

BHAGAVAD GITA

The Global Dharma for the Third Millennium

Chapter 13

Translations and commentaries
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Chapter 13

Prakriti purusha vibhaga yoga

The yoga of understanding nature as distinct from the personal principle

After the scene-setting introduction (chapter 1), the first 4 chapters (2 or *sankhya*, 3 or *karma*, 4 or *jnana*, 5 or *sannyasa*) of the text of the *Bhagavad gita* were about the self (about *tvam*, or "you"), and how to evolve and progress in self realization. Krishna has explained about *karma* and duty, and how we are supposed to work in this world selflessly, without attachment and material identifications.

The second group of 4 chapters (6 or *dhyana*, 7 or *vijnana*, 8 or *taraka brahma*, 9 or *raja guhya*) were about *tat*, "That" supreme Consciousness and Reality. Krishna has explained about the meaning and practice of meditation, so from the realization of the *atman* we can move to the realization of Brahman, Paramatma and Bhagavan while we are still in this world.

The third group of 4 chapters (10 or *vibhuti*, 11 or *visva rupa darshana*, 12 or *bhakti*, 13 or *prakriti purusha viveka*) are about *tattva jnana*, the process of knowledge of Reality, and Krishna explains precisely how to apply and execute *bhakti* in the genuine way, by appreciating the transcendental nature of God and entering into the supreme Consciousness.

The fourth and last group of 4 chapters (14 or *guna traya vibhaga*, 16 or *daivasura sampada*, 17 or *sraddha traya*, 18 or *moksha*) are about liberation or the ultimate success of the entire process, and their teachings are summarized by the famous aphorism *tat tvam asi*. Krishna clarifies the dangerous traps on the road to liberation, and how to make the last steps away from material conditionings, because even a liberated soul (*jivanmukta*) still has to deal with the three *gunas* as long as s/he lives in this world.

So if we want to summarize the entire *Bhagavad gita* in four steps, we can describe them as 1. *tvam*, 2. *tat*, 3. *tattvam*, 4. *tattvam asi*.

Besides the first scene-setting chapter (1, *Arjuna visada*), there is another atypical chapter in the text of *Bhagavad gita*: the 15th, that interrupts the thread of discussion to remind us about the mystical aspect of the supreme Personality of Godhead (Purushottama), who is completely independent from the manifestation of this world and even from the knowledge contained in the Vedic scriptures.

In the 12th chapter, Krishna has given the description of the qualities and activities that a devotee must develop in order to engage in transcendental service. In this chapter, on Arjuna's request, Krishna will explain the difficult and deep science of Purusha and Prakriti, the two sides of Brahman, who are the Father and Mother of everything, both in the material and the spiritual world, and within the *jivatman* as well.

Purusha is the personal principle of perception or consciousness. Some commentators explain the etymology of the word as derived from *pura*, "city": this means that the *purusha* is the lord of the "city of the nine gates" (5.13), or the human body. We know that there are two *purushas*: the two birds described in *Svetasvatara Upanishad* (4.6) and *Mundaka Upanishad* (3.1.1) as well as in *Bhagavata Purana* (11.11.6). Another synonym for the city of the nine gates or the tree of the body is the *kshetra* or "field of action" described in this chapter. Accordingly, this *kshetra* is also called Prakriti. The etymology of this word is said to derive from the compound *pra-kriti* ("made previously"), referring to the first activity of creation.

The definitions of Prakriti and Purusha are not easy to understand, and they become clear only to those who have already established themselves on the level of Brahman realization and have developed *bhakti*, devotion, to the Supreme. Superficial, ignorant people may believe that the word *purusha* indicates a mere ordinary human being of male gender, while for them *prakriti* is simply material nature. Following this materialistic and foolish concept, they conclude that any male human being is the legitimate enjoyer of everything - from women to wealth to resources to the entire world. Conversely, they believe that anything that is not a male human being is not a *purusha*, and therefore has no rights or title to any enjoyment or even freedom or independence, and should simply be exploited carelessly. This understanding is not approved by *Bhagavad gita* or Vedic culture; in fact we will see that, in chapter 16, Krishna will call it asuric, or demoniac. Even human beings of male gender (who believe they are supposed to be the enjoyers) live pitifully under this type of distorted and anti-natural ideology, because all of them vainly attempt to individually and materially take the place of the Supreme - a foolish pursuit that causes them to keep fighting and damaging one another.

The faulty materialistic application of the meaning of *purusha* and *prakriti* can only bring serious damage and many sufferings to everyone, as we can see in the present situation of global society, after several centuries in which this delusion has been spreading around the world. Demonic (asuric) people project their demonic mentality on nature, "demonizing" it in all its forms, from the Mother Goddess herself to knowledge, earth, women, cows, body, healthy pleasure, and the natural elements. When nature is considered an enemy, the inevitable consequence is that people will try to defeat, repress, conquer, dominate and oppress it, with disastrous results. The more we try to control nature, or to oppose it, the more deeply and painfully we get ourselves in trouble.

Someone could think that since the elements that compose the sense objects, our body, the senses, the mind etc, are made of material nature, when we "control the senses and the mind" we are actually controlling nature. However, this would be mere illusion. We can only engage our consciousness (which is our actual identity) in the modalities of nature - either material or spiritual: this will be the subject of the next chapters of *Bhagavad gita*, up to the last one.

VERSE 1

अर्जुन उवाच ।

arjuna uvāca ।

प्रकृतिं पुरुषं चैव क्षेत्रं क्षेत्रज्ञमेव च ।

prakṛtiṁ puruṣaṁ caiva kṣetraṁ kṣetrajñameva ca ।

एतद्वेदितुमिच्छामि ज्ञानं ज्ञेयं च केशव ॥ १३-१ ॥

etadveditumicchāmi jñānaṁ jñeyaṁ ca keśava ॥ 13-1 ॥

arjunah: Arjuna; *uvaca:* said; *prakritim:* the Prakriti; *purusam:* the Purusha; *ca:* and; *iva:* certainly; *ksetram:* the *kshetra*; *ksetra jnam:* the one who knows the *ksetra*; *eva:* certainly; *ca:* and; *etat:* this; *veditum:* to know; *icchami:* I wish; *jnanam:* knowledge; *jneyam:* what is to be known; *ca:* and; *kesava:* o Kesava.

Arjuna said:

"O Kesava, I wish to know about the Prakriti and the Purusha, the *kshetra* and the *kshetra-jna*, the knowledge and the object of knowledge."

The elaboration on these two fundamental concepts will offer new illumination not only on the *kshetra* (the object of knowledge), but also on the *atman* as the *kshetra jna*, on *jnana* itself, on the *jiva atman* as compared to the *param atman*, and on the profound and complex meaning of *prakriti*. Ultimately, everything is consciousness - the *kshetra jna* as well as the *kshetra* and *jnana* itself - but with the distinction of the *prakriti* at the beginning of all manifestations (spiritual and material), when the great divine *lila* or the divine dance started. Therefore we should see that distinction (*vibhaga*) as complementarity rather than opposition of dualities, as the two sides of the same One.

In the 2nd chapter, Krishna had already explained the difference between body and the *atman* that lives in the body, saying that the body is temporary while the *atman* is eternal, and establishing the difference between the spiritual and the material. This is the first, easiest, and superficial meaning of the difference between the *purusha* and the *prakriti*: the *purusha* is the *atman*, and the *prakriti* is the body - not only the individual body, but also the universal body.

During that preliminary discussion, Krishna had made very clear that the *purusha* is the same in all bodies, male or female, and even

animal or vegetable, while *prakriti* is the intrinsic nature of their manifestation, from which they can never become separated (3.5, 3.33). At the same time, the *jivas* can move from the material mode of *prakriti* (7.4, 9.7, 9.8, 9.10, 9.12) to the spiritual mode of *prakriti* (7.5, 9.13, 11.51).

Here materialistic people become confused and lose the thread of the discussion, because they believe that the nature of the *purusha* is what we can call *purushatva ahankara* or the identification with the quality of the *purusha* as enjoyer.

Then if you try to tell them they are actually *prakriti* (7.5), they freak out and start behaving like schizophrenics, because they cannot understand how one can be *purusha* and *prakriti* at the same time. But it is a fact: Krishna also stated clearly that the *jivatmans* (the individual beings) are also *prakriti*, and that the spiritual world and spiritual forms are *prakriti*, too (4.6). Even the transcendental forms and names of Krishna, that are non-different from him, are *prakriti* - the most intimate manifestation of the supreme power - *para prakriti*, or Yogamaya.

In this chapter, Krishna will further explore this mysterious and deep subject, at a subtler level: both *purusha* and *prakriti* are intrinsically spiritual, and all differences are simply due to the mode or nature of the consciousness - in Sanskrit terms, the *prakriti* of the *purusha*.

The additional definition of *prakriti* and *purusha* as *jnanam* and *jneyam*, "knowledge" and "the object of knowledge", is meant to further deepen our understanding. We know that *purusha* is the principle of consciousness, therefore on the superficial material platform it would be logical to conclude that the *purusha* is *jnana*, or knowledge, while the "field" is the *jneya*, "what is to be known". But we also know that *jnana* or *vidya* is identified as the *prakriti* or *shakti*, and the field of knowledge, or *jneya*, as the *purusha* (9.17,

11.18, 11.38, 13.18, 13.24, but also 5.29, 7.1, 7.3, 7.10, 7.30, 10.3, 10.15, 10.17, 15.15). We need to pause and meditate on this concept, in order to understand it properly.

To facilitate this understanding, we must remember that activity is the characteristic of the *prakriti*, while perception or consciousness is the characteristic of the *purusha*. In this light, we will correctly read verses 8 to 12 in this chapter, that describe *jnana*, or knowledge, as a series of activities of the consciousness (the *prakriti* of the *purusha*) that establish the consciousness on the proper level of identification - that is the spiritual level. On the other hand, we will understand that Consciousness (the *purusha* - Isvara, the *param atman*, of whom the *jiva atman* is simply a fragment) is the real purpose and subject of knowledge, because Consciousness is the original blueprint of everything that exists.

VERSE 2

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।

śrībhagavānuvāca ।

इदं शरीरं कौन्तेय क्षेत्रमित्यभिधीयते ।

idaṁ śarīraṁ kaunteya kṣetramityabhidhīyate ।

एतद्यो वेत्ति तं प्राहुः क्षेत्रज्ञ इति तद्विदः ॥ १३-२ ॥

etadyo vetti taṁ prāhuḥ kṣetrajaña iti tadvidah ॥ 13-2 ॥

sri: the wonderful; *bhagavan*: Lord; *uvaca*: said; *idam*: this; *sariram*: body; *kaunteya*: o Kaunteya; *ksetram*: the field; *iti*: like this; *abhidhiyate*: is said; *etat*: this; *yah*: one who; *vetti*: knows; *tam*: that (person); *prahuh*: is called; *ksetra jna*: who knows the field; *iti*: like this; *tat vidah*: who knows this.

The wonderful Lord said:

"O Kaunteya, this body is called the field, and one who knows this (body) is called the knower of the field.

To introduce the discussion in this chapter, Krishna takes us back to the beginning in chapter 2, where he had explained the difference between the *atman* and the perishable material body or *sarira* (2.17, 2.18, 2.19, 2.20, 2.21, 2.22, 2.23, 2.24, 2.25, 2.26). To refer to his teachings about the *atman*, Krishna says *tat vidah*, "he who knows this". Now Krishna will again connect the concept of material nature with the concept of *prakriti*, as he had done previously (3.5, 3.33, 7.4) and will do so again (15.7, 18.40).

The word *kshetra* is usually translated as "field" and refers to the "field of activity", as *prakriti* is the source of all activities (3.5, 3.33, 9.10, 13.21), both at the material and at the spiritual level. Another word from the same root is *kshatriya* - the position of the royal class that protects the kingdom, that is the field of activity of a king. It is also interesting to note that the word *kshata* means "one who protects from injuries", while *kshi* means "perishing" and *kshar* means "decaying".

In relationship to the *kshetra*, the *purusha* or consciousness is the *kshetra jna*, "the knower of the field". However, this definition only applies to one who has attained the transcendental realization and who knows that the eternal *atman* is simply wearing the material body. The word *jna* implies actual knowledge, so a *kshetra jna* is only one who knows he is not the body: the conditioned soul who identifies with the body is just ignorant (*ajna*) and does not know anything.

The knowledge presented by Krishna in this chapter is more advanced than the teachings presented in the previous chapters, and we should not underestimate it.

The same knowledge was requested by Brahma at the beginning of creation, as reported in the *Bhagavata Purana* (2.9.25-30). Specifically in verse 27 Brahma asks, *yathatma maya yogena nana sakti upabrimhitam, vilumpan visrjan ghrnam bibhrad atmanam atmana*, "How has your Self, by the Self, through the union with Maya and the ensuing transformations, accepted many *shaktis* for the purpose of the destruction, the manifestation and the preservation (of the universe)?"

Vishnu replies with the famous *catuh sloki* (2.9.33-36) that constitutes the heart of the *Bhagavata Purana*, preceded by these verses: *jnana parama guhyam me yad vijnana samanvitam, sarahasyam tad angam ca grihana gaditam maya, yavan aham yatha bhavo yad rupa guna karmakah, tathaiva tattva vijnanam astu te mad anugrahat*, "My supreme knowledge is hidden, and it is applied in practice. Try to understand it while I am explaining it, with its secrets and implications. Let this knowledge be realized by you by my kindness: as it is I who manifest the existence of all forms, qualities and activities." (*Bhagavata Purana*, 2.9.31-32).

As we know that forms, qualities and activities are all produced by Prakriti, according to the direction of the Consciousness or Purusha, we see that it is not possible to divide the two. This deep knowledge is expressed in the following *catuh sloki* (2.9.33-36):

aham evasam evagre nanyad yat sat asat param, pascad aham yad etac ca yo 'vasisyeta so 'smy aham, "I am that which existed before the creation, and all that will ever exist. I am the *sat* and the *asat* (the supreme cause and effect), up to the end (of the universe), and I am what remains after all these (creations) and everything else (are dissolved)",

rite 'rtham yat pratiyeta na pratiyeta catmani, tad vidyad atmano mayam yathabhaso yatha tama, "Whatever appears to be of value or without value, is only in relationship with me. You must know

that everything (in this world) is just the shadow of my Maya, like darkness is a shadow (of light)",

yatha mahanti bhutani bhutesucchavacesv antu, pravistani apravistani tatha tesu na tesv aham, "Just like the elemental powers (ether, air, fire, water, earth) are contained in all beings, both great and small, and at the same time they are not limited to them, similarly I am in all beings, and yet I am not (limited to them)",

etavad eva jijnyasam tattva jijnasunatmanah, anvaya vyatirekabhyam yat syat sarvatra sarvada, "This (that I have now said) is the most important subject of transcendental knowledge, the *tattva* that should be researched directly and directly, at all times and places and in all circumstances".

VERSE 3

क्षेत्रज्ञं चापि मां विद्धि सर्वक्षेत्रेषु भारत ।

kṣetrajñam cāpi mām viddhi sarvakṣetreṣu bhārata ।

क्षेत्रक्षेत्रज्ञयोर्ज्ञानं यत्तज्ज्ञानं मतं मम ॥ १३-३ ॥

kṣetrakṣetrañayorjñānam yattajjñānam matam mama ॥ 13-3 ॥

ksetra jnam: who knows the field; *ca*: and; *api*: also; *mam*: me; *viddhi*: (you should) know; *sarva ksetresu*: in all fields; *bharata*: o descendant of Bharata; *ksetra ksetrajnayah*: the field and the knower of the field; *jnanam*: knowledge; *yat*: that; *tat*: which; *jnanam*: (is) knowledge; *matam mama*: my opinion.

"O Bharata, you should know that I am also the knower of the field who resides in all fields. Knowing the field and the knower of the field is called knowledge. This is my opinion.

The absolute definition of *jnana*, "knowledge", is the understanding of the two fundamental factors of Reality: *purusha* and *prakriti*, and how they are one and the same, and at the same time they are two distinct *tattvas* or existences. This very subject has been at the heart of all Vedic knowledge and its commentaries by the great traditional *acharyas* - from Adi Shankara (*kevala advaita*) to Ramanuja (*visista advaita*) to Madhva (*visista dvaita*) to Nimbarka (*dvaita advaita*) to Vishnusvami (*suddha dvaita*) to Krishna Chaitanya (*acintya bheda abheda*). The fact is that God as Reality is simultaneously and inconceivably one and different from the manifestation of the universe, from his energies, and from the individual souls, too.

This verse has been largely elaborated by *advaitins* to prove that the *kshetrajna* is one only, as in the statement "I am also the same *kshetra jna*". Unfortunately, a faulty line of interpretation among the *advaitins* has come to conclude that *kevala advaita* means that conditioned souls are nothing but Brahman that has become subject to *maya* or illusion. Consequently that movement has come to be known as the *mayavada* school, as its conclusion implies that material illusion, or ordinary *maya*, is stronger than Isvara. Such conclusion is contrary to the teachings of *Bhagavad gita* and all the other genuine *shastra*, including the *Upanishads* and the *Vedanta sutras*.

Of course Isvara resides in the heart of every being as *param atman*, but there is not just one bird on the tree of the body. There are *two* birds in the same tree: the *jivatma* and the *paramatma*. One is conditioned, the other is not - he never has been, and he never will be - because Isvara is above the *sat* and the *asat* (15.16).

This has already been stated in verse 9.10: *mayadhyaksena prakritih suyate sa caracaram, hetunanena kaunteya jagad viparivartate*, "Under my order this *prakriti* manifests everything, both moving and non-moving; by this cause the universe is created cyclically."

This *mayavadi* deviation cannot be ascribed to Adi Shankara, who very clearly stated at the beginning of his commentaries to *Bhagavad gita* that Narayana is always transcendental (*narayanah parah avyakta*). He explains further in his commentary to this verse that the *jiva* cannot be Isvara, otherwise Isvara would be subject to *maya*, while we learn from all the *shastra* that Isvara controls *maya*, and not the other way around.

What is Isvara and what is *maya*? Isvara is the supreme Consciousness, and Maya is the illusion, the magic power by which this material world is manifested and the individual souls are covered. If we maintain that Isvara can be subjected to *maya*, or ignorance, the very definition of Isvara loses all its meaning.

In his questions and answers to this verse, Adi Shankara clearly states that Isvara is never subject to *maya*. If we postulate otherwise, we should conclude that ignorance does not exist at all, and that everything is just a *lila* of the Supreme that pretends to be covered by ignorance. In a sense, this is true: the material manifestation and the experiences of the conditioned souls are indeed a part of the *lila* of the Supreme, meant to lead the *anu atman* through the evolutionary process. But this is not the *lila* of the *anu atman*: it is the *lila* of the *param atman*. By definition, *lila* is a blissful activity that is totally free from any material conditioning.

In verse 4.5, Krishna had clearly told Arjuna that he knows all lives and experiences (*aham veda sarvani*) because his consciousness is unlimited, while the consciousness of the

individual soul is limited, even on the liberated level. What to speak of the conditioned soul, that is covered by ignorance.

There is a clear difference (*viveka*) between *vidya* and *avidya*: if we refuse to acknowledge it, we will be forced to come to the untenable conclusion that *shastra* and *sadhana* are useless, because they are meant to lead us from *avidya* to *vidya*. The scriptures become unnecessary only when the *kshetrajna*'s consciousness has directly entered the consciousness of the *paramatma* (*visate tad anantaram*, 18.55), but without the scriptures or *jnana*, one cannot reach this point. It is not simply a matter of different perception of the same situation: God cannot fall under this *tamas* of delusion, because he is *nirguna* - all the scriptures agree on this.

In a sense, also the *anu atma* is *nirguna*: material qualities (such as death, decay etc) do not belong to the *atman*, but are a manifestation of *maya* or *avidya* by illusory superimposition to the *atman*, so the *atman* is not really affected or bound by ignorance and material identification. Illusion can therefore be compared to a cloud in the sky, that cannot really affect the sky itself, but is simply covering our perception of the sky.

Liberation is the inherent quality and nature of the *atman*, while *avidya* is only a superimposition: *avidya* is therefore illusory, as darkness is the absence of light and has no existence of its own. Specifically, *avidya* means identification with *ahankara* and *mamatva*, that we could also translate as "agentship" and "enjoyership".

Defects belong to material body only, to the sense organs that are limited by the four imperfections; blindness concerns the material eyes only, as on the level of liberation there are no defects. However, even on the liberated level, the *anu atman* or *jiva atman* can only be conscious of a limited part of the total *kshetra*, while the *param atman* is eternally conscious (*jna*) of the entire totality

of all *kshetras* (*sarva ksetresu*). So *isvara* and *jiva* always remain two different categories.

Svetasvatara Upanishad (1.12) confirms it very clearly: *bhokta bhogyam preritaram ca matva, sarvam proktam tri vidham brahmam eta*, "Brahman is said to have three aspects: the enjoyer, the enjoyed and the controller of both". So we understand that Brahman is *atman*, *param atman* and *prakriti*: everything that can exist. And all this is fundamentally Consciousness. *Bhagavata Purana* (8.3.13) clarifies the point: *ksetra jnaya namas tubhyam sarvadyaksaya saksine, purusayatma mulaya mula prakritaye namah*, "I offer my respect to you, the *ksetra jna*. You control everything, you are the witness, the *purusha*, the root of the *atman*, and the root of the *prakriti* as well."

And again: *seyam bhavagato maya yan nanyena virudhyate, isvarasya vimuktasya karpanyam uta bandhanam*, "Some say that Bhagavan is illusion, but this is contradictory because Isvara is always liberated, and totally self sufficient. He can never be in bondage" (*Bhagavata Purana*, 3.7.9).

VERSE 4

तत्क्षेत्रं यच्च यादृक्क यद्विकारि यतश्च यत् ।

tatkṣetraṁ yacca yādṛkca yadvikāri yataśca yat ।

स च यो यत्प्रभावश्च तत्समासेन मे शृणु ॥ १३-४ ॥

sa ca yo yatprabhāvaśca tatsamāsenā me śṛṇu ।। 13-4 ।।

tat: that; *ksetram*: the field; *yat*: that; *ca*: and; *yadrik*: as it is; *ca*: and; *yat vikari*: its changes; *yatah*: by which; *ca*: and; *yat*: that; *sah*: s/he; *ca*: and; *yah*: who; *yat prabhavah*: its power; *ca*: and; *tat*: that; *samasena*: in brief; *me*: from me; *srinu*: listen.

"Now listen, as I briefly tell you about the field, its transformations, and its power.

Here we penetrate even more deeply into the heart of knowledge as described in the previous verse. The core of all philosophical discussions in Vedic tradition is the correct understanding of the ontological meaning of God compared to the individual and to the world, as we have seen briefly mentioning the most prominent and famous philosophers of these last centuries. Now we will get directly at the root of the issue, by analyzing how the field (*prakriti*) is simultaneously one and different from the knower of the field (*purusha*), and how the interactions between the two are creating the entire world.

In this regard, the traditional Vedic academia presents two main perspectives, called *vivarta vada* and *parinama vada*, broadly described as "superimposition" and "transformation". We can briefly say that the difference between the two is evaluated on the concept of *maya*, "illusion", by which the individual soul is confused, so that it cannot see Reality as it is.

The *vivarta vada* approach is explained by Adi Shankara, who teaches that the manifestation of the universe is not a transformation of God, but only an appearance or illusion (*maya*) as the products of material energy are temporary and unsubstantial. The technical explanation is that the universe is *adhyasa* (with a long *a* in the second position), a superimposition over the changeless Reality of Brahman. In its original presentation, this perspective does not claim that illusion is more powerful than Isvara, as some confused people have come to believe.

Only the individual soul, the *anu atman* or *jiva atman*, can fall under the control of Mahamaya because of its tiny size. This is confirmed also in *Bhagavad gita* and in all the other Vedic texts, and can be easily verified through daily direct experience by observing the delusional state and the sufferings of conditioned persons.

Illusion means that the *jivatman* confused by *maya* falsely identifies with the material body and the material objects of this world: this is the original mistake that creates all the other problems, resulting in innumerable fears and sufferings. In this darkness of illusion, the conditioned soul sleeps, identifying with a phantasmagoria of forms and names that appear and disappear inevitably in the course of time. Sometimes the conditioned soul experiences them as pleasurable dreams, sometimes as nightmares, but always forgetting its real, original, and permanent identity as spiritual being.

The *parinama vada* approach is usually considered a *shakta* or tantric doctrine, and as such it has been somehow overshadowed during the last centuries because of the increasing influence of patriarchal tendencies on Indian society. However, its contribution to the Vedic heritage of knowledge has continued to be lively and important, especially in the tradition of Deity worship and *bhakti*. According to this approach, the universe is real, as it is a direct transformation of God, therefore Maya Shakti is not illusion, but Reality itself. From this Maya Shakti - the original Prakriti - all the forms derive, both on the spiritual and on the material level. Strangely enough, this is the perspective that could be defined as the original *mayavada* theory, as it presents Maya as the supreme power within the universe.

However, the only people who seem to have problems with what they call "the *mayavada* perspective" (which they identify with the teachings of Shankaracharya) are two particular sects of

vaishnavas, both presently claiming to be descending from the lineage of Madhva. One of the two sects is the orthodox Madhva *sampradaya*, whose members are also called *tattva vadis*, specifically because Madhva focused all his philosophical arguments against what he called the *maya vadis*. If we properly investigate, we will find out that Madhva's philosophy is strongly patriarchal, and reduces the importance of *bhakti* to a minimum. According to Madhva, only Vishnu is Brahman, and only this Brahman is Reality and Existence; Krishna is a temporary or partial manifestation of Vishnu, and Radharani and Lakshmi are merely ordinary individual *jiva atmans*. In Madhva's perspective, the *jiva atmans* are divided into two different ontological categories: those who can become liberated, and those who cannot (*nitya baddhas*). These *nitya baddhas* continue to take birth in the material world eternally as "bad people" (low caste human beings or *asuras*) without any hope of escaping illusion and ignorance, because their conditioning is their "eternal nature" and can never be overcome. Of course, this is not a fact and it is not confirmed in scriptures.

Ironically, the other *vaishnava* sect that continues the "war against the *mayavadis*" (identified by them as Adi Shankara and his followers) is the Gaudiya *vaishnava* lineage, claiming to descend from Krishna Chaitanya (who appeared in Gaudadesa, or Bengal). However, Krishna Chaitanya was seen by his contemporaries and especially by the Madhva followers, as a *mayavadi* himself (as reported in Krishnadasa's *Chaitanya charitamrita*, *Madhya* 9.250). In the same *Chaitanya charitamrita*, considered by the Gaudiya *vaishnavas* as the most authoritative biography of Krishna Chaitanya, we see that Chaitanya heavily criticized the Madhva lineage in unequivocal terms: *karmi, jnani dui bhakti hina tomara sampradaya dekhi sei dui cihna*, "I see that in your *sampradaya* there is an excessive attachment to *karma* and *jnana* that is obstructing the development of devotion." (*Chaitanya*

charitamrita, Madhya 9.276). He also says, *sabe eka guna dekhi tomara sampradaye, satya vighraha kari' isvare karaha niscaye*, "The only good thing I see in your *sampradaya* is that you are accepting without any doubt the truth of the (spiritual) form of the Lord." (*Chaitanya charitamrita, Madhya 9.277*).

In the conversation between Chaitanya and the Madhva sampradaya leaders, it becomes clear that Madhva did not give any importance to *bhakti*, but only to the dutiful performance of social religious duties in the *varna ashrama* system, that according to Madhva automatically leads the eligible souls to liberation and to the attainment of Vaikuntha, the abode of Vishnu (*Chaitanya charitamrita, Madhya, 9.256, 257*). In reply, Chaitanya strongly preaches to the Madhva followers about the paramount importance of *bhakti* and the universal scope of the process of self-realization, by which any human being can attain the highest perfection, as confirmed by *Bhagavad gita* (9.32, 33) and *Bhagavata Purana* (6.16.43, 3.33.7, 11.14.21, 10.84.13). The same point is confirmed also by the *Upanishad*, as for example *Svetasvatara Upanishad* (2.5), that claims that all human beings are equally qualified as *amritasya putras* ("children of immortality"), and by the original *samhitas* (*Rig Veda* 5.60.5, *Yajur Veda* 16.15, *Atharva Veda* 3.30.1) that affirm the inherent equality of all human beings.

In this light, we can better understand the discussion about *vivarta vada* and *parinama vada*.

Let us now return to the *parinama vada* perspective, that gives paramount importance to *bhakti* and *lila*, and worships Yogamaya as the all-powerful sister of Krishna, who can even cover Krishna's perception to enhance the ecstatic experience of loving relationships in the *lila*. According to the *parinama vada* perspective, God is simultaneously immanent and transcendent to the world, and creates all the things in the world through a transformation of the basic Existence or Brahman.

This is in accordance to what Krishna says in this verse (*yat vikari*, "transformations of Brahman"), and can be best understood when we remember that *kshetra* ("the field") is also Brahman or Consciousness, just like the two *kshetra jnas* - *param atman* and *jiva atman* (*Svetasvatara Upanishad*, 1.12). Also *Chandogya Upanishad* supports this perspective: *yatha saumy ekena mrt pindena sarvam mrnmayam vijnatam syad vacarambhanam vikaro namadheyam mrittikety eva satyam*, "Earth's transformations are merely verbal creations of the process of naming; the substance earth itself is alone real" (6.1.4).

In the *parinama vada* perspective, ignorance (*avidya*) does not have a real existence, but it is simply a temporary and confusing absence of perception of knowledge (*vidya*) experienced by the conditioned soul. For the liberated soul, who sees things as they really are, there is no ignorance, but simply the manifestation of divine *lilas* to which we participate consciously or unconsciously, willingly or unwillingly. So, on this level, illusion "transforms" as *lila* because of the action of Yogamaya, giving a totally new meaning to our perception, as it will be exemplified at the beginning of chapter 15 with the image of the banyan tree whose branches go downwards and whose roots go upwards.

This banyan tree is the *prakriti*, manifesting as Mahamaya in this world and Yogamaya in the transcendental spiritual world. The spiritual world is the supreme position (*pada, dhama*) where there is no need of sun, moon, stars or fire because everything is self effulgent. Mahamaya and Yogamaya appear to be exactly the opposite of each other, like a tree and its reflection on a clear water surface: this is because they both stem from the same root - the Consciousness or *purusha* Brahman, the great treasure that is to be found under the tree.

The main obstacle to this understanding is the widespread misconception that inert matter (*jada*) is ignorance (*avidya*).

Actually material objects and phenomena, although not conscious in themselves, are *prakriti* and as such they should be understood as knowledge (*jnana*); in the macrocosm they are the energies (*shaktis*) of the Supreme, Isvara, *param atman*, while in the microcosm they are the objects of the senses (*visaya*) of the *jiva atman*. Consequently, the *jiva atman* has the power to perceive or enjoy them, as his own *shaktis*, secondary manifestations of the supreme Shakti. If we dig even deeper, we will find that such *visayas* are projected by the *jiva atman* through his senses, and therefore the *jiva atman* possesses and manifests a tiny measure of the inherent quality or nature (*prakriti*) of Isvara as the creator. In very simple terms, this power has been described by recent New Age psychology as "the law of attraction", by which our thoughts shape our world and attract events and things (positive or negative) into our lives.

Of course superficial and ignorant simpletons will conclude that it is sufficient to visualize money, properties, position etc in our "meditation" for them to magically manifest into our lives, without any work (*karma*) from our part. Conversely, these deluded people blame failures and losses simply on the "incorrect visualization" that lingers on negative events and things rather than positive events and things.

True, we will not get much benefit from a negative attitude towards life, or the habit of brooding over fears and worries and bad thoughts. In fact, such dark thoughts will distract our mind, preventing us from actually seeing and grasping the positive opportunities to obtain good things, and from rightfully enjoying the good things that we already have. Also, our general demeanor, bodily language, and the energy we project into the environment (as "vibrations" or aura) will reflect this dark and low frequency, subtly attracting people with similar or complementary attitudes and mentality. In other words, we will unconsciously seek people

with a negative approach to life, always thinking about fears, disasters, loss, etc, as well as cheaters and exploiters who thrive on the fears of others and take advantage of them.

However, thinking positive, "happy thoughts" will certainly be beneficial to our life, but we will only obtain the good things that we are destined to receive by dint of our good work, performed either in previous lifetimes or in this one. A positive attitude and pleasant smiling face will certainly help a salesman in his work, but he needs to have something valuable to sell, otherwise there will be no income. If he tries to get money without giving anything valuable in return, he will become indebted and will have to pay the *karma*.

Once we have clarified the possible misconceptions about this issue, we can confidently state that - yes, our reality is determined by the mode of energy (*shakti, prakriti*) that we cultivate or "take shelter" in. We will see this concept even more clearly in the subsequent chapter explaining about the modes of *prakriti*, called *gunas*. By taking shelter in *sattva, rajas* or *tamas*, our individual *prakriti* is modified (*vikara*) and the consciousness is manifested differently, moving towards the light or the darkness. Our proper position is in establishing ourselves (our consciousness) in the light and then in the supreme and imperishable Transcendence: *tamaso ma jyotir gamaya, asato ma sad gamaya, mrtiyor ma amrtam gamaya* (*Brhad aranyaka Upanishad*, 1.3.28).

Just as in the apparent contradiction of *advaita* ("non dual") and *dvaita* ("dual"), the two approaches of *vivarta vada* and *parinama vada* are actually complementing rather than opposing each other, offering a multi-dimensional vision that can be directly perceived by the grace of the Mother Goddess, Sri Vidya - the *para prakriti*, to whom we must resort and in whom we must take shelter, as recommended by Krishna himself in *Bhagavad gita* (9.13).

The reconciliation of the *vivarta vada* and the *parinama vada*, besides the obviously central factor of *bhakti* (that is repeatedly and clearly presented by *Bhagavad gita* as the key to the entire process) is supported by the teachings of the *Upanishads*. In this perspective, the expression *yat vikari*, meaning "its changes" or "its transformations", refers to the transformations of *maya* or *prakriti*, that, too, is known as Brahman (*Svetasvatara Upanishad* 1.9, 12).

VERSE 5

ऋषिभिर्बहुधा गीतं छन्दोभिर्विविधैः पृथक् ।

ṛṣibhirbahudhā gītaṁ chandobhirvividhaiḥ pṛthak ।

ब्रह्मसूत्रपदैश्चैव हेतुमद्भिर्विनिश्चितैः ॥ १३-५ ॥

brahmasūtrapadaiścaiva hetumadbhirviniścitaiḥ ॥ 13-5 ॥

risibhih: by the *rishis*; *bahudha:* in many ways/ many times; *gitam:* sung; *chandobhih:* with hymns; *vividhaih:* various; *prithak:* again and again; *brahma sutra padaih:* by the aphorisms of the *Brahma sutra*; *ca:* and; *iva:* certainly; *hetumadbhih:* by what is the cause; *viniscitaih:* without doubt.

"(This knowledge) has been repeatedly sung in many hymns by the Rishis. Again it has been presented in the aphorisms of the *Vedanta sutras*, with a clear discussion on the causes (and the effects).

Krishna again states very clearly that this knowledge is the most central issue of the entire scope of Vedic teachings, from the original *samhitas* (*Rig, Sama, Yajur, Atharva*) through the *Upanishads* and to the *Vedanta sutras*, in the traditional line of studies prescribed for a genuine student.

Unfortunately, due to the degrading influence of the adharmic academic system, the current general opinion is that one should study Vedic knowledge mainly by learning about the presentations of previous "specialized" researchers and scholars (not the original Rishis, though) either in the western-oriented Indology studies, or in the officially recognized Mathas or institutions that claim to be following the teachings of one prominent teacher and scholars as opposed to the others.

Whether the claims of such *sampradayas* are true or not, the fundamental fact is that such "second-hand" study is simply not the Vedic method: in the genuine Vedic tradition, each and every student is expected to directly realize the *tattva* from the original *shastra*, while the writings of famous *acharyas* should be considered simply as support consultation material. This means that each and every student should directly examine the original *shastra*, including the *samhitas*, the collections of meaning-packed hymns that are chanted and sung during the traditional Vedic rituals.

The original *shastra*, compiled by Vyasa himself, include the *Vedanta sutras* also called *Vedanta, Brahma sutras, Uttara mimamsa, Brahma mimamsa, Sariraka mimamsa, Nirnayaka shastra, Bhikshu sutras* or *Nyaya prasthanas*. *Vedanta* means "the conclusion of the *Vedas*", *brahma* refers to the Supreme Brahman, *mimamsa* means "pursuit", *bhikshu* refers to *sannyasis*, *nirnaya* means "investigation", and *sariraka* means "of the body", intended as a body of knowledge or *jnana kanda*, as opposed to the treatises on ritual procedures or *karma kanda*.

The text of the *Vedanta* is not very large - it is only 555 aphorisms divided into 4 chapters (*adhyayas*), each consisting of 4 sections (*padas*), containing groups of sentences (*adhikarana*). The elaboration offered by the *Vedanta sutras* about the transformation (*yat vikari*) of the field (*kshetra*) or knowledge (*jnana*), is summarized by verse 1.1.12 (of *Vedanta sutras*): *anandamayah abhyasat*, "its nature is constant happiness". Here *anandamaya* refers to the description of the *Upanishads* by which the living being is "a body" made of happiness, *anandamaya*, surrounded by "bodies" that are increasingly grosser, made respectively of intelligence or knowledge (*jnanamaya*), mind (*manomaya*), life energy (*pranamaya*) and gross matter (*annamaya*) assimilated to the food.

This refers eminently to *Taittiriya Upanishad* (2.1.2) elaborating on the central issue of knowledge: *tasmad va etasmad atmana akasah sambhutah ity adina brahma puccham pratistha ity astenanna mayam pranamaya mano maya vijnana maya ananda mayah panca purusha pathitas tesv annamayadi trayam jada kshetra svarupam, tato bhinno vijnanamayo jivas tasya bhokteti jiva kshetrajna svarupam, tasmac ca bhinnah sarvantara anandamaya itisvara kshetrajna svarupam uktam*. Here is the translation: "Among conscious entities, there are 5 gradations of *purushas*, respectively *annamaya* (conscious only of food and sense gratification), *pranamaya* and *manomaya*: these are the modes of consciousness centered on the inert *kshetra*. Different is the *vijnanamaya purusha*, the *jiva*, who is the knower of the *kshetra*: he is the secondary or subordinate *kshetra jna*. Also different is the *isvara*, the *anandamaya purusha*, *paramesvara*, who controls and witnesses everything. He is the original *kshetra jna*."

The first verses of the *Vedanta sutras* already clarify what the text studies: *atha atah brahma jijnasa*, "Therefore, this is the moment to make an effort to understand Brahman" (1.1.1), *janmadi asya*

atha, tat brahma, "Brahman is what originated all this" (1.1.2), *shastra yonitvat*, "it is the origin of the scriptures" (1.1.3), *tat tu samanyayat*, "but through the agreement (of the statements of the scriptures)". The subsequent verses or aphorisms, from 5 to 11, confirm that according to the scriptures only Brahman, the intelligent and conscious principle, can be the cause of the manifestation of the universe.

VERSE 6

महाभूतान्यहंकारो बुद्धिरव्यक्तमेव च ।

mahābhūtānyahaṅkāro buddhiravyaktameva ca ।

इन्द्रियाणि दशैकं च पञ्च चेन्द्रियगोचराः ॥ १३-६ ॥

indriyāṇi daśaikam ca pañca cendriyagocarāḥ ॥ 13-6 ॥

maha bhutani: the great elements; *ahankarah*: the sense of doership; *buddhih*: intelligence; *avyaktam*: the non-manifested; *eva*: also; *ca*: and; *indriyani*: the senses; *dasa ekam*: ten plus one; *ca*: and; *panca*: five; *ca*: and; *indriya gocarah*: the objects of the senses.

"The gross elements, *ahankara*, intelligence, the non-manifested, as well as the 11 senses, and the 5 objects of the senses,

In verses 6 and 7 (this one and the subsequent), Krishna describes the components of the universe, the *kshetra* that is manifested by the original *prakriti*. These elements are not very different from the 24 categories of Sankhya.

We already know from verse 7.4 that the *maha bhuta* ("great beings") are the fundamental elements of matter - *bhumi* (earth), *apah* (water), *anala* (fire), *vayuh* (air) and *kham* (ether or space). Of course, when we speak of "earth" we include all solid matter, in "water" we include all liquids, and so on. Verse 7.4 also listed the 3 subtle elements, as *ahankara* (identification), *manah* (mind), *buddhi* (intelligence): together with the 5 gross elements, these constitute the eight-fold manifestation of elemental matter, or "separated *prakriti*".

This verse here (13.6) lists *ahankara* and *buddhi*, but the mind (*manas*) is included in the 11 senses, while the *avyaktam* ("non manifested") is the *pradhana*, the primordial aggregate of the *prakriti* before the manifestation of the material variety. More specifically, the 11 senses (*indriyani dasa ekam*) are the 5 senses of action (hands, feet, faculty of speech, anus and genitals), the 5 senses of perception (eyes, ears, mouth/ tongue, nose, skin), and the mind. To these, we need to add the 5 sense objects (*indriya gocarah*), also called *tan matra* (internal sense objects) or *visaya* (external sense objects) such as form, sound, taste, smell and touch.

Everything we see in this world is produced by the transformations of these basic elements, in contact with the *kshetra jna*, "the knower of the field", that is the consciousness or *purusha*. However, all activities are always played within the *kshetra* itself, as the *purusha* actually only experiences the feelings produced by the activities of the qualities and elements of nature. Such is the conclusion of chapter 13: *prakrityaiva ca karmani kriyamanani sarvasah, yah pasyati tathamanam akartaram sa pasyati*, "One who sees that all the activities are performed by nature and the self does nothing, is truly seeing" (13.30). This point had already been expressed previously: *na kartritvam na karmani lokasya srijati prabhuh, na karma-phala-samyogam svabhavas tu pravartate*,

"The master (of the city of the nine gates, i.e. the body) is not the cause of the actions performed by others, therefore s/he is not engaged by the results of activities. It is only his/ her nature that acts" (5.14). In this regard, we need to remember here that the *kshetra jna* is always of neutral gender, both male and female, even when we use the term *purusha*.

Another important verse stating this concept is: *prakriteh kriyamanani gunaih karmani sarvasah, ahankara vimudhatma kartaham iti manyate*, "All activities are actually performed by the qualities of nature, but a foolish person who is confused by egotism thinks 'I am doing'." (3.27)

Even earlier, Krishna had presented the same concept at the beginning of his instructions (2.19): *ya enam veti hantaram yas cainam manyate hatam, ubhau tau na vijanito nayam hanti na hanyate*, "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."

VERSE 7

इच्छा द्वेषः सुखं दुःखं संघातश्चेतना धृतिः ।

icchā dveṣaḥ sukhaṁ duḥkhaṁ saṅghātaśchetanā dhṛtiḥ ।

एतत्क्षेत्रं समासेन सविकारमुदाहृतम् ॥ १३-७ ॥

etatkṣetraṁ samāseṇa savikāramudāhṛtam ॥ 13-7 ॥

iccha: desire; *dvesah*: repulsion; *sukham*: happiness; *duhkham*: distress; *sanghatah*: the aggregate; *cetana*: the awareness; *dhritih*:

determination; *etat*: (all) this; *ksetram*: the *kshetra*; *samasena*: in brief; *sa vikaram*: together with their products/ interactions; *udahrtam*: as examples.

desire, repulsion, happiness, distress, the aggregate of the symptoms of life, as well as determination: all these illustrate the concept of field and its interactions.

Besides the 24 elements analyzed by *sankhya* and mentioned in the previous verse, Krishna continues here to list the components of the world, created by the interactions and transformations of the *gunas* - the three modes of material nature.

The word *iccha* means "desire", as in "attraction", while *dvesa* means "hatred" as in "repulsion". We will see in later chapters that these two fundamental polarities equally apply to *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*, and have the power to bind the consciousness of the *jivatman* to the delusion of *maya*. To break this bondage, we need to become detached from both.

The same applies to *sukham* ("happiness", "joy", "pleasure", "comfort") and *duhkham* ("distress", "suffering", "pain", "discomfort"). This *sukham* type of happiness is different from *ananda*, the original genuine transcendental nature of the soul, that is not subject to polarity or duality. There is no contrary or opposite to *ananda*, because *ananda* is an absolute concept; on the other hand, *sukham* finds its opposite in *duhkham*, and both are applied to the transformations of the three *gunas* - *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. A *jivatman* who has taken shelter in *sattva* will feel pleasure in *sattva* and discomfort in *rajas* or *tamas*, while a *jivatman* who has taken shelter in *tamas* will feel pleasure in *tamas* but discomfort in *sattva* or *rajas*, and so on. Pleasure and pain, just like attraction and repulsion, are relative feelings that each particular individual experiences in different circumstances according to the particular mode of objects and activities that s/he

wants to experience. A pig will be enthusiastic about eating excrements and remain uninterested in good sattvic food that is suitable for evolved humans. So according to the type or mode of nature we cultivate, we will develop attraction and consequently we will take birth in a suitable body whose senses will better appreciate that mode.

The *sangatah*, "the aggregate", refers to the bodies that are composed of all such elements - gross and subtle - and that are a direct result of *iccha*, *dvesa*, *sukha* and *duhkha*. This means that once we become detached from these elements, and we turn our consciousness from *cetana* to *cit*, we will not need to take a material body any more, and we will be liberated.

The word *cetana* is a special technical term derived from the root *cit*, usually translated as "knowledge", as in the intrinsic and transcendental quality of awareness that composes Brahman, together with *sat* ("existence" or "eternity") and *ananda* (absolute "happiness"). *Cetana* indicates the perception of material existence - the *kshetra* (field) and its *vikaras* (transformations). It can be translated as "awareness" and also as "symptoms of life", but on the level of duality and transformation, therefore it is also subject to the coloration of the *gunas* - *sattva*, *rajas*, *tamas*.

The last factor mentioned in the verse is *dhritih*, "determination" or "patience", that as we will see in later chapters can also be applied to any of the material *gunas* - *sattva*, *rajas*, *tamas* - thus producing a number of interactions and reactions. When directed to the ultimate transcendental purpose of life, patience can support and lead us to liberation. Similarly, *iccha* and *dvesa* can be applied to aspiring to serve the Supreme and to avoiding everything that is unfavorable to the service of the Supreme. Again, joys and sorrows and the other modes of consciousness or awareness, as well as the gross and subtle material elements, can be suitably engaged in the service of the Supreme, and therefore they will become

instruments for our liberation. Therefore we should understand that all these factors can be manipulated and utilized by the *jiva atman* to experience the *kshetra* and its varieties, either towards further bondage or towards liberation. When we try to lord it over material nature (*apara prakriti*), they will lead us to bondage, while when we engage them in the service of the Supreme under the tutelage of spiritual nature (*para prakriti*), they will lead us to liberation and to pure *bhakti*.

The word *vikara*, "transformation" or "change", is also used to indicate the six stages (*sad guna*) of every manifestation in this world: birth, growth, staying, generation of byproducts, decay, and death.

VERSE 8

अमानित्वमदम्भित्वमहिंसा क्षान्तिरार्जवम् ।

amānitvamadambhitvamahiṁsā kṣāntirārjavam ।

आचार्योपासनं शौचं स्थैर्यमात्मविनिग्रहः ॥ १३-८ ॥

ācāryopāsanam śaucam sthairyamātmavinigrahaḥ ॥ 13-8 ॥

amanitvam: not boasting; *adambhitvam*: lack of arrogance; *ahimsa*: freedom from hatred; *ksantih*: tolerance; *arjavam*: straightforwardness; *acarya upasanam*: approaching the *acharya*; *saucam*: cleanliness; *sthairyam*: steadfastness; *atma vinigrahaḥ*: self control.

"Freedom from the desire for honors, lack of arrogance, freedom from hatred, as well as tolerance, simplicity, the act of

approaching the *acharya*, cleanliness, determination, self control,

The points mentioned by Krishna in these verses are also confirmed in several other passages of the *shastra*, for example in *Bhagavata Purana* (11.10.6), in Krishna's instructions to Uddhava: *amany amatsaro dakso, nirmamo drdha sauhrdah, asatvaro 'rtha jijnasur, anasuyur amogha vak*. A good student is not interested in "making a career", but simply in the genuine cultivation and realization of knowledge. This means he does not want to receive special honors or positions, therefore he is not envious of the honors and the positions of others; most notably he is not envious of the position of the *guru*, and he is not happily anticipating the idea of taking his place.

Unfortunately in the course of Kali yuga, almost all major disciplic successions have grown into powerful institutions, where materialistic interests find scope in the pursuit of control over funds, properties, and followers. This creates opportunities for attractive careers for impostors and exploiters, especially for those who are clever or mentally imbalanced enough to prefer power games over the healthy ordinary and harmless forms of basic sense gratification that are not contrary to the principles of *dharma*, starting from truthfulness. In turn, this explains why so many great *acharyas* who established successful lineages live short lives, sometimes poisoned by their own foremost associates and followers. Of course this scenario can be avoided if the students are properly qualified in *ahimsa*, or absence of hatred and violence: only a non-violent person can truly acquire knowledge, so we should always be very wary when we encounter "religious" people who are overtly or covertly violent towards innocent creatures.

In his instructions to Uddhava, the words *amani* and *amatsara* are very closely connected (and again recalled by the word *anasuyuh*,

"free from envy") establishing the primary qualification of a true and dharmic seeker of knowledge. The word *daksha* ("skillful", "expert") summarizes in *Bhagavata Purana* a number of other qualities detailed in these 4 verses of *Bhagavad gita*, namely simplicity, self control, proper choice of residence and so on - as these are all intelligent decisions whose value was learned from experience.

The word *adambhitvam*, translated as "freedom from arrogance", is strictly connected to *amanitvam* or "freedom from the desire for honors". Very often, people are suffering from lack of self esteem and self confidence because they confuse humility with humiliation; we must therefore clarify this misconception.

The word *nirmama*, "free from sense of possession", equates with *Gita's* instructions in these verses on *vairagya*, *asakti*, *anabhisvanga*, *sama cittatva* and *nirahankara*. By and large, the *brahmana* (anyone who sincerely pursues knowledge) should remain detached from the ordinary traps of family and society. In the *brahmacharya* stage, from age 5 to 15 or 17, the student is physically too young to get entangled in social responsibilities and he remains as a son in the house of the *guru*. After graduation, at the age of 17, the student usually chooses a suitable wife and as a norm generates or adopts at least one son to repay his debt to his own ancestors. However, he does not take pride in producing many children, or flaunting his beautiful and lavishly decorated wife in social gatherings, or in accumulating unnecessary properties or wealth. He does not even like to be an honored guest at public scholarly opportunities, to show off his learning and exalted position: all these are merely distractions, a waste of time and energy. The relationship between the disciple and the *guru* or *acharya* should always remain a personal matter, focused on the genuine transmission of knowledge, and free from any materialistic consideration.

This is possible only when the disciple is truly detached from attraction to self-aggrandizement and hunger for power.

These five verses of chapter 13 (8 to 12) that describe knowledge (*jnana*) are very important to study, and we strongly recommend our readers to memorize and quote them as much as possible. Unfortunately, the current general opinion of people about knowledge is quite different, and involves arrogance, conceit, and a strong material identification and attachment for social position. A "learned scholar" especially wants to make a career in academia and society, and obtain titles and recognition, because according to the degraded present academic system, without such official institutional endorsement, one does not have fair chances to engage in his/ her proper occupation. The hypertrophy of government control and financial lobbies has created a sort of mafia that obstructs and prevents independent and unbiased thinking and learning (and teaching). Standardized school education is strictly enforced under the pretext of promoting culture and literacy, but it is actually used to restrict the field of knowledge within politically accepted limits, to better control and exploit the population. This applies to all levels of schools, from primary to the highest levels of university, as well as to the field of publications, because publishing houses are also controlled and used by the System.

However, there is a way out - the growing sense of independence and the grass-root spreading of internet communication and social media, that facilitates home schooling, self-employment, self-publishing, alternative education, and free exchange of ideas, including debates.

Traditional academic institutions and commercial publishing houses are losing their power and control, and this means that individuals have now the opportunity to teach/ learn privately in courses and seminars independently from the academic system, and to publish their books privately and make them available to

their contacts and to the public, without being limited by the decisions of the political and financial lobbies.

The next step towards freedom in this extraordinary social evolution of our times is self sufficiency for basic requirements such as food and energy, because most genuine intellectuals today are severely limited by their ordinary financial needs, that force them to take up "day jobs" that consume all their time and energies without affording them any opportunity to actually engage in the work that would be their greatest contribution to humanity. This also applies to the ordinary teaching and research jobs - dependent or employed - within the mainstream academic system, that severely restrict the scope of studies and transmission of knowledge by setting commercially oriented and politically acceptable limits. Such jobs only appear to be a proper engagement for intellectuals, but in reality they are not different from all the other servile occupations.

In the Vedic system, intellectuals - *brahmanas* - never depend on anyone else, especially not on an adharmic or asuric government, because the exploration, pursuance, preservation and transmission of knowledge must not be subjected to political control, guidelines or influence. How to re-establish the original Vedic system? We can start by reviewing our life priorities, including the desire for honors and career that push intellectuals into the trap of political subservience. We can give greater importance to simplicity, self control and frugality of life, applying also the other principles of knowledge mentioned in these verses - such as renouncing attachment and gratification (the possession and control of the sense objects), giving less importance to family life and social interaction, and more importance to solitary and peaceful life, where one can totally become dedicated to knowledge.

There is a growing body of resources, know-how and support structure opportunities, to facilitate the self-sufficiency of

individuals or very small communities, through permaculture and even urban gardening, home-level renewable energy production (solar, wind, biogas), re-purposing and re-cycling materials and objects, DIY (do-it-yourself) techniques and basic requirements for daily necessities such as bread, jams, preserves, snacks, drinks, cleaning products, cosmetics, clothing and ornaments, toys, etc. It is now possible for most people to start living off-grid and without the need of a regular salary, which means that we are not bound to a regular job and all that is involved in it (social obligations etc), and we can really engage in the true purpose of human life.

VERSE 9

इन्द्रियार्थेषु वैराग्यमनहंकार एव च ।

indriyārtheṣu vairāgyamanahānkāra eva ca ।

जन्ममृत्युजराव्याधिदुःखदोषानुदर्शनम् ॥ १३-९ ॥

janmamṛtyujarāvyaādhiduhkhadoṣānudarśanam ॥ 13-9 ॥

indriya arthesu: in the objects of the senses; *vairagyam*: renunciation; *anahankarah*: freedom from the sense of doership; *eva*: certainly; *ca*: and; *janma*: birth; *mrityu*: death; *jara*: old age; *vyadhi*: disease; *duhkha*: suffering; *dosa*: the defect; *anudarsanam*: seeing clearly.

renunciation towards the objects of the senses, freedom from the sense of doership, as well as the clear perception of the inherent sufferings and problems of birth, death, old age and disease,

The importance of detachment from material identifications, possession and gratification continues to be stated in these crucial verses. Any intelligent and sincere person will understand that such material identifications and attachments are the direct cause of further entanglement in the cycle of births and deaths, the root ignorance that causes all sufferings.

Deluded people, who are strongly identified with their material body, fall so deeply into ignorance that they even mistake *dharma* for *adharma*, and *adharma* for *dharma* (18.31-32). According to the delusional and dangerous casteist mentality, birth prejudice is the essence of all *dharma* and religious knowledge, and attachment to materialistic society and family life is considered the perfection of religious life for "high caste" Hindus. The concepts of scholarly erudition, seminal or ideological descent ("spiritual lineage"), high birth and parentage, social prestige, position of honor in gatherings and functions, are all manifestations of *ahankara* ("I am the doer") and as such, they are clear evidence of serious ignorance and confusion.

Ordinary materialistic people celebrate the birth of their children as a happy event, because they consider this physical body as the all in all, that enables one to enjoy sense gratification and all its attending circumstances. In Vedic society there are no unwanted children and there is usually no abortion, because all sexual relationships are automatically treated as marriage and everyone has access to safe herbal preventive contraception. However, even in the most favorable circumstances, birth involves a great amount of suffering for the mother and especially for the child, as described in various texts, for example in *Bhagavata Purana* (3.31.1-32). The purpose of human life is therefore liberation from the material conditionings that cause reincarnation, and this is done through the genuine realization of transcendental knowledge, as per the instructions of Krishna.

Family life is generally not favorable to spiritual progress because it reinforces bodily identification, as most of its exchanges and interactions are based on physical contact and roles. But all children are born out of sexual intercourse, and sensual gratification is considered totally legitimate and even sacred when pursued in a dharmic way. Also, a genuine devotee of Krishna will remain protected from attachments because s/he sees his/ her family members as servants of Krishna, and her/ his house as Krishna's house; s/he will consume good food and other pleasurable things as *prasadam* after offering them to Krishna, and worship the Deity of Krishna regularly as the owner and head of the household.

However, it takes a very strong spiritual consciousness to remain detached from bodily identification when our senses are fully engaged in experiencing the greatest pleasures of material life. The danger is very real, and clearly described in many scriptures, especially in the *Bhagavata Purana*, where we find warnings about material attachments and identifications for example in Kapila's teachings (3.31.29-35, 3.31.39-46) and Prahlada's teachings (7.5.5, 7.6.1-18).

Complete renunciation is not the answer, especially in Kali yuga, when taking *sannyasa* is a very risky choice, often causing degradation more than purification. Indeed, the artificial and superficial acceptance of the order of *sannyasa* can truly be the last snare of illusion, therefore it is not recommended at all: *asvamedham gavalambham sannyasam pala paitrkam, devarena sutotpattim kalau panca vivarjayet. Brahma vaivarta Purana* quoted by Chaitanya as in *Chaitanya charitamrita (Adi lila, 17.164)* states, "In this age of Kali, five acts are forbidden: the *asvamedha yajna*, the *gomedha yajna*, the acceptance of the order of *sannyasa*, the offering of oblations of flesh to the forefathers, and a man's begetting children in his brother's wife."

In order to actually understand the teachings of Vedic tradition on this and other important issues, we need to remember that the *Vedas* do not absolutely prescribe or forbid any specific action, because what is medicine for one can be poison for another, and vice versa. There are no "commandments" or blind allegiance in the Vedic system, not even to a *guru* or spiritual lineage (as in a church, for example), because *dharma* and knowledge must be based on personal self realization, and they are dynamic and not static.

In abrahamic ideologies, dogma and fatwas are handed down from the politically established "religious authorities" and the general people are obliged to accept and obey them without questioning, because they have nothing to do with intelligence or wisdom, or even with common sense, decency, conscience and fundamental ethical principles. In fact, the litmus test of one's belonging to an abrahamic faith is the willingness to go against intelligence, wisdom, common sense, conscience and ethics, in order to execute the order of the "established religious authorities".

The Vedic system, summarized in the teachings of *Bhagavad gita*, is diametrically opposite. Krishna explains to Arjuna that he should not hesitate to kill his elders and teachers because they are aggressors, having come to the battlefield to wage an unjust aggressive war against him and his brothers. Such misled elders have chosen an adharmic behavior and they cannot be allowed to damage the *prajas* and the kingdom any further. Arjuna must be ready to overcome his attachments and identification and kill his own family members, but not because the priests are telling him to do so, on the basis of some pseudo moralistic fatwa. He is certainly not going to kill harmless animals, women and children or other innocent civilians, or cartoonists, intellectual dissidents, secular activists, libertarians, non-believers of any persuasion, or anyone who refuses to submit to the priests' unreasonable and adharmic

demands. He is also not going to kill or harm anyone on the basis of race, ethnic group, nationality, or any other birth/ bodily consideration.

It is very important that we understand that the concept of *dharmayuddha* has nothing in common with the so called "holy war" or "religious justice" or "moral police" of abrahamics. In the Vedic system, one can only use force against an aggressor - a person who has already started to attack us with dangerous weapons or clearly manifesting the intention to cause harm to us, to our dependents or to good innocent people.

As a general rule, one should also avoid all kinds of foul play even against aggressors. Krishna never told Arjuna to assassinate Duryodhana in secret, even after Duryodhana had repeatedly attempted to kill the Pandavas and their mother by stealth - by poisoning their food, by torching the house where they were sleeping, and so on. In extreme circumstances, when an adharmic aggressor is too powerful, too well protected, or too sneaky to be fought in the normal manner, a dharmic warrior can resort to stealth and extreme strategies. But these must be carefully chosen from time to time, with the utmost attention to preserving the spirit of dharmic action.

VERSE 10

असक्तिरनभिष्वङ्गः पुत्रदारगृहादिषु ।

asaktiranabhiṣvaṅgaḥ putradāragṛhādiṣu ।

नित्यं च समचित्तत्वमिष्टानिष्टोपपत्तिषु ॥ १३-१० ॥

nityam ca samacittatvamīṣṭāniṣṭopapattiṣu ।। 13-10।।

asaktih: freedom from attachment; *anabhisvngah*: without identifying with emotions and situations; *putra dara griha adisu*: regarding the sons, the wife, the house etc; *nityam*: always; *ca*: and; *sama cittatvam*: equal attitude; *ista*: desired; *anista*: unwanted; *upapattisu*: on receiving.

freedom from attachment, detachment from all association, including the sense of belonging towards children, wife, home etc, as well as equal attitude when receiving the pleasant and the unpleasant,

The qualities of knowledge mentioned in this verse confirm the points of the previous verse and the considerations about choosing *dharma* above the sense of belonging, possession and identification that are characteristic of bodily relationships with family and society.

Krishna insists so much on detachment because bodily or otherwise material identification is the root of all ignorance, and creates the divisive mentality that is characteristic of the *asuras*. The *asuras* are those who attack others to impose their own domination and to exploit people and resources; we could also call them "imperialists".

When we understand that *dharma* consists of the eternal and universal principles of natural ethics (compassion, truthfulness, cleanliness, self-control, etc) and is supported by intelligence (*buddhi*), we become able to choose *dharma* over bodily identifications and attachments, sense gratification, and political loyalties.

As we have already mentioned at the close of the previous chapter, transcendental knowledge and *bhakti* are non-different from *sanatana dharma* (*dharma amritam idam*). So whatever we have discussed in these verses about choosing *dharma* over bodily

identifications and attachments directly applies to choosing transcendental knowledge and *bhakti* over bodily identifications and attachments.

Transcendental knowledge, or *atma vidya*, is non-different from *bhakti*, because as soon as we realize our true spiritual nature and identity (*prakriti* and *purusha*), we immediately connect to the supreme Consciousness in an attitude of service and belonging, that we can define as love.

To rise to a higher level in the interpretation of these verses according to the *bhakti* consciousness, we can turn to one of the most famous *bhakti* literature traditions. In *Chaitanya charitamrita* (*Madhya*, 22.78-80), Chaitanya is quoted to present 26 prominent qualities of a genuine devotee as follows: 1. *kripalu* (kind and accessible to everyone), 2. *akrita droha* (not hostile to anyone), 3. *satya sara* (always dedicated to truthfulness and to the essence of things), 3. *sama* (equally disposed towards everyone), 4. *nidosa* (free from bad behavior and bad qualities), 5. *vadanya* (generous, magnanimous), 6. *mridu* (with a sweet disposition), 7. *suci* (clean and pure), 8. *akinchana* (detached from all material identifications and possessions or affiliations), 9. *sarva upakaraka* (working for the benefit of all creatures), 10. *santa* (serene and peaceful), 11. *krishnaika sarana* (depending on God only), 12. *akama* (free from material desires), 13. *aniha* (selfless), 14. *sthira* (determined, stable), 15. *vijita sad guna* (having vanquished the six negative tendencies and material demands of the body and mind), 16. *mita bhuk* (eating frugally), 17. *apramatta* (free from illusion and delusion), 18. *manada* (respecting others), 19. *amani* (not demanding respect for oneself), 20. *gambhira* (deep and thoughtful), 21. *karuna* (compassionate and sympathetic towards the sufferings of others), 22. *maitra* (friendly), 23. *kavi* (poetic), 24. *daksha* (skillful or expert), 25. *mauni* (grave and silent when required).

In this light we can better understand the statement of the *Bhagavata Purana* (5.18.12): *yasyasti bhaktir bhagavaty akincana, sarvair gunais tatra samasate surah, harav abhaktasya kuto mahad guna, manorathenasati dhavato bahih*, "Wherever there is pure devotion to Bhagavan, also all the good qualities of the Devas are found, while a person who has no devotion towards Hari, and runs around pursuing external things under the dictation of the mind, can never have such great qualities".

This means that a true devotee is recognized by his/ her qualities as mentioned by the scriptures, and by the lack of interest towards external things such as material identifications, bodily concerns, mundane attachments and so on. On the other hand, a materialistic person may gain so many external possessions and positions, but because s/he is always ready to drop everything to run after the next illusion, all the good qualities and achievements s/he may have obtained become immediately lost and are therefore useless.

VERSE 11

मयि चानन्ययोगेन भक्तिरव्यभिचारिणी ।

mayi cānanyayogena bhaktiravyabhicāriṇī ।

विविक्तदेशसेवित्वमरतिर्जनसंसदि ॥ १३-११ ॥

viviktadeśasevitvamaratirjanasaṁsadi ॥ 13-11 ॥

mayi: to me; *ca*: and; *ananya*: totally focused; *yogena*: by the connection/ union; *bhaktih*: of devotion; *avyabhicarini*: uninterrupted; *vivikta desa sevitam*: performing service in a

solitary place; *aratih*: without attachment; *jana samsadi*: to meeting people/ the company of others.

totally and constantly focusing on me through *bhakti yoga*, performing service in a solitary place, without attachment for meeting others,

Krishna's teachings never lose sight of the crucial requirement of *bhakti*, the loving connection between the individual consciousness and the supreme Consciousness.

We have already seen that the individual *jivatman* is unable to control the *prakriti*, but is forced to submit to her, engaging in activities all the time although the *purusha* is not the *karta*, the "doer" of the action. Verse 3.5 stated: *na hi kascit kshanam api jatu tishthaty akarma-krit, karyate hy avasah karma sarvah prakriti-jair gunaih*, "Never, at any time, can a person remain without acting even for one moment, because he is forced to into action by all the *gunas* born from *prakriti*."

Again verse 18.40 will conclude: *na tad asti prithiviyam va divi deveshu va punah, sattvam prakriti jair muktam yad ebhik syat tribhir gunaih*, "There is not even one single person, either in this world or in the world of the Devas, who is free from the influence of the three *gunas* created by the *prakriti*".

The difference between the deluded souls and the wise souls is the conscious choice to serve the divine Consciousness: *mahatmanas tu mam partha daivim prakritim asritah, bhajanty ananya-manaso jñatva bhutadim avyayam*, "However, o son of Pritha (Arjuna), the great souls take shelter in the divine nature and serve me with undivided attention, knowing that I am the inexhaustible origin of all beings" (9.13).

By directly connecting to the supreme Consciousness in a spirit of service, we will happily be engaged on the transcendental level,

because the supreme Consciousness is directing the divine Prakriti (4.6, 8.4, 9.8, 9.10).

To be able to remain on that level of consciousness without interruption (*avyabhicharini*), we need to carefully manage our life habits and choices and avoid disruptions caused by others. Living in a solitary place is therefore one of the most important requirements, because everyone needs silence and peace in order to train and engage the mind in the proper way. In this verse this concept is explained with the words *vivikta desa sevityam*, that had already been mentioned in verse 6.10. This expression refers to a quiet place, free from disturbances and distractions, pure and clean, and comfortable enough so that our meditation is not interrupted by distress signals from the body and the senses. Also, verse 13.11 specifies that one should not only live in a secluded and peaceful place, but that one should also live alone (*ekaki*) in order to avoid the disturbances created by people who are not interested in the cultivation of *yoga* and spiritual life. This will certainly help us to remain *amogha vak*, free from unnecessary talking or *prajalpa*.

Again, the expression *arati jana samsadi* indicates that one should be free from the need or desire to be in the company of others. The attraction or attachment for social life is caused by a fundamental sense of insecurity and fear, by a constant unpleasant chattering and nagging of the mind, that is temporarily covered by louder noise and stronger sensory stimulation. In this way the anxious and confused person seeks the moving crowds, songs, dance, entertainment, fun, and all the various types of sense gratification that distract the mind, as well as the hypnotic effects of intoxication, foolish television shows, and so on.

There is nothing wrong with a little fun or entertainment, that can help us relax the mind and give new strength to the senses, but we should not be attached to it or allow it to control our mind. It should rather be the other way around: we should control our mind,

and control the type of entertainment we allow it - sattvic or preferably pure sattvic. As we have already mentioned regarding regulated sense gratification (2.64, 2.65, 2.68, 3.6, 3.7, 3.41, 4.22, 4.26, 5.8-11, 6.16-17, 6.24, 7.11, 9.27), the secret to remaining free from material entanglement is to accept whatever sattvic pleasures we obtain naturally and to offer them to the supreme Consciousness in a spirit of service.

The practice of *bhakti yoga* is also subject to the principles of *yama* and *niyama*, the regulated prescriptions and abstentions that protect us from adharmic, rajasic and tamasic contaminations. Such rules are favorable to *bhakti*, and they are meant to support us in our development and service.

VERSE 12

अध्यात्मज्ञाननित्यत्वं तत्त्वज्ञानार्थदर्शनम् ।

adhyātmajñānanityatvaṁ tattvajñānārthadarśanam ।

एतज्ज्ञानमिति प्रोक्तमज्ञानं यदतोऽन्यथा ॥ १३-१२ ॥

etajñānamiti proktamajñānaṁ yadato'nyathā ।। 13-12 ।।

adhyatma: the original soul; *jnana*: knowledge; *nityatvam*: the eternity/ constant existence; *tattva*: reality; *jnana artha darsanam*: the realization of the value of knowledge; *etat*: (all) this; *jnanam*: *jnana*; *iti*: like this; *proktam*: called; *ajnanam*: *ajnana*; *yat*: that; *atah*: than this; *anyatha*: any other.

the constant awareness of the original soul, the realization of the value of knowledge: all this is called *jnana*, and anything else is *ajnana*."

These two last items in the description of true knowledge summarize its meaning and scope, showing how in fact all the other items in the list are simply expansions of the consciousness of the Supreme Self, characterized by the stability of spiritual awareness. They would be meaningless without the proper consciousness of the transcendental spiritual nature of the Supreme Self or *adhyatma*.

One who is truly situated in the supreme consciousness is free from *ahankara* and *mamatva*, and therefore is never arrogant or hateful, because he knows that all *jivatmans* are parts of the *paramatman*. The awakening of Self realization also produces a strong desire to harmonize with the Supreme in loving service, therefore one spontaneously approaches the great souls to be inspired and instructed and engaged properly. A person established in Self realization remains balanced and conscious in all circumstances, perceiving things as they are in truth beyond the superficial appearances, and keeping proper consciousness and awareness as the first priorities in life.

The word *adhyatma* ("the original soul") is particularly important here because it indicates a level of consciousness that is higher than the individual *jivatman*. We could call it *krishna chaitanya* or Krishna Consciousness, but we must be very careful not to misunderstand the definition as a superficial sectarian allegiance to some kind of organized religion. A proper realization of *adhyatma* is the key to actually understanding the original meaning of Krishna Consciousness - the *acintya bheda abheda tattva* that reconciles the apparently opposed perspectives of *dvaita* and *advaita*.

Adhyatma refers to the pure Consciousness, that is not bound by any material limitation, and that is the origin and the meaning of everything that exists. When the individual *atman* becomes truly conscious of the *adhyatma*, individuality shifts from the separatist

mentality from the harmonization with the Supreme, and all activities - thinking, feeling, willing, acting - are lovingly focused in the Supreme only. The individual realizes he is simply a *shakti* of the Supreme, a limb (*amsa*) of his unlimited transcendental body, and everything else becomes irrelevant. There is no "personalism versus impersonalism" for a truly realized soul: all contradictory dualities become reconciled, because the Supreme includes all realities and all perspectives.

A pure devotee forgets himself or herself in his/ her meditation and service, immersing completely into the consciousness of the Supreme, so in a sense we can say that his/ her individuality becomes lost on the level of consciousness. Simultaneously, individuality continues to exist eternally in the loving exchanges between the *bhakta* (the devotee) and the *bhokta* (the object of devotion). There is no point in trying to intellectually understand this simultaneous truth of two apparently opposite concepts, because it is explicitly declared as inconceivable (*acintya*). People should stop wasting time and energy into childish squabbles over "who is right and who is wrong" on the subject of personal and impersonal perspectives of God.

All differences are automatically solved when one becomes able to directly see (*darshana*) truth in its greater picture, in a vision that reconciles all apparent opposites; at that point, there is nothing else except engaging in the picture itself, because we realize we are also part of the picture and we have a duty or function to perform there. This is the *tattva jnana artha darshana* described as the sum and substance at the conclusion of these verses.

Active union with the Great Picture of Reality (*yoga*) becomes the complete, constant and permanent (*ananya*) focus of consciousness, precisely because we are already connected with Everything. What else could we desire or need to search? True *jnana* dissipates or destroys the apparent changes of the *kshetra*,

and our consciousness remains fully absorbed in eternity (*sat*), cognizance (*cit*) and bliss (*ananda*).

VERSE 13

ज्ञेयं यत्तत्प्रवक्ष्यामि यज्ज्ञात्वामृतमश्नुते ।

jñeyam yattatpravakṣyāmi yajjñātvāmṛtamaśnute ।

अनादि मत्परं ब्रह्म न सत्तन्नासदुच्यते ॥ १३-१३ ॥

anādi matparam brahma na sattannāsaducyate ॥ 13-13 ॥

jneyam: what is to be known; *yat*: which; *tat*: that; *pravakṣyami*: I will tell; *yat*: which; *jñatva*: by knowing; *amritam*: nectar/immortality; *asnute*: one tastes; *anadi*: without beginning; *mat*: me; *param*: supreme; *brahma*: Brahman; *na*: not; *sat*: sat; *tat*: that; *na*: not; *asat*: asat; *ucyate*: is called.

"I will tell you what is to be known, whose knowledge enables one to taste immortality. My supreme Brahman is the beginningless reality, and it is said that it is neither *sat* nor *asat*.

The first word of this verse, *jneyam*, is directly linked with Arjuna's question in the first verse of the chapter (*jnanam jneyam ca*) and with the very identity of Vishnu, God, as we will see in verses 17 and 18 (*ca tad jneyam grasishnu prabhavisnu ca*). As explained in verse 19 of this same chapter, a devotee can attain true *bhava* (devotional absorption, the nature of Brahman as consciousness) only in this realization (*mad bhakta etad vijñaya*

mad bhava upapadyate). This is also reinforced by the word *asnute* ("s/he tastes") that immediately reminds us of the concept of *rasa* ("taste"), connected with the various feelings or sentiments within the consciousness, especially in relationships.

How to achieve this level? By listening or hearing the discourse (*pravacan*) of the great realized souls, the *acharyas* and the Personalities of God. It is true that normally this hearing process (*sravana*) develops in the personal presence of the *guru*, but we need to understand that it is not merely a physical activity. Just like it is not sufficient to look at the pages of a book to actually understand the meaning of its content, it is not sufficient to sit in front of a *guru* or *bhakta* and let his/ her voice into our ears in order to actually absorb the teachings. If we do not pay sufficient attention and do not accept the teachings sincerely to apply them in practice, it will take a very long time for such discourses to even make a dent into our thick layers of ignorance, and chances are that the weeds of *anarthas* (pride, arrogance, power hunger, delusional identifications etc) will actually invade our hearts and prevent any real realization with a toxic overgrowth. On the other hand, a sincere student will be able to listen to the self realized souls and the Personalities of God even without their physical presence, by associating with them on the spiritual level (through a heart connection), on the subtle or astral level, or simply by reading their books. This is certainly more effective than absent-mindedly sitting in front of the physical body of the *guru*, without the sincere resolution to try to understand and actually practice the teachings. And what should such teachings be about? The most important teachings are those presented by Krishna in *Bhagavad gita*, the first among the *prasthanas traya*, the fundamental texts of Vedic knowledge.

The key words in this verse are *anadi mat param brahma*. They constitute the object of the knowledge announced by Krishna, and

described by the two adjoining parts of the verse ("whose knowledge enables one to taste immortality" and "it is said to be neither *sat* nor *asat*"). As it often happens in Vedic scriptures, a sentence may contain a number of layers of meanings that can take us deeper and deeper into the realization of Reality. Literally, this sentence means: "me/ mine", "supreme", and "Brahman" (the universal Consciousness).

The most popular translation of *mat param brahma* is "that Brahman of which I am supreme". In the next chapter (14.27) Krishna will state that he is the foundation and origin of the Brahman (*brahmano hi pratistha aham*), and already in 7.7 he had said, "nothing is superior to me, everything rests on me" (*mattah parataram nanyat kincid asti... mayi sarvam idam protam*). In this interpretation, the word *mat* indicates possession or relationship.

As we have already seen, the definition Brahman applies both to the supreme *purusha* and to the supreme *prakriti*; when it is applied to *prakriti* it specifically indicates the *mahat tattva* ("great reality") that is the non-manifested entirety of the cosmic manifestation. This is confirmed in *Bhagavata Purana* (1.5.20): *idam hi visvam bhagavan ivetarah*, "all this universe is simply a transformation of Bhagavan".

The expression *mat param* was also found at the conclusion of chapter 11, in verse 55, where it was translated as "me as the Supreme". Here is the verse: *mat karma krin mat paramo mad bhaktah sanga varjitah, nirvairah sarva -bhuteshu yah sa mam eti pandava*, "My devotee is engaged in working for me, and sees me as the supreme (reality). S/he has abandoned all association/ affiliation/ identification, and has no enmity towards any being. (In this way, my devotee) comes to me, o son of Pandu."

Therefore the next possible translation of this verse would read, "me, as the Supreme Brahman".

This interpretation, too, is confirmed by Arjuna (10.12), and indirectly by all the Rishis mentioned by Arjuna to substantiate his realization. It is also found in many verses of the *Bhagavata Purana* (1.2.11, 3.24.10, 3.29.36, 3.33.8, 4.24.60, 7.1.19, 8.24.38), as well as in other passages of Vedic scriptures (for example, *vasudevat paro brahman*). Both meanings are reinforced by the word *anadi*, "beginning-less", or "eternal". The concept of eternity or freedom from death is also contained in the word *amrita*, that we find in this verse.

We become able to understand this verse only through the deep meaning of the word *param*.

On the materialistic level, *param* ("supreme") indicates the most powerful or highest among a number of individual persons or objects, presented in a comparative way. When we say that a person is the greatest, on the material level it means that his greatness (power, knowledge, ability etc) is compared to the greatness of others, and is found superior, while the others are inferior.

However, on the spiritual/ transcendental level indicated by this Sanskrit word, the Supreme does not have terms of comparison, because all other existences are part of the existence of the Supreme. We can only understand this point when we give up the dualistic mentality, as confirmed very clearly by Krishna himself in *Bhagavad gita* (2.45, 4.22, 5.3, 5.25, 7.27, 7.28, 15.5) and in many other Vedic scriptures. Duality is the only source of fear (*bhayam dvitiya*, *Bhagavata Purana*, 11.2.37).

Only by overcoming duality we become able to taste the nectar of that which is *na sat tan na asat*, "not *sat* and not *asat*" - where the word *sat* contains the multiple meanings of eternal, spiritual, good, positive, and so on, while the word *asat* is the exact opposite. A very similar concept was expressed in 9.19: *tapamy aham aham*

varsham ngrihnamy utsrijami ca, amritam caiva mrityus ca sad asac caham arjuna, "I am the origin of the heat (of the sun), I pour down or withhold the rains. I am immortality and death as well. I am *sat* and *asat*, too, o Arjuna."

The Supreme Reality, Brahman, contains everything and is the origin and foundation of everything; the perception of this Supreme Reality is simply clouded by the illusory and temporary manifestation of *ahankara*, or material identification, that is based on duality and separation. As stated in the first verse of the *Maha Upanishad*: *eka hi vai narayana asi*, "only Vishnu exists".

Another reading of the verse ties *anadi* and *mat* in one word only, *anadimat*, where *mat* becomes the suffix *man*, "that which is", in this case, "that which is eternal". In this way, the personal pronoun *mam* is omitted, although not excluded or denied. Even without repeating it in this verse, we already had sufficient evidence from Krishna himself to the effect of the identity of Krishna as the supreme Brahman.

Another interesting point in this verse is the application of the knowledge to the transcendental realization or attainment that brings immortality (*amritam*). Of course, immortality does not refer to the indefinite extension of material life in one's body, because that is a dangerous delusion: even the residents of the highest planetary systems will eventually have to leave their bodies at the time of death.

True, there are bodies that can last much longer than a human body, but all material forms are inevitably going to dissolve. If we want to live longer, however, we need to take a different type of body, like those born on the higher planetary system, and develop the proper consciousness, mental powers and engagement, otherwise our extended years will just be a prolongation of suffering and disappointment.

VERSE 14

सर्वतः पाणिपादं तत्सर्वतोऽक्षिशिरोमुखम् ।

sarvataḥ pāṇipādaṁ tatsarvato'kṣiśiromukham ।

सर्वतः श्रुतिमल्लोके सर्वमावृत्य तिष्ठति ॥ १३-१४ ॥

sarvataḥ śrutimalloke sarvamāvṛtya tiṣṭhati ।। 13-14।।

sarvataḥ: everywhere; *pani*: hands; *padam*: feet; *tat*: that; *sarvataḥ*: everywhere; *aksi*: eyes; *sirah*: heads; *mukham*: face; *sarvataḥ*: everywhere; *srutiman*: possessing hearing/ who listens; *loke*: in the world/ in people; *sarvam*: everything; *avṛitya*: covering; *tisthati*: remains.

"That (Purusha) has hands and feet everywhere, eyes and heads and faces everywhere. He listens everywhere, and always resides everywhere, covering everything.

The supreme Brahman is also the Maha Purusha, the Virata rupa or universal form that has been described in so many verses in the previous chapters. By understanding this Purusha we become able to understand how Isvara, Shakti and all the *jivas* are inconceivably One and individually distinct. Then the illusion of material opposition dissipates, but the loving relationship and *bhava* of devotional service do not disappear - rather, they become stronger and stronger because intelligence and consciousness are better focused (*aikantika bhakti*) as Krishna has already mentioned in 2.41 (*vyayasayatmika buddhih ekeha*).

When the *bhakta* enters (*visate*, 8.11, 18.55, *pravestum*, 11.54) the inconceivable transcendental Body of Consciousness, s/he realizes his/ her nature as limb or body part (*anga*, *amsa*) of the Supreme and spontaneously functions as such, serving the Supreme Sum Total of Reality. This is not possible for those who have not

attained the Brahman and Paramatma realizations and therefore continue to identify themselves and others on the basis of the material body and mind, and to think that they can obtain happiness by harming someone else. A solid and true Brahman realization will enable us to see Bhagavan as something more than a material projection, and to directly perceive and connect with the Soul of all souls everywhere.

This is why this verse explains that the realization of Bhagavan must include the presence of the Supreme everywhere (*sarvatah*, repeated several times), in each living being and even in every atom. At the level of Brahman, this presence consists of the eternal existence of consciousness (*sat*), at the level of Paramatma, this presence is knowledge and realization of the connection of all consciousness (*cit*), and at the level of Bhagavan, it is pure happiness and love. In Krishna's *avatara lila*, *sat* is represented by Balarama/ Shiva, *cit* is represented by Krishna/ Vishnu, and *ananda* is represented by the Mother Goddess. Without Radha there cannot be Krishna, without Yogamaya there cannot be Vishnu, and similarly Krishna appears after Baladeva, and the *avatars* of Vishnu appear (manifest) in this world from the root of Sadashiva, also called Sankarshana. Here the foolish materialists may fall in the trap of illusion and come to think that one of these three must be "more important" or "supreme" in regard to the other two, but that is a big mistake.

There cannot be any opposition or even division among these three; this is why Baladeva, Jagannatha and Subhadra sit on the same throne and are one and the same. Still, they manifest as three distinct Personalities of God to engage their devotees in blissful and loving exchanges (*bhava*). This will be mentioned in verse 19, where Krishna clearly states that a devotee can attain the perfection of devotional service only through this realization. No intelligent and honest person will say that such meaning supports an

impersonalistic (*mayavadi*) conclusion. A *jivatma* does not have mouths and hands everywhere, neither individually nor collectively; without the Supreme Consciousness that is Isvara, all *jivatmas* would be limbs in a body where the individual soul is not present.

Jivatmas are like cells in a body: cells can have a face, eyes, hands etc only with the collective supreme consciousness within the body; similarly the *jiva* can have access to greater consciousness only as much as it enters the Krishna Consciousness. Without a clear realization of Brahman and Paramatma Consciousness, a *jiva* is *jada* ("inert") and covered by thick layers of dull ignorance in the form of the material mind and body identification (*avritya tisthati*, "remains covered"); liberation from such ignorance is a gradual process of dissipation of material identification, and culminates with the total shedding of material body and mind, replaced by the full development of the spiritual body and mind, called *siddha svarupa*.

Saying that consciousness is only possible in connection with Consciousness sounds like stating the obvious, yet most people remain unable to understand it, because they have never paused to think about the nature of consciousness itself. They continue to identify themselves as bodies and minds, and they believe that consciousness is a mysterious "function" that appears at a certain stage of material evolution; the actual fact is just the opposite - it is the eternally existing consciousness that produces matter from time to time, not matter that produces consciousness at some point along a line of progress.

In such a dangerous delusion, these people keep searching for success or "realization" - happiness, knowledge and permanent existence - in material things, attachments and identifications, and thus they slide disastrously into lower levels of consciousness and even into the asuric state of being, as we will see later.

Vedic knowledge offers us the correct perspective, supporting us with many easy and practical examples, and guiding us towards the direct personal experience of this perception of reality (*prakasa*). Consciousness manifests at a certain degree of complexity of matter only because such matter has become organized by intelligence and is therefore suitable to be used as a vehicle, and for the same reason, consciousness leaves a body when it is no more suitable for such use. If life in a material body was merely due to evolution of matter, bodies would never die but they would "evolve" continuously to become increasingly perfect and powerful, but this is not happening. All bodies - from the tiny unicellular organism to the immense whale - are vehicles for consciousness, and they only develop because of the presence of consciousness; when the consciousness overgrows that particular form, the form is simply discarded.

You can mix together all the chemicals that compose a blade of grass, but you will never be able to make it grow without the presence of consciousness. The only evolution is the evolution of intelligence that organizes matter in increasingly more complex ways and higher functions, and moves out of an old limited body to start building a new and more appropriate body through the process of reincarnation. This means that intelligence does not depend on a physical brain; a brain and a nervous system are merely the instruments used from time to time by the ever-existing intelligence, by which conscious life can express itself and perform actions.

God is described as omnipresent, but most people cannot really understand what this means. However, it is generally felt that if we pray to God, he will hear us, wherever we are. There is actually no real need to go to a temple, because we can talk to God and worship God at any time and in any place. The purpose of a holy place is to absorb the good and spiritual energy of all the spiritual

people who assembled there; for this reason temples should be highly spiritual and sattvic places, where conscious recitation of the *shastra* and loving service to Bhagavan are continued constantly. Desecration of a temple or a Deity does not hurt God in any way, but it can demoralize people and break their strength, courage and dedication, while establishing a new temple constitutes a great encouragement and a fresh source of life and energy.

On another level of meaning in this verse, we see that the Transcendental Reality is described with the help of superimposition (visualization) and refutation (explanation) that spread a golden cover on the invisible (*adrasta*) to make it visible to the material senses of the ordinary people (*loke*). The *Isha Upanishad* speaks about this merciful revealing cover, meant to facilitate our approach to the transcendental journey of Self realization. Verse 16 of this *Upanishad* prays Isvara to remove it and to appear in his sweetest and most intimate essence for his devotee, just like we see in verses 11.46 and 11.50-53 of *Bhagavad gita* - the very sweet and intimate form that is behind the mind-shattering effulgence contemplated by Arjuna in the vision of the Virat Purusha (8.9, 11.12, 11.17, 11.19, 11.24, 11.30, 13.18).

All the forms manifested by the Lord are meant to interact with us, and are created by the Ananda or Hladini Shakti: he appears in a sweet and unassuming form to reciprocate with his intimate devotees, and he appears in majestic and blazing forms to impress those who need to feel such greatness.

It is precisely to interact with us, that the Supreme manifests innumerable approaches and perspectives (*sirah*, "heads"), visions and sounds (*aksih mukham*, "eyes and mouths") as well as unlimited forms of actions and service (*pani padam*, "hands and feet") called *karma yoga* or devotional service, to engage us in his worship. Yet, all such senses are not material, even if they appear

to be so: this is confirmed in *Svetasvatara Upanishad* (3.19): *apani pado javano grahitam pasyati achakshuh sa srinoti akarnah*, "He moves without legs, takes without hands, sees without eyes and hears without ears."

VERSE 15

सर्वेन्द्रियगुणाभासं सर्वेन्द्रियविवर्जितम् ।

sarvendriyaguṇābhāsam sarvendriyavivarjitam ।

असक्तं सर्वभृच्चैव निर्गुणं गुणभोक्तृ च ॥ १३-१५ ॥

asaktam sarvabhṛccaiva nirguṇam guṇabhokṭṛ ca ॥ 13-15 ॥

sarva indriya: all the senses; *guna*: of the qualities; *abhasam*: the original source; *sarva indriya*: all the senses; *vivarjitam*: devoid of; *asaktam*: detached; *sarva bhrit*: who maintains/ supports everything/ all; *ca*: and; *eva*: certainly; *nir gunam*: without *gunas*; *guna bhoktri*: the master of the *gunas*; *ca*: and.

"(That Purusha) is the origin of all the senses and *gunas*, but is detached from all senses. He supports everything and everyone, and although he is detached from all *gunas*, he is the maintainer of the *gunas*.

The innumerable and omnipresent heads, eyes, mouths, hands and feet of the Lord are not material, or not visible to the ordinary eyes, unless they are covered by the veil of golden effulgence called *maya*, either Yogamaya or Mahamaya according to our level of consciousness.

As we have seen, the supreme Brahman, the ultimate Purusha/Prakriti, is beyond *sat* and *asat*: he is simultaneously *sat* and *asat*, and neither the one or the other; he is the origin and foundation of both, yet he is not bound by them (4.14, 8.21, 9.9, 13.33, 13.33). This means that on the material level there are no words or concepts that can really define the transcendental form: all our dictionaries in all languages are based on the duality of synonyms and contraries, affirmative and negative, therefore they cannot express what is beyond duality. Words and concepts are simply used as a reflection or a covering veil to show a shape that we can understand.

So although Brahman is the source of all senses and all qualities, he remains free from the material limitations of the senses and the opposition of the qualities. Specifically, the word *vivarjitam* indicates the action of "leaving behind", as in renunciation; in this particular case the meaning is that Brahman is completely beyond the realm of material senses and qualities.

The word *abhasa* is also very important. It includes the meanings of "manifestation, source, radiance, reflection, glimpse, indication, shining, illumination, shadow, projection", which are applied according to the context. Here the immediate sense is "source", as "origin", just like the sun is the source of its light, heat and radiance. The senses of material bodies are originated by the primary Consciousness or perception, and similarly the qualities of material nature are originated by the modes of perception of Consciousness. We will see more about the *gunas* later in the text.

Another meaning of *abhasa* is "projection", an interpretation that moves the comparison from the light to the shadow; just like the sun is the source of the sunlight, the sun is also the source of shadows and darkness, by virtue of duality - opposition or absence. The transcendental eternal and unchangeable Brahman creates the distinction between light and darkness, but it is not limited by this

duality, because it includes both, supports both (*sarva bhrit*) and remains untouched or detached (*asakta*) from both.

The word *maya*, "illusion", should not be interpreted necessarily in a negative sense. By the action of *Yogamaya*, each devotee strongly believes that Krishna is their exclusive object of affection and service - lover, husband, friend, son, father, teacher or employer - and forgets everything else. The devotees really think that Krishna needs their service, help, protection, and they even suffer feelings of sadness or despair from a separation that can only be illusory, considering that God is omnipresent by definition.

Chaitanya himself demonstrated the supreme power of *bhakti* by allowing himself to be covered by *yogamaya* - mistaking a sand dune on the beach in Puri for the Govardhana hill of Vrindavana, seeing an ordinary little boy as Krishna, mistaking the ocean for the river Yamuna, and completely losing all external consciousness during his trance periods. Should we then say that ignorance and materialistic delusion are symptoms of transcendental realization? Certainly not.

This grossly material dimension is just one among many: some dimensions are higher and purer, while some other dimensions are lower and more degraded, and tuning our consciousness into a particular dimension shapes our destiny. As the Vedas teach us, we should go from the bad to the good, from darkness to light, from death to immortality - *asato ma sad gamaya, tamaso ma jyotir gamaya, mrtyor ma amrtam gamaya* (*Bṛhad aranyaka Upanishad*, 1.3.28). It is only from the *suddha sattva*, or pure goodness, that we become able to really transcend duality.

Later on, chapter 15 will present us with the image of the Purushottama (the supreme Purusha) as the banyan tree of Reality, with branches growing downwards and roots growing upwards. This image illustrates the fact that material consciousness and

spiritual consciousness appear as exact opposites, where material consciousness is the mirrored reflection of the true reality of spiritual consciousness.

So what appears to be worse, or most degraded, on the material level, is so because the individual has fallen to a lower dimension and lost the consciousness of the higher purpose of life; thus s/he remains covered and absorbed in the slavery to his/ her own senses and mind, losing memory, intelligence and dignity. On the opposite end of reality, a pure devotee also leaves the ordinary material dimension and appears to have lost memory, intelligence and dignity, but it is because s/he has overcome the limitations of the material identifications.

It is said that happiness is only attained by those who are extremely stupid and those who are extremely intelligent, but not by those who are stationed in between.

A very stupid person is unable to realize his real position, and his sufferings are dulled by ignorance and insensitivity, enjoying the gross pleasures of life that are available even in the lowest states of existence, while a very intelligent person has found true and permanent happiness beyond the limitations of material existence. The happiness of the fool is very temporary, and slides him down lower and lower into sleep and darkness, into the levels of animal and plant life, or even duller bodies, while the happiness of the liberated soul is transcendently permanent and enables him to engage in the direct association with the Personality of God.

The mind can be used for our best advantage or become our worst enemy (6.5) and similarly we can use the senses (*indriya*) to carry us to liberation or to slavery: it only depends on the direction we are choosing - *dharma* or *adharmā*, *vidya* or *avidya*, *sura* or *asura*.

VERSE 16

बहिरन्तश्च भूतानामचरं चरमेव च ।

bahirantaśca bhūtānāmacaram caramenteva ca ।

सूक्ष्मत्वात्तदविज्ञेयं दूरस्थं चान्तिके च तत् ॥ १३-१६ ॥

sūkṣmatvāttadavijñeyam dūrastham cāntike ca tat ॥ 13-16 ॥

bahih: outside; *antah:* inside; *ca:* and; *bhutanam:* of the beings; *acaram:* non moving; *caram:* moving; *eva:* certainly; *ca:* also; *suksmatvat:* the quality of subtleness; *tad:* that; *avijneyam:* that cannot be known; *dura stham:* remaining distant; *ca:* and; *antike:* near; *ca:* and; *tat:* that.

"That (Purusha) is outside and inside all beings, moving and non-moving, and because he is extremely subtle, he cannot be known (through the gross material senses). He is very far and very near (at the same time).

The supreme Soul, the Soul of all souls, is called Param Atman. This Param Atman intrinsically exists everywhere, "inside" and "outside" (*bahih antah*), not only within the hearts of all living beings (from the Devas to the amoebas) and all atoms and subatomic particles (*anu* and *paramanu*), but even in the apparently empty spaces between atoms. He is *existence* itself - what Vedic knowledge expresses with the scientific term *sat*.

Vedic science also tells us that existence itself (*sat*) is consciousness or intelligence. There is no need to search the planets and the space (or religious beliefs) for some Great Mind that organized the entire creation, because God is *existence* itself, and existence *is* intelligence and consciousness.

Foolish materialists become atheists or superstitious bigots because they expect to find some really old man with special powers who plays with human beings and other creatures like a child plays with clay dolls after making them, and therefore they become disappointed or delude themselves into believing that they must take up the jobs that God is unable to do himself - punishing non-believers, converting everyone to a particular type of worship and commands, taking over the domination and exploitation of the planet, and so on. Thus they fall easy prey to clever adharmic propagandists and turn into *asuras*, destroying and killing and causing immense sufferings to others and even to themselves, as explained in chapters 16 and 17.

This is simply due to their ignorance of the fact that God is *existence*, and therefore he exists everywhere, as Prahlada explained to his asuric father Hiranyakasipu. Devotional sentimentalists, in their immature understanding of Transcendence, picture God as an ordinary person - albeit bigger, stronger, and with some extraordinary powers - appearing magically to save Prahlada from the repeated assassination attempts committed by his father, and they need to actually see the terrifying form of Narasimha bursting out of the hall pillar to physically pick up the evil Hiranyakasipu and kill him with his own hands. They do not realize that Prahlada had not needed to see this form, because he already perceived the presence of the Lord everywhere, as explained in his exquisite prayers and in many other famous verses in regard to this wonderful episode.

Narasimha did not appear to save his devotee Prahlada, because Prahlada had already been saved from all aggressions, and he was not in immediate danger at that time. Hiranyakasipu had just asked Prahlada to demonstrate Vishnu's omnipresence, and it was the devotee's word at stake, not his life. When Hiranyakasipu hit the pillar with his weapon, he was trying to kill Vishnu, not Prahlada:

as Hiranyakasipu, too, was a close companion of the Lord (as Vishnu's doormen Jaya and Vijaya had taken birth as Hiranyaksha and Hiranyakasipu), the Lord responded and appeared to engage him in a fighting match. It was out of love that Narasimha appeared, to show himself to Hiranyakasipu and to liberate him from the awkward position of his asuric life.

Vishnu appeared to protect all the good people of the universe by killing the evil doer, and to establish the truth about the principles of *dharma* (4.8); Prahlada, too, appeared for this specific reason, to assist the Lord in his mission by providing the triggering event for the *avatara*, working as a catalyst in the manifestation of that particular form of Vishnu. Such catalyst is always love: Vishnu appears personally only to reciprocate the sentiments and service of his devotee, and to set him as an example for those who aspire to know God. But for the superficial and simple minded materialists, Vishnu's dramatic appearance is what matters most, and turns them towards the desire to know more about God.

Chaitanya loved to hear the story of Prahlada and often chanted this verse: *namaste narasimhaya, prahlada ahlada dayine, hiranyakasipu vaksah silatanka nakhalaye, itah nrisimhah paratah nrisimhah, yatah yatah yami tatah nrisimhah, bahih nrisimhah hridaye nrisimhah, nrisimham adim saranam prapadye*, "I offer my worship to Narasimha, who gives joy to Prahlada, and who tore the body of Hiranyakasipu with his hands. There is no higher reality than Narasimha, and everywhere I go, Narasimha is there. Narasimha is outside as well as inside the heart, and I take shelter in this primordial Existence/ Being, Narasimha."

So why did Narasimha choose to burst out from the pillar, instead of annihilating Hiranyakasipu's body by some kind of subatomic reaction, such as self-combustion, or disintegration, or turning him into a stone, at the very moment the evil king had decided to cause some troubles? Because God wanted the story to be as thrilling and

interesting as possible: this is the meaning of the word *lila*, and the reason for the appearance of the *avatars* in this world. Narasimha gives pleasure to the devotees like Prahlada, by dramatically and magnificently coming to the rescue, performing such amazing activities that people will continue to talk about the story for hundreds and thousands of years. Why do we watch adventure films? Why do we read entertaining books, like the adventures of Harry Potter or the Hobbit Frodo? Because they are full of dangers and difficulties and even serious sufferings, followed by astounding events that bring an unexpected and stunning solution, filling us with joy and satisfaction. This meditation gives us strength and patience to continue our evolutionary journey, face our tests, solve our problems, and strive for perfection.

Of course the value of the story is greater when it carries good teachings for the audience, whether they are expressed by discussion or by example, and the ability of the story teller is greater when the adventure is rich in subconscious or supraconscious symbolism that can penetrate deep into our hearts and touch us intimately. This is the sum and substance of the meaning of "religion". A true religion is simply the tradition (through books, recitation, ritual re-enactment etc) of divine stories (*lila*) based on activities performed by Personalities of God or Self realized souls, that contain symbols and paradigms we need to apply to our own lives in order to evolve our consciousness. Everything else is "support material" to help us understand physics and metaphysics, and apply the fundamental evolutionary teachings to our lives, or commentaries and suggested practices to keep us in that consciousness.

In the story of Narasimha, little Prahlada clearly states that God, that is Reality and the supreme Being/ Existence, is present everywhere, even if we are unable to see him, and can perform any action, even if he does not have a conventional material body.

His body is too subtle to be perceived by our gross material senses or their mechanical instruments (*sukshma avijneya*) and he does not need to move around because he is already everywhere (*acaram caram*). Subtler states of being cannot be perceived by gross instruments. For example, you cannot see a microbe with your naked eye, and similarly you cannot see the air or wind unless you observe its effects on visible objects such as colored dust, a cloth or flag on a pole, and so on. Similarly, you cannot see the mind with a microscope, although you can measure the effects of the mind on its physical vehicle, the brain and nervous system. You cannot see thoughts unless they are expressed in the form of sounds or writing, and you cannot see life unless it moves bodies through breathing, blood circulation, electrical or magnetic radiation etc. Still, what we see is just the effect and not the cause.

The supreme Being is the Cause of all causes, the Existence of existence itself, and as such it cannot be perceived by material senses. This is confirmed by the *Upanishads*:

tad ejati tan naijati, tad dure tad v antike, tad antar asya sarvasya tad u sarvasyasya bahyatah, "He (*Tat*) does not walk and yet at the same time he walks, he is very far and very near, as he is within everything and also outside everything", (*Isa Upanishad* 5),

asino duram vrajeti sayano yati sarvatah, "he is everything and everywhere, but he remains very far from ignorant people", (*Katha Upanishad* 1.2.21),

durat sudure tad ihantike ca pasyatv ihaivam nihitam guhayam, "he is more distant than any far thing, and nearer than here itself; he cannot be seen because he is hidden within", (*Mundaka Upanishad*, 3.17).

In this verse of *Mundaka Upanishad* we find a very important word, *nihitam*, that means "seated in the middle", "established

inside". This is the precise description of the Param Atman, the Soul of all souls, that is within the core of each being or existence.

VERSE 17

अविभक्तं च भूतेषु विभक्तमिव च स्थितम् ।

avibhaktam ca bhūteṣu vibhaktamiva ca sthitam ।

भूतभर्तृ च तज्ज्ञेयं ग्रसिष्णु प्रभविष्णु च ॥ १३-१७ ॥

bhūtabhartṛ ca tajjñeyaṁ grasiṣṇu prabhaviṣṇu ca ॥ 13-17 ॥

avibhaktam: without divisions; *ca*: and; *bhutesu*: regarding the beings; *vibhaktam*: divided; *iva*: as if; *ca*: and; *sthitam*: established/ situated; *bhuta bhartri*: who maintains all beings; *ca*: and; *tat*: that; *jneyam*: to be known; *grasisnu*: who devours; *prabhavisnu*: the powerful Vishnu/ developing; *ca*: and.

"Although undivided, he appears as if he is divided into the (many) beings where he resides. He is the sustainer of all beings, and is to be known as the powerful Vishnu, who devours everything.

This concept is echoed in the verses of the *Rig Veda samhita*: *ekah santam bahudha kalpayanti*, "he is contemplated in various forms, although he is one" (*Rig Veda*. 1.114.5), *ekam sad vipra bahuda vadanti*, "although he is one, he is described in many ways by the learned" (*Rig Veda* 1.164.46).

Here the word *jneyam* ("is to be known") is in perfect juxtaposition to the word *avijneyam* ("cannot be known") in the previous verse, highlighting a fact that is beyond duality. It is true that God cannot be known through material analysis and research, but he can be

known through the perception of his effects on our intelligence and consciousness, that transcend the material level.

A very important word in this verse is *avibhakta*, that means "not divided, not separated", while *vibhakta* means "divided, separated". It is interesting to note that this chapter is entitled *Prakriti Purusha vibhaga yoga*, "The Yoga of understanding nature as distinct from the personal principle", but the most extraordinary concept expressed in this chapter is that in reality there is no *vibhaga* and no *bheda*, and such divisions or separations are simply apparent and not factual.

The *maha vakyas* ("great aphorisms") of the *Upanishads* confirm this very profound truth: *sarvam khalv idam brahma*, "all this is Brahman" (*Chandogya Upanishad*, 7.25.2, *Nrisimha utara tapani Upanishad*, 7), *prajnanam brahma*, "Brahman is full consciousness/ knowledge" (*Aitareya Upanishad*, 3.3), as well as *aham brahmasmi*, "I am Brahman" (*Brihad Aranyaka Upanishad* 1.4.10), *ayam atma brahma*, "this Atman is Brahman" (*Mandukya Upanishad* 2), *tat tvam asi*, "you are that (Brahman)" (*Chandogya Upanishad*, 6.8.7) and *so 'ham*, "I am that (Brahman)" (*Narada parivrajaka Upanishad*, 6.4).

The word *iva*, "as if", indicates the illusory appearance or the example by comparison that is only a reflection or image of reality, but it does not contain it fully.

At a more intimate level, this apparent separation within the supreme Consciousness refers to the highest and most intense form of *yoga* ("union") in *bhakti*, constituted by the *vipralambha rasa*, or "feeling of separation" by which the devotee is fully and deeply immersed in the supreme Consciousness (Krishna Consciousness) in the desire to attain an apparently missing union with Krishna. This is the greatest and most inconceivable mystery, demonstrated in practice by the ecstatic manifestation of Chaitanya's sentiments,

that melt the hearts of the pure devotees and completely confuse the materialists into thinking that Chaitanya was simply a mentally deranged man. Yet, we can all have a similar experience when we miss a person, an object or a situation that we really love or need: the memory of what we have lost brings a feeling of appreciation that is many times stronger than whatever we could have felt before, in the direct physical presence of the object of our love or need. We take air for granted because we breathe it constantly, day and night, so that in general we do not even notice it, but if we suddenly find ourselves without any air - as under water, for example - our awareness and appreciation for the value of air would instantly increase many times.

Again we find in this verse the concept of *acintya bheda abheda*, or "inconceivably different and non-different". All the innumerable personalities we find in the material and spiritual worlds are nothing but "parts and parcels" of God, Vishnu; they only appear to have a different or separate existence, because of the power of *maya* (illusion), that acts as *Yogamaya* in the spiritual dimension and *Mahamaya* on the material level.

The word *bhuta* literally means "being", both in the sense of "living entity" and in the sense of "situation or circumstances of existence", therefore we learn here that the three "categories" of *isvara*, *shakti* and *jiva* are actually One Reality, never really separated and never divided, as confirmed in *Vedanta sutra* (*sakti saktimator abheda*). So when we say that Brahman is truth, and the material world is false (*brahma satya, jagan mithya*), certainly we do not mean that Nature (spiritual nature or material nature - meaning forms, names, qualities, activities etc) is non-existent, or delusional, or unworthy of our worship. We mean that such forms, names etc, only *seem* to change, but in fact they are eternally present in the non-manifested (transcendental, non dualistic or unitarian) state that is Brahman, or Vishnu. Adi Shankara clearly

explains this all-important point at the beginning of his commentary to *Bhagavad gita: narayanah parah avyaktah*, "Narayana is transcendental and non-manifested".

Again, we need to be very careful not to fall into the trap of misunderstanding the word *avyakta*. The popular translation as "non-manifested" is probably not sufficient to help us penetrate its full meaning. We may have noticed that *vyakta* derives from the same root of the word *vibhaga*, and literally means "separated, divided", as *vyakti* means "individual" or "unit". So, when we say that *vyakta* means "manifested", it does not indicate a coming into existence, and *avyakta* does not indicate an absence or non-existence or annihilation. Therefore *vyakta* describes the individuation of a form as distinct from other forms, and implies a measure of illusion (*maya*), either spiritual or material. However this illusion only covers the subordinate being (the devotee or the materialist): Narayana is never subject to the illusion of separation, because he always contains the entirety of Consciousness. *Narayana parah avyaktah* really means that the supreme existence of Vishnu is always omnipresent as the foundation of everything, and can never be separated from his *shaktis*, spiritual or material.

The *Upanishads* confirm this: *yato va imani bhutani jayante yena jatani jivanti yat prayanti, abhisamvisanti tad vijijnasasva tad brahma*, "you should know him, from whom all beings are born, by whose support they live, and in whom they enter (in the end)" (*Taittiriya Upanishad* 3.1)

The presence of Vishnu during all the phases of the cycle of creation, preservation and destruction is highlighted by the words *grasisnu* ("who devours") and *prabhavisnu* ("who develops"). So God is not just the creator, but the preserver and the destroyer as well: this is the description of Time, Kala, that had already manifested in the vision of the Virata Rupa for Arjuna (11.32). This identification of Krishna with Kala/ Kali, on which we

elaborated in the commentary to that verse, explains why the *bija mantra* for Vishnu/ Krishna (*klim*) is the same *bija mantra* for Mother Kali, who is also called Narayani.

The third aspect of the cycle of existence - maintenance or preservation - is expressed by the name *bhuta bhartri*, "who maintains all beings", and refers to Life that provides all nourishment, support, and healing to all beings.

VERSE 18

ज्योतिषामपि तज्ज्योतिस्तमसः परमुच्यते ।

jyotiṣāmapi tajjyotistamasah paramucyate ।

ज्ञानं ज्ञेयं ज्ञानगम्यं हृदि सर्वस्य विष्ठितम् ॥ १३-१८ ॥

jñānaṁ jñeyaṁ jñānagamyāṁ hṛdi sarvasya viṣṭhitam ।। 13-18 ।।

jyotisam: in all the luminaries; *api*: also; *tat*: that; *jyotih*: the light; *tamasah*: darkness; *param*: beyond/ higher; *ucyate*: it is said; *jneyam*: to be known; *jnana gamyam*: to be approached by knowledge; *hridi*: in the heart; *sarvasya*: of everything; *visthitam*: established.

"He is described as the light in all radiant things, transcendental to darkness. He is established in the heart of everything, and he is to be known through the cultivation of knowledge.

The theme of light and radiance as the visible form of Atman/ Brahman is repeated in other verses of *Bhagavad gita*:

kavim puranam anusasitaram anor aniyamsam anusmared yah, sarvasya dhataram acintya-rupam aditya-varnam tamasah parastat, "One should remember the Lord as omniscient, primeval, who controls everything, so small that is contained inside the atom. He maintains everything and his form is inconceivable, as bright as the sun, transcendental to the darkness (8.9),

adityanam aham visnur jyotisam ravir amsuman, maricir marutam asmi nakstranam aham sasi, "Among the Adityas, I am Vishnu. Among the lights, I am the radiant Sun. To the Marutas, I am Marici. To the constellations, I am the Moon" (10.21),

dyutam chalayatam asmi tejas tejasvinam aham, jayo 'smi vyavasayo 'smi sattvam sattvavatam aham, "Among cheaters, I am gambling. Of all that is radiant, I am the power that radiates. Of all ventures, I am victory. Of everything good, I am goodness" (10.36),

yad yad vibhutinat sattvam srimad urjitam eva va, tat tad evavagaccha tvam mama tejo 'msa sambhavam, "Anything that is good, powerful, wonderful, or glorious, that you can encounter, has come to existence as a part of my radiance" (10.41),

divi surya sahasrasya bhaved yugapad utthita yadi bhah sadrisi sa syad bhasas tasya mahatmanah, "If thousands of suns were rising simultaneously in the sky, that radiance would be similar to the radiance of the great Atman" (11.12),

kiritinam gadinam cakrinam ca tejo rasim sarvato diptimantam, pasyami tvam durnirikshyam samantad diptanalarka dyutim aprameyam, "The luminous radiance of all those crowns, maces, and discs is everywhere, so dazzling that I can barely see you. It is like the rays of the sun or an immeasurable blazing fire" (11.17),

anadi madhyantam ananta viryam ananta bahum sasi surya netram, pasyami tvam dipta bhutasa vaktram sva tejasa visvam idam tapantam, "Without beginning, middle or end, your prowess is unlimited. Your arms are innumerable, and your eyes are the Sun and the Moon. I can see your face blazing with flames from your own radiance, scorching the entire universe" (11.19),

nabhah sprisam diptam aneka varnam vyattananam dipta visala netram, dristva hi tvam prvyathitantar atma dhritim na vindami samam ca visno, "O Vishnu, I feel shaken and I have lost my mental balance and peace, looking at this (immense) radiance of yours, of so many colors, reaching up to touch the sky, with immense gaping mouths and fierce glowing eyes" (11.24),

lelihyase grasamanah samantal lokan samagran vadanair jvaladbhih, tejobhir apurya jagat samagram bhasa tavograh pratapanti visno, "From all sides you are licking these devoured people/ worlds into your mouths, whose blazing light covers the entire universe. O Vishnu, your fierce radiance is burning everything" (11.30),

yad aditya gatam tejo jagad bhasayate 'khilam, yac candramasi yac cagnau tat tejo viddhi mamakam , "Know that the radiance emanating from the sun, that pervade the entire universe, as well as the light of the moon and that of the fire, are mine", (15.12).

A similar verse is found in *Svetasvatara Upanishad* (3.8): *aditya varnam tamasah parastat*, "His color is like the radiance of the sun, that is transcendental to darkness."

We also find mention of God's radiance in the most important of all Vedic *mantras*, the Gayatri (*devasya bhargo pracodayat*, "may the radiance of God inspire us") and in the famous verse *tamaso ma jyotir gamaya, asato ma sad gamaya, mrtiyor ma amrtam gamaya*, "From darkness take me to the light, from the

impermanent take me to eternity, from death take me to immortality" (*Brhad aranyaka Upanishad*, 1.3.28).

Light, spirit and intelligence are always associated, also at the individual level. Many psychic travelers have described the soul as "a clear white light", and we know that the aggregate of *jivatmans* is called *brahmajyoti*, "the radiance of Brahman". The clear understanding or realization of reality is called enlightenment or illumination, because it gives us a clear vision of the world and ourselves; the references to realization as "seeing" are also extremely numerous not only in *Bhagavad gita* (2.16, 2.29, 2.59, 4.18, 4.35, 5.5, 5.16, 5.24, 5.25, 6.30, 6.32, 9.7, 10.5, 10.11, 11.3-5, 11.52-55, 13.25, 13.28, 13.29-31, 14.19, 15.11) but in all the *shastra*. Just to make a couple of major examples: the name *rishi*, indicating one of those wise self-realized souls who contributed their knowledge to the corpus of Vedic knowledge, literally means "one who sees", while the word *darshana*, indicating a particular ideological perspective on Reality, literally means "vision", as in the act of seeing. It is one step further from mere intellectual understanding: it is a life-changing paradigm shift.

The transcendental and divine nature of illuminating intelligence is also confirmed in *Svetasvatara Upanishad*:

mahan prabhur vai purusah sattvasyaisa pravartakah, su nirmalam imam praptim isano jyotir avyayah, "The Supreme Personality of God is the Purusha, who disseminates transcendental enlightenment. Just to be in touch with him is to be in contact with the indestructible *brahmajyoti*" (3.12),

yo 'ntah-sukho 'ntar aramas tathantar-jyotir eva, "That (Brahman) is the inner happiness, the inner pleasure, and the inner light", (3.13),

tam ha devam atma buddhi prakasam, mumuksur vai saranam aham prapadye, "desiring liberation from conditionings, we surrender to him, the Lord, who illuminates the/ through intelligence", (6.18).

This radiance of intelligence or consciousness is so strong that it supersedes the light of the sun and all the luminaries of this universe (*Bhagavad gita* 15.6, *na tad bhasayate suryo na sasanko na pavakah*, "(In that abode) there is no (need of the) light of the sun, moon or fire/ electricity), *na tatra suryo bhati na chandra tarakam, nema vidyuto bhanti kuto 'yam agnih*, "There is (no need of) sunlight, or light of moon or stars, what to speak of the light of the fire", (*Katha Upanishad* 2.2.15).

The *Bhagavata Purana* (3.28.40) also uses the example of the radiating light and heat to explain that God is non-different from his *shaktis*: *yatholmukad vispulingad, dhumad vapi sva sambhavat, apy atmattvenabhimatad, yathagnih prithag ulmukat*, "The blazing fire is different from the flames, from the sparks and from the smoke, although all are intimately connected because they are born from the same blazing wood." Similarly, the sun is the foundation and origin of light and heat, as well as shadows and darkness. However, darkness does not have existence in itself, but it is merely absence of light or inability to see the light, while the light is ever-existing and can never be extinguished.

The supreme Soul is established not only in all *jivas*, but inside each atom as well - becoming visible as the blinding blaze of a detonated nuclear bomb. We normally cannot see this light simply because our vision is covered by the darkness of material appearances, but we can observe and perceive its effects through intelligence and scientific knowledge (*jnana gamyam*). And where is this radiant light located? In the center (*hridi*): in the heart of every being, of every existence. This is the "beyond" where we should direct our exploration: a revolutionary new paradigm for all

those who keep searching for happiness "out there" instead of inside their own hearts.

VERSE 19

इति क्षेत्रं तथा ज्ञानं ज्ञेयं चोक्तं समासतः ।

iti kṣetram tathā jñānam jñeyam cuktam samāsataḥ ।

मद्भक्त एतद्विज्ञाय मद्भावायोपपद्यते ॥ १३-१९ ॥

madbhakta etadvijñāya madbhāvāyopapadyate ॥ 13-19 ॥

iti: like this; *ksetram*: the *kshetra*; *tatha*: also; *jnanam*: knowledge; *jneyam*: to be known; *ca*: and; *uktam*: told; *samasatah*: in summary; *mat bhaktah*: my devotee; *etat*: this; *vijnaya*: by understanding; *mat bhavaya*: with/ to my nature; *upapadyate*: attains.

"Thus I have summarized the description of the *kshetra*, *jnana* and *jneya*. My devotee attains my nature/ existence by understanding this (knowledge)."

Here Krishna summarizes his answers to Arjuna's questions. In verses 6 and 7 he spoke about the world or *kshetra* or field of action (*jneya*, "the object of knowledge"), in verses 8 to 12 he spoke about the correct process of understanding and interacting with the *kshetra* (*jnana*, "knowledge"), and in verses 13 to 18 he spoke about the *param atman* (*jnana gamyam*, "that can/ should be attained through knowledge") or the reason for the entire exercise of interaction between the *kshetra* and *kshetra jna*. The expression *jnana gamyam* indicates the purpose, the goal, the destination (*pada*, *dhama*) that all individual souls are meant to reach through their evolution; this ultimate success is already contained in each

individual in the form of conscience (virtue or goodness, and knowledge), but it must be cultivated deliberately, through an act of choice, to blossom into true love. Love (*bhakti*) is the highest reality and the greatest happiness (*hladini sakti*), and constitutes the real meaning of life - creation, preservation and dissolution of the material bodies, as well as evolution of the consciousness towards perfection. This is why only a devotee can really understand the transcendental knowledge.

At some point in their evolution, all human beings face the same question: what is the meaning of life? Why was the universe created? What is the purpose of all this? All beings instinctively search happiness, knowledge and permanent existence, yet they constantly experience sufferings, confusion and loss, of which death is usually considered the greatest tragedy.

At the animal level, the perception of sufferings is limited to the pain of the body and the mind caused by physical elements and events, especially those that are beyond the normal course of life. For example, a mother will suffer great pain for the premature death of a child, but grown up children will leave the family and may not even come to know about the subsequent death of their old parent. Similarly, a cruel death accompanied by unnecessary torture or mistreatment, as it often happens when animals fall victims to evil minded people, increases the natural sufferings of death to an unnatural level. An animal suffers intensely when trapped, imprisoned or confined, and/ or deprived of natural family or society relationships, and/ or subjected to an imposed artificial way of life. However, this natural life is the extent of the aspirations of animals, that appreciate beauty and love, but have no higher responsibilities or spiritual quests.

The more the individual evolves through increasingly complex forms of animal life, the more sensitive s/he becomes, until s/he finally attains a human form of life. At this point, the lessons in the

great school of life become trickier and more difficult, and the individual is required to learn to think beyond the body and mind, beyond the material identification of family, society, or species, and to understand the unity of all life and consciousness. This is why *Vedanta sutra* says, *athato brahma jijnasa*: now, in this human life, we must learn about Brahman, the *jnana gamyam*, that is attained through the correct understanding of his manifestations, activities, qualities, names, forms, teachings, etc.

A human being has already "graduated" from the introductory courses of study on nature that constituted the cycle of animal life, and after becoming qualified on the human level of consciousness, obtains the opportunity to develop higher qualifications in the management of the universe and attaining liberation from conditionings, by expanding his awareness and realization and entering the supreme Consciousness. This is the process of *jnana*, *jneya*, *jnana gamyam*. The choice of definitions for these three subjects, considered together, is truly illuminating, and reiterates the concept expressed in previous chapters about the proper meditation to realize the Supreme, through the visualization and appreciation of the Virata Rupa.

True devotion (*bhava*) to God can only be achieved through the proper knowledge and consciousness of the transcendental Reality; we must be able to outgrow the false sentimentalist devotion that is based on ignorance - which is clearly described not as a mere lack of proper information, but as the opposite of the principles detailed in verses 8 to 12. One of the most important practices in Yoga is *svadhyaya*, the direct personal study of Vedic knowledge, that starts from the science of the Self and covers all aspects of existence.

Of course we are not interested in mere material erudition or academic titles, because we must be extremely careful not to fall into the ignorance of arrogant identification and attachment, that

carry foolish people away from Reality and deeper into illusion. Those unfortunate people who fall in the ego trap of the "great scholar" or "great religionist" remain unable to really approach God (*mayayapahrita jnana*, 7.15). Such people are not interested in knowledge, but in the selfish material advantages they could get from knowledge: they are like *asuras* who want to kidnap the Mother Goddess of Learning and enslave her to their own selfish sense gratification. On the other hand, a true devotee always keeps a respectful and loving service attitude, following in the footsteps of the great *acharyas* and realized souls, who transmitted the realizations of their predecessors and explained them according to their own realizations, but always recognizing the eternal nature of Knowledge herself. This is why we say that *Vedas* are eternal.

A true devotee is always eager to hear, study and understand the glories of God, manifested in the spiritual world and in the material world as well: therefore the Vedic scriptures, especially the *Puranas* and *Itihasas*, contain so many discussions about material creation and human interactions, as well as many important teachings on how to lead a good life. By honoring the manifestation, the forms, the qualities, and the activities of consciousness, we can truly evolve our individual consciousness and harmonize it through entering the supreme Consciousness, the Soul of all souls. This is a true mark of love. When we love someone, we give full attention to that person's properties and work, and we make sincere efforts to better understand his/ her intentions and ideas, so that we can help and assist him/ her better.

Another important point here is that all such knowledge already exists in the heart of each being, because of the presence of the Param Atman, that includes existence, knowledge and happiness. This knowledge is simply covered by various layers of ignorance in the form of prejudice, false identification, material attachments, false information and beliefs, and all other forms of *tamas*

(ignorance) that we will examine in greater details in the next chapters. The proper method of learning consists in approaching realized souls (4.34) and remaining in their presence through service and exchanges of questions and answers, so that it will become clear to us how to distinguish between knowledge and ignorance - thus developing our *viveka* or *buddhi*, the sharp intelligence that can connect our consciousness with the supreme Consciousness.

Some individuals are already born with a favorable disposition, as we will see in chapter 16, by which they are more inclined to perceive the guidance of the Param Atman - that people usually call "the voice of conscience" - and walk the path of self-improvement. This divine-oriented nature of the mind is built through many lifetimes in a human form (*bahunam janmanam ante*, 7.9), and the accumulation of merits (*punya karmanam*, 7.28); it is not an arbitrary gift from God to favor some people only (9.29), but it is something that anyone of us can earn through sincere effort. If someone was wondering why Krishna and Arjuna have spoken of *jnana*, *jneya* and *jnana gamyam* without mentioning the *jnata* ("the knower"), we can easily reply that the subject of *jnata* has been amply discussed from the very beginning, by explaining the nature, qualities, and activities of the *atman*.

VERSE 20

प्रकृतिं पुरुषं चैव विद्वयनादि उभावपि ।

prakṛtiṁ puruṣaṁ caiva viddhyanādi ubhāvapi ।

विकारांश्च गुणांश्चैव विद्धि प्रकृतिसम्भवान् ॥ १३-२० ॥

vikārāṁśca guṇāṁścaiva viddhi prakṛtisambhavān ॥ 13-20 ॥

prakritim: the *prakriti*; *purusam*: the *purusha*; *ca*: and; *eva*: certainly; *viddhi*: you should know; *anadi*: without beginning; *ubhau*: both; *api*: also; *vikaran*: the transformations; *ca*: and; *gunan*: the qualities; *ca*: and; *eva*: certainly; *viddhi*: you should know; *prakriti sambhavan*: born from *prakriti*.

"You should know that Prakriti and Purusha are both eternal, and that their transformations and qualities are born from the Prakriti.

Krishna is again stating that both Purusha and Prakriti are Brahman - the eternal, unchangeable and perfect Consciousness that we could call the blueprint of Reality. However, within this unchanging master plan there is ample scope for well orchestrated variety, which implies apparent change or transformation, usually in closed cycles such as creation, preservation and annihilation.

This characteristic of variety is specifically described as a function of Prakriti or Shakti, that is the Mother of all forms and qualities - both spiritual and material. This apparent transformation or change is due to the principle of action; all forms, qualities, names etc are eternally existing in the Consciousness plan of the Brahman, but they become manifested (i.e. differentiated, visible as individual states of being) through the divisions of time (Kala/ Kali) created by action. This even applies to the transcendental appearance of the Personalities of God (*avatars*) and great liberated souls (*jivan muktas*), although in their case the "change" is effected by the spiritual Nature Yogamaya, and the characteristics of these bodies remain spiritual, made of pure consciousness, and cannot be easily understood by ordinary human beings, who have limited sensory powers, unable even to perceive subtle matter, what to speak of spiritual bodies.

The ordinary/ material perception of Time is also based on change and action. Past, present and future become distinct from each

other simply because of action and change in circumstances or environment, otherwise they would not be distinguishable because Time is actually a continuum and eternally exists as Brahman (11.32). Therefore Kala/ Kali is the original manifestation of creation in the universe: the primordial Father and Mother of all beings. What appears to our ignorant and limited eyes as the velvety blackness of the space is actually filled with the potential of all light and energy, but then again Mother (*shakti*, as power, energy) is the Boss here, the source of all magic, ordinary and extra-ordinary.

All actions are performed by Nature, and the Purusha never really becomes entangled in them (4.14, 5.13): only the conditioned souls are tied by the consequences of their actions because they continue to identify as the doer, as the ego that appears to make a choice and invest the effort in one particular selfishly motivated action. On the other hand, a liberated person will simply guide or direct, through a simple act of consciousness/ awareness, his/ her own nature and engage it in sacred action, *yajna*, or *karma yoga*, without identifying him/ her self with the action but simply working as a matter of duty or service, as explained in the early chapters of *Bhagavad gita* (3.25, etc). What makes action sacred (*yajna*)? The sacred consciousness: when the individual consciousness is united (*yoga*) with the supreme Total Consciousness, any activity performed by Nature becomes sacred (4.25-30), even the simplest act of breathing. All bodies (material and spiritual) are made by, and of, Nature (Mahamaya and Yogamaya) and therefore they must engage in activities (3.33, 4.23, 13.21), because it is through activity that we can attain knowledge and realization, and from realization, true love will blossom.

Some commentators interpreted the expression *anadi* in this verse as "not the primeval cause" instead of "without any previous cause", but if that was the case, we should have to believe that

isvara is also created and directly involved in the material creation and transformation, which he is not, because he is unchanging and transcendental to all dualities. Bhagavan always contains both Purusha and Prakriti: this is the reason why male Deities should be worshiped in the company of their female counterparts. Of course even when the image of the male Deity stands alone, the presence of its female component cannot be separated from it, precisely because Shakti *is* the *form* itself. Without the presence of Shakti, there would be no form - material or spiritual.

At the same time, we need to understand that the forms of Bhagavan are not limited in time and space like our material bodies: they eternally exist within the Brahman, in the spiritual dimension, and can be manifested at any time and in any circumstances by Isvara simply by an act of Consciousness. Consciousness comes before any manifestation of forms, and is not limited by time or space or any material law.

Bhagavata purana (3.7.9) confirms: *seyam bhagavato maya, yan nayena virudhyate, isvarasya vimuktasya karpnyam uta bandhanam*, "This idea, saying that Bhagavan can be overpowered by illusion, is contradictory, because Isvara is ever liberated, and therefore he cannot be conditioned."

VERSE 21

कार्यकारणकर्तृत्वे हेतुः प्रकृतिरुच्यते ।

kāryakāraṇakartṛtve hetuḥ prakṛtirucyate ।

पुरुषः सुखदुःखानां भोक्तृत्वे हेतुरुच्यते ॥ १३-२१ ॥

puruṣaḥ sukhaduḥkhānāṃ bhokṛtṛtve heturucyate ॥ 13-21 ॥

karya: the action to be performed; *karana*: the origin; *kartritve*: in the making/ in undertaking action; *hetuh*: cause; *prakritih*: *prakriti*; *ucyate*: is said; *purusah*: *purusha*; *sukha dukkhanam*: of joy and distress; *bhoktritve*: in tasting; *hetuh*: the cause; *ucyate*: it is said.

"Prakriti is said to be the cause and the origin of the action, while Purusha is the cause of the perception of happiness and distress.

We find a very similar verse in the *Bhagavata Purana* (3.26.8), in the section reporting the instructions by Kapila: *karya karana kartritve karanam prakritim viduh, bhoktritve sukha dukkhanam purusam prakriteh param*, "The (wise) understand that the duties (as *guna* and *karma* constituting the body), the subtle body and the *kartritva* (the development of action) are all caused by *prakriti*. However, the experience of happiness and distress is in/ from the *purusha*, who is different from/ transcends/ the *prakriti*."

This description applies to the Principle of Consciousness (the Purusha), therefore to a certain extent it also includes the supreme Purusha (*raso vai sah*, "he is feeling/ perception", *Taittiriya Upanishad*, 2.7).

In this regard, we can understand the immense importance of the science of *rasas*, the feelings/ perceptions within the field of *bhakti*, that is the highest and most intimate form of *yoga*: *purusah sa parah partha bhaktya labhyas tv ananyaya, yasyantah sthani bhutani yena sarvam idam tatam*, "O Partha, this supreme Person can be attained by undivided devotion. Within him exist all these beings, and he pervades everything", (8.22), *bhaktya tv ananyaya sakya aham evam vidho 'rjuna, jnatum drastum ca tattvena pravestum ca parantapa*, "O Arjuna, only through *bhakti* it is possible to know and to see me truly, and to enter into me", (11.54).

Of course the supreme Consciousness, Bhagavan, is beyond the duality of joy and distress, and enjoys all perceptions and feelings in harmony and bliss, even those that appear like sufferings, as in the separation from his devotees during the *lilas* of the *avatars*, and the concern for all conditioned souls toiling in the material world. For Bhagavan these are simply different tastes (*rasas*): not only the sweet tastes of direct loving devotion (*madhurya*, *sakhya*, *vatsalya*, *dasya*) but also indirectly positive such as compassion (*karuna*), heroism (*virya*), amazement (*adbhuta*, *vismaya*), humor (*hasya*), neutrality (*santa*) and apparently "negative" feelings such as fear (*bhayanaka*), anger (*raudra*) and disgust or repulsion (*bibhatsa*) that create the contrast. The faculty of perception and feeling is always present, but we can choose where to direct and focus it: this is the characteristic of the Purusha. Through the powers (*shaktis*) called desire (*iccha*), determination (*kriya*) and knowledge (*jnana*), the consciousness (*purusha*) engages the body (*rupa*, *indriya*) and its qualities (*gunas*) in transformation (*vikara*), thus creating a variety (*vaicitra*) of feelings (*rasas*).

The example with the taste of foods is particularly interesting, also considering that in Vedic terminology, the word *bhukti* indicates all types of "enjoyment", of both *sukha* and *duhkha*, from the sweetest ripe fruits to the sourest grapes. The particular type of taste we are attracted to is determined by our set of senses, created by our previous *karma*; later on Krishna will explain that the *gunas* we choose according to our *karma* are exemplified by the different types of food and tastes we grow accustomed to, and that life habits can be changed by practice, popularly considered a "second nature". The word *bhakti*, too, comes from the same grammatical root, and refers to the exchange of "emotional food" or *rasas* between points of consciousness, ideally between the *jivatma* cell (as *bhakta*) and the supreme Sum total of Consciousness that we call God (as *bhokta*).

In the macrocosm, this perception or consciousness of the *kshetra* is the *lila* of the Purusha avataras (Karanodakasayi Vishnu, Garbhodakasayi Vishnu, Kshirodakasayi Vishnu), while in the microcosm it appears as a reflection in the activities of the individual *jivatman*. Like the supreme Purusha, the small *purusha* "cell" simply focuses his consciousness, and everything is done by nature (3.27): if the consciousness is focused in the material illusory mode of *ahankara* and *mamatva*, bondage and delusion will ensue, while by focusing one's consciousness in the spiritual mode of sacred service, liberation and happiness will be attained through the action of spiritual Nature.

Sometimes ignorant people remain confused by the existence of sufferings in this world, believing that an omnipotent and omniscient God should never allow anything bad to happen to anyone - especially to the innocent, such as children, friendly animals, and so on. Therefore these people become atheists, denying the existence of God or waging a war against the very concept of religion because they conclude that God must be cruel and evil. This is a childish mentality that should be examined dispassionately in the light of the transcendental knowledge.

The sufferings inherent to the material world are difficulties set to help us learn our lessons and evolve at individual and collective levels. If we carefully observe and follow the original instructions for living in this world, our problems will be limited to the very minimum, and we will be more than capable of overcoming them by applying just a little patience and proper effort. In fact, faced with the proper attitude and education, difficulties can even become stimulating and bring a pleasant thrill - like a good fight, an exhausting hike, or a challenging obstacle. It is said that a diamond is nothing but a piece of coal that was able to handle pressure exceptionally well by re-organizing itself through a better (more harmonious) configuration: this is fundamentally the task of

each and every individual *jivatma*, as we are all meant to evolve and develop into the highest perfection of consciousness.

Even on the material level, a loving parent will be happy and proud of his/ her child's first attempts at learning something new - from walking to performing more complex activities or studying difficult subjects - even if the child faces a certain measure of discomfort or even suffering. A good parent will help the child to understand that anything valuable is worthy of serious effort and even some sacrifice, and that physical or mental pain is temporary and can be overcome with the correct attitude. This of course does not mean that we should put ourselves or anyone else through disproportionate and unnecessary sufferings and difficulties, or into any procedure that can cause physical or mental damage. It simply means that we need to train to tolerate the inevitable sufferings that are inherent to the material body and mind - *adhibhautika klesa, adhyatmika klesa, adhidaivika klesa*.

All these sufferings are only temporary perceptions, and are due to the contact of the senses with their objects (2.14), and from the real perspective of the *atman*, they can be compared to illusory nightmares. A good parent will comfort the child who has had a nightmare, explaining the illusory nature of the experience, offering proper advice and instructions on how to overcome the distress, and so on. If we give too much importance to ordinary sufferings, we will only increase the damage by adding fear, anxiety, guilt, uncertainty, and other similar negative emotions; even loss of limb or death itself are not so scary when the consciousness is properly attuned and has become detached from material identifications and ties.

Of course we do not want to go looking for troubles or to create more unnecessary sufferings for ourselves or for others, because the problems that we each naturally face in life, presented by life itself during our journey, are more than sufficient for our

evolution. However, we should develop the proactive attitude of seeing each problem as an opportunity for personal growth. In fact, this is the approach that God wants to teach us; if we carefully study the instructions offered by the great personalities and the *shastra*, sufferings and problems in life will be reduced to the very minimum, and we will be able to utilize them in a positive or constructive way. Most often, people unnecessarily create their own problems by acting against their good conscience and against the instructions of good teachers. The actual bulk of sufferings in this world are the karmic consequence of pain we have foolishly inflicted on others, and that we must pay back sooner or later, in this lifetime or in a next one.

Unfortunately there have been and there are still many confused people who project their own negative material qualities on God, and imagine that God actually *wants* people to suffer, to *punish* them for some disobedience or for some similar reason, just like materially attached human beings controlled by passion and ignorance can become angry and vindictive against others. This is another form of illusion, because God is certainly not on that level of consciousness, as Krishna clearly stated already: *nadatte kasyacit papam na caiva sukritam vibhuh, ajnanenavritam jnanam tena muhyanti jantavah*, "The (all) powerful (Lord) does not accept /consider the good or bad merits of anyone. It (the problem) is (only due to) the living entities, that are confused because their knowledge is covered by ignorance", (5.15) and *samo 'ham sarva bhutesu na me dvesyo 'sti na priyah, ye bhajanti tu mam bhaktya mayi te tesu capy aham*, "I am equally disposed towards all living beings. I do not hate anyone, and I do not favor anyone. Yet, when someone offers me a sincere service in devotion, I also serve them with love and devotion", (9.29).

When we overcome this duality (2.38, 18.9, 18.28, 18.54), we attain the transcendental level of Bhagavan Consciousness. This is

the greatest difference between the Vedic religion and abrahamic ideologies, where man is always an insignificant and intrinsically flawed creature, made from lowly dirt, who was insufflated with a mysterious "living soul" from God's breath and is not very good at keeping it, and therefore needs to be "saved" by blind allegiance to God's church and its priests. Thus even the greatest saint can only hope of being admitted in the "kingdom of God" to remain there as a background servant, albeit with considerable job perks; God remains unapproachable personally, a distant king demanding constant blind obedience and feared by his subjects because of his whimsical, unpredictable and often cruel behavior. But even attaining such heavenly position is not easy, because in this world, during one short lifetime, man is tossed around and victimized by God' enemy, Satan, who seems to have almost equal power to God's, and even greater power over material nature and the "things of the world". Abrahamics believe that if by any chance or smallest mistake one fails to meet the stringent requirements for admission to heaven, God will throw him/ her into the eternal fire of hell, where Satan's servants will torture him/ her in very painful, horrible, disgusting and humiliating ways forever.

On the other hand, Vedic tradition teaches us that we eternally are all parts and parcels of God, and that we only need to listen to our inner Self and expand our consciousness to attain the same nature of the Supreme. This development is through intelligence and sincere effort, and we have a potentially unlimited number of lifetimes to engage in perfecting ourselves, learning from each and every experience and becoming better persons. All along this evolutionary journey, we receive many messages, instructions, inspirations, opportunities for learning, and even warnings when we are going in the wrong direction; by focusing our consciousness from darkness to light, from temporary to eternal, from death to immortality, we can easily become successful.

The grammatical components of this verse are very interesting. *Karya* is the action to be performed, or "duty" or "task"; previous commentators reveal that here the word *karya* refers to the body, that is an effect of action and at the same time the instrument for action, determining the range of activities and choices of the individual. Generally the word *karma* is used to indicate one's duty, but as a complete action, a process that is already set as a result of previous choices, and that can only be steered by consciousness either in a good or in a bad direction through transformation or modifications of desire (*iccha, kriya, jnana*). So the difference between *karya* and *karma* is the free will that we apply to change the course of our own destiny.

Kriya is therefore the process of creation, by which bodies are created as vehicles for opportunities to perform one's duty in the proper consciousness; this *kshetra* ("field of action") is created from the *mahat*, the non-differentiated Brahman, which through the action of Kala/ Kali develops the sense of identity and differentiation, separation or individuality. The very concept of *ahankara* is based on action: *aham* means "I" and *kara* means "who acts"; to avoid misinterpretations, we need to remember here that deliberate abstention from dutiful action is also considered an action, albeit negative in form, and brings negative consequences.

From this *ahankara* (or *kartritvam*), the action of Time develops the *tan matra* (the subtle schematics of sense perception), and from this blueprint of consciousness applied to action, the *karana* (the 11 sense organs, including the mind) and the *visayas* (sense objects and bodies) will develop. All this is caused by Nature, or Prakriti, and actually constitutes the very identity of Prakriti.

So when we say, *karya karana kartritve hetuh prakritir ucyate*, it means that *prakriti* is the cause or meaning/ reason/ initiator of the *kartritva* (capacity of action) in the *karana* (senses and mind) of the *karya* (action itself as duty we choose to perform). On another

level, the *prakriti* (as engagement of the qualities of one's body and mind) is the *karya* (duty), the *karana* (the cause) and the *hetu* (the meaning or reason) in the *kartritva* (principle of action itself, or impetus for creation). On yet another level, the actions (*karya*, starting with the creation of the universe) are the cause (*karana*) and the purpose (*hetu*) for the sense of doership or agency (*kartritva*) embodied by the various Devas who preside over the functions/ actions within the universe.

Accordingly, the second part of the verse will indicate that the *purusha* experiences the consciousness transformations in the different tastes (sweet, salty, bitter, sour, pungent, astringent) that are variations of *sukha* (pleasure) and *duhkha* (pain). On another level, the *purusha* (as consciousness) is the *hetu* (origin, cause, purpose) of the tasting (*bhoktritva*) of the various feelings and experiences. On another level, the supreme Purusha is the supreme Master (*bhokta*) that is served by all the various personalities in the universe; the good personalities serve him favorably and the bad personalities serve him unfavorably - creating opportunities for *lila*, for the expression of teachings and the demonstration through examples that can be useful for other developing souls. So even the most rebellious *asuras* are actually playing in God's hands, and they are fully controlled by Prakriti through action.

VERSE 22

पुरुषः प्रकृतिस्थो हि भुङ्क्ते प्रकृतिजान्गुणान् ।

puruṣaḥ prakṛtistho hi bhukṅkte prakṛtijāṅguṇān ।

कारणं गुणसङ्गोऽस्य सदसद्योनिजन्मसु ॥ १३-२२ ॥

kāraṇaṁ guṇasaṅgo'sya sadasadyonijanmasu ॥ 13-22 ॥

purusah: the *purusha*; *prakriti sthah:* situated in the *prakriti*; *hi:* indeed; *bhunkte:* enjoys; *prakriti jan:* born from the *prakriti*; *gunan:* the *gunas*; *karanam:* the origin; *guna sanga:* contact with the *gunas*; *asya:* of him; *sat asat:* good and bad; *yoni:* matrix; *janmasu:* in (various) births.

"The Purusha is situated in the Prakriti, and tastes the *gunas* that have originated from the Prakriti. Due to the contact with these *gunas*, he takes birth in various matrixes, good or bad.

The Purusha can never be separated from the Prakriti.

Consciousness exists only through the cognition of existence, and existence is the *kshetra*, as we have seen at the beginning of this chapter. The *purusha* is the *kshetra jna*, the consciousness that perceives the *kshetra*, but this *kshetra* also includes *jnana* (knowledge), *jneya* (the object of knowledge), and *jnana gamyam* (the purpose of knowledge). It is obvious that Arjuna's questions were very wisely chosen, and this indicates that he already knew the answers and the subject perfectly well.

So when Krishna replies, "the *kshetra* is the body and the *kshetra jna* is the soul", we must be very careful not to get merrily simplistic about the subject. The subsequent elaborations offered by Krishna are illuminating for those who keep their minds open, because in 13.16 and 13.17 he says that Vishnu is the *jneya* and *jnana gamyam*, the "object" of knowledge, although he is not *kshetra* but rather *kshetra jna*. So we understand that this knowledge of the field (*kshetra jnana*) applies to action (*prakriti*), as well as to perception (*purusha*), that must also be perceived and known.

This also helps us to understand the difference between the two *kshetra jnas* - the *jivatma* and the *paramatma*. The *param atma* knows all *kshetras* or fields of action (bodies, etc): *ksetra jnam*

capi mam viddhi sarva ksetresu bharata, ksetra ksetrajnayor jnanam yat taj jnanam matam mama. "O Bharata, you should know that I am also the knower of the field who resides in all fields. Knowing the field and the knower of the field is called knowledge. This is my opinion", (13.3).

The *paramatma*, the Soul of all souls, is the real *bhokta*, the cause (*hetu*, *karana*) of the *bhoktritva* for all *jivatmas*, while the acceptance of *rasas* by the individual souls is simply a reflection or imitation or "ripple" of the *rasas* in the supreme Consciousness. We can make a practical example with the activities of a group of children who are helping Mother prepare food in the kitchen; only if they work in the proper consciousness, following the instructions and for a higher purpose, they will be able to produce something useful, otherwise they will have to eat their own unpleasant mess. Father may enjoy having a taste of their food even if it is tasting horrible, or he may already know the taste because of his vaster knowledge, but he is not attached to it and therefore does not need to eat it all, while the conditioned souls are egotistically identifying with their action and therefore they have to eat it up and mop the plate, even if they have to cry for that.

Another very interesting point revealed by previous commentators is that the *purusha* never actually enjoys the sense objects (*visaya*) but only the *gunas* (qualities) associated with such sense objects. In the case of the supreme *purusha*, these *gunas* are the transcendental qualities that create variety of tastes from the three basic elements of *sat* (existence), *cit* (awareness) and *ananda* (happiness), while in the case of the conditioned individual *purusha*, the three *gunas* are the fundamental qualities of material nature (*sattva*, *rajas*, *tamas*), that will be described in detail in the next chapters. To summarize them, we can say that *sattva* is goodness and happiness, *rajas* is effort and pain, and *tamas* is illusion and ignorance.

Consequently, as the verse says (*karanam guna sango 'sya sad asad yoni janmasu*), by the association with these qualities or *gunas*, the *purusha* is "caused" by the subtle body to take birth in a *yoni* or matrix. In the case of the *parama purusha*, the matrix is the spiritual form, manifested by the combination of qualities connected to the specific action or mission, that can appear as *saumya* (benevolent) or *asaumya* (terrifying), or even *sat* (eternal) or *asat* (temporary, as in *avataras* that appear for a particular mission only and then disappear). The *jivatma* itself is one of such *avataras*, specifically described as *vibhinnamsa* ("distinct limb"), or *shaktyavesa* ("invested with power"), although of course it is only an atom (*anu atma*).

Similarly, the use of the word *janma* has previously been applied to the *svamsa avatara* appearance of the transcendental Lord (*janma karma ca me divyam*, "my divine birth and activities", 4.9, *bahuni me vyatitani janmani*, "many have been my births", 4.5, and also in 4.3, *aparam bhavato janma*, "you were born more recently").

Even the use of the word *sristi* as in *srijami aham*, "I create (my form)", (4.7) is applied to the appearance of the Lord, and this gives us a glimpse on the idea that everything is actually spiritual (including what appears to be material) and everything could indeed be directed by pure consciousness.

The cause (*karana*) for identification (*kartritva*) is action. In the *parama Purusha*, such action is *lila*, detached and blissful manifestation that is perfectly conscious and deliberate, and thus never failing (*acyuta*) or subject to actual suffering. Both *purushas* are situated (*stha*) in *prakriti*, but while the *parama purusha* controls the *prakriti*, the *jiva purusha* is controlled by the *prakriti* because of his tiny size and incomplete consciousness.

VERSE 23

उपद्रष्टानुमन्ता च भर्ता भोक्ता महेश्वरः ।

upadraṣṭānumantā ca bhartā bhoktā maheśvaraḥ ।

परमात्मेति चाप्युक्तो देहेऽस्मिन्पुरुषः परः ॥ १३-२३ ॥

paramātmēti cāpyukto dehe'sminpuruṣaḥ paraḥ ॥ 13-23 ॥

upadrasta: the witness; *anumanta*: the one who gives permission; *ca*: and; *bharta*: who maintains; *bhokta*: who enjoys; *mahesvarah*: the great Lord; *paramatma*: the supreme Self; *iti*: like this; *ca*: and; *api*: even; *uktah*: it is said; *dehe*: in the body; *asmin*: this; *purusah parah*: the supreme *Purusha*/ the transcendental *Purusha*.

"However, it is said that within this body also dwells the supreme Purusha, the Paramatma Mahesvara. He is the one who witnesses the action and allows it to be performed, supports it and enjoys it.

Because the definition of Purusha, as pure eternal consciousness, can apply both to the supreme Lord and to the individual *jivatma*, particularly in relationship to action, qualities, forms, etc as explained in the previous verses, here Krishna elaborates on the difference between the *anu atma* (infinitesimal soul) and the *param atma* (the supreme soul).

The sectarian academic mentality divides the study of knowledge in opposite factions, creating the confused and delusional idea that we need to "pick a side" in the field of ideologies and fight against all other groups, rejecting their arguments *a priori*, out of our allegiance to our "own camp". The Vedic system, based on honoring truth (*satyam*) above all, uses philosophical debate simply to improve and expand everybody's realizations, and not for the aggrandizement or "victory" of a particular camp above the

other. In this tradition, the Absolute Truth is that perspective in which all relative truths are contained and reconciled, forming a multi-dimensional vision that is the closest possible to the Sum total of Reality.

Therefore there is no need to be afraid of impersonalism versus personalism: the two perspectives can and should complement each other, because Reality is multi-dimensional. The various schools of thought that have elaborated on the subject in the last 2000 years or so have presented various perspectives that are not at odds with each other, but are meant to complement each other into a greater picture. The most recent perspective, expressed by Krishna Chaitanya, is called *acintya bheda abheda*, "inconceivably one and distinct", establishing that God is at the same time one with, and distinct from, his energies - the world and the individual souls.

The realization of the unity of all Consciousness is called Brahman realization; this Brahman is simultaneous awareness of all beings, individual souls and elements of nature, and is eternally full of happiness and peace, totally transcending all darkness of ignorance. The realization of Paramatma is one step further; this supreme Consciousness is also individual - a supreme Personality that is our conscience, and is immensely more intelligent and wiser than us.

Krishna has stated from the very beginning: *na tv evaham jatu nasam na tvam neme janadhipah, na caiva na bhavisyamah sarve vayam atah param*, "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", (2.12). This is also confirmed in *Svetasvatara Upanishad* (6.13): *nityo nityanam cetanas cetananam*, "he is (the supreme) eternal among all eternal, (the supreme) conscious among all the conscious".

When we attain the Paramatma realization, we are not alone any more. Just sitting next to us, on the tree of our body, we find the greatest friend and lover - not simply a Great Universal Mind, containing all knowledge and awareness, but the Soul of our soul, our innermost Self, who perfectly understands us but is not limited by our weakness.

The *Bhagavata Purana* (11.11.6) confirms: *suparnav etau sadrisau sakhya, yadricchayaitau krita nidau ca vrikse, ekas tayoh khadati pippalannam anyo niranno 'pi balena bhuyan*, "Two friend birds somehow nested on the same banyan tree; one is eating the fruits, the other is not eating any food, but he is the strongest."

This beautiful image is also found in the *Upanishads* (*Svetasvatara Upanishad* 4.6, *Mundaka Upanishad* 3.1.1): *dva suparna sayujya sakhaya samanam vriksam parisavajate, tayor anyah pippalam svadv atty anasnann anyo 'bhichakasiti*.

One could remain confused by trying to reconcile the idea of the Paramatma as the bird who is not eating the fruits of the tree, with the idea of the Paramatma being the *bhokta*, or the supreme enjoyer as stated in this verse. The explanation is not difficult: the supreme Soul is on a higher level of consciousness, a sacred consciousness, where all actions are performed as *yajna* and *tapas*: *bhoktaram yajna tapasam sarva loka mahesvaram, suhridam sarva bhutanam jnatva mam santim ricchati*, "(One who) knows me as the enjoyer/ beneficiary of *yajna* (sacrifice) and *tapas* (austerity), the great Lord of all the worlds/ all people, and the dearest friend of all beings, attains peace", (5.29), *aham hi sarva yajnanam bhokta ca prabhur eva ca, na tu mam abhijananti tattvenatas cyavanti te*, "I am the Lord and beneficiary of all *yajnas*. Those who do not understand my *tattva* will have to take birth again", (9.24).

The individual soul can also enter this dimension of consciousness by tuning in accordingly:

yat karosi yad asnasi yaj juhosi dadasi yat, yat tapasyasi kaunteya tat kurusva mad arpanam, "O Arjuna, whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you sacrifice, whatever you give, whatever you endure in the performance of your duties - do it for me", (9.27),

brahmany adhaya karmani sangam tyaktva karoti yah, lipyate na sa papena padma patram ivambhasa, "Connecting/ dovetailing all activities to the Brahman, giving up all (identifications and) associations, one is never affected by the negative consequences, just like a lotus leaf is never affected by water", (5.10),

na mam karmani limpanti na me karma phale spriha, iti mam yo 'bhijanati karmabhir na sa badhyate, "I am not affected by action and I am not touched by the results of the action. One who really understands this (fact) is not bound by actions either", (4.14),

na ca mam tani karmani nibadhnanti dhananjaya, udasina vad asinam asaktam tesu karmasu, "O Dhananjaya, I am not bound by such actions, as I am situated neutrally, without any attraction for such activities", (9.9),

janma karma ca me divyam evam yo vetti tattvatah, tyaktva deham punar janma naiti mam eti so 'rjuna, "O Arjuna, one who truly knows the divine nature of my births and activities does not have to take another birth after leaving this body, but comes to me", (4.9).

So the bird that is not interested in eating the fruits of the tree is *atma rama* ("taking pleasure in the self") and in more than one sense. First of all, he is self-sufficient and can find all happiness and satisfaction within himself. Secondly, he is enjoying the *jiva atman* - perceiving the feelings and perceptions of the individual souls, and guiding them towards the transcendental happiness that

is *bhakti*. We can make a very simple example in this regard: mouth, tongue, stomach are all eating, but it is the "I" of the body that is primarily benefitted (*bhokta*), although all the parts of the body obtain pleasure and nourishment, too.

Narada pancaratra teaches: *hrishikena hrishiksha sevanam bhaktir ucyate*, "*bhakti* is defined as using one's senses to serve the Lord of the senses". The more we adjust the focus of our consciousness towards happiness and love, the more Paramatma is pleased enjoying these feelings in the heart of the *jiva*; conversely, Krishna will explain (17.6) that *asuras* practice austerities that cause pain and damage to the mind and the body, and the Paramatma feels them too (*mam ca iva ... sarira stham*) although he always remains detached from them and focused on the immense happiness of Brahman (*brahma ananda*). This is confirmed in *Gopala tapani Upanishad (uttara 97)*: *sakshi cetah kevalo nirgunas ca*, "the Witness is pure Consciousness, free from all material qualities".

When we learn and apply this "witness meditation" approach to our own life, we can also establish ourselves in that nature (*bhava*):

apuryamanam acala pratistham samudram apah pravisanti yadvat, tadvat kama yam pravisanti sarve sa santim apnoti na kama kami, "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" (2.70),

naiva kincit karomiti yukto manyeta tattva vit, pasyan srinvan sprisan jighrann asnan gacchan svapan svasan, "One who is a *yogi* thinks/ should think, 'I am not the doer of anything'. One who knows the truth (engages in) seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, eating, going, dreaming, breathing, (etc)", (5.8),

ye hi samsarsa ja bhoga duhkha yonaya eva te, ady antavantah kaunteya na teshu ramate budhah, "Those pleasures that derive from contact with (the sense objects) are the cause for future sorrow because they have a beginning and an end. Therefore, o son of Kunti, an intelligent person does not seek happiness in them", (5.22).

On another level of meaning, the Paramatman is perceived as the *prana vayu*, the life air that sustains all the other *pranas* in the body, and keeps us alive. This *prana vayu* is explicitly identified as the *omkara*, the primeval sound vibration, that is also called *pranava* ("as/ of the *prana*"). More about this concept in chapter 17.

The two attributes of *upadrasta* and *anumanta*, described in regard to the Paramatma, are closely connected. The supreme Soul is the eternal witness and understands everything, therefore he guides us to fulfill our desires and to enter circumstances that will help us progress in our evolution, also reminding us about all such events - either within this lifetime, or between lifetimes, or in a next lifetime - whenever we need and want to know.

Because our awareness is limited by our individual mind structure, we cannot remember everything at the same time, therefore the "superconscious" (the supreme Self) gives us messages and hints from time to time, in the form of inspiration, sudden memories, impulses and even dreams, as well as teachings and comments we hear from other people. When we become more sincere and dedicated to our spiritual evolution, we become more sensitive and open to such messages, and to the "voice of our conscience".

The next two attributes of the Paramatma described in this verse are *bharta* and *bhokta*, accompanied by the name *mahesvara*, "great Lord". We should never forget that our conscience is the voice of God - the beneficiary of all activities, the owner of all

planets, and the well wisher of all beings: *bhoktaram yajna tapasam sarva loka mahesvaram, suhridam sarva bhutanam jnatva mam santim ricchati*, (5.29).

It is also very interesting to notice that the name Mahesvara is normally used to refer to Lord Shiva, the form of Vishnu that engages material nature and begets all souls in this world. Mahesvara is thus Paramatma, the supreme Self of the self - a special position that is technically called *shiva tattva* in the *bhakti* literature.

For those who consider themselves as *vaishnavas* followers of Krishna Chaitanya, it will be interesting to notice that Sadashiva ("the eternal form of Shiva") is described as directly Narayana, or as exemplified beautifully by the characteristic iconography, is depicted as Hari Hara.

The word *bhara* means "burden", as in something that we carry or sustain, as in expenditures etc. So *bharanam* means continuance of the functions, support, sustenance, and *bharta* means "sustainer", applied to all relationships where a powerful person maintains, supports and protects others.

For example, Vishnu is called Indrabharta, "the sustainer of Indra". Also, *bharta* is usually applied to the husband in a marriage relationship.

Krishna had already mentioned some of these attributes (*sakshi* is a synonym of *upadrasta*) in verse 9.18: *gatih bharta prabhuh saksi nivasah saranam suhrit, prabhavah pralayah sthanam nidhanam bijam avyayam*, "I am the destination, the nourisher, the Lord, the witness, the abode, the shelter, the friend. I am the origin, the end, the foundation, the resting place and the seed that never perishes."

VERSE 24

य एवं वेत्ति पुरुषं प्रकृतिं च गुणैः सह ।

ya evaṁ vetti puruṣaṁ prakṛtiṁ ca guṇaiḥ saha ।

सर्वथा वर्तमानोऽपि न स भूयोऽभिजायते ॥ १३-२४ ॥

sarvathā vartamāno'pi na sa bhūyo'bhijāyate ॥ 13-24 ॥

yah: one who; *evam*: like this; *vetti*: knows; *purusam prakrtim ca*: the *purusha* and the *prakriti*; *gunaih saha*: together with the *gunas*; *sarvatha*: in all ways; *vartamanah*: established; *api*: although; *na*: not; *sah*: s/he; *bhuyah*: again; *abhijayate*: takes birth.

"One who knows the Purusha and the Prakriti, as well as the various ways of the *gunas*, will not take another birth, irrespective of his/ her (present) situation.

Ordinary materialistic people think that the purpose of life is merely about living - surviving as long as possible and enjoying as much as possible. A famous materialist, Charvaka Muni, wrote, *rinam krtva ghrtam pibet yavaj jivet sukham jivet, bhasmi bhutasya dehasya kutah punar agamano bhavet*, "While you are still alive, enjoy life by eating excellent food, even if you need to make debts for that, because after the dead body has been burned to ashes, there will be no return". Some people even extend this idea beyond the borrowing and apply it to overtly or covertly fraudulent activities such as stealing or pretending to be a saintly person and begging for charity ("beg, borrow or steal").

In this perspective, religiously inclined materialists hear about the superior pleasures of paradise and develop a desire to be admitted there; accordingly they perform the required rituals to accumulate good merits. However, such position is not permanent, and after exhausting such merits one must take a new birth on the human

level of life and engage in pious religious activities again to earn new credits; this applies to everyone, including those who do not believe in reincarnation and have been told that a place in paradise is a permanent settlement. The laws of nature do not stop working for those who do not "believe" in them.

Some of these materialists who believe in reincarnation have heard that the individual soul develops towards perfection through a variety of increasingly evolved bodies, and conclude that liberation (*moksha*) can be attained only by those who have taken birth in a high family and social position, with a considerable amount of talents, and so on. This is not a fact: any human being can actually attain liberation and perfection simply by taking complete shelter in the Supreme (9.32). Obtaining a human birth (*manusya janma*) is an important turn in a *jivatma's* evolutionary journey, because the nervous system of the functional human body is complex enough to afford philosophical elaboration and spiritual realization.

The purpose of life is the attainment of spiritual realization, that is also called *moksha* or liberation from conditionings; in this verse Krishna explains how spiritual realization consists in achieving the proper knowledge - understanding the facts about *purusha*, *prakriti*, and the various qualities that constitute Nature. Already in verses 4.37 and 4.38, Krishna had stated, *yathaidhamsi samiddho 'gnir bhasma sat kurute 'rjuna, jnanagnih sarva karmani bhasma sat kurute tatha*, "O Arjuna, just like the blazing fire turns firewood into ashes, similarly the fire of knowledge turns all *karma* (reactions to action) into ashes", and *na hi jnanena sadrisam pavitram iha vidyate, tat svayam yoga samsiddhah kalenatmani vindati*, "In this world there is nothing as pure/ sacred as knowledge. One who achieves perfection in (this) *yoga* comes to find full happiness in the Self in the course of time."

This knowledge is not merely the accumulation of theoretical data, but truly changes the life of a person: *yasya sarve samarambhah*

kama sankalpa varjitah, jnanagni dagdha karmanam tam ahuh panditam budhah, "Those who are intelligent declare that a truly learned person is one who has left behind all ventures based on the determination for personal sense pleasure and has thus burned all his *karma* (to ashes) by the fire of knowledge", (4.19).

The reason why we keep taking birth in this world is because we still carry unresolved issues, material desires, attachments and identifications, that we could describe collectively as "karmic seeds" because they have been produced by our previous materially motivated actions. However, since material motivation is due to ignorance of the true nature and duty of the soul, all *karma* can be neutralized by proper knowledge, like seeds burned by fire cannot germinate, so there will be no more rebirth (*Mahabharata*, Vana parva, 199.107).

The expression *vartamanah api* means "although situated in the material world", and carries several layers of meanings. It refers to the *jivan mukta*, who still lives in a material body but does not identify with it: in this sense, it does not really matter which position one holds in the *varna* and *ashrama* system, because by definition transcendental consciousness is not limited by a particular material situation. Many people believe that one can attain *moksha* only by entering the order of *sannyasa*, while ordinary people, who have a regular job and family responsibilities, are excluded from this possibility, and therefore there is no point for them to make any effort in that direction. This is not a Vedic concept, and it is certainly not supported by *Bhagavad gita*.

Already in verse 3.20, Krishna clearly stated that anyone can be situated in perfection (*moksha*) even in this life, by applying the science of action: *karmanaiva hi samsiddhim asthita janakadayah*, "Janaka and others (like him) became situated in perfection through the performance of activities."

He also said, *mam hi partha vyapasritya ye 'pi syuh papa yonayah, striyo vaisyas tatha sudras te 'pi yanti param gatim*, "O Arjuna, those who have completely taken shelter in me will attain the supreme destination, even if they were born from impure intercourse, women, business people and traders, or manual workers", (9.32)

In the *Maha Upanishad* (2.14- 77) we find that when Sukadeva went to visit Janaka, on the advice of his father Vyasa, he found the famous king surrounded by all sorts of sense gratification, but perfectly detached and fully conscious of the transcendental reality. A *jivan mukta*, a soul that is already liberated even while still living in the material body, can remain in any social position without identifying with it. Krishna Chaitanya said, *naham vipro na ca nara patir napi vaisyo na sudro, naham varni na ca griha patir no vanastho yatir va*, "I am not a *brahmana*, I am not a *kshatriya*, a *vaisya* or a *sudra*, and similarly I am not a *brahmachari*, a *grihastha*, a *vanaprastha* or a *sannyasi*".

The actual purpose of life consists in attaining liberation from all conditionings and thus overcoming the need to wear a material body. At this point we can really begin to live and act on the transcendental level (*brahma bhutah prasannatma na socati na kanksati samah sarvesu bhutesu mad bhaktim labhate param*, 18.54) where true *bhakti* can manifest.

In the preliminary stages of devotion one must acquire sufficient faith (*sraddha*) to actually abandon all other considerations and seriously engage in the process of *vaidhi bhakti* (regulated devotional service). Through service to the Supreme, regular association with liberated souls and the study of transcendental knowledge, one can directly experience a glimpse of the spiritual existence (*abhasa*) and therefore attain the level of *nistha* (strong belief). The increased enthusiasm and love produce a real taste (*ruci*) for spiritual life, and this higher taste enables us to become

detached (*asakti*) from material things, as advised in verse 2.59. This is the level of Brahman realization (*brahma bhuta*) where we are fully satisfied (*prasanna atma*) with our service and union with the Supreme, and from which we can easily come to realize the presence of the Supreme in all beings as Param Atman (*samah sarvesu bhutesu*). Only from this level the true sentiments of devotion - *bhava* and *prema* - can manifest; before this point, they are simply *abhasa rupa*, a reflection or shadow of real *bhakti*.

Therefore we need to seriously engage in the process of *anartha nivritti*, "dropping whatever is not valuable", or in other words all the manifestations of *ahankara* (material identification) and *mamatva* (material attachment). One who is still carrying this material luggage will continue to be blinded by selfish desires (*kanksati*) and suffer for all losses (*socati*), and to make an egotistic distinction between one's own benefit and the benefit of all beings (*sarvesu bhutesu*), categorizing others according to the selfish benefit s/he can obtain from them. This attitude will certainly keep the conditioned soul tied to the wheel of reincarnation.

VERSE 25

ध्यानेनात्मनि पश्यन्ति केचिदात्मानमात्मना ।

dhyānenātmani paśyanti kecidātmānamātmanā ।

अन्ये साङ्ख्येन योगेन कर्मयोगेन चापरे ॥ १३-२५ ॥

anye sāṅkhyena yogena karmayogena cāpare ।। 13-25।।

dhyanena: by meditation; *atmani*: in the self; *pasyanti*: they see; *kecit*: some; *atmanam*: the self; *atmana*: by the self; *anye*: others; *sankhyena yogena*: by the *sankhya yoga*; *karma yogena*: by the *karma yoga*; *ca*: and; *apare*: others.

"Some see (all this) in the self through meditation, others by engaging the *atman* within the *atman*, and others through the *sankhya yoga* or the *karma yoga*."

The special character of Vedic religiosity consists in the personalized approach for progress; anyone can be properly engaged and attain ultimate success simply by expertly utilizing one's *guna* and *karma*, the qualities and the activities that have been created by previous impressions (*samskaras*).

Many people speak about "meditation", but have rather foggy ideas about what exactly this is supposed to mean. Most "yoga practitioners" today believe that meditation is simply about making a deliberate effort to relax, breathe peacefully and forget daily problems - to fight stress, improve physical health, and so on. Of course relaxing and bringing silence in the mind are useful and beneficial practices, but they only serve as a preliminary preparation for real meditation; we could make the example of a man who wants to travel and sits in a vehicle. It is a very good start, but unless we actually get the motor running and drive the car to destination, we are not going anywhere, and we cannot say we have been "traveling".

The first method of realization described in this verse is *atma vidya*, the realization of the transcendental nature of *atman*, that is also called *brahman* realization because the *atman* is the individual manifestation of *brahman*. This is called *dhyana*, "meditation". By true meditation, we actually tap into the universal Consciousness and find *sat*, eternal existence, *cit*, complete awareness, and *ananda*, transcendental happiness.

The second method mentioned in the verse is *dhyana* (meditation) on the *atman* of the *atman*, the *param atman*. The individual Self becomes united with the supreme Self, and this is called *yoga* ("union"). Both the first and the second method are connected as subsequent steps of the same journey.

The third method is called *sankhya yoga*, and the fourth method is called *karma yoga*. *Sankhya* consists in categorizing the components of reality, specifically distinguishing what is spiritual from what is material. This method is also called *jnana yoga*, and is based on the study of the *shastra*; with a sincere practice of the theoretical principles thus learned, the *jnani* becomes able to drop material identifications and attachments, and therefore attains the transcendental level (7.19). *Karma yoga* is a faster method, that can be practiced also by those who have relatively less intellectual capacities; by working selflessly and with devotion in the service of God and for the benefit of all creatures, the *sadhaka* is supported and energized by the positive karmic reactions and quickly attains spiritual realization (9.27).

However, we should not think that these methods are separated from each other. Krishna has told us already in 3.3 and 5.4 that the two roads of Sankhya and Karma are actually one only; theory and practice must work side by side, just like knowledge (*jnana*) and renunciation (*vairagya*). When our learning does not become practical application, it remains useless, as in the case of those medical doctors who warn people about the dangers of smoking cigarettes but are unable to drop the bad habit themselves. Similarly, work without knowledge cannot bring proper fruits, as even the best intentions will fail to help us because we will commit a lot of mistakes. Philosophy without application becomes dry arrogance and cruelty, while religious dedication without philosophy becomes fanatical bigotry and dangerous sentimentality.

The key to success is the proper study of Transcendence and a sincere commitment to its pursuit, leaving behind all other considerations: our intelligence should be totally focused on the goal, and not dispersed in many other concerns (2.41). This intensity, this dedication, is called *bhakti*, and it burns like the fire of passion that we experience in this material world - but while material passion burns our intelligence and good sense (2.62-63, 3.39), the fire of *bhakti* burns all *anarthas* and karmic reactions (4.18-20). In fact, this fire of *bhakti* is the source of all blessings for those who are filled with material desires, for those who desire liberation, and for those who are already free from all desires, as confirmed in *Bhagavata Purana* 2.3.10: *akama sarva kamo va moksa kama udara dhih, tivrena bhakti yogena yajeta purusam param.*

A true devotee is anxious to learn about God and his instructions, and while s/he resides in this material world, s/he wants to understand how things work here, so that s/he will be able to offer them or engage them in divine service. Pure love is the best motivation, because it is free from selfishness, and therefore it constitutes the fundamental factor in all the paths of Yoga. At the conclusion of *Bhagavad gita* (18.55) Krishna will say: *bhaktya mam abhijanati yavan yas casmi tattvatah, tato mam tattvato jnatva visate tad anantaram*, "One can know me truly only by *bhakti*, and by this realization one enters Eternity". The *Bhagavata Purana* (11.14.21) confirms in the teachings given by Krishna to Uddhava: *bhaktayaham ekaya grahyah sraddhayatma priyah satam, bhaktih punati man nistha sva pakan api sambhavat*, "I can be attained through pure *bhakti* and full faith. I am the *atman*, dear to the good people (*sat jana*), and such *bhakti* in full dedication purifies anyone, even dog eaters".

Again in *Bhagavata Purana* (11.20.6) Krishna confirms the unity of the three methods: *yogas trayo maya prokta nrinam sreyo*

vidhitsuaya jnanam karma ca bhaktis ca nopayo 'nyo 'sti kutracit, "I have described (these) three *yogas* because I wish that human beings could attain perfection. These are *jnana*, *karma* and *bhakti*: there is no other way."

VERSE 26

अन्ये त्वेवमजानन्तः श्रुत्वान्येभ्य उपासते ।

anye tvevamajānantaḥ śrutvānyebhya upāsate ।

तेऽपि चातितरन्त्येव मृत्युं श्रुतिपरायणाः ॥ १३-२६ ॥

te'pi cātitarantyeva mṛtyuṁ śrutiparāyaṇāḥ ॥ 13-26 ॥

anye: others; *tu*: but; *evam*: in this way; *ajānantaḥ*: who do not know; *śrutva*: by hearing; *anyebhya*: from others; *upasate*: worship/ approach; *te*: they; *api*: although; *ca*: and; *atitaranti*: go beyond/ transcend; *eva*: certainly; *mṛtyum*: death; *śruti parayanah*: dedicated to hearing/ to the scriptures.

"Others still, who do not have sufficient knowledge, worship because they learn from others; they also overcome death because they are dedicated to learning from the scriptures."

The previous verse used the word *pasyanti* ("they actually see") because the direct meditation and engagement in Transcendence is the prescribed method to attain Self realization. However, it may take many lifetimes for a conditioned soul to attain that level and truly engage in *yoga* (*manuṣyaṇam sahasresu kascid yatati siddhaye, yatatam api siddhanam kascin mam vetti tattvataḥ, 7.3, bahunam janmanam ante jnanavan mam prapadyate, vasudevah sarvam iti sa mahatma su durlabhah, 7.9*).

In the early stages of spiritual development, when we are still ignorant (*ajanantah*), we engage indirectly in the process by attaching ourselves to the association of the *tattva darshis* (4.34): *tad viddhi pranipatena pariprasenena sevaya, upadeksyanti te jnanam jnaninas tattva darsinah*, "You should learn this (knowledge) by approaching those who directly contemplate the Truth, asking them many questions and offering them service. Those who have the knowledge will initiate you (into this science)."

This initiation or beginning of the spiritual evolution is based on sincerely listening (*sruti parayana*) to *shastra*, *guru* and *sadhus*. "Listening" is different from "hearing": the act of listening implies a certain degree of attention and an effort to understand the meaning of what one hears. Sometimes people who were born into a traditional religious family simply sit through the recitation of spiritual discourses without making any real effort at understanding and realizing what is discussed; this is also a beneficial practice but the effects will be very limited - as a hungry man cannot get real nourishment simply by smearing the food over his closed mouth. We need to actually open our minds and hearts to the transcendental knowledge with full attention, not only by listening but also by repeating and remembering (*sravanam*, *kirtanam*, *smaranam*). This absorption of the knowledge of Transcendence must also be accompanied by sincere service (*pada sevnam* and *vandanam*, as well as *pranipatena sevaya*), that constitutes the requirement of *vairagya* - abandoning one's attachments and identifications by simply becoming a servant of Yoga.

This is called worship, *arcanam*. The true meaning of worship is not tied to ritualistic ceremonies, but consists in selfless service to the object of our love and dedication. Some people are confused because they believe that "worship" constitutes a sort of

acknowledgment of the absolutely (and exclusively) supremely divine position of the object of our worship, and especially in the case of abrahamic ideologies, this concept creates a mental friction, because it is believed that "worship" should only be applied to one specific personal manifestation of God. Of course each abrahamic group fights the others over this issue.

In the abrahamic perspective, such "worship" is filled with fear and is based on a pact of exclusive allegiance and blind obedience, in recognition and acceptance of the immense, exclusive and absolute power of the Divinity that is worshiped. Even if the concept of love is introduced in such religious contemplation, it remains unable to really connect the devotee and the Divinity, because it believes that a human being can never attain God but must only pay homage from a distance.

The Vedic concept is quite different. Since God is Consciousness, present in the hearts of all beings, and manifests in innumerable forms, the concept of "worship" is translated on a much more familiar and loving level. It applies to all the various forms of the one Godhead and even to its representatives and glorious creations, which constitute the expression of God's nature and concerns. When a Hindu "worships" a cow or a banyan tree, or his own parents or even a guest, s/he is expressing love, appreciation, admiration, consideration, respect, gratitude, towards a manifestation of the goodness of the Divine, that is offering him/her an opportunity to reciprocate the blessings s/he has received.

Of course the concept of "worship" is associated with the concept of "religion" or "faith", but there are many levels of such function of consciousness. Later in the text of *Bhagavad gita* Krishna will explain about the three types of faith and religion (chapter 17, *sraddha traya vibhaga yoga*), showing that not all religious people obtain the same results. Those who practice religion without properly following the transcendental science remain bound to the

material tendencies called *gunas*, explained in detail in chapters 14 and 16 (*guna traya vibhaga yoga* and *daivasura sampad vibhaga yoga*), and obtain results accordingly.

The different forms of religiousness depend on the level of proper knowledge and personal evolution; all human beings have a natural tendency to religion, as religion (from the Latin word *religare*, "to connect") connects the individual with the greater existence in which s/he lives, and manifests in some expression of respect or worship offered to this greater existence. This natural tendency of the human being stems directly from the spiritual intelligence that is spontaneously present in everyone and is variously known as "the voice of conscience", "sense of ethics", "good sense" and so on, and that Vedic scriptures call *sanatana dharma*. This *sanatana dharma*, or eternal and universal sense of religion, is the primeval origin of all religious faiths.

Worship (*upasana*) is synonymous with respect and service; so when a human being perceives and acknowledges the greater existence and offers respect and service to it, this is called religion. This greater existence can be one's family or tribe or even the entire universe: the connection and dedication to its service in positive harmony - that we call religion - is the true source of satisfaction for the soul. The greater satisfaction and benefit is obtained when worship is offered in virtue and purity (*sattva*), while the presence of greed (*rajas*) and ignorance (*tamas*) will create negative side effects that can even destroy the benefits completely. This is suggested in this verse by the reference to death (*mrityum*), that is not the physical death of the body but the spiritual death of the soul who sinks deeper and deeper into the regions of of ignorance (16.19-20). The only hope to escape from this disastrous course is to obtain the knowledge of the scriptures, the *sruti* (16.24), first by listening from the realized souls and then studying it directly.

In all cultural traditions we will find individuals who practice religion. Even atheists worship Reason and Logic, and recognize the intrinsic value of ethics and conscience, and of working for the benefit of the entire society or universe. The real problem is when a cultural tradition is hijacked by individuals who are motivated by ignorance and material greed, and consequently the spontaneous and natural religious tendencies of the people are directed towards evil and destructive beliefs and practices, characteristic of the *asuras*. This is exactly the opposite of what a *tattva darshi* does to engage rajasic and tamasic people in a progressive method of worship; the religious teachers must always be situated in genuine transcendental realization, in order to properly direct all levels of people. When the "religious authority" lacks this realization or is actually a victim of greed and ignorance, even sincere and intelligent followers become corrupted and fall on the asuric level of life, because we develop the same qualities of the object of our worship.

This verse offers us the fundamental point of religion, that can liberate us from death: learning from genuine scriptures and from qualified teachers and realized devotees. Everything else is just *laukika sraddha*, or "popular belief", that cannot give good results and in some case could even be disastrous.

VERSE 27

यावत्सञ्जायते किञ्चित्सत्त्वं स्थावरजङ्गमम् ।

yāvatsañjāyate kiñcitsattvaṁ sthāvarajāṅgamam ।

क्षेत्रक्षेत्रज्ञसंयोगात्तद्विद्धि भरतर्षभ ॥ १३-२७ ॥

kṣetrakṣetrajañāsamyogāttadviddhi bharatarṣabha ॥ 13-27 ॥

yavat: whatever; *sanjayate*: comes into being; *kincit*: anything; *sattvam*: *sattva*/ existence; *sthavara*: non moving; *jangamam*: moving; *ksetra*: the field; *ksetra jna*: the knower of the field; *samyogat*: through the union/ connection; *tat*: that; *viddhi*: you should know; *bharata rshabha*: o best of the descendants of Bharata.

"O descendant of Bharata, you should know that whatever comes to being, moving or non moving, is generated by the union between the field and the knower of the field.

After describing the knowledge of the scriptures, Krishna again repeats its sum and substance: whatever exists is generated or manifested by the union of the *prakriti* and the *purusha* - the two components of the Supreme Brahman - both at the spiritual level and at the material level. We remember how this point was highlighted in the *catuh sloka*, the four central verses of the *Bhagavata Purana* (2.9.33-36), from *aham evasam evagre* to *yat syat sarvatra sarvada*.

All we can see, and therefore all that can be the natural object of our worship, is fundamentally God - *sattvam*, Existence itself. The unlimited manifestation of the spiritual worlds and all the powerful manifestations in these material worlds are simply the *shakti*, or energies, or powers, of the supreme Existence, and we become better able to realize this eternal existence of *suddha sattva* when we situate ourselves in *sattva* or goodness by following the scientific method of Yoga.

According to our level of realization or *sva bhava* (personal nature or personal sentiments) we will connect with the Supreme through an experience of union (*yoga*, religion) that is the powerful source of bliss and satisfaction. At the most primitive level, this union between the *purusha* and the *prakriti* is attained through the physical union of the male and female energies within the material

body - the fundamental pure sexual act that offers momentary freedom from the limitations of egotism and a glimpse of the ecstatic experience. This primordial union is sacred, as Krishna clearly states in 7.11, and it is found at the highest level of consciousness at the level of *madhurya rasa bhakti* in the ecstatic union of the soul (as *prakriti*) with God (as *purusha*).

Unfortunately, the understanding of this fundamental principle has been desecrated by asuric ideologies based on *rajas* (greed) that disregard the very concept of *dharma* (ethical principles) and - even worse - by those based on *tamas* (ignorance) that have consistently presented *dharma* as *adharma*, and *adharma* as *dharma* (18.30-32). The resulting contamination has created extreme confusion (*ajanantam*) and great sufferings for everyone, and the only medicine consists in proper knowledge and understanding (*sruti parayanam*) to transcend gross material identification (*atitaranti mrtyum*).

In this verse, the word *sattvam* refers to the supreme Existence as well as to its various manifestations, as in "beings", "situations", and "objects" - all permanent and temporary, moving and non-moving on different levels of meaning. At the grossest level, this "moving and non-moving" refers to the various species of life, from the minerals to the plants, to the animals, to human being and even to highest residents of the heavenly planets, but at the subtlest level it refers to the constant transformation of all things and circumstances, that engages the soul in its evolutionary journey in a vast array of experiences.

The *samyoga* (union) between *kshetra* and *kshetrajna* is therefore meant for our evolution and progress, carrying us from the material level to the spiritual level, from ignorance to the light, from death to immortality - *tamaso ma jyotir gamaya, mrtyor ma amritam gamaya* (*Bṛhad aranyaka Upanishad*, 1.3.28). This is represented in the previous verse by the word *atitaranti* ("they go beyond").

VERSE 28

समं सर्वेषु भूतेषु तिष्ठन्तं परमेश्वरम् ।

samaṁ sarveṣu bhūteṣu tiṣṭhantaṁ parameśvaram ।

विनश्यत्स्वविनश्यन्तं यः पश्यति स पश्यति ॥ १३-२८ ॥

vinaśyatsvavinaśyantaṁ yaḥ paśyati sa paśyati ।। 13-28 ।।

samaṁ: equally; *sarvesu bhutesu*: in all beings; *tisthantam*: residing; *parama isvaram*: the supreme Lord; *vinasyatsu*: in things that will be destroyed; *avinasyantam*: in things that will not be destroyed; *yah*: s/he; *pasyati*: sees; *sah*: s/he; *pasyati*: (really) sees.

"The supreme Lord equally resides in all beings, in those that will be destroyed and in those that will not be destroyed. One who sees this, is actually seeing.

Krishna is leading us to the conclusion of this very important chapter, discussing the simultaneous difference and non-difference of the Purusha and the Prakriti.

We have seen in 2.16-17 that matter and spirit are characterized respectively by destruction and non-destruction (*nasato vidyate bhavo nabhavo vidyate satah*), and that spirit can never be destroyed (*avinasi tu tad viddhi*). This spirit is the Consciousness that pervades all things (*sarvam idam tatam*); the individual spiritual fragments are the *atman*, and the sum total of all consciousness is the *brahman*.

There is no difference in quality between the *atman* and the *brahman* - in fact they are one and the same - but there is a difference in quantity or vastity of such consciousness. This understanding will enable us to assimilate, realize and practice all the teachings of Vedic scriptures.

The distinction between spirit and matter is useful in the beginning of our study; however, as the student progresses and becomes more capable of understanding the subject, the vision deepens and expands, removing the support walls that were used to learn to stand up.

This is not a contradiction at all.

We could make the example of mathematics: in the beginning we are taught that a greater number cannot be subtracted from a smaller number - you need to have 4 apples in your basket, in order to remove 3 apples and find that only 1 apple is left. However, when we have advanced past this elementary level, we discover that we actually could subtract a greater number from a smaller number: this is called algebra, and can be explained by the example of "borrowing more apples" from someone else and thereby incurring a debt or calculating a negative number. So there is no contradiction in the two apparently opposite statements.

When we have realized that God is Consciousness and Existence, the distinction between the personal subject of the consciousness and the manifestation of such thoughts becomes less important; this applies on the three levels of Brahman, Paramatma and Bhagavan as well.

At the Brahman level, the *mahat tattva* is also consciousness because it constitutes the blue print information (i.e. knowledge) of the sum total of reality in the world. At the level of Paramatma, Isvara is present both in the hearts of the individual *jiva atmans* and in the hearts of each and every single atom of matter, and even in between such atoms. At the level of Bhagavan, the consciousness of God is lovingly focused on all creatures and creations, to manifest and support their maintenance and progress and reciprocate their devotion.

An important word here is *samam*, placed in the position of honor at the beginning of this verse and the subsequent one. The Supreme Lord is situated in all beings and situations (*sarvesu bhutesu*) in the same manner; he does not make any discrimination about the material position or body of the various beings, or even about their *guna* and *karma*. This is why a realized soul is equally well disposed towards everyone, and has no prejudice at all, and especially does not mistreat anyone.

The Vedic tradition and *Bhagavad gita* do not condemn, despise or demonize material nature - bodies and objects and resources - as some other ideologies do. On the contrary, we celebrate the beauty of Mother Nature and rejoice in healthy pleasures and joys, while still remembering that they are temporary and limited.

In this verse, the word *pasyati* is particularly important and is repeated twice at the end. It was used in the same way in previous verses, for example in verses 5.5 and 6.30. Vedic knowledge gives great importance to direct personal verification and realization, and does not rely on blind faith and allegiance, therefore it accepts the validity of different *darshanas* ("perspectives") of the same One Reality.

However, we should not think that such an open-minded approach means that we can give the same value to all opinions, including the whimsical speculations of ignorant people. There is a stark difference between a particular perspective (or angle of vision) of reality and a distorted hallucination, projection or fantasy.

It is therefore imperative that we follow the expert guidance of realized teachers and systematically clean our minds from the contamination of ignorance, so we will become able to truly see things as they are and not as we imagine them to be.

VERSE 29

समं पश्यन्हि सर्वत्र समवस्थितमीश्वरम् ।

samaṁ paśyanhi sarvatra samavasthitamīśvaram ।

न हिनस्त्यात्मनात्मानं ततो याति परां गतिम् ॥ १३-२९ ॥

na hinastyātmanātmānaṁ tato yāti parāṁ gatim ।। 13-29।।

samaṁ: equally; *paśyan*: seeing; *hi*: indeed; *sarvatra*: everywhere; *sama vasthitam*: equally situated; *īśvaram*: the Lord; *na*: not; *hinasti*: becomes diminished/ degraded; *atmana*: by oneself; *atmanam*: the self; *tataḥ*: then; *yati*: attains; *param gatim*: the supreme destination.

"One who sees the Lord as equally situated everywhere never becomes degraded/ by being controlled by his/ her mind / by engaging the self in the self, s/he ultimately attains the supreme destination.

In this verse, the expression *atmana atmanam* can be interpreted in two ways, because our mind and identification can either degrade or elevate us, based on the choices we make in regard of consciousness. This was already explained very well in verse 6.5: *uddhared atmanatmanam natmanam avasadayet, atmaiva hy atmano bandhur atmaiva ripur atmanah*, "One should raise him/ herself by his/ her own effort, and not degrade him/ herself. Certainly one should be one's own friend, and one can be one's own enemy as well."

Therefore the two possible translations of this verse are:

a) "One who sees the Lord as equally situated everywhere never becomes degraded by being controlled by his/ her mind and ultimately attains the supreme destination" and

b) "One who sees the Lord as equally situated everywhere never becomes degraded, and by engaging the self in the self, s/he ultimately attains the supreme destination."

In both cases, the one key factor to ensure our elevation rather than degradation is being able to see God in everything - every creature, every object, every place, every situation.

A *tattva darshi*, or *rishi* ("one who sees") cannot remain confused, because s/he has directly experienced the luminous view of Reality. It is not simply a matter of faith, that can be lost along the way. Once you have really tasted the honey, there will be no more space for doubts in your mind regarding the meaning of the word "sweet".

How to recognize a true *tattva darshi* from an ordinary non-realized person? It is actually very simple: the answer is presented again and again in *Bhagavad gita* and all the other scriptures. When someone has actually seen the presence of the Supreme Being and Consciousness in every creature, there is no more partiality or identification based on superficial and external differences, such as bodily identification. Material bodily identification is the root of all ignorance, and the cause of all sufferings.

All the negative qualities experienced by human beings - fear, hatred, lust, cruelty, as well as greed for power, possession and domination - automatically disappear when we overcome the delusion of the identification with the temporary material body and the attachment to temporary material things. Make a list of all the crimes, injustices and horrors that have ever plagued human society, and you will find that they are all based on the delusion of separation of interests calculated in terms of identification with the material body.

For a realized soul, every situation offers an opportunity to be in contact with God - the Supreme Consciousness - through an act of sincere service. Anything and anyone can be engaged, either by our associating or dissociating with it, by treasuring or discarding it, by consuming or non consuming it. We need to remember that action is constituted not only by the physical performance of some movement of the body and the senses, but also by the engagement of the mind and even by the deliberate choice of abstaining from a particular act. This was already explained in verses 4.16-18.

With this deeper awareness and motivation, a person never becomes destroyed or degraded (*na hinasti*) even in the most unfavorable situations including the death of the body. All these can be used as opportunities rather than problems, although of course we should not go around searching for trouble or expect never to feel pain or loss. Degradation or contamination does not depend on external factors, but on one's mind. External contamination is something temporary and can be removed easily with a bath and other purification methods, as long as the mind and consciousness are pure. On the other hand, when we allow our mind and consciousness to become polluted by making the wrong choices, we become really degraded.

VERSE 30

प्रकृत्यैव च कर्माणि क्रियमाणानि सर्वशः ।

prakṛtyaiva ca karmāṇi kriyamāṇāni sarvaśaḥ ।

यः पश्यति तथात्मानमकर्तारं स पश्यति ॥ १३-३० ॥

yaḥ paśyati tathātmānamakartāraṁ sa paśyati ॥ 13-30 ॥

prakritya: by the *prakriti*; *eva*: certainly; *ca*: and; *karmani*: the activities; *kriyamanani*: are performed; *sarvasah*: in all situations; *yah*: one who; *pasyati*: sees; *tatha*: also; *atmanam*: the self; *akartaram*: who is not the doer; *sah*: s/he; *pasyati*: sees.

"One who sees that all the activities, under all circumstances, are performed by the Prakriti, and that the Atman is not the doer, really sees.

Contamination by external circumstances normally happens through the physiological functions of the body and the contact with matter, as explained in verses 5.8-10. The acts of seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, eating, moving around, dreaming, breathing (and other *prana* functions, such as sneezing etc), talking, evacuating, absorbing, opening and closing one's eyes (as in falling asleep and waking up) are associated with some type of contamination, and this is why we must bathe regularly.

One of the basic religious requirements or duties for human beings consists in washing at least once a day, and keeping oneself as clean as possible in regard to body (internally and externally), food, clothing, living quarters, etc. This is the most elementary difference between civilized people (*aryas*) and non-civilized people (*anaryas*).

Of course true cleanliness also extends to the mind and consciousness, and as we purify ourselves from the contamination of material identifications and attachments, we can truly develop and attain perfection. This is the meaning of the realization described in this verse, as well as in verses 5.10 and 3.27. Only matter (gross matter like the body and subtle matter like the mind) can become dirty or contaminated; the *atman*, the *purusha*, the original consciousness, is always pure. It is like the sun, that can temporarily be clouded by ignorance, but is never really affected.

The root itself of ignorance and stupidity is the *ahankara*, the material identification that binds us to the performance of material activities. As Krishna as clearly stated in verse 3.27: *prakriteh kriyamanani gunaih karmani sarvasah, ahankara vimudhatma kartaham iti manyate*, "All activities are actually performed by the qualities of nature, but a foolish person who is confused by egotism thinks 'I am doing this'."

When our ignorance is dispelled by transcendental knowledge, we can see the distinction (*vibhaga*) between ourselves (as *purusha*) and the material energy (as *prakriti*) that constitutes our bodies, senses and minds, as well as the objects of our senses. Therefore verse 5.9 explained that a self realized person (a *sthitha prajna*) knows that the senses naturally engage in the sense objects but does not identify with them. In this way s/he is never affected by material activities, just like a lotus leaf is never affected by water (5.10).

A greater degree of contamination is brought about by the fundamental sufferings we encounter in the normal cycles of life - birth, death, old age and disease - and also in situations where we are forced to suffer humiliation or insult, or even to perform actions that are contrary to our desires and intentions. The same considerations apply here, too. Only the external surface - body and senses - can be contaminated in such circumstances, and the person who is able to remain detached from all such actions (5.11) is always pure, like the lotus flower is always fresh, sweetly scented and perfectly clean in spite of its growing out of dirty mud and standing there all the time.

Since all external activities are performed by the senses in connection with the sense objects, and the *sthitha prajna* knows that his/ her own identity is not affected by them, s/he is not the *karta* ("doer") but rather the *akarta* ("non-doer") as explained in this verse.

A clear awareness (*pasyati*, "truly sees") is based on this point specifically; the *atman* is never really the "doer" or the "enjoyer", and as soon as s/he actually realizes this truth, s/he becomes free from *karma*.

Of course this does not mean that we should not strive to focus our consciousness or awareness in the proper modes (*gunas*) of *prakriti* - so that *prakriti* (our mind, senses and body) will function in such a way that our consciousness is purified and not degraded. The next chapters will elaborate extensively on this important point.

On the transcendental level of *akarma*, the *atman* participates of the supreme Consciousness of Brahman: Krishna used this definition of *akarta* to design himself in verse 4.13, to state that he is never affected by any material contamination, or touched by action or by the consequences of action (5.12).

This instruction reconnects the thread of discussion with the original question asked by Arjuna in verse 2.54: *sthita prajnasya ka bhasa samadhi sthasya kesava, sthita dhiih kim prabhaseta kim asita vrajeta kim*, "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?"

At that time Krishna answered:

prajahati yada kaman sarvan partha mano gatan, atmany evatmana tustah sthita prajnas tadocyate, "O Partha, when someone gives up attachment towards 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" (2.55),

dukkheshv anudvigna manah sukhesu vigata sprihah, vita raga bhaya krodhah sthita dhiih munir ucyate, "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" (2.56). We may remember here that the word *muni* is a synonym for *rishi*, as one who truly sees Reality as it is becomes liberated from material distractions, attachments and identifications.

VERSE 31

यदा भूतपृथग्भावमेकस्थमनुपश्यति ।

yadā bhūtapṛthagbhāvamekasthamanupaśyati ।

तत एव च विस्तारं ब्रह्म सम्पद्यते तदा ॥ १३-३१ ॥

tata eva ca vistāraṁ brahma sampadyate tadā ॥ 13-31 ॥

yada: when; *bhuta*: of the beings; *prithak bhavam*: the separation happens; *eka stham*: situated in one; *anupasyati*: becomes trained to see; *tatah eva*: there after; *ca*: and; *vistaram*: the development; *brahma*: Brahman; *sampadyate*: attains the position; *tada*: at that time.

"When one becomes trained to see all beings as situated in one, even when they are separated, and (how all this) is developed, s/he attains the position of Brahman.

This is the conclusion of the chapter that explains the simultaneous oneness and difference of the *purusha* and the *prakriti*. The *sthita prajna* clearly sees this difference through the proper use of *viveka* (discriminating intelligence) but at the same time sees that everything that exists is part of the great Plan, conceived and manifested by the great Intelligence or Consciousness.

Brahman is the name by which Vedic scriptures call this great Consciousness - in which we participate to a greater degree and with greater happiness when our tiny awareness (*anu atman*) is not confused by material identifications based on duality and separation. This "unitarian field" of consciousness is also being discovered by the most cutting edge advanced physicists.

A wise person (*pandita*) sees with equal friendliness the *brahmana* who is learned and gentle, the cow and the elephant, as well as the dog and the uncivilized people (*vidya vinaya sampanne brahmane gavi hastini, suni caiva sva pake ca panditah sama darsinah*, 5.18). Of course the specific behavior of each individual must be taken into proper consideration, but that only refers to their particular prakritik nature and not to their intrinsic being (*atman*), that is spiritual and constitutes an integral part of the cosmic Consciousness (Brahman).

On the Brahman level (*brahma bhuta*) there is no separation of existence between the various beings, therefore a *yogi* who has attained that level is always a well-wisher of all beings, and never mistreats anyone, or envies anyone, or tries to exploit anyone. Only on this level one can truly engage in devotional service (*bhakti*), as Krishna will clearly state in verse 18.54: *brahma bhuta prasannatma ma socati na kankshati, samah sarvesu bhutesu mad bhaktim labhate param*.

The word *vistara* used in this verse means "manifestation", as in "development" or "transformation" or "differentiation", and applies to the creation of temporary forms and activities, intended for a specific function in time and space.

In chapter 10 we have seen Arjuna asking Krishna what is the specific meditation by which we should remember God (*katham vidyam aham yogims tvam sada paricintayan, kesu kesu ca bhavesu cintyo 'si bhagavan maya*, 10.17) and Krishna replied with

the vision of the Virata rupa. This means that we certainly can and should meditate on God by perceiving his presence in the universal manifestation and in all beings and things, that are produced by the union of the *purusha* and the *prakriti* (13.27). We do not need to reject material nature, but simply perceive it in relation to spirit; this requires some training or practice, but such pure and focused vision is the only way to overcome ignorance and remain on the liberated level.

VERSE 32

अनादित्वान्निर्गुणत्वात्परमात्मायमव्ययः ।

anāditvānnirguṇatvātparamātmāyamavyayaḥ ।

शरीरस्थोऽपि कौन्तेय न करोति न लिप्यते ॥ १३-३२ ॥

śarīrastho'pi kaunteya na karoti na lipyate ॥ 13-32 ॥

anaditvat: because it has no beginning; *nirgunatvat:* because it is not subject to the *gunas*; *parama atma:* the supreme Self; *ayam:* this; *avyayah:* imperishable; *sarira sthah:* that is residing in the body; *api:* although; *kaunteya:* o son of Kunti; *na karoti:* does not act; *na lipyate:* is not affected (by the action).

"O son of Kunti, this Paramatma resides in the body but has no beginning and is not subject to the *gunas*. He is imperishable, he does not act and he is not affected by the action.

Brahman, Paramatma and Bhagavan are the same *Tat* or *tattva* perceived in different degrees (*Bhagavata purana*, 1.2.11), so whenever we speak of one of these three perceptions, we indicate *Tat*, the supreme Reality. This supreme Reality has no beginning,

because it is always existing (*sat*); eternal existence is its defining characteristic together with *cit* (consciousness) and *ananda* (happiness). It is not produced by some evolutionary process, or created by something else.

This same eternal Consciousness resides in each body as the Soul of the soul (*param atma*), from whom the individual soul (*anu atma, jiva atma*) emanates and by whom it is supported and guided. Under his authority, the *jiva atma* connects with action, either through spiritual energy (*para prakriti*) or material energy (*apara prakriti*) constituted by the *gunas* (qualities) - respectively *sat, cit, ananda* and *tamas, rajas, sattva*.

Between this pure supreme Consciousness that is never touched by action and the individual embodied consciousness that engages in action there is an intermediate concept of identity or "I-ness" that we call Shiva tattva or Sankarshana (a name that literally means "attraction"). It is an extremely subtle existence, that is simultaneously transcendent and immanent, eternal and non-eternal, because it becomes manifest and non-manifest in the various cycles of creation although it is always existing.

This Sadashiva appears in the material universe as *param atma* to generate all beings and enable them to act, and as *param guru* to guide them. He is the Father of everyone, and attracts everyone towards either the spiritual consciousness or the material consciousness (as each individual being chooses), therefore he is the all-auspicious giver of all blessings. However, he himself is never touched by any action (*na karoti na lipyate*) and gives the same power to a pure *jiva* that attained the realization of his Consciousness by dropping all false identification and attachments. For this reason, it is said that Shiva controls the *ahankara*, and operates the mode of destruction; when the individual soul faces such destruction willingly or unwillingly, respectively elevation or degradation ensue, with consequent liberation or bondage.

When we purify our identification by establishing it on the spiritual level, following the example of the greatest Yogi and Guru, Shiva Mahadeva, we enter a higher level of consciousness that is described as "*shivo 'ham*" ("I am Shiva").

Of course the *jivatman* will never be able to become the *totality* of Shiva (Sadashiva, who is none other than Vishnu), but will act like Shiva in the same nature of Consciousness. The name Shiva literally means "auspicious", and indicates that particular expression of Consciousness that out of compassion (*karuna*) manifests in this world for the benefit of all beings. Therefore, the embodied *jivatman* can aggregate his/her tiny consciousness to the supreme Consciousness of the compassionate Isvara, and act in this world for the benefit of all beings - this is, in a nutshell, the entire meaning of the instructions of *Bhagavad gita*.

Sincerely working for the benefit of all beings is called *selflessness* - and this is the key to understand how to destroy the material ignorance of *ahankara* and *mamatva*. These two roots of material *samskara* are very difficult to eliminate, because they easily creep into all *gunas*, including the noble *sattva*, expanding *selfishness* from the core of the individual being to the circle of family, community, society, or species. We can recognize them because they are inevitably based on duality and separation of interests as in sectarianism, racism, and in all forms of prejudice or discrimination based on material identification and attachment.

Shiva Mahadeva offers us the medicine in the form of renunciation (*tyaga*) based on knowledge (*jnana*), which destroys the attachment and identification with such temporary objects and positions. This does not mean that we should formally accept the social position of *sannyasa*, because that would just be another material identification and attachment. Krishna has already explained (6.1) that real renunciation has nothing to do with the externals, but is a level of consciousness in which one works

selflessly and dutifully for the benefit of all beings: *anasritah karma phalam karyam karma karoti yah, sa sannyasi ca yogi ca na niragnir na cakriyah*.

A *sannyasi* can give up ordinary work and rituals only to engage more fully and deeply in the active work for the benefit of all beings, and has totally given up all identifications and attachments. Unfortunately, in Kali yuga we see many fake *sannyasis* and *sadhus* who are very much attached to separatist identification and exploitation of others, even to a greater extent than ordinary people.

As explained in *Bhagavata purana*, this happens because among the general ignorance rampant in society, a degraded fool is accepted as a *brahmana* simply because he is wearing a thread (*vipratve sutram eva hi*, 12.2.3), or as a scholar simply because he is quick with words (*panditye capalam vacah*, 12.2.4).

In the same way, any degraded person is accepted as *sannyasi* or *brahmachari* simply by external distinctive clothing (*lingam evasrama khyatav*, 12.2.4), and an arrogant hypocrite will be accepted as a *sadhu* simply because of his amassed wealth and number of followers, while a humble spiritualist who does not pursue a political career or accumulate money and properties will be considered merely an ordinary person (*anadhyataiva asadhutve sadhutve dambha eva tu*, 12.2.5).

Consequently, ignorance will be reinforced because such fake *gurus* and *sadhus* are not capable or interested to properly guide spiritual seekers, but are very anxious to procure the support and friendship of famous and wealthy people. So *dharma* and religious devotion will be honored superficially only for the sake of obtaining personal fame (*yaso 'rthe dharma sevanam*, 12.2.6) either individual or collective, and the sacredness of a *tirtha* will depend on how far one will travel to reach there (*dure vary*

ayanam tirtham, 12.2.6) and thus on how much good business local people can do by exploiting the tourists.

VERSE 33

यथा सर्वगतं सौक्ष्म्यादाकाशं नोपलिप्यते ।

yathā sarvagatam saukṣmyādākāśam nopalipyate ।

सर्वत्रावस्थितो देहे तथात्मा नोपलिप्यते ॥ १३-३३ ॥

sarvatrāvasthito dehe tathātmā nopalipyate ॥ 13-33 ॥

yatha: as; *sarva gatam*: all pervading; *sauksmyat*: because of the quality of subtleness; *akasa*: space; *na upalipyate*: is not affected; *sarvatra*: everywhere; *avasthitah*: situated; *dehe*: in the body; *tatha*: similarly; *atma*: the self; *na upalipyate*: is not affected.

"Just like space is present everywhere but is not affected by anything because of its subtlety, similarly the Atman is not affected even while residing in the body.

Both *param atman* and *atman* have the same transcendental nature, comparable to the sun or the space in relation with atmospheric elements. We can understand that the sun always remains untouched and unaffected by any cloud or darkness, and similarly space (*akasa*) is present everywhere unaffected and untouched by the presence of material objects - gross or subtle - that occupy a specific position in the universe.

As in this verse, we can also make the example of an earthen pot - a layer of clay that appears to enclose a portion of space. If we

move the pot in another position, the space previously enclosed by it remains free from all relation with the pot, and has not been changed in any way either by its presence or absence. Space supports and enables the existence of all objects, but exists independently and cannot be destroyed; it is therefore the closest example to Atman that we can perceive in this world.

In ancient time, physics and metaphysics were considered two sides of the same universal science, and people were better equipped to study and understand subtle concepts such as space - that cannot be seen or touched or smelled or tasted. Unfortunately a few centuries ago there was a fracture caused by the spreading and establishment of intolerant and dogmatic ideologies, that systematically enforced blind belief in theories presenting them as absolute and indisputable facts, to be accepted as articles of faith. Such a stupid approach undermined the proper use of intelligence and the subtle faculties of the mind, and the popular mentality dropped to the grossest level of "tangible" reality and practice as opposed to "abstract" theory.

Furthermore, since such ideologies violently rejected the intrinsic value of nature and natural forces, the healthy pleasures that support life and the wholesome respect for creation became demonized and persecuted. However, as denial and repression cannot solve any problem (3.33), the natural needs of human beings that were pushed back crept up in distorted and perverted ways, loaded with suffering and guilt and fear and hatred, and creating an artificial and hypocritical condition based on ignorance.

Today our task is to reverse this pathological process, allowing the collective mind of human society to heal and recover. Vedic knowledge is the greatest medicine for this cure, because it still contains the active principles of the original pure science.

VERSE 34

यथा प्रकाशयत्येकः कृत्स्नं लोकमिमं रविः ।

yathā prakāśayatyekah kṛtsnam lokamimam raviḥ ।

क्षेत्रं क्षेत्री तथा कृत्स्नं प्रकाशयति भारत ॥ १३-३४ ॥

kṣetraṁ kṣetrī tathā kṛtsnam prakāśayati bhārata ॥ 13-34 ॥

yatha: as; *prakasayati:* illuminates; *ekah:* one; *kritsnam:* the entire/complete; *lokam:* world; *imam:* this; *raviḥ:* the Sun; *ksetra:* the field; *ksetri:* the self who lives in the field; *tatha:* in the same way; *kritsnam:* everything; *prakasayati:* illuminates; *bharata:* o descendant of Bharata.

"O Bharata, just like the Sun illuminates all this world, in the same way the *kshetri* illuminates the entire *kshetra*.

Some people may have problems in understanding the nature of space, because it is so subtle and cannot be experienced through the material senses of the gross body. Yet space, or ether, can be studied scientifically as the support of light and radio waves, and the substratum of magnetic fields.

In any case, everybody knows what the Sun is. Even blind people can feel its power in the form of heat, so we can safely use this example to elaborate on the scientific study of the power of the Sun. The energy of the Sun emanates from the Sun and pervades all the universe and all bodies, even when we are not able to see or perceive it.

All forms of matter are transformations of energy, and all energy is a transformation of the primordial energy of solar fusion. It is only by the sunlight that plants grow and produce wood and coal and petrol (hydro carbons) as well as the grains (carbohydrates) that we eat to produce the cells of our bodies. Furthermore, the heat of the

sun rays evaporates water from the surface of the planet, creating clouds and rain. Finally, the power of the mass of the Sun creates the planetary movements by which Earth revolves, and we experience the darkness of the night. In its essential form, the Sun is omnipresent and omnipotent, supporting the existence and development of all beings.

Katha Upanishad (2.2.11) also explains: *suryo yatha sarva lokasya caksur na lipyate caksusaur bahya dosaih, ekas tatha sarva bhutantaratma na lipyate loka duhkkena bahyah*, "The sun, that can be described as the eye of all beings (as it enables all eyes to function by perceiving light) does not become affected by the defects in our eye or the defects in what is perceived by that eye. In the same way, the one *param atman* is not subject to the happiness or misery of anybody, even though he is situated in all beings."

VERSE 35

क्षेत्रक्षेत्रज्ञयोरेवमन्तरं ज्ञानचक्षुषा ।

kṣetrakṣetrajñayorevamantaram jñānacakṣuṣā ।

भूतप्रकृतिमोक्षं च ये विदुर्यान्ति ते परम् ॥ १३-३५ ॥

bhūtaprakṛtimokṣam ca ye viduryānti te param ॥ 13-35 ॥

ksetra ksetrajñayoh: of the *kshetra* and the knower of the *kshetra*; *evam:* thus; *antaram:* what is between/ the difference; *jnana caksusa:* with the eyes of knowledge; *bhuta:* of the beings; *prakriti:* the *prakriti*; *moksam:* liberation; *ca:* and; *ye:* those who; *viduh:* they know; *yanti:* they go; *te:* they; *param:* the Supreme.

"Those who contemplate the *kshetra* and the *kshetra jna* and the difference between the two, and how to attain liberation through/ from the nature of existence, will reach the Supreme."

The power of true knowledge is the key to liberation and perfection of life. *Bhagavad gita* is the best study guide to such knowledge, and leads us from the basic understanding of spirit and matter, to the art of action in spiritual consciousness. This knowledge is directly experienced (*pasyanti*) by those who learn to use the eyes of intelligence and knowledge (*jnana cakshu*) rather than their physical eyes that can easily be misled by external appearances and cannot see beyond them. By this deep vision we become able to really contemplate the nature of all beings, that is transcendental and eternal.

Liberation is attained in stages. The first stage is the search for knowledge (*jnana*), that gives a meaning and a purpose to life, then comes the realization (*viduh*) that finally puts everything in the proper perspective and shows us the great Picture. This usually happens after many lifetimes (7.18) of sincere search, that starts from the deliberate choice of understanding the eternal Reality (*athato brahma jijnasa, Vedanta sutra, 1.1.1*).

However, such vision does not exclude the knowledge of *prakriti* - material as well as spiritual - and this will be the subject of the last chapters of *Bhagavad gita*.

As Krishna has explained repeatedly, actions are performed by nature through the effect of the *gunas*; the individual soul (*jiva atman*) can only choose to focus on which modality s/he wants to function. We can choose to contemplate spiritual nature (*para prakriti*) or if we are not yet able to do that, we can learn how to use the material *gunas* in such a way that we can elevate ourselves rather than degrade ourselves.

The subject of the *gunas* is gradually introduced in an increasingly stronger way, because the knowledge of the *gunas* is the key factor that will enable us to remain on the liberated level (*brahma bhuta*) even while still living in this body and in this world. And this is of paramount importance.

Some deluded ignorant fools believe that a conditioned soul can automatically attain liberation at the time of death, provided s/he has pledged allegiance or dedication to a particular Deity. This is not confirmed in any genuine Vedic teaching, and those who choose to blindly rely on such sectarian allegiance will have to face serious problems in the future.

It is true that God comes to the rescue of his true devotee, but such devotion must be sincere and supported by honest work and a serious effort to attain self-realization. One cannot delegate one's own self-realization to others - *guru*, *sanga* or even *ista deva*. Each one of us must deliberately abandon all false identifications and attachments, and constantly practice the proper meditation on the Supreme Consciousness. There are no shortcuts, no free tickets, no cutting corners. If one claims to be a devotee of Krishna, s/he must sincerely study and understand and practice Krishna's instructions as revealed in *Bhagavad gita*. Krishna will guide us, but he will not do our work for us.

Why *Bhagavad gita* was spoken? To encourage Arjuna to engage in his proper duty. Arjuna realized that Krishna was the supreme Brahman and pledged his devotion to him, but Krishna did not exempt him from performing his duties on the battlefield.

Our purpose should be to serve God for the benefit of all, not to try to use God for our own myopic selfish advantage.