi*: therefore; *phalam*: fruits; *tyaktva*: giving up; *manishinah*: thoughtful/wise personalities; *janma*: birth; *bandha*: bondage; *vinirmuktah*: completely liberated; *padam*: position; *gacchanti*: go; *anamayam*: without misery.

In this verse the word *tyaktva* is particularly significant.

As we have mentioned, joys and sorrows, or the results of actions, continue to present themselves in our daily life as long as we have a material body, and in turn become the cause of our future developing a next material body if we have some identification and attachment with them. The body itself is the incarnation of the *karma-phala*, the fruits of actions, both desirable and undesirable. It is not possible to avoid such results by abstaining from action, because the avoidance of a particular action is also a karmic choice that will give its good or bad results in due time.

A Self-realized person, who is engaged in Buddhi Yoga, does not expect to live a perfect life full of joys and success, free from any cloud of sorrow or disappointment, because this is not possible as long as we have a material body and we live in the material world. Rather, such a liberated person remains neutral - neither attracted nor repulsed - in front of such events, and faces them like one tolerates the various weather conditions, such as storms and sunny days, the heat of summer and the cold of winter (2.14). We naturally understand that the seasons change and there is nothing we can do about it, even if we wanted. Of course we can create small environments such as buildings and gardens where to take shelter from the excessive temperatures and meteorological precipitations, and adjust our clothing to make it more suitable to the season, but we cannot stop the rain from falling, or the wind from blowing, or the sun from heating up the atmosphere. We know that all such manifestations are temporary.

Similarly, a wise person knows that all joys and sorrows are temporary in nature, and if we let them go without remaining attached to them, their effects will fade away. Deluded people try to run after joys and escape from sorrows by artificial means, sometimes even by adharmic means, but this attempt is futile and often brings exactly the opposite of what one wants to obtain.

The fact is that, from the highest to the lowest planet (8.16), this universe is subject to the temporary nature of all acquisitions and joys because of the endless cycle of births and deaths. There is no position in this world, even on the higher planets, that is really and completely safe and free from danger and sufferings, as even Brahma eventually dies

when the cosmic manifestation is dissolved. This very temporary nature of material bodies creates the condition for illusion and misery; we can attain the platform of *anamayam*, "without illusion or misery" only when we are free from such conditions. This eternal position of unclouded bliss is called *paramam padam*, the supreme position, and is identified as the abode of Vishnu, the transcendental Lord. Another meaning of the verse indicates that Buddhi Yoga gives freedom from the results of the action, and at the same time it is an achievement that results from the proper actions, performed out of duty and without attachment. From the liberated level afforded by Buddhi Yoga, one can realize the supreme Position (18.54).

यदा ते मोहकलिलं बुद्धिर्व्यतितरिष्यति ।

yadā te mohakalilam buddhirvyatitarishyati ।

तदा गन्तासि निर्वेदं श्रोतव्यस्य श्रुतस्य च ॥ २-५२ ॥

tadā gantāsi nirvedam śrotavyasya śrutasya ca ॥ 2-52 ॥

“When (this) intelligence/wisdom will lead you out of the dense swamp of illusion, you will come to a point where you will be indifferent to whatever has been heard or will remain to be heard.”

yada: when; *te*: your; *moha*: illusion; *kalilam*: muddy waters; *buddhih*: intelligence /wisdom; *vyatitarishyati*: surpasses/overcomes; *tada*: then; *ganta asi*: you will acquire; *nirvedam*: lack of care; *srotavyasya*: what remains to be heard; *srutasya*: what has been heard; *ca*: and.

The definition *nirvedam* could be translated as "not-knowledge", and here it refers to the dispassion and detachment towards theoretical discussions, opposed to Buddhi as the direct and clear perception of reality (*prakasa* or *darshana*) that surpasses whatever theoretical information we may acquire from other sources.

The teachings of Krishna in *Gita* on the science of Yoga are not a dogmatic ideology, and they do not constitute a body of beliefs or observances to be followed in order to be accepted as faithful members of a community or a tradition. Rather they encourage us to become Self-realized individuals, capable of seeing things as they are, without being confused by temporary and relative conditions. It is the same difference that we can observe between slavery and freedom, between blindness and clear vision, between mindlessness and wisdom - and it rises from the deeply constructive and positive approach towards the inherent nature of the individual, as a spiritual being made of eternity, awareness and bliss, rather than a miserable sinner in need of being rescued as we find in the approaches influenced by abrahamic ideologies.

Here we are not asked to simply have faith and believe on the word of some authority: rather we are encouraged to develop a maturity of discrimination and a direct experience that is more valuable than any amount of theory. Scriptures, the instructions of the Guru, and the consensus among the learned traditionally constitute the system of cross-

references recommended in order to better understand the deep and complex corpus of Vedic knowledge. However, these remain as simply indications of the path that each one of us has to walk in the journey of Self realization. They should not be considered as absolute, because in this world there is always the danger that they may have been contaminated by the muddy waters of illusion - either by our own illusion and by the limitations of our own senses and intelligence, or by the illusion and limitations of other people who transmit such information. This does not apply merely to the ritualistic ceremonies, but to all fields of knowledge and understanding.

Westernized academy enforces a vision based on a linear evolution and progress of thought in the history of humanity, thereby assigning different time frames for the original composition of the various scriptures, but this is a faulty and incomplete perspective, supported by a dishonest and biased presentation of archeology, anthropology and paleontology. In the 20th century, on this planet we simultaneously had nuclear and space scientists as well as tribals that lived on a level of technology that is usually described as characteristic of the Paleolithic age, as well as a number of groups in intermediate positions on the apparent ladder of human progress - for example, subsistence farmers that used the same methods and tools for many hundreds or thousands of years. All levels of human evolution and progress can exist simultaneously, and therefore we need all types and levels of instructions from sacred scriptures to suit the needs of each and every individual. The historical dating of a particular copy of a text is not a proof of the progressive development of a particular philosophical perspective, because there might very well have been earlier compilations that have been destroyed, by accident or by deliberate plan. Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. This is confirmed by the Vedic tradition, clearly stating that the present version of the Vedas was simply compiled at the beginning of this particular Kali yuga, but existed previously and was mostly transmitted aurally from teacher to disciple. Curiously, this is considered as a symptom of degradation and not of progress, since in previous times human beings had better memory and did not need to write a lot of stuff down.

श्रुतिविप्रतिपन्ना ते यदा स्थास्यति निश्चला ।

śrutivipratipannā te yadā sthāsyati niścalā ।

समाधावचला बुद्धिस्तदा योगमवाप्स्यसि ॥ २-५३ ॥

samādhāvacaḷā buddhistadā yogamavāpsyasi ।। 2-53 ।।

“When you are stable in your consciousness without being confused by what has been heard, then you will achieve the yoga where the intelligence does not weaver from *samadhi*.”

sruti: of heard knowledge (in the Vedic scriptures); *vipratipanna*: confused by apparent contradictions; *te*: your; *yada*: when; *sthasyati*: remains situated; *niscalā*: without moving; *samadhau*: in *samadhi* (constant meditation); *acalah*; unflinching; *buddhih*:

intelligence/wisdom; *tada*: then; *yogam*: Yoga; *avapsyasi*: you will attain.

The expression *sruti-vipratipanna* (“confused/agitated by what has been heard”) also applies to a literal reference to the scriptures (traditionally called *sruti* because they are spoken to the student by the teacher), where people lacking in direct self-realization can see apparent contradictions, because different scriptures observe Reality from different perspectives and are meant for people at different degrees of evolution.

For example, it is said that the Supreme has no qualities, and at the same time it is also said that the Supreme has unlimited qualities. Also, it is said that Spirit has no personality, and at the same time it is also said that the Supreme has many personalities - or that it is very small and very big, or very near and very far. By rising above the limited understanding of material experience, we can understand that there is no real contradiction between these concepts - just like after reaching the peak of a mountain we are able to see that actually all the different paths that lead there are going in the same right direction, although at the foot of the mountain they seemed totally opposite to each other. One who has crossed over the difficult region of illusion and duality is not confused by these apparent contradictions but is able to see the Big Picture where everything is perfectly reconciled – including the knowledge that we don't have yet, but will be revealed in the future. In this sense, a truly realized soul always remains open and able to integrate all further from different perspectives, constantly remaining in a balanced consciousness.

The definitions of *samadhi* and *sthita-prajna* are found many times in *Gita* as the indication of the purpose to be attained through Yoga. Both words carry the meaning of "constant intelligence/understanding", that sober level of consciousness where one is not confused by the constant turbulent stream of contrasting impressions created by the environment, by others and by one's own mind. It is important to understand that the definitions *niscalā* and *acalā* ("not moving") do not refer to the stubbornness of those who choose to remain in ignorance, attached to their own prejudice or to the second-hand prejudices they received from others. It is rather the firmness and determination, the steadfastness that stays the helm of our boat to keep it on the proper course while we travel through life. It is a sort of dynamic immobility, like finding a permanent center of balance that will sustain us even when we are walking or running, enabling us to make sense of everything at all times.

अर्जुन उवाच ।

arjuna uvāca ।

स्थितप्रज्ञस्य का भाषा समाधिस्थस्य केशव ।

sthitaprajñasya kā bhāṣā samādhisthasya keśava ।

स्थितधीः किं प्रभाषेत किमासीत् ब्रजेत किम् ॥ २-५४ ॥

sthitadhīḥ kiṁ prabhāṣeta kimāsīta vrajeta kim ॥ 2-54 ॥

Arjuna said:

"O Keshava, a person who is firmly established in the consciousness of meditation is said to be in samadhi. How does he speak, and what does he say? How does he move, and

how does he stay?"

arjuna: Arjuna; *uvaca*: said; *sthita*: established; *prajñasya*: of one who really knows; *ka*: what; *bhasha*: language/description; *samadhi-sthasya*: of one who is fixed in samadhi; *kesava*: o Keshava (killer of the Keshi demon); *sthita-dhih*: firm intelligence/meditation; *kim*: how; *prabhasheta*: speaks; *kim*: how; *asita*: remains sitting/still; *vrajeta*: goes about; *kim*: how.

In the previous verses, Krishna has emphasized the importance of direct, personal realization of the Self over the second-hand information one can derive from hearing. Such firm vision has been described as the purpose of Yoga, the intelligence that enables us to act adequately in this world without remaining entangled in the results of action. This concept is further highlighted here, by explicitly assimilating the expressions *sthita-prajna*, *samadhi* and *sthita-dhi*.

Arjuna calls Krishna by the name of Keshava, indicating that he can kill the demon of doubt, that like the asuric horse Keshi carries the mind impetuously here and there, following various ideas and interpretations.

Doubt is a function of intelligence, because when we are faced with some new information or concept it is a good idea to explore it deeply, raising doubts and questions on its meaning and expanse so that we can make sure we have actually understood it correctly. Asking questions is a very important part of the process of learning (4.34): when a teacher does not accept questions, it is definitely not a good sign.

The student asks questions from his/her particular perspective, and this offers the double benefit to allow the teacher to evaluate the actual position or level of progress of the student, and to dynamically contemplate the complete picture of Reality by temporarily moving to that particular perspective and describing its view.

When a teacher refuses to work in this way, it is either because of lack of personal realization (he simply can't see the multidimensional picture and therefore is unable to describe the object from a different perspective) or because of a lack of sincerity in caring for the student's needs. In either case, such teacher is not qualified to take the student to the desired goal, and he is just a pretender and a cheater.

Since so much depends on actual personal realization, on the effective guidance of a genuine teacher, we must equip ourselves with the instruments that are necessary to recognize such a genuine teacher and thus avoid the double trap of following a cheater and committing offenses towards a great soul.

What are these instruments? Since a student is, by definition, not sufficiently qualified to verify the theoretical validity of the teachings he receives by mere exposition, s/he needs to learn how to ask questions first. The answers you receive are only as good as the questions you make. Besides the extensive questioning about the knowledge itself, a student needs to conduct a critical observation and analysis of what the teacher talks about and how s/he behaves in daily life, what moves him/her and what are his/her interests. By definition, a person who has a direct and integrated multi-dimensional perception/vision of Reality sees beyond dualities and is able to connect all aspects of his/her life to the service of Reality. Separating theoretical knowledge from its practical application leads to the disaster well illustrated by the saying, "those who can, do, and those who can't, teach". Who wants to be guided in the performance of surgical

operations by a person who is not a skilled surgeon himself? Only a fool.
A teacher is not supposed to have much of a private life, and although it is disrespectful to intrude into all details of a teacher's personal intimate life, by living in the family of the Guru (*gurukula*) a student gets plenty of legitimate opportunities to observe the symptoms described in the verse - what the teacher likes to talk about, and how s/he is able to connect everything to the "unified field of consciousness" and explain how to reconcile apparent contradictions. Also, it is very instructive to observe how the teacher chooses to invest his/her own personal energy, by pursuing or not pursuing activities or interests - in other words, going or not going to places, i.e. sitting or moving.

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।

śrībhagavānuvāca ।

प्रजहाति यदा कामान्सर्वान्पार्थ मनोगतान् ।

prajahāti yadā kāmānsarvānpārtha manogatān ।

आत्मन्येवात्मना तुष्टः स्थितप्रज्ञस्तदोच्यते ॥ २-५५ ॥

ātmanyevātmanā tuṣṭaḥ sthitaprajñastadocyate ॥ 2-55 ॥

The Lord said:

"O Partha, when someone gives up all the desires that flow into the mind, and remains satisfied in the *atman*, he is said to be firmly situated in the (correct) understanding."

sri: the glorious; *bhagavan*: Lord; *uvaca*: said; *prajahati*: gives up; *yada*: when; *kaman*: the desires; *sarvan*: all; *partha*: o son of Pritha (Arjuna); *mano*: of the mind; *gatan*: entered; *atmani*: in the atman; *eva*: certainly; *atmana*: with the self; *tushtah*: satisfied; *sthita-prajñah*: of firm understanding; *tada*: then; *ucyate*: is said.

The word *atman* is the basis for the concept of "self-realization". *Atman* means "self" in the sense of spiritual self, but sometimes according to the context it also applies to the mind or the senses, so the meaning can be expanded accordingly.

Kama, or desire, is an external impression that enters our mind. It is not something that comes from our own self... not from the soul, not from the mind, and not even from our body. It is a suggestion that attracts us outside, to run after so many things and ideas. There is a basic difference between need and desire. A need is a factual requirement, while a desire is a fantasy for pleasure and happiness. For example: when we are hungry we need some food, but we may desire to eat a particular dish rather than another, although our nutritional requirements could be equally met by a simple preparation or by an elaborate one.

We cannot give up our genuine needs, but we can learn to recognize whether an impulse contemplated by the mind is worthy of being fulfilled, and in which way. When we repress a genuine need, it will pop up again, stronger and stronger, while when we let a desire slide away, it will be substituted by others in the constant flow of distractions that

enter the mind. Also, we should not seek our real happiness in what others expect from us, or what others say or do about us. Projecting or blaming our shortcomings, failures, or difficulties on others or on the environment is not going to help us at all, either. Fulfilling a need is a very basic action, by which we can obtain some natural pleasure; however, we can never find true happiness in continuing to indulge in the same action even after our real need was met. For example, if we are hungry we may eat a nice bowl of rice and vegetables, but if our mind is not satisfied we may be tempted by the desire to eat more even if we have had enough food. Sometimes we eat not because we are really hungry, but because we feel consciously or subconsciously that the pleasure we derive from the taste of the foods will make us happy. This is a fine line, because our mind has needs, too, and they are as real as the needs of our body. So the best course of action consists in soberly recognizing the actual and reasonable needs of our body and mind, and allowing the extravagant whimsical desires to flow out unattended just like they had flown in unsolicited. The key to solve the problem lies in understanding what is the nature of the happiness that we still crave even when the genuine and reasonable needs of our body and mind have been fulfilled. Such intimate happiness belongs to a different level and can be attained only in Self realization - by focusing on the *atman/brahman*, the source of everything, because it is the only Reality that never changes. Only spiritual Reality remains unchanged, constantly filled with happiness, awareness and eternity/truth, while everything in the material manifestation comes and goes in cycles and therefore distracts our mind with the absence of what we like and the presence of what we do not like.

दुःखेष्वनुद्विग्नमनाः सुखेषु विगतस्पृहः ।

duḥkheṣvanudvignamanāḥ sukheṣu vigataspr̥haḥ ।

वीतरागभयक्रोधः स्थितधीर्मुनिरुच्यते ॥ २-५६ ॥

vītarāgabhayakrodhaḥ sthitadhīrmunirucyate ।। 2-56 ।।

“A person whose mind is not distracted by sufferings or joys and remains detached, free from attraction, fear and anger, is called a Muni who is able to maintain a steadfast meditation.”

duhkheshu: in the sufferings; *anudvigna*: not destroyed/disturbed; *manah*: the mind; *sukheshu*: in joys; *vigata*: not attracted; *sprihah*: touched; *vita*: without; *raga*: attachment; *bhaya*: fear; *krodhah*: anger; *sthita*: steadfast; *dhih*: understanding; *muni*: a muni (wise/thoughtful person); *ucyate*: is said.

The word *muni* means "thoughtful person", someone who does not talk unnecessarily because he is focused in contemplation of Reality.

From the same root, we have the word *mauna*, meaning "silence" and referring to a very popular practice in a beginner's *sadhana*, when the student learns to remain quiet and let the useless chatter of the mind fade away. Superficial people usually have a lot of trouble

observing the vow of silence, and tend to cheat by engaging in almost mute conversations by signs, writing, and other means of communication, like dumb or deaf people usually do. When there is nobody else around to engage, they may watch TV or listen to the radio, but this is not a real *mauna vrata*. The genuine practice of *mauna* is aimed at attaining inner quiet, where the mind becomes like the clear water of an undisturbed pond. Then we become able to see what is at the bottom of the pond.

When the external chattering stops, we can become aware of the internal chattering of the mind. When we succeed in stopping the internal chattering of the mind, only the blissful awareness of the soul remains, and the voice of the conscience - the Paramatma, the Supreme and Original Guru - can be heard without interference. This divine voice has the characteristic of stillness or eternity. It flows from a place of stability and comfort, where we can take shelter without fear of ever losing that protection.

This is what can give us real stability in a world that is constantly changing, and make us able to go through sorrows and joys without being distracted by them, and without deviating from our purpose and duty.

Again, this verse confirms that sorrow and joys will always come and go, but when our mind is firmly standing on a center of balance that is not shifting, we become able to see each sorrow and joy at its face value, without being touched deeply by them.

When we are able to let go of each temporary joy or sorrow, we do not develop attachment for objects or conditions, and therefore we are not afraid to lose what we want or to get what we do not want. Fear generates anger, which can manifest in one way or another, depending on the character of the individual and the environment conditions.

The worst type of anger is repressed anger, that festers in the mind and in the heart and creates a lot of negative feelings and thoughts, poisoning our existence and obstructing our progress because we may even convince ourselves that we are not "angry" persons.

It is very important to properly understand the meaning of *krodha*, "anger", because just like *himsa*, "violence", it can be interpreted in a misleading way to confuse the superficial people. A qualified *kshatriya* warrior fights and kills the aggressors without being touched by *krodha* and *himsa*, because his actions are not dictated by personal motivations. He is not venting his personal problems and frustrations, and he is not seeking any personal advantage in the fight - revenge, elimination of rivals, acquisition of a better status. He is just stopping the aggression and protecting the *praja*. Thus a dharmic fight always remains on the level of *sattva* or *visuddha sattva* even if it becomes "violent" or "angry". Shouting, throwing weapons, or even cutting bodies to pieces are not necessarily a proof of anger or violence, and they should certainly be employed when the circumstances require it for the protection of the good and the innocent. Sometimes, a nice smile and gentle words are sufficient; sometimes they are not, and could even be interpreted as weakness and uncertainty.

There is nothing commendable in hypocritically hiding one's anger and envy, in putting up a false face and pretending to be very advanced persons, while in truth we are nurturing hatred and making clever plans to cause trouble and sufferings to others.

In Kali yuga hypocrisy becomes a social virtue, and many believe that one should keep a meek and gentle attitude externally, to better achieve success in the most devious and cruel plans. For such people, a criminal is only one who gets caught and punished - even if he has not done anything wrong.

This view is contrary to the basic dharmic principle of truthfulness: in fact, it is better to

straightforwardly express our opinion and protest and take action when something is wrong, because through communication and proactive interaction we can solve problems.

यः सर्वत्रानभिस्नेहस्तत्तत्प्राप्य शुभाशुभम् ।

yaḥ sarvatrānabhisnehastattatprāpya śubhāśubham ।

नाभिनन्दति न द्वेष्टि तस्य प्रज्ञा प्रतिष्ठिता ॥ २-५७ ॥

nābhinandati na dveṣṭi tasya prajñā pratiṣṭhitā ।। 2-57।।

“A person who is detached from all situations/places, who does not become elated in favorable circumstances or spiteful in unfavorable circumstances, is firmly situated in wisdom.”

yah: one who; *sarvatra*: everywhere; *anabhi snehah*: without affection/ attachment; *tat tat*: that that/ whatever; *prāpya*: attaining; *subha*: auspicious /good; *asubham*: inauspicious/ bad; *na*: not; *abhinandati*: praises/ welcomes; *na*: not; *dveshti*: recriminates/ rejects; *tasya*: of this; *prajñā*: full knowledge; *pratiṣṭhita*: established.

Again, Krishna confirms that a person who is *sthita prajna*, or *prajna sthita*, is free from attachment to temporary things, such as a particular place or a particular type of circumstances - to anything anywhere. This is because he has no material identification to begin with. A *sthita prajna* has no problem moving to different places, because he has no attachment to his birthplace or to the place of his ancestors - all considerations based only on the material body. He does not become elated or dejected when during his journey in life he reaches or crosses over (*prāpya*) good or bad circumstances. Of course, he takes advantage of the good circumstances to perform his work, and he tolerates bad circumstances that slow him down or obstruct his work. Some people believe that a detached and renounced person abstains from all actions, but this has already been clarified in verse 2.47, that states that one should not become attached to inaction, either. The two extremes of *raga* and *dvesha* are both defined as attachments: one is about liking and the other about disliking, but they are not different from each other. When you hear someone who keeps harping against something that is neutral in nature, it means that he has a negative attachment against it.

Again, there is a fine line between the proper discrimination born from intelligence, that helps us to choose *sat* rather than *asat*, and the unjustified discrimination born from prejudice and attachment. To better understand where the line is, we need the expert guidance of a Self-realized and dharmic person.

यदा संहरते चायं कूर्मोऽङ्गानीव सर्वशः ।

yadā saṁharate cāyaṁ kūrmo'ṅgānīva sarvaśaḥ ।

इन्द्रियाणीन्द्रियार्थेभ्यस्तस्य प्रज्ञा प्रतिष्ठिता ॥ २-५८ ॥

indriyāṇīndriyārthebhyastasya prajñā pratiṣṭhitā ।। 2-58 ।।

“A person who completely withdraws the senses from the sense objects, like a tortoise/turtle withdraws all its limbs (inside the shell), is firmly situated in wisdom.”

yada: when; *saṁharate:* withdraws; *ca:* and; *ayam:* this; *kurmah:* tortoise/turtle; *angani:* the limbs; *iva:* like; *sarvasah:* all; *indriyani:* the senses; *indriya:* of the senses; *arthebhyah:* from the pursuit; *tasya:* of him; *prajña:* perfect knowledge; *pratiṣṭhita:* established.

Krishna obviously considers this point as so important that he keeps explaining from all possible perspectives. He is not simply wasting his time and ours, so we should give each of these verses our full attention and respect.

The key word in this verse is *artha*, here used in a slightly different meaning. We have seen that *artha* means "value, asset, purpose, aim, pursuit", generally with a positive sense. Besides, Krishna has already explained that one should engage in the proper prescribed action in the best possible way, but without attachment to the fruits of action, and we know that action requires the utilization of the senses, as well as of the mind. A tortoise stretches his limbs out of the shell when it is required for the proper activities, and withdraws them again when he perceives a danger, or when it is time to preserve energies. It would be foolish or even impossible for the tortoise to keep his limbs inside the shell at all times, because each living entity has to act or work (3.4, 5, 6) to keep the body alive and functioning. Therefore the senses should be used dutifully in the performance of one's duty. What we need to withdraw from, is the faulty belief that the objects of the senses are the actual *artha*, or the purpose of life. We have already mentioned that a dharmic training makes the individual able to acquire *artha*, and then to satisfy *kama*, on the road to *moksha*. In fact, the *artha* we acquire is not a purpose in itself, but only a means to an end, an instrument that must be used and then discarded.

विषया विनिवर्तन्ते निराहारस्य देहिनः ।

viṣayā vinivartante nirāhārasya dehinaḥ ।

रसवर्जं रसोऽप्यस्य परं दृष्ट्वा निवर्तते ॥ २-५९ ॥

rasavarjaṁ raso'pyasya paraṁ dṛṣṭvā nivartate ।। 2-59 ।।

“The embodied soul may keep the sense objects at a distance and reject them, but he can

give up the taste (for such objects) when he sees/finds the Supreme/ something that has a higher/better taste."

vishaya: objects of senses; *vinivartante*: go away from; *niraharasya*: of one who does not consume; *dehinah*: one who is embodied; *rasa*: taste; *varjam*: giving up; *rasah*: taste; *api*: although; *asya*: of him; *param*: much better; *drishtva*: by seeing; *nivartate*: gives up.

The word *vishaya* refers to the objects of the senses; not to the objects in themselves, but to the sensual projection that we perceive of them in our mind. For example, we can abstain from the object of taste even while we are eating food, if we are just consuming the food without noticing how it tastes. Usually this happens when our mind is occupied with something that we consider more important or more attractive - for example, a thrilling film we are watching, or the prospect of an important meeting, or something similar. The word *nirahara* means "not accepting, not eating, not tasting" and here it specifically applies to abstention or abstinence from a particular object of sense gratification. This can be practiced successfully to a certain measure, because the body and the mind can adapt to almost every condition. One can survive on very little sense gratification, even for long periods of time, either voluntary or forcibly, by choice or by the strength of circumstances. However, mere external abstinence does not mean that the desire for the sense object has died away. In fact, in some cases abstinence can aggravate the desire to the point of damaging the mental balance, like the steam trapped in a pressure cooker builds up and can explode dangerously. As long as we have a body (*dehinah*), we have senses, and our senses must be engaged somehow for the survival and functioning of the body. So, is sense gratification good or bad? Can it be avoided, can we really withdraw from it, like a tortoise withdraws his limbs? Only when it is dangerous, when it is detrimental, or in other words, when it is pursued for its own sake, when we are trying to get from it the deep and permanent happiness we all aspire to. The need for *rasa*, or "taste" is an intrinsic quality of the soul and cannot be eliminated or removed. When artificially suppressed, it will find its way and surface again usually in distorted and more dangerous forms, such as the obsession for power, fame, or even masochistic, sadistic or otherwise psychotic practices. The verse warns us about artificial renunciation, that may create serious psychological problems especially in Kali yuga, when the influences of passion and ignorance are stronger than in other periods. What is the solution? Finding a higher taste, a *param rasa*, that can engage our minds and senses in a pursuit that is worthy of being entertained. This higher taste is spiritual realization and the union in selfless service to the Supreme.

यततो ह्यपि कौन्तेय पुरुषस्य विपश्चितः ।

yatato hyapi kaunteya puruṣasya vipaścitaḥ ।

इन्द्रियाणि प्रमाथीनि हरन्ति प्रसभं मनः ॥ २-६० ॥

indriyāṇi pramāthīni haranti prasabhaṁ manaḥ ।। 2-60 ।।

"O son of Kunti, the senses are so troublesome that they can forcibly carry away the mind

even of a man who is wise and strives to control them."

yatato: trying; *hi*: certainly; *api*: although; *kaunteya*: o son of Kunti (Arjuna); *purushasya*: of the purusha; *vipascitah*: with discriminating knowledge; *indriyani*: the senses; *pramathini*: agitating; *haranti*: take away; *prasabham*: forcibly; *manah*: the mind.

The word *purusha* is usually considered as meaning "man" as in "male", but in the transcendental science it refers to the "enjoyer", to the active and affirmative principle in the soul that seeks pleasure and happiness. Thus, it naturally includes both men and women, because the conditioned souls that have taken a female body also seek and pursue pleasure and happiness. Some even say that women are "many times lustier" than men....

The *purusha* principle is a characteristic of the spirit, and finds its purest manifestation in the Parama Purusha, Isvara or Param Atman - the Supreme Lord. The English definition, too, expresses this principle, the tendency to "lord it over", or to enjoy, possess and dominate. It is not a bad tendency in itself, provided the *purusha* is capable and willing to perform the duties of such position, and not just try to claim the rights. The Supreme Lord is perfectly able to give shelter to anyone and everyone, to fulfill all desires and needs of all living entities, and living in their hearts he is also always perfectly aware of their feelings and thought processes. In this way he reciprocates with every living entity, at the same time allowing them full freedom to choose whatever action they want, and without ever exploiting or mistreating them.

On the other hand, the individual soul (*jivatma*) is much less powerful and therefore he needs to subordinate his enjoyment to the enjoyment of the Supreme, just like a cell in our body can only subordinate its individual enjoyment to the enjoyment of the entire body. When all the cells or the limbs of a body cooperate properly to nourish the body and to keep it in good health, they can automatically obtain the enjoyment and well being they naturally aspire to.

The key to understand the nature of the *jivatma* is the fact that it is constituted by both the *purusha* principle and the *prakriti* principle: each individual living being is both male and female at the same time. The perfect balance of these two principles, that enjoy and support each other within the individual soul, mind and body, is the secret of the *hatha yoga* and of all the similar sciences that existed in the world, such as alchemy, or the Mysteries of ancient Egypt and Greece, the Divine Marriage, and other secret doctrines and practices that were revealed only to a small group of initiates.

This elitarian approach is required because it can only be understood by persons who have attained a subtler level of consciousness, overcoming the immediate identification with the gross material body. When the awareness of the individual has been refined to the point that s/he can perceive and act at the level of energies (*prana maya kosha*), it becomes possible to unite the *purusha* and the *prakriti* principles within the Self, and attain the perfect balance and happiness.

Men and women seek each other to "find their better half", in an exchange of energy that makes them feel complete. This is because the *purusha* principle in each one of them is reaching out to enjoy the *prakriti* through his senses. Such attraction is not found only between two bodies of different gender, but also between the *purusha* principle in a

living entity and the *prakriti* in inanimate sense objects, such as the *prakriti* energy of foods, etc. It is the most primeval force in the universe, found in all the living beings including animals and plants, but in human beings it attains a platform where it can be sublimated and trigger higher realizations.

Krishna confirms here that such a powerful primeval force should not be underestimated or neglected, because it can sweep us away even if we realize that we are headed towards disaster.

तानि सर्वाणि संयम्य युक्त आसीत् मत्परः ।

tāni sarvāṇi saṁyamya yukta āsīta matparaḥ ।

वशे हि यस्येन्द्रियाणि तस्य प्रज्ञा प्रतिष्ठिता ॥ २-६१ ॥

vaśe hi yasyendriyāṇi tasya prajñā pratiṣṭhitā ।। 2-61।।

“A person who keeps all these (senses) properly controlled/regulated and engaged in a constant consciousness of me, has certainly mastered them and is firmly situated in wisdom.”

tani: those; *sarvani*: all; *samyamya*: controlling; *yukta*: engaged; *asita*: should remain fixed; *mat-parah*: focused on me; *vase*: in full control; *hi*: certainly; *yasya*: of him; *indriyani*: the senses; *tasya*: of him; *prajña*: perfect knowledge; *pratiṣṭhita*: firmly situated.

Although it is extremely difficult to control the senses, it is still possible to achieve this extraordinary success by focusing on the Supreme, through the multi-dimensional approach of Yoga. Krishna has already explained the principle of Yoga as the equanimity in front of joys and sorrows, and the action that is performed dutifully and selflessly without attachment to the personal enjoyment of the results.

In this verse Krishna starts to introduce the basic techniques of Yoga, the practices that will enable us to attain the proper results in our daily life.

All the genuine branches of Yoga - *hatha*, *kriya*, *bhakti*, *jnana*, *karma* etc - are constituted by eight basic steps that support our progress. These are: *yama* (abstentions), *niyama* (prescriptions), *asana* (control of the body), *pranayama* (control of the breathing and body energy), *pratyahara* (disconnecting the senses from the external sense objects), *dharana* (focusing the attention), *dhyana* (meditation) and *samadhi* (constant awareness). The word *samyamya* in this verse stresses the observance of the basic regulatory process known in yoga as *yama* and *niyama*.

The system of rules and regulations prescribed in the practice of yoga is meant to facilitate the *sadhaka* in training his mind and senses in the proper direction and creating positive impressions and habits in the subtle body.

Yama includes *ahimsa* (absence of hostility), *satya* (truthfulness), *asteya* (honesty), *brahmacharya* (sexual abstinence) and *aparigraha* (simplicity).

Niyama includes *saucha* (cleanliness), *santosha* (inner satisfaction), *tapas* (austerity),

svadhyaya (study of the scriptures) and *isvara pranidhana* (devotion/surrender to God). All these principles need to be applied on the levels of body (*saririka*), speech (*vachika*) and mind (*baudhika*).

At the level of the body - the easiest and first step for beginners - this naturally involves some control on one's diet, as eating is the most elementary way we relate to the environment and to other living entities. So *ahimsa*, *saucha* and *tapas* suggest a pure vegetarian diet consisting of clean, fresh and healthy ingredients, such as grains, fruits, and vegetables: foods belonging to the influence of *sattva*. Besides, it is wise to abstain from the so-called recreational substances that have a negative influence on the consciousness. *Brahmacharya* also suggest avoiding the contemplation of sexual materials, as well as the unnecessary association with potential sexual partners, the excessive care for one's body, down to the basic tendency to see people as the material bodies they wear. In fact, *brahma acharya* means "behaving as Brahman", on the platform where we identify ourselves and other people as spirit souls, without giving undue importance to bodily features such as gender etc. It is also interesting to note that all the forms of Yoga require the study of the scriptures and devotion/ surrender to God, highlighted here specifically by the expression *mat-parah*.

Many people and groups have been trying to separate Yoga from its spiritual identity, to turn it into some type of physical exercise, gymnastic or competitive sport.

All such groups and individuals carefully keep silent about *yama* and *niyama* and just focus their practice on *asana* or at most on *pranayama*, because they know that by presenting the entire picture truthfully, they would lose a lot of customers who are simply interested in some trendy fitness practice, to get slim and trim to better engage in sense gratification, or to cope with stress in their frantic lives.

Of course the practice of yoga is an integrated approach and does not neglect the health of the body and mind, teaching excellent exercises that are effective on such levels even when used separately from the pursuance of the actual purpose of Yoga. But this is comparable to ripping apart a rare painting of immense value in order to take the nice frame and use it as a toilet seat.

ध्यायतो विषयान्पुंसः सङ्गस्तेषूपजायते ।

dhyāyato viṣayānpuṃsaḥ saṅgasteṣūpajāyate ।

सङ्गात्सञ्जायते कामः कामात्क्रोधोऽभिजायते ॥ २-६२ ॥

saṅgātsañjāyate kāmaḥ kāmātkrodho'bhijāyate ।। 2-62 ।।

“By thinking about the objects of the senses, a person associates with them, by association desire develops, and from (unfulfilled) desire anger arises.”

dhyayata: contemplated/ meditated on; *vishayan*: the sense objects; *pumsah*: a purusha; *sangah*: association/ attachment; *teshu*: in them; *upajayate*: appears; *sangat*: from the attachment; *sanjayate*: grows; *kamah*: lust; *kamat*: from lust; *krodhah*: anger; *abhijayate*: is born.

This verse and the next, usually quoted together, describe the consequences of the bad choice of contemplating the sense objects instead of letting them flow away withdrawing our senses from them. The power of pleasure is so strong that our senses can even engage in enjoying the simple mental perception of the sense object, without coming in physical contact with it. *Dhyana* means "meditation", and *dhyayate* means "meditates".

Meditation is the ability to concentrate on a subject, consider it, channel energy into it, and bring it from the subtle platform (non-manifested) to the visible and perceivable platform (manifested). It is actually a natural practice and tendency of the mind: everyone is capable of doing it. Without this faculty, it would not be possible to perform even the most fundamental tasks of life: working, studying, solving practical problems, making choices. Physically, the mental activity in our brain is performed by low voltage electrical currents which are carried through the nerve cells. The brain is a quite large mass of nervous cells, where electrical impulses circulate by specific paths which are created by habit. So by thinking about a particular thing for a sufficient time, we create preferential paths that are followed automatically even without a conscious effort. This mechanism of meditation is an instrument that can be used to elevate our consciousness or to degrade it - depending on the object we are contemplating.

As we have mentioned, contemplation/ meditation is an effective method to associate with the object of our meditation on the subtle level. In fact, when the meditation is strong enough, the actual object of our meditation will feel the energy of our attraction and a physical connection will be established, first on the subtle level and then gradually on the gross level, too. This mechanism is utilized in the various methods of "positive affirmation", by which it is possible to attract good things, good people and good opportunities into our life by regularly meditating on them through visualization.

This association or contact (*sanga*) through contemplation or meditation produces a type of familiarity, and through identification this produces attachment.

Due to the natural tendency of the *purusha*, the senses will be attracted to enjoy such sense object and to possess it on the subtle level and eventually on the gross level, too: this is called lust (*kama*). Unfortunately, this lusty desire to enjoy and possess material sense objects of gratification is doomed to disappoint us, because as individual souls we do not really have any control over the sense objects. As all situations are temporary, sometimes we may get contact with a sense object, and sometimes it will elude us; this uncertainty produces fear, and fear in turn produces frustration and anger.

क्रोधाद्भवति सम्मोहः सम्मोहात्स्मृतिविभ्रमः ।

krodhādbhavati sammohaḥ sammohātsmṛtivibhramah ।

स्मृतिभ्रंशाद् बुद्धिनाशो बुद्धिनाशात्प्रणश्यति ॥ २-६३ ॥

smṛtibhramśād buddhināśo buddhināśātpṛṇaśyati ।। 2-63 ।।

“Anger becomes confusion, and confusion (becomes) failing memory. Because of the loss of memory, intelligence is lost, and when intelligence is lost, one falls from his

position."

krodhat: from anger; *bhavati*: becomes; *sammohah*: confusion; *sammohat*: from confusion; *smriti*: memory; *vibhramah*: error; *smriti-bhramsad*: from the loss of memory; *buddhi*: of the intelligence; *nasah*: destruction; *buddhi-nasat*: from the destruction of intelligence/ understanding; *pranasyati*: one falls down.

The anger produced by fear and frustration in the absence of the enjoyment of the sense objects is a blinding emotion that soon turns into confusion. We have seen that such development is inevitable because we have no real control over the sense objects and their enjoyment, that appear and disappear in their due course independently from our will. In the previous verses, Krishna had recommended that we should engage in work without being attached to the enjoyment of the fruits of the action: now he is graphically illustrating what happens to those who decide otherwise.

Contrarily to what many people think, God is not concerned with punishing those who disobey his orders, and his instructions are not whimsical and based on exacting some kind of allegiance from us. Like the most affectionate parent, God is simply explaining in a clear, reasonable and scientific way what is the result of each action, and then leaving us the freedom to choose according to our intelligence.

God wants us to use our power of understanding to get a clear picture of all the causes and effects in this world, so that we can better manage ourselves and achieve our desired goals. If we insist to make the wrong choice, he is not going to stop us: it is our privilege to try to make things work in a different way from what they were designed for. We also learn by falling down and picking ourselves up again to continue our journey.

The system is planned perfectly: nothing is ever really lost in this learning process, and no bad experience is so bad that we cannot recover from it - in the same lifetime or in a next one. Even pain is useful to soften our understanding without crushing our spirit; if we want to avoid it, we just need to learn how to handle the knife by holding the handle instead of the blade.

रागद्वेषविमुक्तैस्तु विषयानिन्द्रियैश्चरन्

rāgadveṣavimuktaistu viṣayānindriyaiścaraṇ

आत्मवश्यैर्विधेयात्मा प्रसादमधिगच्छति ॥ २-६४ ॥

ātmavaśyairvidheyātmā prasādamadhigacchati || 2-64 ||

“A person who has become free from the attraction and repulsion for the objects of the senses, maintains the control of himself in his actions and regulates himself (in body, mind and senses) obtains satisfaction/ the blessing (of the Lord).”

raga: attraction; *dvesha*: repulsion; *vimuktaiḥ*: completely free; *tu*: but; *vishayan*: the sense objects; *indriyaiḥ*: by the senses; *caran*: going; *atma*: self; *vasyaiḥ*: controlled; *vidheya*: regulated; *atma*: self; *prasadam*: mercy; *adhigacchati*: attains.

Not only God does not want to punish us for pursuing sense gratification against his instructions, he is showing us special mercy by offering this same sense gratification on the condition that we enjoy it in a regulated way.

The word *prasadam*, “blessing” or “mercy”, means that a yogi accepts as *prasadam*, or blessing, whatever s/he receives from the Lord as a manifestation of the divine kindness. Enjoying such divine gifts is perfectly legitimate and gives the senses their proper engagement, without guilt or attachment, and trains the mind to surrender more and more to the unlimited blessings of the Divine.

In practice, this concept of *prasadam* is applied by consuming the food that has been offered to the Deity. According to tradition, the system of worship of the Deity in the temple or in one's home requires the presentation of a number of items to the installed image of the Deity, of which the most important is the offering of food (*naivedya*). The basic worship ritual includes, beside the food, also a lamp (*dipa*), flowers (*pushpa*), perfume (*gandha*) and incense (*dhupa*). A more complex version of the *puja* ritual also adds offering a seat of honor (*asana*), water to bathe (*snana*) and wash hands and feet (*achamana* and *padya*), a refreshing drink made with yogurt and honey (*madhuparka*), fresh clothing consisting of a lower (*vastra*) and an upper garment (*uttariya*), sandalwood paste (*chandana*), a sacred thread (*upavita*), nice ornaments (*alankara* or *abharana*), flower garlands (*mala*), prayers (*stuti*), and even entertainment consisting of songs and dances (*gita* and *nritya*), fanning with *chamara* and decorated fans (*vyajana*), shoes (*paduka*), a mirror (*darpana*) and a ceremonial umbrella (*chatra*), a royal bed for resting (*beharana*), a symbolic sum of money (*pranami*), etc.

However, the offering of food remains the most important part of the ritual. It can be as simple as a fruit and some water, or as elaborate as thousands of different preparations. By regularly consuming this consecrated food, the yogi easily and happily learns to control his/her senses, because s/he does not know what the cook has prepared to offer to the Deity, and since *prasadam* is not ordinary food, it cannot be disrespected according to material considerations of liking and disliking. Also, it is a fact that the food consecrated by a ritual offering takes a special wonderful taste that a sensitive person can immediately recognize. Another important advantage is that only purely sattvic foods can be offered to the Deities: this automatically protects us from the temptation to eat the wrong and unhealthy types of foods. Sattvic foods - grains, seeds, vegetables, fruits, etc - are the healthiest sources of nutrients, on which our body is designed to function, from the shape of our teeth to the length of our intestine, to the ability of our system to get rid of toxins. Such natural fresh food is best suited for our proper maintenance and enjoyment, and even more important, it is easy to find/collect without too much work, and without creating too much sufferings to other living entities, something that definitely weighs on the efficiency balance.

Further, the distribution of *prasadam* is done in a regulated way according to a precise schedule; every day at established times a particular number and type of preparations.

This is hinted by the word *vidheya*, that comes from *vidhi*, "regulated process".

Later in *Gita*, Krishna will repeat this concept, recommending to consume the *yajna sista* or the “leftovers of the sacrifice” (3.13) and to offer to God whatever we eat (*yad asnasi*) (9.27).

The tradition of *prasadam* distribution is extremely ancient and universal in all genuine

religious traditions; in fact *Gita* (17.13) says that a *yajna*, or sacrifice, that does not include the distribution of *ashrista annam*, the food grains remaining after the completion of the ceremony, is to be considered as ignorant (*tamasam*).

Anything offered to the Lord becomes *prasadam*, and anything received from the Lord is *prasadam* as well - the ritual is not strictly necessary, but it is useful to help our consciousness focus in that direction.

प्रसादे सर्वदुःखानां हानिरस्योपजायते ।

prasāde sarvaduḥkhānām hānirasyopajāyate ।

प्रसन्नचेतसो ह्याशु बुद्धिः पर्यवतिष्ठते ॥ २-६५ ॥

prasannacetaso hyāśu buddhiḥ paryavatiṣṭhate ॥ 2-65 ॥

“This *prasadam* (blessing) brings about the destruction of all sufferings, gives satisfaction to the mind, and (by it) the proper intelligence/understanding is quickly established.”

prasade: in this *prasadam*; *sarva*: all; *dukhhanam*: sufferings; *hanih*: are destroyed; *asya*: of him; *upajayate*: appears; *prasanna*: satisfied; *cetasah*: consciousness; *hi*: certainly; *asu*: very soon; *buddhih*: intelligence; *pari*: completely; *avatishtate*: becomes firmly established.

The word *prasadam* includes the meanings of blessing, favor, mercy, satisfaction, contentment, serenity, peace, and pleasure. From the same root we have the word *prasida*, an invocation often used to address a Deity in prayer, invoking his/her benevolence towards the worshiper.

We have then at least two meanings in this verse: one is focused on the contentment attained by the yogi who has genuinely come to control his senses by giving up both attraction and repulsion, and therefore only accepts what comes spontaneously for the proper maintenance of the body.

The other meaning - of *prasadam* as the sacred food that has been offered to the Deity - is more focused on *bhakti*, on the personal relationship between the *bhakta* or devotee and the *ista devata*, the Divine Personality that the devotee worships. This meaning is much sweeter and very attractive, constituting the easiest and quickest path to attain the higher taste that our soul is always seeking. Later in *Gita* and especially as its conclusion, Krishna will confirm that *bhakti*, or the loving relationship between the devotee and the Personality of Godhead, is the supreme modality of Yoga (6.47, 18.55, 9.34, 18.65 etc.). However, it would be foolish to believe that one of these two interpretations is right and the other is wrong, or that the two are incompatible and meant to be followed separately by different factions of religionists. We need to integrate the two visions in order to get the actual picture.

Bhakti is the supreme form of Yoga only when it is firmly established in spiritual

realization (18.54), otherwise it cannot take us very far. The devotional attitude must become free from material identifications and attachments (*upadhi*), from duality, from sentimentalism, from ignorance and misconceptions, and even from the desire to receive reciprocation from God. This is called *suddha bhakti*, pure devotion, described beautifully in the eight verses of the Sikshastaka, personally composed by Chaitanya to summarize his teachings. It is very interesting to see how Chaitanya's preaching mission was focused on the recitation of the names, qualities and activities of the Lord, as well as on the distribution of consecrated spiritual food that had been offered to the Lord. Chaitanya chose to spend the greatest and last part of his life in the holy *dhama* of Jagannatha Puri, where the offering of foods to the Deity in the temple is considered the most characteristic aspect of the rituals, and the consecrated food, called *mahaprasadam*, is considered a direct manifestation of God.

नास्ति बुद्धिरयुक्तस्य न चायुक्तस्य भावना ।

nāsti buddhirayuktasya na cāyuktasya bhāvanā ।

न चाभावयतः शान्तिरशान्तस्य कुतः सुखम् ॥ २-६६ ॥

na cābhāvayataḥ śāntiraśāntasya kutaḥ sukham ।। 2-66 ।।

“A person who is not connected/ engaged (in Yoga) cannot have the (proper) intelligence/ understanding. A person who is not engaged (in Yoga) cannot get any good results, or be able to attain peace. And how can there be happiness without peace?”

na: not; *asti*: there is; *buddhih*: intelligence; *ayuktasya*: of one who is not connected/ engaged; *na*: not; *ca*: and; *ayuktasya*: of one who is not connected/ engaged; *bhavana*: focused mind; *na*: not; *ca*: and; *abhavayataḥ*: one who is not established; *santih*: peace; *asantasya*: of one who is not peaceful; *kutaḥ*: where; *sukham*: happiness.

This verse continues to elaborate on the practical way to become established in the constant higher awareness called *samadhi*, where the consciousness is not distracted by joys or sorrows, and we act out of selfless duty only, constantly remembering our true nature as atman, the transcendental and universal spirit that inhabits the body. Krishna has already explained that this intelligence is called Yoga, and in this verse he highlights the fundamental meaning of the definition as "connection", that gives contentment, peace and happiness to the individual in its proper place within the greater Reality.

This is also the fundamental meaning of the word "religion", that derives from the Latin *religare*, or "to connect". Religion is what connects the individual to God - to his/her purpose in life, to the environment where s/he lives, to the others, to the Self. Knowing one's place in the universe and being properly engaged in a functional service to the higher good is the key to a feeling of contentment, peace and happiness.

In this sense, the definition can be applied to practically all ideologies that regulate the behavior of the human being in connection to a greater reality, as each human being can

have a particular concept of God according to many factors.

For example, a communist atheist also has a religion: he worships the State (an idea that is not much different from the concept expressed in the *Purusha sukta*) and the communist ideology as the greater reality he is connected to. His behavior, choices and priorities are all dictated by such ideology, and when he is properly situated within the community, working sincerely and selflessly and being adequately taken care of, he feels at peace and happy. Ironically, in its institutionalized and totalitarian (fundamentalist) form, the communist ideology is rather similarly to the ideology it was born to fight - it even has its saints and apostles, its priests and priestly hierarchy, its worship rituals, holy places and shrines, festival observances, sacred books, dogmas, and even a kind of inquisition or "ideological police" that is meant to subdue, punish or persecute ideological dissidents - i.e. anyone who questions the dogma, even in terms of ethics or morality or basic human rights.

On the other hand, there are some ideologies that are generally considered as religions but allow plenty of freedom to their followers, both in regard to beliefs and in daily life choices. Not only Hinduism (in its original form), but all the non-exclusivist ideologies known as Animism, Shamanism, Taoism, Jainism and Buddhism are also officially considered religions, although radically different from the abrahamic model that is generally used as a reference pattern by academia.

For example, Buddhism does not concern itself with God and has no hierarchical religious institutions or even a fixed doctrine except for the four Basic Truths of the sufferings of this world and the Eightfold Path of right behavior, that is basically about ethics. Buddhism does not focus on a next world - in fact it considers it an illusion just like this one - and it speaks of karma as a scientific law of physics: every action has a reaction. Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism worships Buddha as the embodiment of Divinity, but this idea of Divinity is vague, something like the idea of Jesus in Christianity, but minus its personal character (everybody can be Buddha - just realize your "buddhity" and you are there), and especially without God, the church, the bible, heaven or hell, salvation, baptism, etc, that have no equivalent in Buddhism.

In a sense, Buddhism is an upgrade of ordinary human ethics, that through detachment takes one to the peace of "nothingness", but deeply and intrinsically values ethical conduct in this world as a visible and natural symptom of such detachment.

In abrahamic religions the only real point of ideology is faith - the need to believe in God's word (orders) and ideally secure absolute political power for the religious leaders, to convert or subjugate everyone and wipe out all other ideologies/ faiths. The information about God, the soul, etc, is very scarce, often contradictory, and must be applied according to the dictates of the religious leaders that constitute the ultimate and undisputable authority on God's orders. Those who consider themselves as Christians, Muslims or Jews but do not recognize themselves in such ideology are considered as "not very religious" or even "heretics" by their own religious authorities.

The science of Yoga described in *Gita*, on the other hand, can be applied universally. It is perfectly compatible with any ethical ideology, because it accommodates both personal and impersonal views about Divinity, as well as any of the innumerable forms and names of God. We could say that Yoga is the foundation for all forms of religion, as well as for all the progressive ideologies that aim at improving the balanced and happy functioning of the individual and the society. According to the Yoga taught by Krishna in *Gita*, we

need to connect everything to the purpose of life, Self realization, and the service to the Supreme Reality.

This connection to the Supreme requires the engagement of our senses, mind and intelligence in the performance of dutiful and selfless service, that will give us peacefulness and ultimately that very happiness that everybody is seeking.

Another meaning of this verse is stressing the importance of pacifying the mind and withdrawing/ controlling the senses in order to achieve a level of clarity of vision that is called *buddhi* or intelligence. *Buddhi* (intelligence), *shanti* (peacefulness) and *sukha* (happiness) are here strictly connected, just like previously (62, 63) *dhyana* (contemplation) was strictly connected to *sanga* (association/ attachment), *kama* (desire), etc. While the previous chain reaction was a vicious circle, this verse presents a virtuous circle by which one can become liberated from all sufferings and delusions.

In this case, too, Krishna is explaining the simple scientific facts of life, so that we can better understand the choice that lies in front of us.

The word *bhavana* can also be translated as "desire, longing", but is radically different from the lusty desire of enjoyment, possession and exploitation that is *kama*.

इन्द्रियाणां हि चरतां यन्मनोऽनुविधीयते ।

indriyāṇāṃ hi caratām yanmano'nuvidhīyate ।

तदस्य हरति प्रज्ञां वायुर्नावमिवाम्भसि ॥ २-६७ ॥

tadasya harati prajñām vāyurnāvamivāmbhasi ।। 2-67 ।।

“A mind that follows the senses becomes subservient to them, and takes away the wisdom of that (person) like the wind sweeps a boat on water.”

indriyanam: of the senses; *hi*: certainly; *caratam*: roaming around; *yan*: those; *manah*: the mind; *anuvīdhīyate*: is constantly engaged; *tad*: that; *asya*: of him; *harati*: takes away; *prajñam*: wisdom/ understanding; *vayuh*: the wind; *navam*: a boat; *iva*: like; *ambhasi*: on the water.

In all ethical ideologies, the individual needs to control his senses and mind in order to execute his duties selflessly, for the greater benefit of the supreme Reality to which he belongs and which he is supposed to serve. Yoga gives the perfect scientific approach to this need, detailing all the mechanisms of cause and effect, the steps in the process, the pitfalls and the best way to avoid them.

This verse is directly connected to verse 60 of this same chapter - but while verse 60 stated that the senses are so turbulent that they can drag away the mind of a person who is trying to control them, this verse speaks about a person who decides to actually follow the senses. Like the word *vipascitah* in verse 60, the word *prajnam* used in the verse suggests that even those who had already attained the level of proper understanding/ realization/ wisdom can fall in this trap, and get swept away in the storm of uncontrolled mind just like anybody else. There is no room for complacency: as long as one has a

material body and senses, the danger is present.

It is all a question of engagement. Either we engage ourselves in Yoga - the science of selfless action that utilizes our senses and mind for the service to the higher good - or we follow an uncontrolled mind that is engaged in the service of the senses.

People who claim that they do not want to follow Yoga or any ethical ideology because it limits their freedom - by telling them what they should or should not eat etc - are actually deluded by illusion, because they are never free. They are actually following the dictates of their senses and mind - such ruthless masters that they do not care at all for the bad consequences of our actions on our well-being, health, or other important aspects of our life. They do not even care for our actual physical and mental needs: in fact they often go against the natural instinct that is meant to safeguard our health and well-being, as we can see for example in the pathological eating disorders.

A mind that is dedicated to following the requests of the senses can get us in a lot of troubles and it can even kill us, destroy our relationships, send us bankrupt, or land us in serious legal difficulties... all situations where we will be forced to remain without the very same sense gratification that led us to that troubled condition in the first place.

We could ask ourselves how free is a man who subordinates all his choices to the whimsical requests of his own senses and mind, or to the whimsical requests of the senses and mind of his family or friends, to the expectations of people in general (as society or community, nation, cultural tradition etc), or to the need of working at a job he does not like but offers money to pursue his sense gratification or pay for his credit card debts. At some point he is just slaving on just to pay the bills, the rent and the basic food supplies - whose cost is manipulated by the System to keep him constantly under pressure.

The System holds him a prisoner through the commercial advertisements, the opinion-making media, peer pressure, and the myth of sense gratification itself. He cannot take time for himself even when his body and mind are getting near to collapse, so he has to buy medication to "keep going" in his absurdly demanding engagements, and when he gets a vacation he usually wastes it away in a sense gratification tour de force, running from an expensive and exhausting "fun activity" to the other. Sometimes such "fun activities" effectively short-circuit his chances for well-being and happiness with sports accidents, traffic wrecks, terrorist attacks or other unexpected disasters, such as being cheated by a scam travel agency, mugged in a foreign city, etc. What to speak of ordinary small troubles such as mosquito bites, ants in the park meadow, sunburns, blisters on the feet, hangovers, or some minor gastro-enteric infection.

Eventually, the so-called free man becomes totally confused and frustrated, deeply dissatisfied, trapped in the consequences of his own foolish actions, and yet he cannot see any way out, because he keeps looking in the wrong direction.

तस्माद्यस्य महाबाहो निगृहीतानि सर्वशः ।

tasmādyasya mahābāho nigṛhītāni sarvaśaḥ ।

इन्द्रियाणीन्द्रियार्थेभ्यस्तस्य प्रज्ञा प्रतिष्ठिता ॥ २-६८ ॥

indriyāṇīndriyārthebhyastasya prajñā pratiṣṭhitā ॥ 2-68 ॥

“Therefore, o mighty armed (hero), one who practices restraint in all activities while engaging the senses in the objects of the senses, is firmly situated in wisdom.

tasmad: therefore; *yasya*: of him/her; *maha-baho*: o mighty armed (Arjuna); *nigrihitani*: dominated; *sarvasah*: everywhere; *indriyani*: the senses; *indriya*: of the senses; *arthebyah*: in the purpose; *tasya*: of him/her; *prajña*: wisdom; *pratiṣṭhita*: firmly situated.

The prescription offered by *Gita* is simple and amounts to good old common sense: just use restraint. There is no need to stop engaging the senses and the mind, as some people try to do in their frustration.

What is common sense, if not natural, logical wisdom? It is the intrinsic intelligence of the soul, the voice of conscience, that is promptly and freely available to anyone who is willing to sincerely listen to it. It does not need to be acquired externally, because this voice speaks from within our own heart: what greater freedom could we wish for?

In this verse, Krishna half-jokingly calls Arjuna by the epithet *maha-baho*, "mighty armed", implying that the greatest battle is the daily engagement in controlling one's mind and senses, something that requires strength, skills, and intelligence.

In the Vedic system, children were trained in these combat skills starting from an early age. The first training is through the good example of his/her elders and family members, who are the natural role models for all children. The good example of parents who act selflessly to perform their duties and live honesty in observance with the principles of dharma is the single greatest blessing that one can receive in life, because it establishes a fundamental imprint on which all other gathered knowledge and experiences are grafted. A bad example from one's parents is like weak foundations in the building of a house, something that makes higher construction rather dangerous.

When the child reaches a certain age, he begins to speak and understand the language, so s/he is also offered important teachings in the form of precepts, stories, answers and explanations to his/her questions. Eventually, when the child starts to develop social skills, s/he is required to observe some degree of discipline or self control, in preparation for the training s/he will receive at school.

Of course there are exceptions - souls that have already evolved to a certain level but need to further strengthen themselves by sticking to their principles and realizations even when exposed to negative influences from the earliest childhood, or, on the opposite side, degraded souls that take birth in a good family to test their patience and discrimination or to exact the payment of some ancient karmic debt.

However, in both situations there is clear sense of incompatibility that soon causes a healthy separation from the family of origin. In fact, the earlier this separation occurs, the

better it is for everyone.

The second environment where children are supposed to be trained by example and precept is the school. In the Vedic system school teachers are expected to be very qualified not only in regard to theoretical knowledge, but also in personal behavior and ethical principles, and especially in the science of Self realization. A *brahmana*, by definition, has deeply realized Brahman and acts from that platform only. In the genuine system, all the examples and precepts that a child receives from family, elders and school resonate on the same principles and knowledge that every individual obtains from the natural wisdom that speaks from his heart with the voice of the conscience.

या निशा सर्वभूतानां तस्यां जागर्ति संयमी ।

yā niśā sarvabhūtānām tasyām jāgarti saṁyamī ।

यस्यां जाग्रति भूतानि सा निशा पश्यतो मुनेः ॥ २-६९ ॥

yasyām jāgrati bhūtāni sā niśā paśyato muneḥ ।। 2-69 ।।

“For such a wise person, what is night for all creatures becomes the opportunity for regulated awakening, and the time when the creatures remain awake is night for him.”

yah: s/he; *nisah:* night; *sarva:* all; *bhutanam;* of the living entities; *tasyam:* him/her; *jagarti:* remains awake; *samyami:* one who is self-controlled; *yasyam:* in which; *jagrati:* keeps awake; *bhutani:* all living entities; *sah:* s/he; *nisah:* the night; *paśyatah:* who sees; *muneh:* the wise.

There are various levels of meanings for this verse – from the most literal, recommending that the yogi takes proper advantage of the quiet hours of very early morning when everybody else is sleeping, to the most symbolic, implying that the needs, interests, pursuits and logic of materialistic people are totally unnecessary for a yogi.

The time for waking and sleeping is one of the basic lifestyle habits that need to be regulated by the sincere and dedicated student of Yoga. We have seen that food habits, and especially the choice of sattvic food offered to God, can greatly help one's progress in Self realization, because they help the senses and the mind to engage in pleasure in a healthily regulated way. A similar consideration applies to the sleep pattern.

In all ashrams, temples and in the homes of civilized people in the Vedic tradition, the day starts very early. Rising early is a good habit based on a scientifically verified fact: about one hour before sunrise, the movement of liquids on our planet changes in what we can macroscopically observe in the ocean tides. In the microcosm of the human body, this change of movement in the liquid substances stimulates the elimination of urine and stool, as well as mucus in the respiratory passages. If we get up early in the morning, we can easily go to the bathroom and get rid of these materials, that are loaded with toxins and other substances that need to be expelled from our body. If we miss this early morning opportunity because we are still sleeping deeply, the toxins and other rejected substances remain blocked in the system and risk being slowly re-absorbed into the blood

stream. So the healthiest thing is to get up, go to the bathroom, brush our teeth, clean our tongue and clear our throat, then finally take a full shower and put on fresh clothes. In cold climates and during the winter, the pre-dawn hour can be too cold to afford a full bath and it may be possible to postpone the shower a few hours, but still it is always recommendable to get up early and clean up as much as we can.

In the magic and powerful hour that precedes sunrise, nature stirs and its basic energies meet creating a moment of balance. This is called *sandhya*, the union between the night and the day, and it is similar to the other two *sandhyas* in the day, i.e. midday and sunset. At these times, the play between the masculine and the feminine energies attains a moment of balance, in which both the brain hemispheres work together and the consciousness can find exceptional realizations. Just make a simple experiment: check the activity of both nostrils during the different times of the day. You will notice that around sunrise, midday and sunset both nostrils are working simultaneously, while at other times only one nostril is active. In advanced yogis, the balance between the two brain hemispheres becomes more common and steady, so the breathing occurs naturally through both nostrils more often, or even all the time.

Pranayama is one of the basic steps of Yoga, because through breathing we can greatly help our work in controlling the senses and the mind, and in regulating the physical functions of the body. Performing *pranayama* at *sandhya*, with a clean body, and at the auspicious time of the tide change, is extremely effective.

What about going to sleep? Different creatures have different habits, and some predators are most active in the night, but in general the daytime sunlight is needed to normally perform the basic activities of life. The various periods of the day and night are subject to the influence of the three *gunas*. It is said that *sattva guna* predominates from the *brahma muhurta* - about one hour before sunrise - to midday. This is the best time to study, plan, and organize our work for the rest of the day, and get most of our duties completed. When we get up early in the morning we have a lot more hours for our productive pursuits.

After midday *rajas guna*, the influence of passion, becomes predominant and we become restless for food and other sense gratification, such as private phone calls, social interactions etc. Usually the afternoon hours are less productive at work, unless we had previously planned our actions carefully. At some point, around sunset, we become tired even if we did not work much during the daytime, and the need for entertainment and gratification gets stronger. We have dinner, and we feel that we are entitled to have some fun; unfortunately the tendency is to engage in tamasic activities such as drinking alcohol or taking recreational drugs, passively sliding into a stupor at the movies or in front of the TV screen, or engaging in similar activities that put intelligence and wisdom to sleep. On a deeper level of interpretation, the wise *sadhaka* stays awake in the dark night of ignorance, because that is the time of strictly following the regulations and disciplined duties that keep us on track. After the sun of realization has risen, there is less need for rules and regulations because one is spontaneously attracted by what is transcendental and real, so the wise *sadhaka* can let go of the strict control of the mind and let the natural feelings of the soul take over. This is called *raganuga bhakti*. Its powerful emotions can absorb our consciousness in such a total way that we may lose the awareness of the external world, just like a person who is sleeping. Others call this blissful ecstasy with the names of *nirvana* ("cessation of the wind" of the mind) or *turiya*,

the fourth state of consciousness where the mind is totally silent, in deep awe for the contemplation of Reality. Some commentators argue that the night of the wise *sadhaka*, or *sannyasi*, indicates that his consciousness is not encumbered by the multitude of ritualistic performances and social duties that keep ordinary people awake during the day. So in this sense he just sleeps in regard to such duties, and wakes up only in the subtle contemplation of abstract things, that for some people may seem to be dreams. In fact, we see that *sannyasis* are not required to perform the usual ceremonies or to engage in a social occupation or job, because he needs to be free to perform whatever preaching activity is required by his mission. However, we must be careful because *sattva* always need to be engaged in itself by utilizing *rajas*. When such engagement is suspended, *sattva* may become tainted with *tamas* or ignorance, and it drags the *sadhaka* lower and lower into a delusion of higher realization, while in fact the so called *sannyasi* remains in a lazy idleness or starts pursuing sense gratification, material power, a social position etc.

आपूर्यमाणमचलप्रतिष्ठं

āpūryamāṇamacalapratiṣṭham

समुद्रमापः प्रविशन्ति यद्वत् ।

samudramāpaḥ praviśanti yadvat ।

तद्वत्कामा यं प्रविशन्ति सर्वे

tadvatkāmā yaṁ praviśanti sarve

स शान्तिमाप्नोति न कामकामी ॥ २-७० ॥

sa śāntimāpnoti na kāmakāmī ॥ 2-70 ॥

“The ocean does not move from its position, no matter how much water enters to fill it. A person who similarly (withstands the flow) of desires entering (his mind) achieves a peace that is not (achieved) by one who wants (to cultivate) desires.”

apuryamanam: constantly filled; *acala*: without moving; *pratiṣṭham*: steady; *samudram*: the ocean; *apah*: waters; *praviśanti*: enter; *yadvat*: similarly; *tadvat*: in the same way; *kamah*: the desires; *yam*: him/her; *praviśanti*: enter; *sarve*: all; *sah*: that person; *santim*: peacefulness; *apnoti*: achieves; *na*: not; *kama-kami*: one who desires desires.

This beautiful image of the ocean, constantly filled by hundreds of rivers and streams and yet remaining within its boundaries, contains a number of levels of meanings. The most immediate meaning is that the ocean is so great that it cannot be disturbed by the waters that keep flowing into it. The mind of the *mahatma* is also so great and boundless that it is not agitated like the small and narrow minds of the materialists.

A realized spiritualist does not give much importance to the myriad of desires, thoughts, and other pieces of information that rain down and flow like rivers into the mind of everyone. It is not that the spiritualist does not get any input from the world. Trying to solve the problem by artificially separating oneself from the world is not a very good

idea. True, in the beginning stages of the Yoga practice a *sadhaka* needs to have a quiet environment to start the training. However, when the willpower has become a little stronger and the mind is relatively subdued, it is better to learn the practice of dynamic meditation, by which one is able to face the external world and still remain undisturbed and focused. It is impossible to remain forever isolated from the external world, and even if one has not had any experience of sense gratification in his entire life, still the natural tendency of the senses remains.

There is a famous story about a yogi who, to better control his senses, went to meditate under the water in a cool lake, where nobody could go to disturb him. Unfortunately there were fish in the lake, and one day the yogi opened his eyes and was offered the "indecent" spectacle of two small aquatic creatures dancing in the joy of mating. The bottled up desires for sense gratification exploded in the mind of the poor man, and he had to hasten out of the water and among ordinary people to find himself a wife - and quickly. In Kali yuga things are even more difficult, because we are running short of undisturbed locations on top of mountains or in the middle of forests where a yogi can withdraw from the world. The Himalayas have become a popular tourist destination and are littered with empty drink cans and other stuff left by visitors, and the jungles have been auctioned to the mining industry or are being cut down for coal, or thinned down to accommodate the demographic expansion, with the blasting loudspeakers entertaining the sparse villagers with Bollywood music. The method offered by Krishna in *Gita* is rather less dramatic and much more effective: just engage the senses properly, in selfless activities for the benefit of all, and patiently tolerate the inflow of desires without remaining attached to them or running after them. This will be sufficient.

The expression *kama kami* is particularly interesting, as it indicates a person who is eager to have desires: this vividly illustrates the tendency of contemporary society to push people towards extreme consumerism and sense gratification even in their advanced age, when the senses become more quiet and the body does not demand much any more.

By deeply studying the example of the ocean, we can find out a lot of other interesting and beautiful concepts. For example, we know that the ocean can remain within its boundaries because of the evaporation of the water under the sun rays. Similarly, the heat of our passion for the service of the Supreme can evaporate all desires in the offering of a sacrifice that will be beneficial to everyone, since the fruits of such service like clouds will bring rain to the parched lands and enable the healthy growth of all creatures.

विहाय कामान्यः सर्वान्पुमांश्चरति निःस्पृहः ।

vihāya kāmānyaḥ sarvānpumāṁścarati niḥspr̥haḥ ।

निर्ममो निरहङ्कारः स शान्तिमधिगच्छति ॥ २-७१ ॥

nirmamo nirahaṅkāraḥ sa śāntimadhigacchati ।। 2-71 ।।

“By abandoning all desires, a person moves freely without attachments and because he does not consider himself the owner or doer of anything, he attains peace.”

vihaya: giving up/letting go; *kaman*: desires; *yah*: s/he; *sarvan*: all; *puman*: a person

(*purusha*); *carati*: walks around; *nihsprihah*: untouched; *nirmamah*: without sense of proprietorship/ belonging/ affinity; *nirahankarah*: without material identification; *sah*: s/he; *santim*: peace; *adhigacchati*: really attains.

When we let go of desires, they flow away without too much trouble because of their temporary nature. Desires only remain stuck to our mind if we grasp at them and nurture them in our mind, carrying them around as luggage even from one lifetime to the other. All this luggage makes our journey very difficult and longer than actually required, and restricts our freedom to move around.

Besides the whimsical desires that are fancied by the mind, there are two other huge pieces of luggage that make our life difficult and prevent us from breaking free from material conditioned existence: they are technically called *mamatva* and *ahankara*. *Mamatva* is the "mine-ness", or sense of proprietorship, belonging, or affinity that creates a bondage for the individual; it can apply to inert objects such as clothes, ornaments, vehicles, buildings, homes, relationships, countries, to living entities, or even to concepts as in the case of political parties, ideologies etc. This feeling of possession turns both into the desire for exploitation and the need of servitude towards the object of our possession, and conditions our happiness to the flimsy satisfaction we can derive from such temporary objects.

Ahankara is a composite word, from *aham*, "I", and *kara*, "do". This concept is sometimes translated as "material identification" or "false ego", or more literally but rather incomprehensibly, "doership" or "authorship". To properly understand the definition we need to connect it with the previous instruction of remaining detached from the fruits of the action. When one performs an activity, it is logical to expect the fruits of the action if we believe we are the doer, the author of the action that has full responsibility for it.

By introducing this concept of *ahankara* in his speech, Krishna is taking us deeper into the science of action, Karma Yoga, that will be the subject of the next chapter.

As Krishna will clearly explain later in the text, the individual is not supposed to be fully responsible for his actions, because he is not supposed to act independently. If he does so, he will be accountable for the good or bad results and will have to accept the consequences, binding him to the cycle of *karma* and *samsara*.

Let's make an example: a bank employee works handling money on behalf of the bank and its customers. Every day huge amounts pass through his hands, as he moves the funds from one account to the other, but he is not acting independently and therefore he is not responsible for the results of such actions, and he is not expecting to gain or lose any money personally in the transactions. He just needs to do his work properly, in the best possible way, and remain detached from the money he works with. If by any chance the bank employee starts to develop a sense of *mamatva* and *ahankara* towards his actions, he immediately gets into troubles because he will try to appropriate and enjoy the money he handles. As a consequence, automatically he will be held responsible for the missing funds and he will have to pay for that. Of course, if he independently takes money from the bank and invests it gainfully on his personal responsibility, he will also have to accept the fruits of his action and become attached to the wealth he has accumulated. However, since bank employees are not supposed to conduct this kind of activities independently, he will have to pay back the initial capital to the bank and he will lose his job, thus

finding himself in a difficult position in spite of his extra income.

Now, if the bank employee has a talent for investments and development of assets, and wants to take a leading position, he does not really need to independently siphon off funds for his risky ventures without the sanction of the higher authorities. There is a better way to engage his tendencies and qualities: he can work more closely with the general manager, learning more about the market and whatever other information may be required or useful, and then he can work in a more responsible capacity within the bank organization. In this way he will still be protected and taken care of, he will have his expenses covered by the bank with a better salary, and he will not break any law or regulation. If the investment goes wrong, he will not have to pay from his own pocket. In the greater organization of the universe, God is the real owner of everything and has a very good plan for all of us. Such divine plan also includes equipping each individual with a certain amount of intelligence, talents, instruments and opportunities, so we should not have the impression we are just cogs in a machine or puppets on strings. But we need to learn the importance of cooperation and service to the greater good, because every time we are trying to "take care of our own business" without considering our duties, we are going for unnecessary trouble.

By connecting ourselves to the greater Reality, finding our progressive place in the universe, and working sincerely in selfless and dutiful service, we can actually achieve the peacefulness that is the basis for happiness. In this verse, peacefulness is called *shanti*; one of its synonyms is *nirvana*, as the cessation of the agitating winds of desires in the mind.

एषा ब्राह्मी स्थितिः पार्थ नैनां प्राप्य विमुह्यति ।

eṣā brāhmī sthitiḥ pārtha naināṃ prāpya vimuhyati ।

स्थित्वास्यामन्तकालेऽपि ब्रह्मनिर्वाणमृच्छति ॥ २-७२ ॥

sthitvāsyāmantakāle'pi brahmanirvāṇamṛcchati ॥ 2-72 ॥

“O son of Pritha, this is the spiritual level. A person who has attained this level never becomes confused, and by remaining in that position, he attains spiritual liberation at the end of his time.”

esha: this; *brahmi*: spiritual/ transcendental; *sthitih*: position; *partha*: o son of Pritha (Arjuna); *na*: not; *enam*: this; *prapya*: obtaining; *vimuhyati*: becomes confused; *sthitva*: being situated; *asyam*: in this; *anta-kale*: in the final moment; *api*: even; *brahma*: spiritual; *nirvanam*: cessation of agitation; *ricchati*: attains.

The last verse of the chapter presents detachment and freedom from desires, *mamatva* and *ahankara* as the transcendental position of Brahman, the natural and permanent identity of the soul or atman. When the *jiva* atman, the individual soul, attains this transcendental consciousness he finds his original freedom (*moksha*) from all ties and karmic consequences, and is not conditioned by attraction and repulsion any more.

Thus, at the final moment - the death of this material body or the destruction of the universe or both - he will not suffer the crisis of confusion caused by the disappearance of the objects of material identification and possession, and he will be really free.

Nirvana is a word that has become famous through the Buddhist preaching, but it is not characteristic of Buddhism only.

Unfortunately, some prejudiced and sectarian people who consider themselves Vaishnavas or devotees of Krishna express a negative or even hostile attitude towards this concept of *nirvana*, considering it "impersonalistic" or "nichilistic". This is because they have not read *Bhagavad Gita*, and therefore they have not noticed how many times Krishna (the supreme authority they claim to worship, follow or even represent) clearly and explicitly mentions *nirvana* as the level of transcendental realization that we are expected to attain. We sincerely hope that our humble efforts in this translation and commentary will help to fill up the gaps in their understanding of Krishna and his teachings.

Brahmi sthitih, or the "position related to Brahman" is *brahma nirvanam*, in the sense that the consciousness/awareness of our real nature is permanent, stable, and it is not disturbed by external circumstances - it does not waver like a flame that moves in a gush of wind. This is the meaning of "nirvana", a composite word constituted by the negative prefix *nir* and the word *vata*, "wind".

Later in *Gita* Krishna will also associate the transcendental level with the definition *nitya sattva*, or *suddha sattva*, the eternal and pure form of goodness (*sattva*) that characterizes spiritual existence/ reality (*sat*). This level is the genuine realization of our true nature/identity, and it is above the material *gunas*. Through a *sattvic* lifestyle we can come close to it, yet eventually we will have to go beyond *sattva*, too, by overcoming the identification and attachment to the benefits that one can get from *sattva*.

Nitya sattva is thus equated with *brahma nirvana*, because as long as *sattva* remain material, it will soon drag the individual back into *tamas* and *rajas* - therefore it cannot be called *nitya*. And what is eternal and pure existence if not the spirit - *atman*, *brahman*?