

BHAGAVAD GITA

The Global Dharma for the Third Millennium

Chapter 14

Translations and commentaries
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Chapter 14

Guna traya vibhaga yoga

The yoga of differentiating between the *gunas*

At the beginning of his instructions, in chapter 2, Krishna had focused on explaining the difference between the *atman* (spirit, or consciousness) and the body (matter, or material nature).

Then in verse 7.5 he stated that besides material nature (*apara prakriti*) there is a spiritual nature (*para prakrti*): *apareyam itas tv anyam prakritim viddhi me param, jiva bhutam maha baho yayedam dharyate jagat*, "O Arjuna, know that besides this inferior *prakriti* there is also another, a higher one - the living beings by which the universe is upheld."

In chapter 13, Krishna had wonderfully presented the nature (*prakriti*) of consciousness (*purusha*), to help us understand how the two factors are simultaneously One and distinct from each other, and together they constitute the supreme Brahman.

Interestingly, in that context Krishna has not drawn a clear divisive line between spiritual nature and material nature, but has taken us to the higher level where material nature is perceived as that very same spiritual nature when she manifests in the material world. By

defining this *mahat tattva* as Brahman (13.13, 20, confirmed more explicitly in 14.3 and 14.4, and in *Mundaka Upanishad 1.1.9*, *tasmad etad brahma nama rupam annam ca jayate*, "from this Brahman names, forms and matter become generated") and by recommending the contemplation of the Godhead as the Virata rupa (10.17), *Bhagavad gita* is introducing us to the transcendental dimension where we attain the same sentiment (*bhava*) of the Supreme. Interestingly, the word *bhava* also translates as "nature" (8.3, 8.6, 10.17, 17.16) indicating the mode of consciousness in which one deliberately focuses with full awareness. And of course, this word is amply used in the context of *bhakti* literature to indicate a state of ecstatic spiritual consciousness.

Isvara - the Lord - is characterized by the fact that he is not controlled by the *gunas*, but he rather controls them and therefore he is transcendental to them. The *jivatman* is a fragment, limb or cell (*amsa*, 15.7) of the Lord and as such s/he is also transcendental to the material *gunas*, and certainly s/he can learn how to control them and use them exactly like the Lord does - in other words, use them in the devotional service to the Lord by removing the "separatist" (dualistic) mentality that shows a difference of interests between the *jivatman* and the Lord. Like every healthy cell or limb in our body, each *jivatman* still retains a certain degree of individuality (name, different function etc) but its consciousness is solely directed to the service of the entire body and the highest consciousness in it.

This concept is beautifully simple, yet immensely profound and containing the key to liberation from all conditionings, as Krishna himself stated very clearly in the previous chapter (13.24): *ya evam veti purusam prakrtim ca gunaih saha, sarvatha vartamano 'pi na sa bhuyo 'bhijayate*, "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 situation".

So, this chapter 14 is a manual on the modifications of the *gunas* and how to use them - the greatest knowledge (14.1). The subject will be elaborated again in chapters 16, 17 and 18, to the very conclusion of *Bhagavad gita*.

VERSE 1

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।

śrībhagavān uvāca ।

परं भूयः प्रवक्ष्यामि ज्ञानानां ज्ञानमुत्तमम् ।

param bhūyaḥ pravakṣyāmi jñānānām jñānamuttamam ।

यज्ज्ञात्वा मुनयः सर्वे परां सिद्धिमितो गताः ॥ १४-१ ॥

yajjñātvā munayaḥ sarve parāṁ siddhimito gatāḥ ॥ 14-1 ॥

sri bhagavan uvaca: the wonderful Lord said; *param:* transcendental/ supreme; *bhuyah:* again; *pravakṣyami:* I will tell; *jnananam:* of all sciences; *jnanam:* the knowledge; *uttamam:* supreme; *yat:* which; *jnatva:* knowing; *munayah:* the great sages; *sarve:* all; *param:* highest; *siddhim:* perfection; *itah:* from here; *gatah:* went/ attained.

The wonderful Lord said,

"I will tell you again about this supreme knowledge among all sciences. Through this knowledge, all the great sages have attained the supreme perfection/ of transcendental realization from this world.

The first word in the verse, in the position of honor, is *param*, "the Supreme", "the Transcendental", and refers to the higher level of

knowledge where we are able to see everything in God and God in everything.

Krishna says, *bhuyah* ("again, further"), because he had already explained this highest knowledge (*jnanam uttamam*) at the beginning of chapter 9:

raja vidya raja guhyam pavitram idam uttamam, pratyaksavagamam dharmyam su sukham kartum avyayam, "This is the king among all sciences, the king among all secrets, the highest purifier. It is known through direct experience, it is dharmic, it is joyful to practice and it is imperishable" (9.2),

maya tatam idam sarvam jagad avyakta murtina, mat sthani sarva bhutani na caham tesv avasthitah, "All this universe is pervaded by me in my non-manifested form. All beings exist in me, but I am not in them" (9.4),

na mat sthani bhutani pasya me yogam aisvaram, bhuta bhrin na ca bhuta stho mamatma bhuta bhavanah, "(At the same time) the beings are not in me. See my divine *yoga*! I contain all existences, but I am not contained in the various beings, although I am myself the creation of all beings" (9.5).

Some people underestimate the knowledge of the *gunas* in the dangerously false notion that one "automatically transcends them" simply by pledging allegiance and service to God and his priests, but this is not confirmed in *Bhagavad gita* or in any other Vedic text. The damage caused by such ignorant and deluded persons is immense, because they continue to indulge in abominable activities and in a degraded form of consciousness (called asuric as we will see in chapter 16) and at the same time they demand to be worshiped as God (as his direct representatives). Such a behavior would not even be acceptable in God himself, as Krishna has clearly stated (3.22-25), what to speak of individual souls.

Only those who have completely abandoned illegitimate actions (*tv anta gatam papam*, 7.27) can attain the spiritual level; therefore we need to seriously study the science of action (chapter 3) and the science of the modes of nature (chapter 14) in order to remain firmly on the correct path.

All the great sages (*munayah sarve*) have walked this road, and thus they attained the highest perfection (*param siddhim gatah*), consisting in full freedom from the bondage of rebirth (*na sa bhuyo 'bhijayate*, 13.24). Nobody is exempt from this requirement, because action is inevitable: *na hi kascit ksanam api jatu tisthaty akarma krit, karyate hy avasah karma sarvah prakriti jair gunaih*, "Never, at any time, can one remain without acting even for a moment, because s/he is forced into action by all the *gunas* born from *prakriti*" (3.5).

Not even the "transcendental devotees and stalwart *sannyasis*" are exempt: *sadrisam cestate svasyah prakriter jnanavan api, prakritim yanti bhutani nigraha kim karisyati*, "Even a person who has the proper knowledge must engage in actions according to his own nature. All embodied beings must follow their nature: what can abstention accomplish?" (3.33), and *na karmanam anarambhan naiskarmyam puruso 'snute, na ca sannyasanad eva siddhim samadhigacchati*, "A person cannot achieve freedom from *karma* by abstaining from action, just like perfection cannot be achieved simply through *sannyasa*" (3.4).

As explained clearly, the only solution consists in performing all work as sacred action: *yajnarthat karmano 'nyatra loko 'yam karma bandhanah, tad artham karma kaunteya mukta sangah samacara*, "Actions must be performed as sacrifice, otherwise in this world they cause bondage and further actions. Therefore, o son of Kunti, you should perform your activities for that purpose of sacrifice, remaining free from attachment" (3.9).

This sacred action is always based on correct knowledge, because without the correct knowledge even the most complicated and impressive rituals remain useless (17.5-6, 17.13). The only true ingredient of all *yajnas* is the awareness of knowledge: with that proper consciousness, even the smallest and ordinary daily activities become the highest acts of worship. Verse 9.27 clearly stated: *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."

As we will see in this chapter, awareness of knowledge is the most important characteristic of *sattva guna* - the quality of goodness, that illuminates and guides us in the proper direction.

The last section of the verse is also very interesting, and presents several important words: *munayah, param, siddhim, itah, gatah*.

The definition *muni* ("silent") refers to the serious effort in spiritual practice, by which one drops all other concerns and interests that are generated from the mundane identifications and attachments (2.56). When a *sadhaka* is fully immersed in divine consciousness, s/he does not talk much about useless trifles such as gossiping and political games. Of course this does not mean that s/he is not aware of the reality around him/ her or that s/he is not trying to help others to direct their activities in a positive and proactive way for the spiritual and material benefit of society and the universe in general. A true *sadhaka* continues to perform his/ her work in the world, which includes offering good advice and coaching sincere persons in their progress, but is able to understand when and where and how to invest his/ her energies and speech power.

The word *sarve* ("all") clearly indicates that this is a very scientific process, that can be experienced and duplicated by anyone by

following the exact method. Some ignorant fools have been duped into believing that one can add the word "yoga" to any ordinary activity and that will be just as authoritative as the genuine original instructions by Krishna and the great Rishis. So they arrogantly claim they are engaged in *hasa yoga* ("the yoga of laughing") or *khana yoga* ("the yoga of eating" as in restaurants), or *nidra yoga* ("the yoga of sleeping"). And when questioned about the authenticity of such fancy fantasies, they get angry and accuse us of being "dogmatic". But what will be the result of such "yogas"? Certainly not the same result attained by the *munis* and *yogis* who scientifically applied the actual original method; this is also confirmed in verse 16.23.

The expression *param siddhim* is very interesting, because it can be interpreted at different levels. *Param* means "supreme" as well as "transcendental", while *siddhim* means "perfection" and it also indicates the mystic powers acquired through *yoga*. Consequently, this verse offers a sort of catalogue of all the blessings one can attain through the supreme knowledge (*jnanam uttamam*) taught by Krishna - benefits that go from the grossest material platform of increasing one's charisma and mundane success to the highest level of transcendental realization and pure love for God in full Krishna Consciousness. This ultimate goal is indicated by the word *itah*, "from here", indicating a guaranteed progress from the level of human life (*athatah brahma jijnasa, Vedanta sutra, 1.1.1*) or this material world.

The word *gatah* ("gone") states that such progress is eternal and imperishable, and that once the *muni* has attained any true level of spiritual realization, s/he does not fall back again (2.40, 4.9, 4.35, 6.30, 6.40-45, 8.15, 8.21, 13.24, 15.6).

VERSE 2

इदं ज्ञानमुपाश्रित्य मम साधर्म्यमागताः ।

idaṁ jñānamupāśritya mama sādharmaṃyamaḡataḥ ।

सर्गेऽपि नोपजायन्ते प्रलये न व्यथन्ति च ॥ १४-२ ॥

sarge'pi nopajāyante pralaye na vyathanti ca ।। 14-2 ।।

idam: this; *jnanam*: knowledge; *upasritya*: taking shelter into; *mama*: my; *sa dharmyam*: the same *dharma*; *agatah*: having attained; *sarge*: in the creation; *api*: even; *na upajayante*: they do not take birth; *pralaye*: in the annihilation; *na vyathanti*: they are not shaken; *ca*: and.

"Those who take shelter in this knowledge attain my same position, and they are not going to take birth in a next creation. They will also remain firmly established even at the time of the dissolution.

Krishna's words carefully maintain the balance of meaning in this verse: on one side, he clearly reminds us that as *jivatmans* we will never become God directly in the totality of Godhead, but he also declares that we can attain the same dharmic position of God - the same job, so to speak.

The word *dharma* contains a wealth of meanings, as we have already discussed in previous commentaries. It comes from the verbal root *dhr*, "to sustain", and defines the positive action that sustains existence. Therefore it can be translated as "nature", "duty", "function", "consciousness", and "position" as well. By applying each of these meanings to the translation of this verse, we obtain an expansion of true meanings.

What is the *dharma* of Krishna, or Vishnu? Supporting and maintaining the universe in its material and spiritual progress, which includes protecting the good and harmless people and weeding out the evil doers, as well as explaining the principles of ethics and religion (4.8). Therefore *sa dharmyam mama* can be translated as "the same supporting nature as me". Other commentators explain that "*sa dharma*" indicates the particular form of liberation called *sarupya mukti*, that consists in acquiring a form that is similar to the Lord's. However, since on the spiritual level the consciousness/ sentiment *is* precisely the form, and the other way around, the ultimate meaning is the same.

At another level, the "*dharma* of Krishna" is the *bhagavata dharma* or devotional service to the Supreme, also clearly presented in *Bhagavad gita* in so many verses; in this sense the word *dharma* here can be equated with *bhava*, in the sense of ecstatic love for God. We can easily see that there is no difference between these two levels of understanding, because devotional service is essentially about serving God and his mission, in whatever position or activity Bhagavan will present us from time to time.

This path absolutely requires *upasritya*, "taking shelter", the humility and spirit of selfless service and dedication to the Supreme. Krishna had already explained this point several times (3.30, 4.10, 7.14, 7.29, 9.13, 9.32) and will explain it again as the supreme conclusion of *Bhagava gita* (18.55, 18.57, 18.66). The *jivatman* can never be the totality of God, and therefore it needs to always "dovetail" itself to the Supreme Consciousness through the Supreme Shakti. To do this, one must be totally free from envy (*anasuya*, 3.31, 4.22, 9.1, 12.13, 16.18, 18.66, 18.71), towards the Lord or even towards the *jivatmans*, who are *amsas* of the Lord.

The second part of the verse applies both to the creation and dissolution of the universe and to the creation and dissolution of

the individual body, as well as the beginning and end of the various experiences and circumstances that one comes to face in life. Accordingly, it refers to the liberated souls who take birth as *shaktyavesa avataras* to assist the Lord in his missions as well as to the *jivan mukta sadhakas* who have attained the full spiritual realization while still living in a material body. Both categories of liberated souls are never shaken by external circumstances or difficulties because they are fully conscious of God' plan. For such liberated souls there is no more birth, even if they incarnate in this world for a spiritual mission.

VERSE 3

मम योनिर्महद् ब्रह्म तस्मिन्गर्भं दधाम्यहम् ।

mama yonirmahad brahma tasmingarbham dadhāmyaham ।

सम्भवः सर्वभूतानां ततो भवति भारत ॥ १४-३ ॥

sambhavaḥ sarvabhūtānām tato bhavati bhārata ॥ 14-3 ॥

mama: my; *yonih*: matrix; *mahat*: the great; *brahma*: Brahman; *tasmin*: in that; *garbham*: embryo; *dadhami*: I give; *aham*: I; *sambhavaḥ*: birth/ possibility; *sarva*: all; *bhutanam*: beings; *tatah*: thereafter; *bhavati*: becomes; *bharata*: o descendant of Bharata.

"O descendant of Bharata, the *mahat tattva* is my matrix, in which I create the embryo of creation from which all beings/ situation subsequently manifest.

Brahman is the complete Reality, the One that contains everything and in which all dualities are reconciled. Therefore, it includes both the male and female aspects, as illustrated by the famous

symbolic concept of *ardhanarisvara*, "the Lord that is half woman".

Here Krishna says, *mama yonih* ("my womb", "my uterus") to indicate his female nature, and *garbham dadami* ("I give the embryo") to indicate his male nature. Male and female are two halves of the same One Reality. Since the microcosm represented in the human body reflects the macrocosm of the Universal Form, our own brain and nervous system consists of two symmetric halves - the left and right hemispheres and their particular wiring. The Tradition of Hatha yoga or Kriya yoga is precisely about approaching Self realization from this angle of uniting the male and female energies within one human body in the Divine Wedding, and this primordial concept was found in many other ancient cultures at global level.

When we say that we can never separate Isvara from Shakti, we are stating a much deeper truth than usually people can understand. It is not on the same level as the foolish delusional promises of young inexperienced lovers who swear "never to leave each other", because that feeling is merely a dim reflection of the true light of the Self that eternally resides within each and every one of us. The Truth is that God is simultaneously Isvara and Shakti - and we, as God's *amsas* or limbs/ cells, are also simultaneously *purusha* and *prakriti* - male and female.

According to a particular set of karmic seeds and desires, each individual develops more female or male chromosomes and therefore is born either with a vagina or a penis, but in every male body there is a tiny vagina (the opening of the penis tip) and in every female body there is tiny penis (the clitoris) and testicles that are nested up into the body (the ovaries). Every male has a certain amount of female energy and tendencies, and every female has a certain amount of male energy and tendencies. In rigid societies, the gender role is enforced on the basis of typical dress and hair

style, and characteristic behaviors that emphasize logic in males and emotion in females.

In Vedic society, such differences are not enforced but accommodated in all possible variations, even to the recognition of the legitimacy of the *tritiya prakriti*, or "third nature", of those individuals whose bodies or even minds do not fit in the ordinary male-female categorization. Even more importantly, Vedic culture is designed to lead each and every individual to the level of personal integration of both energies in a blissful balance and harmony; such position is highly respected not only at the spiritual level (where it is recognized as the purpose of *yoga*) but also at the material level.

An individual who has attained this sacred Union of the male and female energies in his/ her own body and mind is considered an auspicious character from whom we can receive blessings because of the absence of lust (the greed to possess and exploit) in his/ her mind and body. This is also the position of Isvara/ Shakti, whose union is constant and full of grace and bliss like a cosmic Dance.

This *garbha* ("embryo") mentioned by Krishna in the verse is *hiranya garbha*, the "golden seed" of the universe, also called *brahmanda* (*brahma anda*, "the egg of Brahman" or "the egg of Brahma" from which Brahma is born) worshiped by the ancient religions in the Mediterranean region. The mystic knowledge of ancient Egypt, Greece and Canaan was focused on the Cosmic Egg or Typhon's Egg, from whom Phanes - the personification of "revelation" (in Greek, *phanes* literally means "revelation" as in *theophany* or *epiphany*) also identified with Mitra or the Sun was born.

Modern physicists, too, have reached the same conclusion about the origin of the universe and express it in very similar way; they say that before the Big Bang the universe was one vast body

containing all the universal mass - a Cosmic Egg or Cosm-Egg for short. This "Son" was also at the center of worship in ancient religions, together with the cosmic Mother and Father, in the fundamental Holy Triad from which the concept of Trinity was copied.

We find Vedic confirmation in the Jagannatha Tradition; the middle figure in the Triad is sometimes identified as Brahma, and not only as Lakshmi or Subhadra. In this perspective, when the Triad is seen as Vishnu, Shiva and Shakti it symbolizes the first manifestation of Brahman (Vishnu who is *avyakta*) that "becomes distinct" as Shiva and Shakti. When the Triad is seen as Shiva, Kali and Brahma, it symbolizes the second creation by which Isvara/ Shakti manifests as Time (Kala/ Kali) to give birth to Brahma, the first created being and the architect of the universe. These subjects will be amply elaborated in the *Puranas* and especially in the *Bhagavata Purana*, that describes both the primary and the secondary creations.

In this verse, Krishna clearly states that the *mahat tattva* is Brahman (*mahat brahma*). This was already hinted in the previous chapter (13.13), where it was said that the supreme Brahman is neither *sat* or *asat*, because it is both *sat* and *asat* - that is including cause and effect, eternal and temporary, spiritual and material, and male and female. Verse 13.20 again highlighted this supreme and eternal Unity of Brahman as Purusha and Prakriti at the same time: *prakritim purusam caiva viddhy anadi ubhav api, vikarams ca gunams caiva viddhi prakriti sambhavan*, "You should know that Prakriti and Purusha are both eternal, and that their transformations and qualities are born from the Prakriti."

The *Mundaka Upanishad* also confirms: *tasmad etad brahma nama rupam annam ca jayate*, "then this Brahman gives birth to names, forms and gross matter" (1.1.9), which are the basic components of the living beings and the life circumstances as well.

VERSE 4

सर्वयोनिषु कौन्तेय मूर्तयः सम्भवन्ति याः ।

sarvayoniṣu kaunteya mūrtayaḥ sambhavanti yāḥ ।

तासां ब्रह्म महद्योनिरहं बीजप्रदः पिता ॥ १४-४ ॥

tāsāṁ brahma mahadyonirahaṁ bījapraḍaḥ pitā ॥ 14-4 ॥

sarva yonisu: in all matrices; *kaunteya:* o son of Kunti; *murtayah:* the forms; *sambhavanti:* become manifested; *yah:* that; *tasam:* all of them; *brahma:* the *Brahman*; *mahat:* the Great; *yonih:* Matrix; *aham:* I; *bija:* the seed; *pradah:* who gives; *pita:* the father.

'In whatever form of matrix they appear, all beings are children of the supreme Mother and I am the Father, who gives the seed.'

The *mahat brahma* has now distinguished itself into the two halves - Mother and Father - with two different functions: awareness and activity. Perfect success can only be attained when both energies are well balanced and work together in harmony.

In the same way, we can attain the transcendental level of *bhakti* only when we sincerely worship both halves of the Godhead, each one of them helping us to receive the blessings of the other half. This is also the meaning of the famous Hare Krishna mantra, where the Triad of Jagannatha is contained in all its manifestations as Krishna, Rama and Hare or Hara.

It works at the transcendental level, where the *bhakti lata bija* ("the seed of the plant of devotion") is given by Consciousness (*rasa*) as the Father, and the nourishment and development is given by the activities of devotional service as the Mother. Therefore Krishna Consciousness is meaningless without the service of Radha o Bhakti.

It works at the *sadhana* level, where the seed of spiritual desire is given by the Sat Guru as the Father, and the nourishment and development is given by the constant study of the *Vedas* and the practice of thier teachings (*vidya*) as the Mother.

It also works at the material level, where the genetic blueprint (Consciousness/ Knowledge/ Father) unites with the materials supplied by the matrix (amniotic fluid/ hormones etc/ Mother) to develop and grow. It even works in the non-mammal animal species and plants, where the seed of life as DNA unites with the "nourishment material" represented by the egg or by the flesh of the seed or fruit in which it grows - that is also a sort of *yoni*.

Because Isvara/ Shakti is the Father/ Mother of all living beings, a person who is on the level of divine consciousness will not be envious or hostile to any other being, but will rather consider everyone as brother/ sister.

This verse contains the most powerful statement to the effect that the Mother Goddess is Brahman in this world (*brahma mahad yoni*) and not the submissive servant-wife as she has been portrayed increasingly often under the patriarchal abrahamic influence that percolated in Hinduism in the past centuries due to the degradation of Kali yuga.

In the original Vedic vision, still reflected in the iconography that was depicted in the period preceding the first abrahamic invasions and dominations, Isvara and Shakti are on the same level and of the same stature, and equally bless their devotees. In those depictions, Shakti (in all her forms, as Lakshmi, Durga, etc) does not wear a *sari* and does not cover her head in "shyness", but she rather reveals her beautiful body decorated with rich ornaments but very little clothing. She either sits or stands alone, sometimes next to Isvara, but she does not kneel or sit at his feet massaging or worshipping them.

The overpowering patriarchal influence that was imposed on Indian society from the 7th century onwards seeped into the Hindu mind contaminating it with an increasing tendency to misogyny; this disease weakened the *shakti* ("power") of Indian culture and society, both at individual and collective levels. An increasingly male-dominated society inevitably becomes unstable emotionally because of the imbalance between the two primeval forces, and the ensuing discomfort creates in everyone (including the males) a sort of subconscious anger and frustration that is vented over the incarnations of the female energy - women, nature, bodies, cows, Mother Earth, water, healthy pleasures, love, knowledge and happiness.

This pathological degeneration triggers a vicious circle that ultimately produces a sheepish mentality in the general population, dramatically lowering their self-esteem and making them easier to be controlled and exploited. In such a scenario, self-affirmation is left to petty and mean methods or dirty tricks, such as betrayal and hidden revenge, that are characteristic of weak and powerless people.

We need to understand that in the early stages of every individual's existence - during pregnancy and for a few years after birth - the child does not consider him/her self as a separate identity from his/her mother's. The child's self esteem totally depends on the image of the mother, and his/ her future character is shaped by the concept his/ her mother has of herself and by the attitude that others show towards her. A mother that does not consider herself as worthy or deserving respect and affection, or capable of taking decisions and directing her own life, or qualified enough to independently engage in the pursuit of knowledge, prosperity and happiness will inevitably produce children who are unable to properly function as individuals or as a community. Such persons are easily dominated and exploited by ruthless rulers and "leaders"

just like their mothers were dominated and exploited by ruthless husbands and "family elders".

VERSE 5

सत्त्वं रजस्तम इति गुणाः प्रकृतिसम्भवाः ।

sattvaṁ rajastama iti guṇāḥ prakṛtisambhavāḥ ।

निबध्नन्ति महाबाहो देहे देहिनमव्ययम् ॥ १४-५ ॥

nibadhnanti mahābāho dehe dehinamavyayam || 14-5 ||

sattvam: sattva; rajah: rajas; tamah: tamas; iti: like this; gunah: the gunas; prakriti: (from the prakriti); sambhavah: manifested; nibadhnanti: bind; maha baho: o mighty armed one; dehe: in the body; dehinam: of the embodied (beings); avyayam: eternal.

"Sattva, rajas, tamas: these are the gunas manifested by the prakriti. O mighty armed (Arjuna), these (gunas) bind the eternal soul to the body.

We enter here in the specific description of the three modalities of material nature called *gunas*. The word literally means "qualities" or also "ropes", as they cause conditioning or "binding" (*nibadhnanti*) when we are overpowered by illusion, but they can also be used to climb out of the trap when we know how to handle them properly.

All embodied beings (*dehinam*) are subject to these *gunas*, from the highest to the lowest species of life in the universe, as Krishna will confirm in the last chapter: *na tad asti prithivyam va divi devesu va punah, sattvam prakriti jair muktam yad ebhih 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*" (18.40).

The embodied soul (*dehi*) who is conditioned by material identifications and attachments (*ahankara-mamatva*) is hopelessly bound by these ropes, that tend to reinforce such conditionings in an apparently endless cycle, as confirmed in the *Bhagavata Purana*: *sa esa yarhi prakriter gunesv abhivisajjate, ahankriya vimudhatma kartasmity abhimanyate*, "Absorbed in the *gunas* of nature, the *atma* is confused by *ahankara*" and *tena samsara padavim avaso 'bhyety anirvritah, prasangikaih karma dosaih sad asan misra yonisu*, "By revolving helplessly in the situations of the *samsara*, he obtains the mixture of good and bad results of his previous activities, in different species of life" (3.27.2-3).

Kapila elaborates in detail on this science: *evam parabhidhyanena kartritvam prakriteh puman, karmasu kriyamanesu gunair atmani manyate*, "So by false identification, the *purusha* becomes convinced that he is the doer, and applies to himself the actions performed by the *gunas*" and *tad asya samsritir bandhah, para tantryam ca tat kritam, bhavaty akartur isasya, saksino nirvritatmanah*, "That misconception creates the bondage to the *samsara*, by which the soul loses all independence - although the soul is the witness, untouched by any action, independent and free from attachment to action." (3.26.6-7). This *samsara* manifests as the cycle of births and deaths, that is totally centered on bodily identification, as illustrated by the couple of words *deha-dehinam*.

So how can we become free from the cycle of *samsara*? Not by our own individual power, because the *jivatma*'s power is pathetically insufficient to fight against the Mother Goddess. But we can establish our consciousness in the Supreme Consciousness: *daivi hy esa guna mayi mama maya duratyaya, mam eva ye prapadyante mayam etam taranti te*, "This divine energy of mine,

manifesting as the three *gunas*, is very difficult to overcome, but those who take shelter in me can cross over this magic" (7.14).

This "taking shelter" (*upasritya*, 14.2) does not equate to the blind sectarian allegiance and obedience preached by abrahamic ideologies. It is rather the rising of our awareness to a divine level, in which we act as Isvara: selflessly - that is, without the clouds of duality that constitute selfishness. There is no selfishness at the divine level, because Bhagavan includes the consciousness or awareness of all beings and existences. By taking shelter in this awareness or knowledge (*idam jnanam upasritya*, 14.2), we rise above the play of the material *gunas* and become able to utilize them rather than being helplessly dragged around by them.

The *Bhagavata Purana* confirms: *sattvam rajas tama iti prakriter gunas tair, yuktah parah purusa eka ihasya dhatte, sthity adaye hari virinci hareti samjnah, sreyamsi tatra khalu sattva tanor nrinam syuh*, "Sattva, rajas, tamas are the qualities of nature; in their contact, the transcendental *purusha*, although one, accepts the forms of Hari, Brahma and Hara, for the maintenance of the universe. Of these, the personified form of *sattva* can bestow the greater benefit to human beings" (1.2.23).

It is important to understand that Bhagavan (the Supreme Purusha) is always perfectly situated in Consciousness and is detached from the activities, that only pertain to Prakriti (spiritual and material); the material *gunas* are created by *prakriti* from a state of balance. This is also explained in Krishna's instructions to Uddhava: *prakritir guna samyam vai, prakriter natmano gunah, sattvam rajas tama iti, sthity utpatty anta hetavah*, "Nature consists of the balance of the *gunas*, but the nature of the *atman* is not subject to the *gunas*. However, (the *gunas* called) *sattvam*, *rajas* and *tamas* are the cause of the maintenance, creation and destruction" (11.22.12).

VERSE 6

तत्र सत्त्वं निर्मलत्वात्प्रकाशकमनामयम् ।

tatra sattvaṁ nirmalatvātprakāśakamanāmayam ।

सुखसङ्गेन बध्नाति ज्ञानसङ्गेन चानघ ॥ १४-६ ॥

sukhasaṅgena badhnāti jñānasaṅgena cānagha ॥ 14-6 ॥

tatra: there; *sattvam*: *sattva*; *nir malatvat*: purity; *prakasakam*: illumination; *anamayam*: freedom from defects; *sukha*: happiness; *sangena*: by the contact; *badhnati*: binds; *jnana*: knowledge; *sangena*: by the contact; *ca*: and; *anagha*: o sinless one.

"O sinless (Arjuna), among these, the contact with *sattva* through association binds to purity, illumination, freedom from defects, happiness, and knowledge.

The word *sattva* develops from the root *sat*, meaning "existence, reality, goodness, permanence, truth", but is often translated as "virtue", which is an ambiguous term loaded with semantic distortions that can greatly differ from one culture to the other.

In the Vedic sense, the meaning of "virtue" does not convey any sense of self-righteousness, rigidity or prudery as it usually does in abrahamic-oriented cultures. Rather, "virtue" should be understood here to mean the quality of something that is "good, valuable" in itself.

Similarly, the name *anagha*, by which Krishna addresses Arjuna, should be seen in the true and original Vedic light, that expresses the meaning of "good natured, free from cruelty". This quality of fundamental goodness, that includes compassion and sympathy for all beings, is a most important requisite, and constitutes the application of *sattva* in the lives of human beings.

The quality of *nirmalatvat* (purity) is developed by regular association with cleanliness - taking bath daily, wearing clean clothes, eating clean food, living in a clean place and so on. The influence of this purity will reinforce itself and shape our character through habit, becoming our own nature.

The quality defined as *prakasakam* (enlightenment, illumination) is the clear vision that is developed when all impurities are washed away from the mind. This applies to spiritual realization and the contemplation of transcendental Reality, but also to daily activities and situations, where the habit to cleanliness helps us to remove all unnecessary considerations from our mind.

The quality called *anamayam* is translated as "calm, serene, without past debts or defects, harmless" and also derives from cleanliness, as we develop the habit of becoming detached from *anarthas* ("things devoid of value") and negative thoughts. This must become a habit because *anarthas* and negativities keep coming in the normal course of life, and we need to learn to drop them as quickly as possible. All these good habits inevitably lead to happiness (*sukha*), that is also a state of mind and a habit. We should "make up our minds to be happy", in all circumstances, which means always trying to find the positive aspects and accepting even problems as good opportunities to develop and improve.

But all these are ropes, and we must use them, not remain tied by them. Cleanliness is next to godliness and keeps us healthy and comfortable, but being obsessed by cleanliness can become a pathological disorder, and even obstruct our progress and daily functions. For example, we may become unable to get our hands dirty for the purpose of cleaning the floor or our soiled laundry, or we may feel very uncomfortable and unhappy in situations where we cannot avoid sitting in an unkempt public place or walking through some unclean area.

When we climb a mountain or walk through some dangerous place, it is a good idea to tie ourselves to a safety rope, that will protect us from falling down and getting hurt. *Sattva* is such a rope, and conditions us to those behaviors that we need to develop as habits in our personal evolution. However, even the best safety rope needs a release system, that we can choose to utilize to become free from the harness if need be. *Sattva* can also become an impediment if we remain unable to rise over it when the situation requires it, especially for the sake of *dharma* or devotional service.

VERSE 7

रजो रागात्मकं विद्धि तृष्णासङ्गसमुद्भवम् ।

rajo rāgātmakaṁ viddhi tṛṣṇāsaṅgasamudbhavam ।

तन्निबध्नाति कौन्तेय कर्मसङ्गेन देहिनम् ॥ १४-७ ॥

tannibadhnāti kaunteya karmasaṅgena dehinam ॥ 14-7 ॥

rajah: rajas; *raga atmakam*: consisting of attachment; *viddhi*: you should know; *trishna*: thirst/ hankering; *sanga*: the contact; *samudbhavam*: appeared (from); *tat*: that; *nibadhnati*: binds; *kaunteya*: o son of Kunti; *karma*: action; *sangena*: by contact with; *dehinam*: of the embodied beings.

"O son of Kunti, you should know that the contact with rajas develops attachment and hankering, that bind the embodied beings to action.

Rajas, usually translated as "passion", is the active *guna* that influences creation and acquisition; it is required to carry *sattva* from theory into practice in this world, where nobody can even survive without working (3.8).

Action is not a bad thing at all, *per se*. In fact, action is the foundation for *yajna* and *dharma*, as we see in chapter 3:

karma brahmodbhavam viddhi brahmaksara samudbhavam, tasmāt sarva gatam brahma nityam yajne pratisthitam, "Know that work comes from Brahma, and Brahma comes from the Imperishable, therefore the all-pervading Brahman eternally resides in sacred action" (3.15),

annad bhavanti bhutani parjanyaad anna sambhavah, yajnad bhavati parjanyo yajnad karma samudbhavah, "All creatures come to being thanks to food grains, and food grains come into being thanks to rain. Rain comes thanks to the performance of sacrifice, and sacrifice comes to being through work" (3.14).

The problem is actually ignorance (*tamas*), by which the conditioned soul is deluded into egotism and selfishness (*ahankara-mamatva*): *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).

As long as *rajas* is engaged, directed and controlled by *sattva*, everything goes very well. Desires and aspirations (*trishna*) can become purified and even bring purification to our life: *mat karma krin ma paramo mad bhaktah sanga varjitah, nirvairah sarva bhutesu 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.” (11.55).

Because God is the sum total of all beings, the realized souls serve the Supreme by working for the benefit of all: *labhante brahma nirvanam risayah ksina kalmasah, chinna dvaidha yatatmanah sarva bhuta hite ratah*, "The wise seers of Reality attain the *brahma nirvana* because have been purified from all faults and have cut off dualistic illusions, engaging themselves in working for the benefit of all living beings." (5.25)

Of course this means that we need to give up *raga-dvesa*, the duality of selfish attachment and repulsion: *vita raga bhaya krodha man maya mam upasritah, bahavo jnana tapasa puta mad bhavam agatah*, "Many who were free from attachment, fear and anger, fully taking shelter in me, have been purified by austerity and knowledge, and attained my realization" (4.10).

It is this detachment from the fruits of activity - not from the activity itself - that leads us to perfection: *karmany evadhikaras te ma phalesu kadacana, ma karma phala hetur bhur ma te sango 'stv akarmani*, "You certainly have the right to perform actions but never the right to enjoy the fruits of your actions. Do not try to become the cause of the fruits of the action, but do not become attached to inaction." (2.47). This early instruction by Krishna is confirmed in chapter 5: *yuktah karma phalam tyaktva santim apnoti naisthikim, ayuktah kama karena phale saktu nibadhyate*, "A *yogi* gives up the results of activity and therefore attains permanent peace. One who is not a *yogi* becomes tied by the results of the action that s/he desired to obtain through work" (5.12).

The same is true for the various applications of *rajas*, as in family and society, for this life and the next (*drista* and *adrasta*). The secret is the scientific knowledge of *varnas* and *ashramas*, by

which individuals are trained and enabled to perform their duties according to *dharma*. In this way, even the ordinary daily activities will become *bhagavat dharma* (14.2): *saktah karmany avidvamsa yatha kurvanti bharata, kuryad vidvams tathasaktas cikirsur loka sangraham*, "O Arjuna, just like the ignorant people who are attached to the results of actions engage in work, a person who has knowledge should work conscientiously but without attachment, for the benefit of people in general" (3.25).

VERSE 8

तमस्त्वज्ञानजं विद्धि मोहनं सर्वदेहिनाम् ।

tamastvajñānajaṃ viddhi mohanaṃ sarvadehinām ।

प्रमादालस्यनिद्राभिस्तन्निबध्नाति भारत ॥ १४-८ ॥

pramādālasyanidrābhistannibadhnāti bhārata ॥ 14-8 ॥

tamah: tamas; tu: but; ajnana jam: born from ignorance; viddhi: you should know; mohanam: confusion; sarva dehinam: of all embodied beings; pramada: madness/ intoxication; alasya: laziness; nidrabhih: excessive sleep; tat: that; nibadhnati: binds; bharata: o descendant of Bharata.

"However, o descendant of Bharata, you should know that *tamas* causes ignorance and its binding results, such as confusion, madness, laziness and excessive sleep.

Tamas is the modality of nature that obscures knowledge and awareness, and therefore it is usually translated as "ignorance". It is the dark influence that covers the true nature of the being with misconceptions and error - the actual cause of bondage to the selfishness that can damage *rajas* and the self-righteousness that

can damage *sattva*. Ignorance here does not refer simply to the absence of a particular knowledge or understanding, but defines the stubborn refusal to accept or even contemplate knowledge and understanding. Therefore it has very little to do with the lack of official educational or academic qualifications, and a lot to do with false identifications and attachments (*ahankara-mamatva*).

We have already elaborated on this particular point in our commentaries to verses 13.8 to 13.12 that described true knowledge: *amanitvam adambhitvam ahimsa ksantir arjavam, acaryopasanam saucam sthairyam atma vinigraha, indriyarthesu vairagyam anahankara eva ca, janma mrityu jara vyadhi dukkha dosanudarsanam, asaktir anabhisvangah putra dara grihadisu, nityam ca sama cittatvam istanistopapattisu, mayi cananya yogena bhaktir avyabhicarini, vivikta desa sevivam aratir jana samsadi, adhyatma jnana nityatvam tattva jnanartha darsanam, etaj jnanam iti proktam ajnanam yad ato 'nyatha*, "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, 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, 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, totally and constantly focusing on me through *bhakti yoga*, performing service in a solitary place, without attachment for meeting others, the constant awareness of the original soul, the realization of the value of knowledge: all this is called *jnana*, and anything else is *ajnana*."

Ignorance, *ajnana*, is then defined as illusion or confusion (*moha*), by which people think they will live forever in the same position or material body and keep their things forever; this causes them to

ignore the karmic consequences of their bad actions and neglect. In chapter 9, Krishna had explained these as characteristics of the *asuras*, the people who have a demoniac mentality: *moghasa mogha karmano mogha jnana vicetasah, raksasim asurim caiva prakritim mohinim sritah*, "Entertaining delusional desires, engaging in delusional activities, and delusionally convinced of their knowledge, such people are confused by incorrect awareness, and they certainly take shelter in the bewildering nature of *rakshasas* and *asuras*" (9.12). Chapter 16 will elaborate even further on this subject.

The association with illusion and confusion (*moha*) through practice and habit causes the loss of intelligence, defined as *pramada*, or madness, and a tendency to inertia defined as *alasya* ("laziness, carelessness, neglect") and *nidra* ("sleep, forgetfulness, oblivion"). This deadly poison of ignorance contaminates the power of *rajas*, directing activity towards stupid choices, destructive actions, criminal pursuits, intoxication or various types, and the worst types of selfishness and egotism that do not care for the sufferings of others or even for one's own future sufferings resulting from the consequences of present actions.

Every care must be given to avoid falling into the traps of *tamas*, because that is the *andha kupa* (blind well) from which it is almost impossible to escape, and that drags the *jivatman* down into the lowest levels of existence, into ghostly life, animal life, plant life and mineral life, where there is no choice but one can only bear sufferings for a very long time. This is why Krishna offered us the knowledge of *karma yoga*, the proper engagement in action, in chapter 3 immediately after clarifying the difference between *atman* and material body, in chapter 2. The science of action or *karma yoga* is the easiest approach and can purify and elevate even the most degraded conditioned souls, in the most difficult circumstances where no higher consciousness is possible.

We need to be always be very careful to remain detached from *tamas* by using *rajas* under the direction of *sattva*, until we become able to rise over all the *gunas* and become established in *suddha sattva*, the transcendental goodness that is the same position of Isvara or Divine Consciousness: *niyatam kuru karma tvam karma jyayo hy akarmanah, sarira yatrapi ca te na prasiddhyed akarmanah*, "You should perform the dutiful actions, because action is better than non-action. Without action, it is even impossible to maintain the body, that is the vehicle of the Self" (3.8), and *mayi sarvani karmani sannyasyadhyatma cetasa, nirasir nirmamo bhutva yudhyasva vigata jvarah*, "You should fight this battle in the consciousness of surrendering all your actions to me, without selfish desires (*rajas* contaminated by *ahankara* and *mamatva*) and without lethargy (*tamas* in full delusion as *pramada*)" (3.30). We must be very careful because the fundamental ignorance of *ahankara* and *mamatva* will create confusion also in regard to *sattva* and *dharma*: *adharmam dharmam iti ya manyate tamasavrita, sarvarthan viparitams ca buddhih sa partha tamasi*, "When confused by ignorance, the faculty of understanding will tend to present *adharma* as *dharma*, and *dharma* as *adharma*" (18.32). This is how nonsensical ideas are created, mistaking *tamas* for *sattva*, as in the case of the famous concept of "lazy *brahmana*".

VERSE 9

सत्त्वं सुखे सञ्जयति रजः कर्माणि भारत ।

sattvaṁ sukhe sañjayati rajaḥ karmaṇi bhārata ।

ज्ञानमावृत्य तु तमः प्रमादे सञ्जयत्युत ॥ १४-९ ॥

jñānamāvṛtya tu tamaḥ pramāde sañjayatyuta ॥ 14-9 ॥

sattvam: *sattva*; *sukhe*: in happiness; *sanjayati*: binds; *rajah*: *rajas*; *karmani*: in activities; *bharata*: o descendant of Bharata; *jnanam*: knowledge; *avrtya*: covering; *tu*: but; *tamah*: *tamas*; *pramade*: in madness; *sanjayati*: transforms; *uta*: it is said.

"O descendant of Bharata, it is said that *sattva* binds through/to happiness, *rajas* through/to activities, and *tamas* transforms into madness.

All three *gunas* are dangerous, albeit in different measures, and we must always be careful how to handle them properly, without allowing ourselves to be bound by any of them. It is a very subtle science, and we must apply our intelligence to understand it properly.

Sattva - goodness - is the best instrument we can use because purity and knowledge elevate us to higher levels of consciousness, but if we become attached to it through *ahankara* and *mamatva*, ignorance creeps into the happiness and comfort created by *sattva*, and we risk sliding into self-complacency, self-righteousness and laziness, something that will certainly put us in the power of *tamas*. Goodness in itself and for itself, without a higher purpose, turns sour and falls into its opposite, because opposites are closer to each other than sometimes we like to think.

Let's make an example. Taking bath regularly gives us a taste for cleanliness, but if we become complacent and egotistic, believing that we are clean by nature and identification, we might fall into the delusional idea that we do not need to clean the place where we live or even to wash, and we fall pray to *tamas*. The same trap lays within the love for knowledge created by *sattva*. If we allow *ahankara* and *mamatva* to drag us to the level of material identification, we may delude ourselves into thinking that we are entitled to such study and knowledge because of our high birth, and then that our birth itself is the only qualification for such

knowledge. At that point, madness has already developed and it will not take long before we come to believe that we do not need to study because we are already knowledgeable - or even authorities on knowledge - by dint of our birth.

The proper use of *rajas* is to engage our activities to the service of the Supreme through dedication to work that is beneficial for all beings. However, the ignorance produced by *ahankara* and *mamatva* will harden *rajas* and bind us to the selfish desire to collect for ourselves the benefit of such work, in the form of enjoyment of wealth, position and power. As a result, we will make selfish choices, and this will create a stronger tendency to selfishness, in a vicious circle. Inevitably, the attachment for the results of our actions will fan a greater desire for sense enjoyment, and on the level of materialistic vision we become confused by that illusion. As Krishna has already explained: *dhyayato visayan pumsah sangas tesupajayate, sangat sanjayate kamah kamat krodho 'bhijayate, krodhad bhavati sammohah sammohat smriti vibhramah, smriti bhramsad buddhi naso buddhi nasat pranasyati*, "By thinking about the objects of the senses a person associates with them, by association desire develops, and from unfulfilled desire anger arises. Anger becomes confusion, and confusion becomes failing memory. Because of the loss of memory, intelligence is lost, and when intelligence is lost, one falls from his position." (2.62-63)

Tamas is the dull and dense pull of gravity that drags us down, the darkness that covers our vision if we do not keep ourselves active and clear minded by using *rajas* and *sattva* in the proper way. The influence of *tamas* is the most powerful characteristic in the material world, and comes into being already when in the beginning, *ahankara* and *mamatva* become separated by duality and direct our consciousness away from the Supreme. It is the root of the vicious circle of deaths and rebirths into delusional ventures,

of the bad choices that produce bad tendencies by which bad choices will be made again and again: this is expressed by the word *sanjayate*, generating attachment and conditioning.

To summarize, we can say that *sattva* brings happiness, *rajas* keeps us active and *tamas* makes us helpless; these three qualities are the modes in which our mind can work. It is up to us to control and direct our mind for a higher purpose, powering the vehicle that can carry us through the journey of evolution.

VERSE 10

रजस्तमश्चाभिभूय सत्त्वं भवति भारत ।

rajastamaścābhibhūya sattvaṁ bhavati bhārata ।

रजः सत्त्वं तमश्चैव तमः सत्त्वं रजस्तथा ॥ १४-१० ॥

rajaḥ sattvaṁ tamaścaiva tamaḥ sattvaṁ rajastathā ॥ 14-10 ॥

rajaḥ: rajas; tamah: tamas; ca: and; abhibhuya: overcoming; sattvam: sattvam; bhavati: becomes; bharata: o descendant of Bharata; rajah: rajas; sattvam: sattva; tamah: tamas; ca: and; eva: although; tamah: tamas; sattvam: sattva; rajah: rajas; तथा: then.

"O descendant of Bharata, when *rajas* defeats *tamas*, it turns into *sattva*. But when *rajas* obfuscates *sattva*, it becomes *tamas*, and then *tamas* overpowers *sattva* and *rajas* as well.

The three *gunas* are always in movement, like waves in the ocean, and the predominance of one overcomes the other two, like a strong gust of wind sweeps the waves and a boat from one side to another.

However, there are only two directions - not three - in which we can move: higher or lower. So it is *rajas*, the power to act and to move, that decides the day: if it supports *sattva* and accepts to be guided by it through intelligence and pure selfless action in the service of the Supreme, then *tamas* is defeated permanently, and *rajas* also transforms into *sattva*. We then attain the level of pure *sattva* or *visuddha sattva*, the *vasudeva* state, that is the transcendental level from which we do not fall back again. Conversely, if *rajas* allows itself to be contaminated by *tamas* in the form of the delusional material identifications and attachments, we go down and remain indefinitely bound by the consequence of our foolish and cruel actions, sinking into the lowest forms of life. Then *tamas* wins and everything else is lost - hope, joy, knowledge, desires and even the ability to act that would raise us from this living death.

The word *abhibhuya* in this verse contains the meanings of "overpowering, subduing, covering, over-riding, defeating", and illustrates the dynamics of the transformations of the material world. Krishna has already explained that such power of transformation is divine and cannot be stopped: the only solution is to remain detached from the phantasmagoria of the *gunas* and their products, and keep our consciousness strongly fixed on the Supreme on the transcendental level. The *jivatma* is not really acting: *prakriteh kriyamanani gunaih karmani sarvasah, ahankara vimudhatma kartaham iti manyate, tattva vit tu maha baho guna karma vibhagayoh, guna gunesu vartanta iti matva na sajjate*, "All activities are actually performed by the qualities of nature, but a foolish person who is confused by egotism thinks 'I am doing'. One who knows things as they really are is able to understand the various qualities and activities, and therefore he engages the tendencies in the interaction with the appropriate tendencies: this awareness keeps him free from attachment." (3.27-28).

Krishna has been explaining this from the very beginning: *traigunya visaya veda nistraigunyo bhavarjuna, nirdvandvo nitya sattva stho niryoga ksema atmavan*, "The Vedas deal with the various manifestations of the three *gunas*. O Arjuna, you should rather become detached from all these three *gunas*, and situate yourself in that pure goodness that is not subject to changes. One who knows the *atman* becomes free from all dualities and finds protection in detachment." (2.45)

We just need to learn to "let go", by finding the real source of happiness: *visaya vinivartante niraharasya dehinah, rasa varjam raso 'py asya param dristva nivartate*, "The embodied soul may keep the sense objects at a distance and reject them, but he can give up the taste for such objects when he finds the Supreme, that is the real taste of happiness." (2.59)

VERSE 11

सर्वद्वारेषु देहेऽस्मिन्प्रकाश उपजायते ।

sarvadvāreṣu dehe'sminprakāśa upajāyate ।

ज्ञानं यदा तदा विद्याद्विवृद्धं सत्त्वमित्युत ॥ १४-११ ॥

jñānaṁ yadā tadā vidyādvivṛddhaṁ sattvamityuta ॥ 14-11 ॥

sarva dvaresu: at all the doors; *dehe*: the body; *asmin*: this; *prakasa*: enlightenment; *upajayate*: becomes manifest/ appears; *jnanam*: knowledge; *yada*: when; *tada*: then; *vidyat*: by (transcendental) knowledge; *vivridham*: increased; *sattvam*: *sattva*; *iti*: thus; *uta*: it is said.

"It is said that when all the doors of the body are enlightened by the realization of knowledge, then such knowledge increases the power of *sattva*.

The increase of *sattva* is a cause and an effect at the same time, therefore we can also translate this verse in the reverse order: "It is said that when the power of *sattva* increases, all the doors of the body are illuminated by knowledge".

The doors of the body are the 9 openings where the senses or perception and action reside: 2 eyes, 2 ears, 2 nostrils, 1 mouth, 1 genital opening and 1 anus. How can such bodily parts be enlightened by *sattva* or knowledge? By engaging in the appropriate action, choosing contact with sattvic habits, substances, and actions. This good choice will in turn raise the level of our consciousness and our sense perception will become clearer and liberating.

We should use our eyes to see beautiful, clean, auspicious things, and to direct all our actions in a way that is beneficial to all beings - even to the transcendental and divine level if we contemplate the form of the Personalities of Godhead.

Similarly, we should listen to good and beneficial sounds, that direct our actions in the proper engagement and even towards *vidya* or transcendental knowledge. The sense of smell can also be engaged in *sattva* and even in *suddha sattva*, and so on. The two lower openings of the body should not be neglected either, but they should be kept clean and pure through good habits and by the proper awareness about the true nature of sense objects. This is called *prakasa*, illumination or enlightenment.

Here are Krishna's teachings to Uddhava:

yadetarau jayet sattvam, bhasvaram visadam sivam, tada sukkena yujyeta, dharma jnanadibhih puman, "When *sattva* overcomes the other two (*gunas*), a person becomes radiant, pure, auspicious, full of happiness and other good qualities" (*Bhagavata Purana* 11.25.13)

purusam sattva samyuktam, anumiyac chamadibhih, kamadibhi rajo yuktam, krodhadyais tamasa yutam, "A person connected with *sattva* can be recognized by his qualities, such as self control, a person in *rajas* by lust and so on, and a person in *tamas* by anger and so on". (*Bhagavata Purana* 11.25.9)

yada bhajati mam bhaktya, nirapekshah sva karmabhih, tam sattva prakritim vidyat, purusam striyam eva va, "A person - man or woman - who worships me with devotion, performing their duties without attachment, should be understood as situated in *sattva*" (*Bhagavata Purana* 11.25.10)

VERSE 12

लोभः प्रवृत्तिरारम्भः कर्मणामशमः स्पृहा ।

lobhaḥ pravṛttirārambhaḥ karmaṇāmaśamaḥ sprhā ।

रजस्येतानि जायन्ते विवृद्धे भरतर्षभ ॥ १४-१२ ॥

rajasyetāni jāyante vivṛddhe bharatarṣabha ॥ 14-12 ॥

lobhah: greed; *pravrittih*: engagement; *arambhah*: endeavor/beginning; *karmanam*: in actions; *asamah*: uncontrolled; *spriha*: contact; *rajasi*: in *rajas*; *etani*: all these; *jayante*: appear; *vivriddhe*: when there is an increase; *bharata rsabha*: o best among the descendants of Bharata.

"O best among the descendants of Bharata, when the contact with *rajas* creates a tendency to greed and a lack of control in engaging in activities, then there is an increase in *rajas*.

As with *sattva*, also the increase of *rajas* is a cause and an effect at the same time, therefore we can also translate this verse in the reverse order: "It is said that when the power of *rajas* increases,

there is an increase of greed, and an uncontrolled urge to begin many activities and enterprises."

A passion for action remains pure (i.e. *sattvik*) as long as we are not attached to the selfish enjoyment of the results of the action: *karmany evadhikaras te ma phalesu kadacana, ma karma phala hetur bhur ma te sango 'stv akarmani*, "You certainly have the right to perform actions but never the right to enjoy the fruits of your actions. Do not try to become the cause of the fruits of the action, but do not become attached to inaction." (2.47)

When there is an increase in *rajas* without *sattva*, desire or passion takes a power of its own and contaminates the purpose of our activities. Too little *rajas*, and we slide into *tamas* through inaction. Too much *rajas*, and we slide into *tamas* as well, but through cruelty.

We find confirmation in Krishna's teachings to Uddhava: *yada jayet tamah sattvam, rajah sangam bhida calam, tada duhkkena yujyeta, karmana yasasa sriya*, "When *rajas*, causing attachment, differentiation and change, overpowers *tamas* and *sattva*, (a man) feels suffering and works hard desiring fame and opulence." (*Bhagavata Purana* 11.25.14). Even religious activities can be overshadowed by *rajas* and *tamas*: *yada asisa asasya, mam bhajeta sva karmabhih, tam rajah prakritim vidyat, himsam asasya tamasam*, "A person who worships me hoping for blessings, performing his duties to get their results, has a nature in *rajas*. A person who hopes for violence must be considered under *tamas*." (*Bhagavata Purana* 11.25.11)

The word *lobhah*, "greed" refers to the thirst (*trsna* 14.7) for acquisitions, possessions, power, domination, and control. When such thirst is excessive and cannot be quenched by healthy dharmic and natural sense gratification, it becomes an obsession. Here too we find the influence of *tamas* or ignorance, because a person of

knowledge should understand that the pleasures of the senses and material possessions are temporary and cannot give true happiness (2.14, 5.22).

The word *pravritti*, "engagement" is generally used in opposition to *nivritti*, "renunciation" as in *pravritti marga* as opposed to *nivritti marga*. In fact there is no contradiction, because one can engage in action while remaining detached from the results of the action.

Here it is used together with the word *arambhah*, that means "endeavor" in the sense of "beginning an action" with a purpose of obtaining a result. When we are compelled by greed to run after many schemes and ventures, and to choose which ones seem to promise better advantages for us, *rajas* increases its power and the vicious circle downwards starts.

The word *asamah* means "uncontrolled" as in unlimited desires and engagement in action even beyond the point of exhaustion, but it also includes the meanings of "dissatisfaction, restlessness, desire, aspiration, rejection". It refers to the intrinsic nature of sense gratification and possession: when we try to find happiness in sense gratification, we become inevitably disappointed because there can be no real lasting happiness there. Krishna has already explained this point: *ye hi samsparsa ja bhoga dukkha yonaya eva te, ady antavantah kaunteya na tesu 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)

The use of the word *spriha*, "to touch", is particularly interesting here. Touch is the contact of the senses with the sense objects that causes joy and distress (*matra sparsas tu kaunteya sitosna sukha dukkha dah*, 2.14). We can observe this fundamental tendency

even in small children who want to touch everything, but this contact is also effected through the other senses, as our sense of sight comes in touch with the images, and so on.

VERSE 13

अप्रकाशोऽप्रवृत्तिश्च प्रमादो मोह एव च ।

aprakāśo'pravṛttiśca pramādo moha eva ca ।

तमस्येतानि जायन्ते विवृद्धे कुरुनन्दन ॥ १४-१३ ॥

tamasyetāni jāyante vivṛddhe kurunandana ॥ 14-13 ॥

a prakasah: lack of enlightenment; *a pravrittih:* absence of engagement; *ca:* and; *pramada:* madness/ intoxication; *moha:* confusion/ illusion; *eva:* certainly; *ca:* and; *tamasi:* in *tamas;* *etani:* all these; *jayante:* manifest; *vivṛddhe:* with the increase; *kuru nandana:* o beloved descendant of Kuru.

"O beloved descendant of Kuru, with the increase of *tamas* we find stupidity, laziness, madness and confusion, that tend to get worse and worse.

The word *pramada* was already used in 14.8 in association with *alasya* (laziness) and in 14.9 as the most prominent effect of *tamas*. Again it will be used to exemplify *tamas* (together with *moha* and *ajnana*) in verse 14.18, and with *alasya* and *nidra* in verse 18.39, at the conclusion of Krishna's teachings in *Bhagavad gita*. The meanings of *pramada* include "whimsical, insensitive, stupid, psychologically imbalanced or damaged". In the state of *pramada*, one remains unable to believe what is totally obvious, in front of him, and all intelligence is lost.

Pramada is also mentioned as one of the four main defective tendencies of the conditioned souls, together with *bhrama* (mistake, misunderstanding, false knowledge), *vipra lipsa* (conscious or unconscious cheating propensity) and *karanapatava* (defective sense perception).

In his conversation with King Pracinabarhi (*Bhagavata Purana*, 4.29.5), Narada Muni applies the concept of *pramada* in attributing it to material intelligence blinded by the identification with the body: *buddhim tu pramadam vidyan mama-aham iti yat krtam, yam adhisthaya dehe asmin puman bhunkte aksabhir gunan*, "Intelligence becomes confusing when it acts according to *aham* and *mama* ("I" and "mine"), taking shelter in the identification with this body - by which the *purusha* engages the senses in the material *gunas*."

Again, the word *pramada* is used in verse 5.14.9 in the description of material conditioning, as applied to the confusion of the mind and intelligence that one experiences in the storm of the senses in material lust. Another translation of *pramada* is therefore "intoxication", that is not limited to the abuse of psychotropic substances (alcohol, drugs etc), but includes sexual lust and all other forms of lust - power, violence, cruelty, possession, pride, egotism, etc.

The word *prakasa* means "enlightenment, illumination, realization, understanding, vision", so *a-prakasa* is exactly the opposite: a lack of vision, the inability to understand, dullness, the stupidity that prevents us from seeing even the most obvious things. It is utter foolishness, lack of knowledge as well as lack of discriminating knowledge (*viveka*).

Similarly, as *pravritti* refers to "engagement in action", its opposite *a-pravritti* points to the inability to actually perform a task properly or at all - neglect, inertia, laziness and carelessness.

This tendency is very widespread in Kali yuga, where most of the population is immersed in ignorance, and people like to "hang out" or "phase out" in front of the television or video games, or become lost in intoxication. In all such examples, people squander the valuable time of their human life in literally doing nothing - not as a necessary time of rest and relaxation to replenish one's energies, but as a precise goal of life and search for happiness. In the general opinion of tamasic people, the best occupation is considered a sort of perennial vacation, or a job where there is no real work to do, no responsibility or duty, as for example in some bureaucratic or political positions. This fundamental alienation from reality can lead to extremes such as escapism in dreaming, virtual reality, role enactment, and reciprocal delusion in couples or groups.

The leaders among the Asuras - many of whom belong to the human race as well - are eager to implement and exploit this process of idiotization of the masses, through deliberate chemical, magnetic and biological pollution in food, medicines, water, air and environment in general, drug addiction, climate control and lowering of ethical and moral standards. This process reinforces the tendency to ignorance and inertia and is reinforced by them, in a vicious circle where lack of interest for understanding the actual situation in society and one's actual position leads to poor choices or the refusal to make good choices (which is intrinsically a bad choice), which in turn aggravate ignorance and increases the tendencies to make mistakes and take the wrong decisions.

This asuric scheme envisions a "new world order" where a small group of extremely powerful persons controls all the resources at global level and even the general population, treating them as animals or *untermenschen* (sub-men), a definition created by Nietzsche. In this picture, human beings like farm animals can be "culled" without any ethical consideration, in a deliberate depopulation program, if their numbers become too large. This is

the bottom of *tamas*, where the conditioned soul experiences complete helplessness and cannot find any meaning in life.

It is very easy (and totally useless) to blame others for such a situation. The only solution is for each and every one of us to rise above *tamas* and utilize any strength of *rajas* we can gather, putting it under the control and guidance of *sattva*, and reclaim our own right to personal and collective evolution and realization as explained by *Bhagavad gita* and the Vedic system.

Those who have already awakened from the slumber of delusional dreams should try their best to wake up others, even if only one person at a time, and for any period of time, so that the momentum can increase and the balance will be tilted away from *tamas*. To be effective in this work, we absolutely need to deeply understand the *gunas* of material nature, as Krishna is kindly teaching us here.

The most important point is to understand *tamas*, because *tamas* contaminates *rajas* and destroys *sattva*, and is therefore the real enemy from which we must guard ourselves. What is ignorance? It is not simply illiteracy, or the lack of knowledge or information (that could be easily overcome with a little effort), but it is rather the distrust towards evolution, the lack of interest towards knowledge and information, or even the opposition against knowledge and information. Such ignorance is born from fear, which in turn develops from the root cause of *ahankara* and *mamatva* - material identification and attachment.

Tamas becomes particularly dangerous when it mixes with the concept of religion, and as Krishna will clearly state later (18.32) the influence of *tamas* causes people to mistake *dharma* for *adharm*, and *adharm* for *dharma*. Therefore we see foolish people worshiping ignorance and *adharm* as the "age old religious tradition" and ranting and raging against everyone else, blaming others for the consequences of their own stupid mistakes

and demanding "the government" to "ban" this and that by rule of law and to persecute those who are not "in line" with such demented policies based on *tamas* and totally contrary to the teachings of Vedic scriptures.

Here is a very enlightening description in Krishna' teachings to Uddhava: *yada jayed rajah sattvam, tamo mudham layam jadam, yujyeta soka mohabhyam, nidraya himsayasaya*, "When *tamas* overpowers *rajas* and *sattvam*, the consciousness is covered by stupidity, inertia, complaining, confusion, sleep, violence, and false hopes" (*Bhagavata Purana* 11.25.15). We should remember here that *moha* indicates "attachment to illusion" and *himsa* is "hatred, violence, anger".

VERSE 14

यदा सत्त्वे प्रवृद्धे तु प्रलयं याति देहभृत् ।

yadā sattve pravṛddhe tu pralayaṁ yāti dehabhṛt ।

तदोत्तमविदां लोकानमलान्प्रतिपद्यते ॥ १४-१४ ॥

tadottamavidāṁ lokānamalānpratipadyate ॥ 14-14 ॥

yada: when; *sattve*: in *sattva*; *pra vridhdhe*: there is an increase; *tu*: however; *pralayaṁ*: the annihilation; *yati*: goes; *deha bhrit*: one who carries a body; *tada*: then; *uttama vidam*: of the greatest; *lokan*: the planets/ dimensions; *amalan*: pure; *prati padyate*: he attains.

"When the strength of *sattva* increases, at the time of *pralaya* the embodied soul attains the highest dimensions of the pure souls.

A similar verse is found in the instructions given by Krishna to Uddhava: *sattve pralinah svar yanti, nara lokam rajo layah, tamo layas tu nirayam, yanti mam eva nirgunah*, "Those who die in *sattva* go to Svarga, those who die in *rajas* take a new birth in the world of men, and those who die in *tamas* sink into a degraded situation, but those who have risen above the *gunas* attain me" (*Bhagavata Purana* 11.25.22).

In this verse, the word *amalam* can be translated as "pure", as it literally means "without any contamination", where contamination is the ignorance of material identification and attachments. The word *tu*, "however", indicates that when we attain a sufficient strength in *sattva*, there is no more space for *rajas* or *tamas*.

When *sattva* becomes completely pure and stable, it is called *suddha sattva* or *visuddha sattva* ("pure goodness"): this is the *vasudeva* level of transcendental consciousness, that establishes us in the spiritual world even while we are still living in this material body. In such a blissful consciousness, we will certainly rise to the highest regions of the universe to serve and assist Isvara in the managerial tasks we may be assigned, until the end of the cycle of creation. At that time, we will continue to serve Isvara in the non-manifested spiritual world, usually known as Vaikuntha.

The *pralaya* ("destruction, annihilation, dissolution") mentioned in this verse applies to the dissolution of the present body as well as to the partial dissolution of the universe at the end of Brahma's day. In either case, the *sattvik* person leaves the human body s/he was wearing and rises to the higher dimensions. The material body that we are now wearing (*deha bhrit*) will be left behind because we have already developed our divine or spiritual body (*siddha deha*) that is made of pure consciousness and works much better than anything made of material elements. The degree of power of such *siddha deha* depends on the degree of consciousness: if it still composed largely of mental constructs - thoughts, emotions,

beliefs etc - it will be a subtle body suitable for the highest planets of this material universe, called Svarga or Svargaloka, but it will not rise higher. Vedic scriptures explain that within this universe there are several levels or dimensions of consciousness exemplified by the *chakras* in the body and illustrated in the descriptions of the Virata rupa.

In general, people learn (or should learn) in *yoga* classes that there are 7 *chakras* in the human body: 1) *muladhara* (at the base of the spine, between the anus and the genital opening), 2) *svadhisthana* (below the navel, in the area of the bowels), 3) *manipura* (above the navel, in the pit of the stomach), 4) *anahata* (in the middle of the chest, near the heart), 5) *visuddha* (throat), 6) *ajna* (in the middle of the forehead, a little above the area between the two eyebrows) and 7) *sahasrara* (the crown suture at the top of the skull). The 7 human *chakras* are directly connected in ascending order to: 1) survival, 2) sense gratification, 3) self affirmation, 4) compassion, 5) communication, 6) understanding and 7) inspiration. However, these 7 *chakras* and the corresponding planets or *lokas* only represent the level of human consciousness; there are 7 lower planets and *chakras* below the *muladhara*, and 7 higher planets and *chakras* above the *sahasrara*.

The 7 sub-human *chakras*, in descending order, are: 1) *atala* (in the hips or loins, connected to fear and lust), 2) *vitata* (in the thighs, connected to anger and resentment), 3) *sutata* (in the knees, connected to envy), 4) *talatala* (in the calves, connected to doubt and confusion), 5) *rasatala* (in the ankles, connected to arrogance), 6) *mahatala* (in the toes, connected with selfishness), 7) *patala* (on the feet soles, connected with hatred and malice). Some descriptions congregate all the lower planetary systems as Patala (the subterranean levels).

The 7 super-human *chakras*, in ascending order, are: 1) Svargaloka (including Gandharvaloka, Kinnaraloka, etc), 2) Maharloka (also

called Pitriloka or Yamaloka), 3) Vishnuloka (also called Dhruvaloka), 4) Siddhaloka, 5) Janaloka (including the luminaries and administration manager Devas), 6) Tapoloka, 7) Satyaloka (also called Brahmaloaka). Some descriptions put Vishnuloka (Dhruvaloka) at the highest position, and others congregate all the higher planetary systems/ *chakras* into "Svargaloka", and calculate Bhurloka and Bhavarloka as intermediate earthly or human planets, for a total of 14 planetary systems or levels of consciousness instead of 21. In any case, the dimensions of existence above the human level are difficult to understand for those who have a human mind, so we can simply meditate on the "divine consciousness" that includes all the levels above the human platform.

It is interesting to note that the traditional iconography clearly depicts these higher *chakras* in the representation of Devas, Siddhas, etc, usually translated as a towering hairdo decorated with jewels, or as a tall crown surrounded by a halo. This knowledge of the divine *chakras* or higher levels of consciousness was widespread in ancient cultures also outside India, and survived in popular folklore for example in the conical hats of "wizards and witches".

The influence of *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* causes us to develop a mentality respectively as *sura* ("divine being"), *asura* ("ruthless being"), and *pasu* ("animal being"). At the time of death, such condition becomes permanent as there is a new opportunity to develop a suitable body according to such consciousness. Krishna has already explained this point several times:

yam yam vapi smaran bhavam tyajaty ante kalevaram, tam tam evaiti kaunteya sada tad bhava bhavitah, "O son of Kunti (Arjuna), whatever state of existence/ nature one remembers at the time of leaving the body, s/he attains (precisely) that state of being/ condition, (because) of always contemplating that existence." (8.6)

anta kale ca mam eva smaran muktva kalevaram, yah prayati sa mad bhavam yati nasty atra samsayah, "One who, at the end of time (of this life), remembers me while leaving his/her body attains my nature. There is no doubt in this." (8.5)

VERSE 15

रजसि प्रलयं गत्वा कर्मसङ्गिषु जायते ।

rajasi pralayam gatvā karmasaṅgiṣu jāyate ।

तथा प्रलीनस्तमसि मूढयोनिषु जायते ॥ १४-१५ ॥

tathā pralinastamasi mūḍhayoniṣu jāyate ॥ 14-15 ॥

rajasi: in *rajas*; *pralayam:* the annihilation; *gatva:* attaining; *karma sangisu:* among those who are attached to activities; *jayate:* takes birth; *tatha:* similarly; *pralinah:* one is destroyed; *tamasi:* in *tamas*; *mudha:* devoid of intelligence; *yonisu:* in matrices; *jayate:* takes birth.

"When death/ annihilation comes, those who are under the influence of *rajas* take a new birth among those who are attached to activities, while those who meet destruction while under the influence of *tamas* take birth in matrices devoid of intelligence.

The numbers of those who attain the higher spheres of existence after leaving their bodies depends on the proper functioning of society. In Vedic society, all children above 5 years of age can be entrusted to a genuine qualified Guru for the most delicate and important period of their lives, when they can learn and be trained to become worthy human beings.

The first thing all students must learn is the meaning of *dharma* - the universal and eternal principles of ethics that sustain the evolution, prosperity and happiness of the individual and society as well. The Guru watches them closely because the students live in the Guru's family - the *guru kula* - and are directly engaged in a variety of tasks.

The Vedic approach to education is a personalized one according to individual talents and capabilities, but there is a basic training that all students can and must receive in order to be accepted as members of a civilized society: truthfulness and honesty, compassion, cleanliness and discipline.

These fundamental principles of *dharma* are also important characteristics of *sattva guna*, and become easier to follow when the predominating influence on our life is sattvik. Therefore, the Guru must be sattvik in nature, behaviors and conclusions. A sattvik training produces good individuals and good citizens, and prepares them for a lifetime of personal and collective progress, in whatever *varna* or occupational class they will work in the future.

As we will see later (18.41-44) the *brahmana* is a person whose mentality and tendencies are already sattvik by nature (*svabhava prabhavair gunaih*, 18.41) and manifest as peacefulness, self control, austerity, cleanliness, tolerance, simplicity, and a strong love for knowledge (*samo damas tapah saucam ksantir arjavam eva ca jnanam vijnanam astikyam*, 18.42).

A person who has a *kshatriya* nature is influenced by *sattva* with a latent tendency to *rajas*, and therefore he needs to be trained more strictly to a harder discipline. His natural qualities of heroism, leadership, resourcefulness and generosity are sattvik, but if *rajas* is not controlled, they can turn into arrogance and thirst for power over people and wealth, deceitfulness, and manipulation of others through corruption and dirty politics. Therefore the Guru trains the

kshatriya students in overcoming selfishness and egotism, through the study of the transcendental science as well as in sacrificing one's life in defense of the *prajas*.

A genuine *brahmana* will live in such a way that at the end of his life, he will naturally attain the higher dimensions or planetary systems, or even the spiritual world. A *kshatriya* can also attain the same destination by remaining faithful to *sattva* and to the principles of *dharma* (that are also a manifestation of *sattva*), especially if he is killed on the line of duty. A *vaisya* can also attain the same destination by working honestly for the benefit of society and all *prajas*, and remaining detached from the sense of position, possession and sense gratification in his service of producing and circulating wealth. Even a *sudra* can attain the highest position (*tatha sudras te 'pi yanti param gatim, 9.32*) if he works in a spirit of sacred action or sacrifice. Therefore, *sattva* and the basic principles of *dharma* are also taught to those students who have a *sudra* nature and are not very good at understanding science or taking responsibilities.

However, if a *brahmana* or a *kshatriya* or a *vaisya* become attached to the activities in themselves (*karma sangi*) because of some trace of material identification and attachments in *rajo guna*, they will not be able to attain the higher and pure dimensions, but they will take another birth as human beings, to continue to work sincerely in society until they evolve further. This is traditionally described as the path of *karma kanda*, or the *pravritti marga*, and it is not condemned but it is rather considered perfectly legitimate. If the principles of *dharma* are respected, the individuals naturally reap the successes of *artha* and *karma* and finally become interested to *moksha* - that can be attained through *sattva* and then *visuddha sattva*.

The real problem is when a human being allows himself to become influenced by *tamas*, either by lack of training or lack of personal

qualities. In that case, he will not be considered part of the civilized society of the *varnas*; according to the degree of stupidity and impurity he may choose a suitable occupation to obtain his livelihood for himself and his family just like animals do - by foraging, hunting and even stealing. An animal is not to be blamed for such actions because he is not able to see that they are inappropriate or unjust, and similarly a non-civilized human being lives freely and innocently without rules, like an animal.

What are the greatest concerns of animals? Eating good food, sleeping in a cozy place, finding a suitable mate and building a family, and defending; animals also give great importance to playing and having fun, as well as to establishing one's position in society and control over one's territory. We find animals often demonstrate a great sense of art (music, for example, as many love to sing and dance) and even architecture (as in building dams and intricate nests) and farming (as some species of ants who herd and milk aphids like cattle).

In the human form of life, these animal activities may be performed in a more or less technological and refined way, as this also applies to people who consider themselves very "civilized". At the time of death, one will be naturally attracted to take a new birth in a body that offers better opportunities for the activities he has developed.

Taking birth as an animal is not a punishment, but an opportunity to play out one's tendencies in an appropriate context. If one likes blood, meat and other non-vegetarian foods, taking birth as a human being is not very convenient - a birth as a carnivorous animal will be much more appropriate. If one is obsessed by sexual lust, it will be much more rewarding to take birth as a rabbit or a mouse, who can have sex many times a day and without too much difficulty in finding a sexual partner. Since the higher functions of intelligence are actually a burden in the pursuit of such activities,

the conditioned soul is relieved from all complications as a *pasu* (animal) in a *mudha yoni* (a matrix devoid of intelligence). When the desire for such activities will be exhausted, the conditioned soul will again obtain an opportunity for a human birth.

At any time we have a choice to evolve or devolve, to elevate or degrade ourselves (13.29), and if we take the proper measures while we still have some intelligence, we will be saved from sinking too low into *tamas*.

The careful cultivation of awareness is therefore the prime duty of all human beings who wish to progress and obtain a better situation after death. Already Krishna has explained: *yam yam vapi smaran bhavam tyajaty ante kalevaram, tam tam evaiti kaunteya sada tad bhava bhavitah*, "O Arjuna, whatever state of existence/nature one remembers at the time of leaving the body, s/he attains precisely that state of being, because of always contemplating that existence" (8.6).

VERSE 16

कर्मणः सुकृतस्याहुः सात्त्विकं निर्मलं फलम् ।

karmaṇaḥ sukṛtasyāhuḥ sāttvikam nirmalam phalam ।

रजसस्तु फलं दुःखमज्ञानं तमसः फलम् ॥ १४-१६ ॥

rajasastu phalam duḥkhamajñānam tamaśaḥ phalam ॥ 14-16 ॥

karmanah su kritasya: of good actions; *ahuh*: they say; *sattvikam*: in *sattva*; *nirmalam*: immaculate; *phalam*: results; *rajasah*: *rajas*; *tu*: but; *phalam*: the results; *duhkkham*: distress; *ajnanam*: ignorance; *tamaśah*: *tamas*; *phalam*: the result.

"They say that *sattva* gives immaculate results as properly performed duties, while *rajas* produces distress, and *tamas* produces ignorance.

The *gunas* produce causes and effects at the same time, reinforcing themselves, as actions produce reactions and these reactions in turn create the tendency to perform more similar actions. Therefore this verse can also be translated in reverse as follows: "They say that the immaculate results of properly performed duties produce *sattva*, distress increases *rajas*, and ignorance increases *tamas*."

Increase in the strength of one *guna* is obtained through a series of choices in regard to life habits - food, company, activities, mental attitudes etc - as will be explained later with practical examples. In any case, we can keep in mind the basic principle that cultivating the influence of *sattva* in our life is done by practicing cleanliness in mind and body - which includes letting go all selfishness and egotism. A person who is not contaminated by material identifications and attachments (the direct cause of egotism and selfishness) is clean and light, and more capable of tasting true happiness because of such detachment and sincerity in performing his/ her duties.

Since the original nature of the soul is loving service, the selfless performance of one's duty gives the greatest sense of satisfaction possible on the material level, and nourishes the power of *sattva* both at individual and collective level. It can be compared to the feelings of well being produced by physical cleanliness - when we take a nice warm shower and wear clean clothes and enjoy a clean and pleasant environment.

Finishing one's chores and completing one's tasks is also called "discharging" one's duty; by doing so in a proper way we feel happy and light and healthy as when we remove impurities (*mala*) from our own bodies. In this regard, we may mention that the word

mala ("impurity") refers to all those material substances that are meant to be eliminated or discharged for the sake of the body's health and purity. As we may also remember, the first duties of civilized people after they wake up every morning is to cleanse their bodies through the "bathroom rituals" that refresh them into a *sattvik* feeling of cleanliness and clarity of mind and senses.

Of course the duties we must perform should not be considered as an impurity: in this example, the impurity (*mala*) is rather the nagging uncomfortable feeling that we have not done what we were supposed to do. Due to the impure nature of this abstention or failure, the natural urge to render service and perform our functions becomes constipated and creates the toxic effects of laziness, neglect, callousness, and foolishness that increase the influence of *tamas*.

The word *su-krita* ("good action") used in this verse to refer to the duties of a human being (*karmanah*) that increase the influence of *sattva* is also found in association with the expression *punya karma* ("virtuous action") indicating all those good deeds that accrue one's merits. Here the concept of religious merits overlaps the concept of ethical merits, because real religion - as the favorable relationship of the individual with the entirety of Reality - is a synonym of *dharma* or ethical way of life. Religious merits are accrued by distributing charity to the meritorious people, by studying healthy and useful knowledge, by sacrificing one's wealth and work for the common good, by showing respect to good and beneficial persons, and similar actions. Sometimes such *punya* is created without full awareness of the importance of our actions, as for example when we offer help to a person without really knowing his greatness, or we contribute to deliver valuable things (books, foods, etc) where they can really give the greatest benefit. Such actions are called *ajnata sukriti* ("unconscious good deeds") and they also increase the power of *sattva* in our life.

On the other hand, the results of *rajas* - egotism and selfishness, identification and attachment - are inevitably going to bring distress, because of the natural limits of the material world. Any position or possession will become lost in time (with considerable suffering when it happens), and even the process to acquire them is painful, stressful and exhausting. Overwork is one of the well known causes of health problems, at the physical level, at the mental level and also in the field of human relationships especially with family and friends.

Workaholics know very well that full dedication to one's "career" for its own sake is likely to cause estrangement from one's spouse and children, because there is no more time or energy to give to one's near and dear persons. All relationships are strained, especially with co-workers or competitors who are seen as opponents and enemies to defeat, and this constant fighting mentality takes its toll on blood circulation and cardiac functions, with a higher rate of strokes and heart attacks, and even on breathing, with increased incidence of asthma and similar respiratory problems. Also, an overworked and stressed person usually needs to sustain him/herself with stimulants such as coffee, cigarettes or drugs of various kinds, and all these substances cause damage to the body and the mind. Meals are also neglected, in regard to quality and environment and the relaxation required for proper digestion, so a workaholic will likely develop gastric ulcers, liver complaints, and irritable bowel syndrome.

But the final and greatest suffering comes at the time of death, when loss and disillusionment appear inevitable and one is forced to question the actual value of the activities s/he pursued and their results, and the purpose of life itself. In modern times and western culture, literature and other forms of art have often elaborated on this subject - the most famous probably being Ebenezer Scrooge, a character created by novelist Charles Dickens.

When attachment to activities and their results becomes excessive, the conditioned soul becomes *a-sura* ("not nice"), and therefore indulges in ruthless acts and even criminal and destructive behaviors (brilliantly illustrated by Krishna in verses from 16.4 to 16.20), that can only create sufferings to everyone, in this life and in the next. For people who have been conditioned by this asuric tendency, there is nothing that cannot be considered "business" - from pornography to sex slavery to selling dangerous drugs, trafficking in weapons or human organs, deliberately polluting the environment, and so on and so forth.

As far as *tamas* and ignorance (*ajnanam*) are concerned, the two definitions are practically synonyms, so there is no really much to elaborate about. Ignorance is the vicious circle par excellence, in which indulgence in laziness, insensitivity, idiocy and addiction to damaging behaviors constantly and quickly aggravate the condition, leading to total incapacitation and often even death by overdose and the condition of ghost. There is a "point of no return" in *tamas*, where a conditioned soul is truly lost for a period - sometimes for several lifetimes - in utter helplessness and confusion.

VERSE 17

सत्त्वात्सञ्जायते ज्ञानं रजसो लोभ एव च ।

sattvātsañjāyate jñānam rajaso lobha eva ca ।

प्रमादमोहौ तमसो भवतोऽज्ञानमेव च ॥ १४-१७ ॥

pramādamohau tamaso bhavato'jñānameva ca ॥ 14-17 ॥

sattvat: from *sattva*; *sanjayate*: develops; *jnanam*: knowledge;
rajasa: from *rajas*; *lobhah*: greed; *eva*: certainly; *ca*: and;

pramada: madness; *mohau*: illusion; *tamasah*: ignorance; *bhavatah*: become manifest; *ajnanam*: stupidity; *eva*: certainly; *ca*: and.

"From *sattva*, knowledge is generated. From *rajas*, greed is born, and certainly *tamas* manifests madness, illusion, ignorance and stupidity.

The concept of knowledge (*jnanam*) must be understood in the light of the Vedic values (13.8.12), and not simply as the accumulation of information or technical skills, which could be more correctly defined as erudition. In fact, mere information or technical skill - that is not properly directed by dharmic/ ethical principles - is not *sattvik* at all, and could even become downright asuric if utilized for the wrong purposes. The difference between cleverness and intelligence is that cleverness is myopic, and is unable or unwilling to see the long term results of the action, because it is controlled by *rajas* and *tamas* (18.29-32). The results of such cleverness in action only appear to be profitable in the short run, but they are disastrous in the long run, so they cannot really help us to improve our situation either individually or collectively. So what's the benefit?

The word *lobha* is sometimes translated as "avarice", but its primary meaning is "greed" or "lust", applicable to all those positions and possessions that can be obtained through action. Of course, once such prizes are achieved, a greedy person may also become a miser and refuse to share or utilize his/ her properties for beneficial purposes outside the immediate range of his/ her selfishness. This pathological inability can even cause the miser to live in a miserable way, like a pauper, without actually enjoying the benefit of his/ her possessions and positions.

The word *kripana* ("miser") specifically applies to this particular kind of mentality, because such a narrow-minded person is

pitiable, both in this life and the next. Krishna had already stated it at the beginning of his instructions: *durena hy avaram karma buddhi yogad dhananjaya, buddhau saranam anviccha kripanah phala hetavah*, "Therefore, o Dhananjaya, keep far away from all bad activities by engaging in Buddhi Yoga. Always take shelter in this intelligence. Those who work only because they are interested in the fruits of the action are pitiable" (2.49).

For those who keep their intelligence in the purity of *sattva*, the performance of actions will never become bondage: *karma jam buddhi yukta hi phalam tyaktva manisinah, janma bandha vinirmuktah padam gacchanty anamayam*, "The wise people give up the fruit born from their actions by engaging in this Buddhi Yoga and thus become free from the bondage of rebirth, attaining a position that is free from all sufferings" (2.51). This is the highest position of *sattva*, in which all actions become sacred worship to God and devotional service, in this world and in the next.

Again, the influence of *tamas* is the real enemy, that we need to understand clearly so that we will not be vanquished by it. When *tamas* increases to a certain point at collective level, the situation becomes so bad, nobody believes anything can be done to improve the situation. Characteristic symptoms are depression, moroseness, cynicism, loss of self esteem and self reliance. People come to think it is normal to be irresponsible, fighting, cheating, callous, selfish, violent, arrogant, corrupt, and ruthless, so they become alienated from the true purpose of life.

These concepts have been repeated already several times, and this should make us understand how important they are, and how we need to always remember them. We should not underestimate these verses, thinking they are redundant or unnecessary, because as long as live in this world we must guard against the danger of bondage caused by the *gunas*.

VERSE 18

ऊर्ध्वं गच्छन्ति सत्त्वस्था मध्ये तिष्ठन्ति राजसाः ।

ūrdhvaṁ gacchanti sattvsthā madhye tiṣṭhanti rājasāḥ ।

जघन्यगुणवृत्तिस्था अधो गच्छन्ति तामसाः ॥ १४-१८ ॥

jaghanya-guṇavṛttisthā adho gacchanti tāmasāḥ ॥ 14-18 ॥

urdhvam: upwards; *gacchanti*: they go; *sattva sthah*: those who are established in *sattva*; *madhye*: on the intermediate level; *tiṣṭhanti*: they remain; *rajasah*: those who are in *rajas*; *jaghanya*: abominable; *guna*: qualities; *vritti sthah*: regularly engaged in; *adhah*: down; *gacchanti*: they go; *tamasah*: those who are under the influence of ignorance.

"Those who are established in *sattva* rise upwards, those who are in *rajas* remain on the intermediate level, but those who regularly engage in the abominable qualities of *tamas* fall downwards.

Sometimes the word *sattva* is translated as "piety" and a man who is established in *sattva* is called "pious", but this is not precisely correct. The semantic luggage of the word "pious" is filled with negative meanings created by mainstream abrahamic ideology, including a measure of self-righteousness, bigotry, self-conceit, and "holier-than-thou" attitude. The Vedic concept is certainly different, and considers religiousness as inextricably connected with the strongest principles of ethics, such as compassion, honesty, truthfulness and genuine austerity. Bigoted and self-righteous people, on the other hand, are usually hypocrites who condemn the small weaknesses of others but secretly indulge in much worse activities themselves.

The word *urdhvam*, "upwards", is also used in the expression *urdhva retam*, indicating that stage of *yoga* by which the life energy is raised through the spine, from the *muladhara chakra* up to the *sahasrara chakra*, where it unites the male and female energy at a sublimated level. This is possible when the *sadhaka* behaves like *brahman* (*brahmacharya*) and is not disturbed by lust in any form; therefore the life energy that ordinary people spend in materialistic pursuits remains inside the body of the *sadhaka* and can be sublimated, fueling his progress upwards even beyond the *sahasrara chakra*.

When the life air of a *sadhaka* leaves his/ her body through the *sahasrara chakra*, elevation to Svarga and beyond is assured; when less advanced persons die, the life air may exit the body through the other *chakras* or the openings (doors) connected - such as the mouth or nostrils, and more rarely, through the eyes or the ears. In the case of a degraded or very unevolved person, the life air often escapes through the lower doors, especially through the anus, sometimes accompanied by stool or urine, and by a shiver in a leg or foot.

Of course this *brahmacharya* cannot be compared to the forced artificial abstinence from a normal sexual life, that is merely repression and denial (3.6, 3.33) and usually brings more problems than solutions. because these are clearly a manifestation of *tamas*. What is repression, if not the foolish attempt to ignore the facts, to fight against reality and nature, to delude oneself into believing that problems will simply disappear if we ignore them?

Repression never solves any problem, it rather pushes issues down and out of sight, where they always fester and cause physical and mental diseases, and cannot be addressed straightforwardly and cleanly as they should have in the first place. This is how artificially repressed sex desires become distorted into an insane lust for power and possessions, cruelty towards others (sadism) and

even towards oneself (masochism), and in some cases into an uncontrollable and diabolic need for destruction and blood. Chapter 16 will elaborate more about this asuric or demoniac mentality that is generated by *tamas* when it controls *rajas*.

In the previous chapters, Krishna had already warned us that we must always strive to elevate ourselves, and be careful not to sink into the degradation of *tamas*: *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." (6.5)

And because the transcendental consciousness of Bhagavan is the purest and most powerful of existences, by always remaining Krishna conscious we will establish ourselves on the *vasudeva* level: *samam pasyan hi sarvatra samavasthitam isvaram, na hinasty atmanatmanam tato yati param gatim*, "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" (13.29). Of course this Bhagavan Consciousness includes the Paramatma Consciousness and the Brahman Consciousness, and must be expressed through one's actions and attitude towards all beings. There cannot be any trace of tamasic influence in such Consciousness - overt or covert. Hypocrisy and deceit especially in the field of religion is the most dangerous form of *tamas* and brings the worst disasters: *andham tamah pravisanti, ye 'vidyam upasate, tato bhuya iva te tamo, ya u vidyayam ratah*, "Those who worship according to ignorance, without knowledge, will enter the darkness, but even more those who propound false knowledge," (*Isa Upanishad* 9).

On the human level, people engage in activities because they are interested in the results. This is totally legitimate and can continue indefinitely (*tisthanti*) especially if the *karmi* respects the

principles of *dharma* and performs his/ her duties sincerely: a human being is respectable when he/ she is working hard and enjoying healthy pleasures, accepting only the share that s/he has been assigned. The *Isa Upanishad* (1, 2) clearly states: *isavasyam idam sarvam, yat kim ca jagatyam jagat, tena tyaktena bhunjitha, ma grdhah kasya svid dhanam, kurvann eveha karmani jijivise chatam samah, evam tvayi nanyatheto asti, na karma lipyate nare*, "All this universe belongs to God, and each individual should accept only the share of wealth that has been assigned to him/ her, without becoming greedy. If one continues to act in this way, without deviating from this path, one can happily live for one hundred years and will never be degraded by his/ her actions".

The power of *rajas* means good actions, not bad actions. Only the influence of *tamas* can turn *karma* (action, duty) into *ugra karma* or *vikarma*, with negative consequences for everyone, creating a hellish situation. *Isa Upanishad* continues to explain (3): *asurya nama te loka andhena tamasavrtah, tam te pretyabhigacchanti, ye ke catma hano janah*, "Those who kill the *atman* slide down together with the *asuras* and the ghostly creatures, into the levels of life covered by the blind darkness of *tamas*".

Of course killing the *atman* itself is not possible, so the expression "*atma hanah janah*" refers to those who neglect the *atman* by identifying with the material body both in regard to themselves and towards others. Such foolish people chose to be deluded by *ahankara* and *mamatva*, and this deliberate choice increases their lust and greed many times. The expression *vritti sthah* ("without modifications of the activities of the mind") clearly illustrates that such unfortunate and stupid people actually make the consistent choice to degrade themselves by taking shelter in *tamas*.

The word *adhah* ("down") is symmetrically opposed to *urdhvam* ("up"), and symbolizes the downfall of consciousness to the lowest levels, both within the human body and in the cosmic scale of the

planetary systems. On the level of asuric life, a human being is only interested in the qualities of the lowest *chakras* - survival, sense gratification - and remains unable to rise further. For those who linger in such mentality, Earth itself becomes hell.

VERSE 19

नान्यं गुणेभ्यः कर्तारं यदा द्रष्टानुपश्यति ।

nānyam guṇebhyaḥ kartāraṁ yadā draṣṭānupaśyati ।

गुणेभ्यश्च परं वेत्ति मद्भावं सोऽधिगच्छति ॥ १४-१९ ॥

guṇebhyaśca paraṁ vetti madbhāvaṁ so'dhigacchati ।। 14-19 ।।

na: no; *anyam:* other; *gunebhyah:* than the *gunas*; *kartaram:* (any) *kartas*; *yada:* when; *drasta:* one who sees; *anupasyati:* s/he sees; *gunebhyah:* than the *gunas*; *ca:* and; *param:* supreme/ higher; *vetti:* s/he knows; *mat bhavam:* my nature; *sah:* s/he; *adhigacchati:* attains permanently.

"One who realizes that the activities are performed merely by the *gunas* has the right vision, and by knowing my nature, attains the level of perfection.

This concept has been expressed several times already by Krishna:

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),

na kartritvam na karmani lokasya srijati prabhuh, na karma phala samyogam svabhavas tu pravartate, "The master (of the city of the nine gates, the body) is not the cause of the actions performed by

him or by other people. Thus s/he is not engaged by the results of activities. It is only his/ her nature that acts" (5.14),

karya karana kartritve hetuh prakritir ucyate, purusah sukha duhkhanam bhoktritve hetur ucyate, "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" (13.21),

prakrityaiva ca karmani kriyamanani sarvasah, yah pasyati tathatmanam akartaram sa pasyati, "One who sees that all activities, under all circumstances, are performed by the *prakriti*, and that the *atman* is not the doer, really sees" (13.30).

The *atman* is consciousness, but when taking shelter in *prakriti* or *shakti* (nature or power), s/he becomes engaged in activities. The fundamental characteristic of action is movement, and therefore all activities are always moving and never stable. Even the emotions that the *purusha/ atman* experiences are in constant motion because they are mediated through the movements of the mind (*vrittis* and *vasanas*); according to Patanjali himself (*Yoga sutras*, 1.2) *yoga* is precisely the science that enables us to stop these *vrittis* and *vasanas* (*yogah citta vritti nirodhah*) and experience the eternal unchangeable Reality that is beyond the material world.

This unchangeable reality is expressed here with the words *mat bhava*, "my existence", that is pure Consciousness or sentiment (also associated with the definition *prema*). In the spiritual world/dimension, only Consciousness exists - the eternal Existence where all things are contained in a state of non-manifestation, free from the limits of time and space and movement.

The word *drasta* ("one who watches") as opposed to *karta* ("one who does") is also extremely important. Nature or *prakriti* is the real cause of the action, and the *purusha* or *atman* is simply watching, as a witness. We can remember this word *drasta* used in

verse 13.23: *upadrasta anumanta ca bharta bhokta mahesvarah, paramatmeti capy ukto dehe 'smin purusah parah*, "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."

The experience of the "enjoyer" (*bhokta*) indicates the awareness or feeling that is the specific characteristic of Consciousness. Therefore one of the preliminary exercises in the practical *yoga* techniques consists in the "witness meditation", by which the *sadhaka* practices detachment in the neutral observation of the movements of the mind, the *gunas* and the sense objects.

Generally conditioned souls are not really aware of the movements of the mind because they identify with it, and their awareness runs after the various thoughts and emotions that drift across the mind, jumping from one to the other without even realizing it.

Through the gradual practice of *pratyahara*, *dharana* and *dhyana*, the *yogi* learns to become detached from the objects contemplated by the mind, not unlike a cinema goer becomes aware of the contents of the movie as distinct from his/ her own actual reality. At some point, the spectator becomes able to appreciate the film as a work of art, see behind the special effects, and so on, and that is when s/he will not be upset emotionally by the various scenes and situations as they develop from the plot.

The *atman* is *param*, transcendental, and when we learn to remain detached from whatever is not *atman*, we attain a stable consciousness (*sthita prajna*). Such position is permanent, precisely because it is not geared into change, and therefore we will not fall down again.

VERSE 20

गुणानेतानतीत्य त्रीन्देही देहसमुद्भवान् ।

guṇānetānatītya trīndehī dehasamudbhavān ।

जन्ममृत्युजरादुःखैर्विमुक्तोऽमृतमश्नुते ॥ १४-२० ॥

janmamṛtyujarāduḥkhairvimukto'amṛtamaśnute ॥ 14-20 ॥

gunan: the *gunas*; *etan:* all these; *atitya:* transcending; *trin:* three; *dehi:* the embodied being; *deha samudbhavan:* originated from the body; *janma:* birth; *mrityu:* death; *jara:* old age; *dukhai:* sufferings; *vimuktah:* completely free; *amritam:* immortality; *asnute:* s/he eats/ enjoys.

"By rising beyond these three *gunas*, the embodied soul becomes completely free from the effects of the body - birth, death, old age and all their sufferings - and enjoys immortality."

The word *atitya* means "transcending, overcoming, going beyond" and refers to the attainment of the transcendental level.

All the three *gunas* must be transcended: Krishna has already stated this in 2.45 (*traigunya visaya veda nistraigunyo bhava arjuna, nirdvandvo nitya sattva stho niryoga ksema atmavan*). The correct method is to firmly establish oneself in *sattva* first (*nitya sattva sthah*), and from there we can rise even above *sattva*, by completely abandoning all material identification and attachment even to good things. We have already seen that attachment to material *sattva* binds us to the material level, and because the *gunas* are always in movement, their wheel will turn and *tamas* will creep in again.

The material body is a product of the *gunas*, and is necessarily subject to them as part of the *prakriti*, but we are not. We can and should therefore remain detached from the natural activities of the body (5.8-9) while still directing them into *sattva* with our consciousness: *naiva kincit karomiti yukto manyeta tattva vit, pasyan srinvan sprisan jighrann asnan gacchan svapan svasan, pralapan visrijan grihnann unmisan nimisann api, indriyanindriyarthesu vartanta iti dharayan*, "One who is a *yogi* thinks, 'I am not the doer of anything'. One who knows the truth engages in the activities of seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, eating, going, dreaming, breathing, talking, abandoning, accepting, opening and closing one's eyes, and engages the senses in the sense objects in a *sattvik* manner."

The activities that pass through the nine gates of the body are particularly important in this regard; food, sleep, cleanliness habits, sense gratification, thoughts, emotions, etc should always be directed preferably towards *sattva*. In this way, the *atman* becomes free from sufferings due to body and enjoys immortality (*amritam asnute*, "eats the nectar") already while living in this body (*jivan mukta*).

Of course the body will come under a certain measure of all the three *gunas* in the course of its functions. For example, closing the eyes (*nimisam*) involves accepting a small part of darkness that is required for sleep and rest (*nidra*); practicing *yoga* does not mean that we should never sleep: *yuktahara viharasya yukta cestasva karmasu, yukta svapnavabodhasya yogo bhavati duhkha ha*, "For one who consciously controls his food intake, who is controlled in moving around, who makes controlled efforts in working, and is regulated in sleeping and keeping vigil, *yoga* becomes the destroyer of sufferings." (6.17)

The sufferings of birth, death, old age are inevitably connected to the nature of the material body, that is constantly changing. All

change brings the loss of a previous situation, and this creates a certain measure of suffering, proportionately greater when attachment and identification is stronger.

Obtaining a new body and leaving the old one is a shock for those who are identified with the body because of ignorance and illusion; these conditioned souls are not wise (*dhira*) and so they become confused (*muhyati*): *dehino 'smin yatha dehe kaumaram yauvanam jara, tatha dehantara praptir dhiras tatra na muhyati*, "The embodied soul who lives in this body passes from childhood to youth to old age, and similarly at the end of this body he passes on. A wise person is not confused by this." (2.13)

Immortality is certainly possible, but it can only apply to the consciousness or awareness, not to the material body. Anyone who has taken birth will have to die: *jatasya hi dhruvo mrityur dhruvam janma mritasya ca, tasmad apariharye 'rthe na tvam socitum arhasi*, "Because what has taken birth must necessarily die, and what has died will again be reborn. There is no point in despairing over something that is inevitable." (2.27)

The *atman* / *brahman* is not touched by any of such changes. Krishna has already explained this from the very beginning: *yam hi na vyathayanty ete purusam purusarsabha, sama dukkha sukham dhiram so 'mritatvaya kalpate*, "O best among men, one who is not distracted by all changes and is always equally balanced in suffering and in joy, is a wise person and he can aspire to immortality." (2.15)

The word *dhira* ("wise") is from the same root as the words *dhyana* ("meditation") and *samadhi* ("equal consciousness"), and refer to the consciousness (*atman*) that is not subject to change (2.18-21). In verse 2.56, *dhira* is equated with *muni*: *dukkhesv anudvigna manah sukhesu vigata sprihah, vita raga bhaya krodhah sthita dhir 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)

VERSE 21

अर्जुन उवाच ।

arjuna uvāca ।

कैलिङ्गैस्त्रीन्गुणानेतानतीतो भवति प्रभो ।

kairlīṅgaistrīṅguṇānetānatīto bhavati prabho ।

किमाचारः कथं चैतांस्त्रीन्गुणानतिवर्तते ॥ १४-२१ ॥

kimācāraḥ katham caitāṁstrīṅguṇānavartate ॥ 14-21 ॥

arjunah uvaca: Arjuna said; *kaih:* by which; *lingaih:* forms/symptoms; *trin:* three; *gunan:* the *gunas*; *etan:* these; *atitah:* who have transcended; *bhavati:* becomes; *prabho:* o Lord; *kim:* how; *acarah:* s/he behaves/ acts; *katham:* how; *ca:* and; *etan:* these; *trin:* three; *gunan:* the *gunas*; *ati vartate:* goes beyond.

Arjuna said,

"O Lord, what are the symptoms manifested by one who has transcended the three *gunas*? How such a person behaves, and how has s/he overcome the three *gunas*?"

This verse is similar to 2.54, in which Arjuna started the series of his questions by asking: *sthita prajnasya ka bhasa samadhi sthasya kesava, sthita dhiih kim prabhaseta kim asita vrajeta kim,* "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?"

The word *lingaih* ("forms, characteristics, signs, symbols") is particularly interesting here. It is said to derive from the expression *ligi gatyau* and it refers to movement and transformation, and its most famous definition is *lingyate jnayate anena iti lingam*, "that by which (reality) is cognized or approached". Another explanation expands the word *linga* into *lim* ("to dissolve, to merge in") and *ga* ("to emerge"), to refer to a number of philosophical and theological meanings applied to Shiva Mahesvara, who is traditionally worshiped in the form of the Lingam. More specifically, the definition applies to the subtle level or subtle body, that contains the causes (*karana*) for future manifestations, especially in the ascending direction. In other words, *lingam* is the first manifested expansion of Brahman in this world, that enables differentiation and creation for the progress of all conditioned souls.

Colonial indologists usually translate *lingam* as "male sexual organ", but that is certainly not the ordinary meaning. Of course, when we want to define the concept of "man" (as in male human being), the male sexual organ can certainly be considered a "characteristic" of some relevance, especially considering the fact that the original Vedic culture has no taboos regarding the anatomy of the human body and serenely accepts depictions of naked figures also of Deities. Shiva Mahesvara is quite often portrayed in that way because traditionally ascetics and *yogis* renounced the complications of clothing, and Shiva is undoubtedly considered the greatest ascetic.

The original shape of the Shiva lingam worshiped in temples is not phallic, but ellipsoid - egg-shaped - to represent the concept of the identity of the Consciousness that manifests at the beginning of creation as the sum total of the universe, the Hiranyagarbha. Of course, since in Hinduism there is no institutional control on the religious life of individuals or groups, anyone is completely free to

create whatever depiction of Shiva lingam or any other form of the Godhead they like, based on their understanding. Such freedom of belief and expression does not mean that all those forms should be automatically accepted as genuine, because authenticity should be verified through a comprehensive and deep study of the original scriptures. However, as long as such depictions do not appear to be offensive, they are amply tolerated.

The expression *atitah* was first used in 4.22 in reference to overcoming duality (*dvandva atitah*), then it is repeated several times in chapter 14 (14.20 *gunan atityah*, 14.21 *gunan atitah*, 14.25 *gunah atitah*, 14.26 *gunan sama atityah*).

Arjuna's questions are perfectly appropriate and relevant, because when we are searching for good association and guidance, there must be some precise parameters to evaluate each particular individual, some rules or characteristics that can be observed externally.

Krishna has already explained how to rise above the *gunas* (2.45, 3.27, 3.28, 3.29, 7.14, 13.20, 13.24, 14.19) but still Arjuna presents a new opportunity for more elaboration.

VERSE 22

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।

śrībhagavānuvāca ।

प्रकाशं च प्रवृत्तिं च मोहमेव च पाण्डव ।

prakāśam ca pravṛtṭim ca mohameva ca pāṇḍava ।

न द्वेष्टि सम्प्रवृत्तानि न निवृत्तानि काङ्क्षति ॥ १४-२२ ॥

na dveṣṭi sampravṛtṭāni na nivṛtṭāni kāṅkṣati ॥ 14-22 ॥

sri bhagavan: the wonderful Lord; *uvaca*: said; *prakasam*: enlightenment; *ca*: and; *pravrittim*: engagement; *ca*: and; *moham*: illusion; *eva*: certainly; *ca*: and; *pandava*: o son of Pandu; *na dvesti*: does not hate; *sampravrittani*: completely engaged/developed; *na*: does not; *nivrittani*: stopping the engagement; *kanksati*: s/he desires.

The wonderful Lord said,

"O son of Pandu, (such a person) does not hate enlightenment, engagement in activities or illusion, and neither becomes totally immersed in them, and does not abstain from work.

The first verb holding the sentence is *na dvesti* ("does not hate") directly connected to its opposite *na kanksati* ("does not desire"), indicating that a person who has transcended all the three *gunas* is not particularly repulsed or attracted by *sattva*, *rajas* or even *tamas*. It is not that a transcendental person loves *sattva* and hates *tamas*. Attraction and repulsion (*raga* and *dvesa*), love and hatred are two forms of the same principle of attachment - manifested in the positive or in the negative. Even hatred and spite can bind us to a dangerous object of the senses or to a bad relationship, so the real solution is to remain neutral and detached.

What is resisted, persists, because of we are investing energy into it. We can verify this very simple truth with the famous exercise "do not think about a pink elephant" - the more you strive, the more real the "pink elephant" image gets. The mind and especially the subconscious mind works with symbols and ideas, not with grammar, so by projecting an image we reinforce it, even if our intention is to remove it.

A less innocent exercise is the foolish effort made by some ignorant celibate monks to become detached from their sexual lust by investing spite and hatred into the image of women, for

example. As long as they keep thinking and speaking of women - albeit in the negative way - their attachment and lust will never drop off. The only solution is *not* to think of women as objects of enjoyment, not with attraction and not with repulsion: the real *brahmacharya* consists in thinking about the *atman* that is the same whether it drives a body or another.

The same concept of neutrality from both positive and negative attachment is presented in many other verses (*nabhinandati na dvesti*, 2.57, *raga dvesa vimuktas tu*, 2.64, *raga dvesau vyavasthitau*, *tayor na vasam agacchet*, 3.34, *yo na dvesti na kanksati*, 5.3, *iccha dvesa samutthena dvandva mohena*, 7.27, *na me dvesyo 'sti na priyah*, 9.29, *yo na hrisyati na dvesti na socati na kanksati*, 12.17, *araga-dvesatah*, 18.23, *tyaktva raga dvesau*, 18.51, *na socati na kanksati*, 18.54).

This verse describes three wrong approaches: 1) hating, 2) aspiring to become attached, 3) desiring to neglect. The first approach is rejection or repulsion as in active opposition, the second approach is active attachment, and the third approach is rejection through negative desire or passive abstention from all actions.

Let's make an example directly connected to the context of *Bhagavad gita*: engagement in the battle against aggressors. Arjuna should not hate (*na dvesti*) to fight in the battle to defend the *prajas*; he should engage willingly for the sake of duty even if the action is painful. Also, Arjuna should not engage in the battle out of selfish considerations and attachment to fighting *per se* (*sampravrittani*). Finally, Arjuna should not abstain (*nivrittani*) from his dutiful action out of lack of personal interest.

The word *sampravrittani* means "fully engaged/ manifest as experiences or objects" and is a reinforced form of *pravritti* ("engagement"), indicating the activities considered as the focus of action in themselves. At the end of the verse we find the negative

or privative form *nivrittani*, referring to the actions of abstinence or *nivritti*. Abstention from action is also a choice and will bring consequences - good if the action from which we abstain was bad, and bad if the action from which we abstain was good. In general, however, abstention as a systematic habit in life can increase the influence of *tamas*, while engagement in action with attachment and opposition to action in attachment will increase the influence of *rajas*. The only way to increase *sattva* is to engage in action for the sake of duty, as we will see in the last chapter (18.8-10, 18.23-28).

Prakasa (enlightenment), *pravritti* (engagement) and *moha* (illusion) are expressions respectively of *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*, and they come and go with the waves of material nature, as soon as one of the *gunas* becomes predominant even temporarily. Due to the characteristic of movement (action, change) that is inherent to *prakriti*, there will be opportunities for enlightenment even for those who normally live in *rajas* or *tamas*, and similarly there will be engagement or activities also for those who normally live in *sattva* or *tamas*, and illusion is possible for those who live in *rajas* and even in *sattva*. The real problem is not experiencing these states, but remaining attached to them, because inertia will inevitably attract the influence of *tamas* and our perception will become clouded.

VERSE 23

उदासीनवदासीनो गुणैर्यो न विचाल्यते ।

udāsīnavadāsīno guṇairyo na vicālyate ।

गुणा वर्तन्त इत्येवं योऽवतिष्ठति नेङ्गते ॥ १४-२३ ॥

guṇā vartanta ityevaṃ yo'vatiṣṭhati neṅgate ॥ 14-23 ॥

udasina vat: as neutral; *asinah*: sitting; *gunaih*: by the *gunas*; *yah*: one who; *na*: never; *vicalyate*: is shaken; *gunah*: the *gunas*; *varthane*: following; *iti*: like this; *evam*: certainly; *yah*: s/he; *avatisthati*: always remains; *na ingate*: is not overwhelmed.

"One who remains sitting in a neutral position in respect of the *gunas* is never shaken, and following this (policy) regularly s/he remains firmly established and is not overwhelmed.

Neutrality is manifested in real detachment, by which we engage in our duty without attachment for action or inaction or for the results of the action: this is pure *sattva* or *visuddha sattva*.

The word *asinah* derives from the same root as *asana* ("sitting place"), and therefore carries the meaning of a stable and comfortable position that can be maintained for a long time without difficulty. However, a sitting position still allows us to perform a great variety of tasks, especially those focused on intelligence and the higher faculties of the mind. This means that all ventures should first be examined "by sitting", collecting information and data, verifying the values, planning a strategy and so on, before actually walking into physical action. This is how *sattva* directs *rajas* and favors success for the benefit of all. Without the proper direction and guidance of *sattva*, *rajas* becomes erratic, whimsical and altogether dysfunctional, attracting the influence of *tamas* and sliding the conditioned soul into stupidity and illusion.

The expression *udasina vat* ("as neutral") conveys the idea that in a deepest sense the liberated soul is not really neutral or disinterested in the results of the activities, as s/he strongly desires to please Isvara and to assist in the mission of protecting the good people, destroying the evil doers and establishing the principles of religion or ethics. That desire is transcendental to each particular action or object, and therefore it is not binding us to material attachment. As

the next verse will clearly state, we are eager to use everything - clay, stone and gold - for the service of the Supreme and his mission.

The liberated soul actually works and makes choices, but without identifying with them in a selfish or egotistic way (*mama* and *aham*), therefore s/he is beyond emotions and thoughts and attraction. This is the healthy and auspicious way of living (*svastha*), that will bring unending blessings in this life and in the next.

The expression *na vicalyate* ("is not agitated") refers to the various emotions and thoughts we will experience in the course of action, because of the nature of change and transformation of action itself. It is reinforced by the verb *avatisthati* ("always remains established"), and by the expression *na ingate* ("is not overwhelmed"). Emotions are like winds that can sweep our boat over the ocean, and attachment is like a sail that catches them and connects them to our awareness. Any sailor knows that when a storm comes, all sails must be rolled up so that they do not offer resistance, but the winds should run through and go away. In this way, the ship will remain more stable.

Emotions and thoughts can be positive or negative, and bring hopes or worries. We should utilize all beneficial things in the service of the Supreme and just let the negative things fall through and away, without remaining attached to either. Joy, hope, desire and aspiration are like favorable winds that push our ship on its course, but we must manage them expertly so that the sails themselves are not overwhelmed and ripped apart by an excess of "good wind". This ship that will enable us to cross the ocean of material existence is knowledge (*jnana plavana*, 4.36).

A liberated soul is not overwhelmed because s/he is surrendered to the greater Intelligence and its vast plan (11.33-34, 18.73). This is also amply confirmed in *Bhagavata Purana* (for example in 1.5.32,

1.9.16-17, 1.19.14, 3.16.26, 4.11.23, 5.1.15, 8.19.29, 10.70.38). Of course this does not mean that a liberated soul becomes passive or abandons the use of his/ her brain and intelligence; in fact a liberated soul is illuminated and guided by *suddha sattva* and therefore s/he is in a very good position to understand God's plan and to assist it in the best possible way, because his/ her vision is not clouded by the ignorance of dualism.

VERSE 24

समदुःखसुखः स्वस्थः समलोष्टाश्मकाञ्चनः ।

samaduḥkhasukhaḥ svasthaḥ samaloṣṭāśmakāñcanaḥ ।

तुल्यप्रियाप्रियो धीरस्तुल्यनिन्दात्मसंस्तुतिः ॥ १४-२४ ॥

tulyapriyāpriyo dhīrastulyanindātmāsānstutiḥ || 14-24 ||

sama: equal; *duhkha*: distress; *sukha*: joy; *sva*: one's own; *stha*: is established; *sama*: with equal consideration; *lostra*: clay; *asma*: stone; *kancanah*: gold; *tulya*: equal; *priya*: pleasant; *apriyah*: unpleasant; *dhirah*: sober; *tulya*: balanced; *ninda*: offense; *atma samstutih*: glorification/ praise of self.

"The wise is firmly established (in *suddha sattva*) and equally (tolerates) his own joys and sorrows. S/he (sees) with equal consideration a lump of clay, a stone and a piece of gold, and gives the same value to pleasant and unpleasant things, remaining sober and balanced in front of insult as well as glorification (directed to him/ her).

The word *sama* is repeated twice in the verse, and reinforced by the word *tulya* ("balanced"). Already Krishna has presented this point several times (2.15, 2.48, 4.22, 5.18, 5.19, 6.3, 6.7, 6.8, 6.9,

6.29, 6.32, 10.5, 12.4, 12.13, 12.15, 12.18, 12.19, 13.10, 13.28, 13.29) and will continue to do so (14.26, 18.10, 18.50, 18.54). Therefore we can understand how important this instruction is.

Another word that is directly connected to *sama* is *samadhi* (*sama dhi*, "equal understanding"), that refers to the constant level of transcendental awareness in all circumstances. This is the ultimate goal of *yoga* as clearly confirmed by Patanjali, who entitled the first chapter of his *Yoga sutras* to the pursuance of *samadhi* (*Samadhi pada*).

In particular, verse 6.8 utilized exactly the same example we find in this verse, comparing *lostra* (clay), *asma* (stone) and *kancanah* (gold) as having the same value, as all of them can be usefully engaged in the service to the Supreme, although in different ways. Foolish and ignorant people evaluate objects according to artificial parameters and therefore they do not engage materials and resources properly; for example we can see lazy and arrogant craftspeople who do a very bad work when using less expensive materials, because they think that such objects do not deserve their full attention and effort. These people have no self-esteem and their cynical mentality will prevent them from feeling true happiness and pride in their work.

This example of material elements mirrors the considerations offered in verse 5.18, where the equal value is given to the different bodies of the *brahmana*, the cow, the elephant, the dog and the uncivilized person who considers dog flesh as a normal food. In both cases - material elements and bodies - the fundamental value is the same because all of them can be usefully engaged in the service of the Supreme.

Clay can be used for making cooking pots or water containers, stone can be used to build houses, and gold can be used for ornaments or for trade. A Deity can be fashioned out of any of

these substances and still be perfectly fit to be worshiped, because all these materials are pure and useful. Of course Krishna did not mention stool or bone in his example, because these substances cannot be engaged usefully in daily life for the same purposes. In regard to the bodies of the souls in this world, a *brahmana* can be engaged in teaching and offering consultancy and assistance in various activities, a cow can be engaged in producing milk, the elephant can be engaged in carrying heavy loads, the dog can be engaged in protecting homes, and the uncivilized person can be engaged in assisting society from the outside by supplying forest products. This does not mean that all these embodied souls must be forced into engagement, but if they are favorable and willing to be engaged, we can find the perfect service for them.

Tolerating joys and sorrows is not easy, because they raise emotions in our mind and in the minds of the people around us. Also, it is important to understand that a liberated soul does not become insensitive to joys and sorrows (especially those of others), but s/he continues to perform his/ her duties in the service of the Supreme without being really distracted.

The word *sva* can be interpreted in two ways: as connected to the word *sthan* ("remains in his/ her own position") or as connected to the words *duhkha* and *sukha* (distress and happiness). In the first instance, the deeper meaning is that the liberated soul is always conscious of its real nature as *atman*, and therefore remains established on the transcendental level as its natural and permanent position. In the second instance, the meaning is that neutrality and detachment should not come in the way of compassion, and that a liberated soul should actually be concerned about the sufferings of others (*para duhkha dukkhi*). The same concept is reinforced in the last part of the verse, where *atma* ("self") is clearly connected to the pair of opposite words *ninda* and *samstuti* (offense and praise). Ordinary people are not easily upset by the offenses and praise

offered to others, except for really envious people who actually enjoy seeing others offended and suffer when others are praised.

In verse 12.19 the same issue of offense and praise was mentioned: *tulya ninda stutir mauni santusto yena kenacit, aniketah sthira matir bhaktiman me priyo narah*, "Balanced in front of insult and adoration, silent, satisfied with whatever s/he obtains, without residence, strongly determined: a devotee is very dear to me among all human beings." The word *ninda* ("offense") includes several degrees of seriousness, from a mere neglect or lack of proper respect to unprovoked lethal violence, while *stuti* (and its reinforced form *samstuti*) is the praise and glorification usually offered to great personalities, beginning with the Personalities of Godhead. These are one degree stronger than *mana* and *apamana* (6.7, 14.25), meaning "respect" and "lack of respect".

Obviously any degree of offense is unpleasant, and any praise is pleasant, but a wise person (*dhira, muni*) knows that both are relative and temporary, and does not give them too much value.

The other couple of opposites, *priya* and *apriya*, contain a number of meanings, that can be applied to different contexts. While *ninda* and *stuti* have universal value, *priya* and *apriya* have individual value, because what is dear to someone could be annoying for someone else and the other way around. For example, *priya* is used as "dear, darling" to indicate a very close loving relationship, such as the one between lovers or spouses. It is also applied to one's favorite food or anything we could be particularly fond of, and that give us pleasure and happiness. By extension, we can use it to summarize all the good things that are desirable, favorable, or valuable to us specifically - the things we like as distinct from the things we dislike personally. On the opposite side, *apriya* is the exact contrary, and any contact with such unpleasant things or people is expected to create feelings of discomfort, annoyance and even distress.

The word *tulya* literally means "balance", as in the instruments that is used to weight objects, especially to ascertain their value.

VERSE 25

मानापमानयोस्तुल्यस्तुल्यो मित्रारिपक्षयोः ।

mānāpamānayostulyastulyo mitrāripakṣayoḥ ।

सर्वारम्भपरित्यागी गुणातीतः स उच्यते ॥ १४-२५ ॥

sarvārambhaparityāgī guṇātītaḥ sa ucyate ॥ 14-25 ॥

manah: in being honored; *apamanayah:* in being neglected; *tulyah:* balanced; *tulyah:* equally disposed; *mitra:* friends; *ari:* enemies; *paksayoh:* to the divisions; *sarva arambha:* all personal enterprises; *parityagi:* who has completely renounced; *guna atitah:* beyond the *gunas*; *sah:* s/he; *ucyate:* is said (to be).

"(A person who) remains equally disposed in being honored and in being neglected, and is equally disposed towards the categories of friends and enemies, who has completely renounced the idea of pursuing egotistic material enterprises, is said to be beyond the *gunas*.

In this material world and especially in Kali yuga it is easier to be neglected, blamed or insulted even without any reason or against all reason. The odds of getting mistreated become greater for those who are sincerely engaged in fighting against the ills of a corrupt and ignorant society, because as we will see later in chapter 16, asuric people are very expert in insulting others and enjoy inflicting pain on their innocent victims.

A person who has abandoned the illusion of *ahankara* and *mamatva* remains detached and is not distracted by adulation or slandering; if there is anything useful s/he will engage it, otherwise s/he will let everything flow by without much concern. Of course, one should avoid the situations such adulation and offenses are likely to be produced, and this is why one should live alone, independently and detached from social life. We should know what is the limit of what our mind and body can bear, and make the suitable choices to avoid exposing ourselves to excessive stress. The martyr syndrome is a psycho-pathological problem, not a spiritual qualification; we do not need to lay down and act like a door mat so that everyone can wipe their feet on our head. When we say that we should be as humble as a blade of grass and as tolerant as a tree, we should remember that even grass and trees have limits in humility and tolerance, and they are not exempt from suffering serious damages from excessive mistreatment. Fortunately, a human body has the ability to move around (unlike grass and trees) and step aside from the stampeding rhinos to avoid being beaten to a pulp. Some people may easily mistake our tolerance and friendliness for stupidity or masochism, and they may even come to believe we like being exploited, mistreated, stabbed in the back and persecuted. There is no vedic injunction that forbids us from making them understand they are seriously wrong.

Also, to be friendly with someone you do not need to support and help them engage in *ugra karma*, or even engage ourselves in such criminal activities to keep them company. Quite the opposite: a true friend, a *mitra*, will try to save us from committing some big mistake. There is a difference between *maitra* ("friendship") and *sanga* ("association, company"): while friendship is always a positive beneficial sentiment, *sanga* could be good or bad - to remain on the transcendental level, it should only be true *sat sanga*.

The word *paksha* (*pakshayoh*) refers to divisions or categories, as in the moon fortnights, called *sukla* ("white") and *krishna* ("black"), respectively translated as waxing and waning moon. Applied to human society, *paksha* means party or camp, when one group is opposed to the other by dint of allegiance or nature, as in *mitra* ("friends") and *ari* ("enemies"). This equal disposition to all camps is easily described as non-sectarianism and freedom from the party mentality, something that is sorely required especially in the camp of materialistic religiosity, among organizations and institutions, such as churches or *mathas*.

Material religiosity will not be able to take us to the supreme level. The *Bhagavata Purana* (1.1.2) clearly says: *dharmah projjhita kaitavo atra paramo nirmatsaranam satam*, "Rejecting the so-called illusory religion, we are discussing here only about transcendence, that is for good people who are free from envy".

What is envy (*matsara*)? The dualistic and separatist mentality that divides people into camps (*pakshas*).

These professional sectarian religionists, who claim to speak as authorities - as representatives of God - should give the good example and behave as devotees of God, and not as devotees of their own organization or sect. If they were truly transcendental or even just sattvic, they would welcome the idea of fair cooperation and recognize and appreciate the good work done by others and the *guna* and *karma* demonstrated, and join forces.

The danger for such people is to become victimized by *tamas* through material identification and separatism; this is particularly disastrous because they can turn into *asuras* if they try to exploit God's name and words to better manipulate and cheat or bully people into submitting to them by material oppression, repression and depression, or accusing them of not being humble or cooperative enough. *Asuras* will consider such lack of submission

to their tyranny as hostility against them or even against God, but they are being fooled by illusion and will end not in paradise, but in lower births. Instead of God-brothers they turn into Godfathers: mafia is based on hierarchy and blind allegiance to bosses even against *dharmā*, *vidyā*, *satya* and *sattva*. There is no such concept in genuine Vedic knowledge. Verses 7 to 20 of chapter 16 of *Bhagavad gita* clearly explains how the *asuras* disregard the genuine knowledge from the scriptures, and how their religious activities are useless because they are not supported by *dharmā*, beginning with truthfulness, compassion, and purity from the contamination of material identification.

We should not cultivate hatred (*dvesa*) or envy (*matsara*) towards these unfortunate people. We must recognize that *asuras* and *adharmā* and *avidyā* also have a role to play in the world, and we are not interested in going after them or "stopping" them. We actually wish them well in detached friendship (*maitra*), and we pray that they may realize their mistake, for their own benefit. We will not try to take away their properties or followers: let them enjoy whatever success is due to their previous *karma*, but if someone is interested to hear or learn the truth, and improve their life, we should be ready to do our duty. We need to defend our own service, and we do it independently and in accordance to the true teachings of the scriptures. There is no religious monopoly to be enforced: this pursuit of spiritual perfection is everybody's birthright, just like everybody has a right to take a cold bath in the month of *magha*. If we cannot find any genuine devotee of God, it is better to directly take shelter in the *param guru* rather than supporting *asuras* and their organizations.

The expression *sarva arambha parityagi* ("abandoning all egotistic pursuits") does not mean that we should not start dharmic ventures or preaching missions. It means we do not identify them as "ours" in a separatist mentality.

VERSE 26

मां च योऽव्यभिचारेण भक्तियोगेन सेवते ।

mām ca yo'vyabhicāreṇa bhaktiyogena sevate ।

स गुणान्समतीत्यैतान्ब्रह्मभूयाय कल्पते ॥ १४-२६ ॥

sa guṇānsamatītyaitānbrahmabhūyāya kalpate ॥ 14-26 ॥

mam: to me; *ca:* and; *yah:* one who; *avyabhicarena:* without deviating; *bhakti yogena:* through *bhakti yoga*; *sevate:* offers service; *sah:* s/he; *gunan samatitya:* having transcended the *gunas*; *etan:* all these; *brahma bhuyaya:* on the level of *Brahman*; *kalpate:* desires.

"One who truly serves me in *bhakti yoga* without deviation develops desires on the *Brahman* level, transcending all these *gunas*.

Krishna immediately clarifies that *sarva arambha parityagi* does not mean that we should not work sincerely for the benefit of all beings and in the service of the Supreme. Such desire (*kalpate*) is transcendental and does not bind us to the material *gunas*, but rather propels us forward and upward, nearest to Krishna's Consciousness.

The desire for immortality is the inspiration that carries us from the darkness to the light: *asato ma sad gamaya, tamaso ma jyotir gamaya, mrtyor ma amrtam gamaya* (*Bṛhad aranyaka Upanishad*, 1.3.28) because it removes our identification with the material body, that is inevitably going to die.

Krishna had already explained that such desire is a legitimate pursuit even on the level of transcendence after rising above the *gunas*: *yam hi na vyathayanty ete purusam purusarsabha, sama*

duhkha sukham dhiram so 'mritavaya kalpate, "O best among men, one who is not distracted by all these and is always equally balanced in suffering and in joy, is a wise person and he can aspire to immortality" (2.15).

Another very similar verse is found at the conclusion of the *Bhagavad gita* (18.53): *ahankaram balam darpam kamam krodham parigraham, vimucya nirmamah santo brahma bhuyaya kalpate*, "One who has become completely free from *ahankara* and *mamatva*, from the sense of material strength, pride, lust, anger and greed, and is peaceful, focuses his/ her desires towards Brahman."

The *Bhagavata Purana* (11.29.34) confirms: *martyo yada tyakta samasta karma, niveditatma vicikirsito me, tadamrtatvam pratipadyamano, mayatma bhuyaya ca kalpate vai*, "If a mortal has renounced all his activities by fully dedicating him/ herself to me, desiring to serve me, such desire qualifies him/ her to attain my same nature, and immortality, too".

And also: *harir ni nirgunah saksat, purusah prakriteh parah, sa sarva drg upadrasta, tam bhajan nirguno bhavet*, "Hari is above the *gunas*. He is the Purusha himself, transcendental to material nature. He is the witness who sees everything. By worshiping him, one also becomes free from the *gunas*" (*Bhagavata Purana* 10.88.5) and *bhakti aham ekaya grahyah sraddhayatma priyah satam, bhakti punatin man nistha sva pakan api sambhavat*, "I can be acquired only by pure *bhakti* and I am dear to people who have deep faith. Such devotion and faith purifies anyone from the contamination of birth, including dog eaters", (*Bhagavata Purana*, 11.14.21).

The word *avyabhicarena* ("without deviation", "without change", "without interruption") refers to a firmly established consciousness or *samadhi*, and is found also in verses 13.11 and 18.33 with the same meaning. True service in *bhakti yoga* (*bhakti yogena sevate*)

is not a part-time concern, a function we attend once a week or a couple of hours a day: it is a constant uninterrupted dynamic meditation. Anything less than that is merely imitation or practice aimed at attaining "the real thing", and it will not give the expected results, such as happiness, full consciousness and all the other divine qualities. This is confirmed in *Bhagavata Purana* (1.2.6): *sa vai pumsam paro dharmo yato bhaktir adhoksaje ahaituki apratihata yayatma suprasidati*, "The supreme *dharmo* for human beings is selfless and uninterrupted devotional service to Transcendence: this gives complete satisfaction to the soul."

The expression *brahma bhuyaya* ("on the level of Brahman") should not be overlooked or underestimated. Without the transcendental realization of Brahman as universal Consciousness there can be no real *bhakti* - at most, there will be some sentimental attachment to a cultural or affective idea, that most people may call "devotion". In this sense, one can be devoted to one's family or career, to scientific research, or to other causes. On the level of material religiosity, one can be a devotee of any religious figure or teaching or group, but usually this boils down to keeping pictures in one's house, saying a little prayer now and then, attending some congregational function to establish one's belonging to the social group. The spirit of service (*sevate*) is usually absent, or directed to the distribution of food and clothing to "the poor" or to the aggrandizement of the material position of one's chosen group by building large churches or temples or *mathas* and decorating them with gold or other impressive features. All these activities remain on the materialistic level, and at most they can give some *punya*.

The real *bhakti* starts from the level where we have overcome the materialistic mentality (*dharmah projjhita kaitavo*, *Bhagavata Purana*, 1.1.2) as decisively confirmed at the conclusion of *Bhagavad gita* (18.54).

VERSE 27

ब्रह्मणो हि प्रतिष्ठाहममृतस्याव्ययस्य च ।

brahmaṇo hi pratiṣṭhāhamamṛtasyāvyaśyaś ca ।

शाश्वतस्य च धर्मस्य सुखस्यैकान्तिकस्य च ॥ १४-२७ ॥

śāśvatasyaś ca dharmasyaś sukhasyaśaikāntikasyaś ca ॥ 14-27 ॥

brahmanah: of *Brahman*; *hi*: indeed; *pratiṣṭha*: the foundation; *aham*: I am; *amritasya*: of the immortal; *avyayasya*: of the unchangeable; *ca*: and; *śasvatasya*: of the eternal; *ca*: and; *dharmasya*: of *dharma*; *sukhasya*: of happiness; *aikantikasya*: of the One; *ca*: and.

"I am the foundation of the Brahman, the immortal, unailing/imperishable, eternal (Brahman), that is the ultimate *dharma* and happiness, the One Reality."

This is the most explicit verse establishing the supreme position of Krishna as Bhagavan, the Personality of Godhead. There is nothing impersonal in the pronoun *aham*, ("I"), that Krishna uses many times in *Bhagavad gita* to refer to the Godhead.

However, we should not think that this is "a victory over impersonalism", because there has never been a war between Brahman, Paramatma and Bhagavan, that are all one and the same (*vadanti tat tattva vidas tattvam yaj jnanam advayam, Bhagavata Purana* 1.2.11). Bhagavan is knowledge (*jnanam advayam*), consciousness, and Brahman and Paramatma are the same consciousness - the only difference is *our* perception.

Ignorant and foolish persons who have no realization or even understanding of Brahman cannot possibly love or even understand Bhagavan, and *maya* will accommodate them by projecting a vast array of fantasies by which the conditioned soul "creates" his own

God in his own image. It is easy to expose such useless mental speculations because they do not correspond to the fundamental qualities of God, that we can find described in the original scriptures and by many realized souls as based on *dharma*, the universal ethical foundation of existence. So when you are presented with an image of God (or religion) that goes against compassion, happiness, truthfulness, intelligence and knowledge, ethical principles, transcendence, equanimity and so on, you can be sure that someone is trying to dupe you into buying their foolish fantasies. It is particularly dangerous when such "preachers" are evidently engrossed into the *ahankara* and *mamatva* concept of life and are following the conclusions and behaviors described in chapter 16 as characteristic of the *asuras*. *Asuras*, or "demoniac people", can very well appear to be religionists, and especially claiming monopoly over religion, so we need to watch them carefully to avoid being confused by them.

We can remain safe if we sincerely cultivate the proper *sattvik* knowledge, that enables us to distinguish *dharma* from *adharma*: *pravrittim ca nivrittim ca karyakarye bhayabhaye, bandham moksam ca ya vetti buddhih sa partha sattviki*, "Sattvik understanding knows what should be accepted and what should be abandoned, what should be done and what should not be done, what should be feared and what should not be feared, what will bring bondage and what will bring liberation" (18.29).

And the highest level of *sattva* takes us beyond the material identification: *jnanam visuddham paramartham ekam, anantaram tv abahir brahma satyam, pratyak prasantam bhagavac chabda samjnam, yad vasudevam kavayo vadanti*, "The purest knowledge about the supreme purpose of life does not have an inside or an outside. Brahman is described as the inner Truth, the serene Bhagavan, whom the *kavis* call Vasudeva" (*Bhagavata Purana* 5.12.11).

The word *pratistha* means "foundation" but also "establishment", "beginning", and "origin". In other words, Consciousness exists because there is a Conscious "I" (*aham*) who contemplates the Existence. It is a concept that many wise people have grasped in some measure, even intuitively without the benefit of previous knowledge, but Vedic scriptures elaborate on it scientifically and objectively, presenting it as the purpose of spiritual realization as well: *atma vidya*, "the science of the self". We as *jivatmas* have a sense of self because awareness is a fundamental function of the self. When there is no self, there cannot be any awareness; all sentences require a subject, all observations require an observer.

Brahman, Paramatma, Bhagavan, are *jnana*, knowledge, and so are the Atman and the Prakriti. Is there anything that is not originally knowledge? No. This knowledge or consciousness always exists, even when it is covered or distorted. A madman may believe he is Napoleon or Joan of Arc, but this does not mean that in fact he is nothing; his consciousness exists, but it is distorted in a superimposed image where inapplicable identifications are introduced. The consciousness always exists, even during a coma or at death, because when we leave the body we continue to remain conscious, in this or in different dimensions.

Now the Consciousness of God is non-different from our own minuscule consciousness, except for the fact that Brahman/Paramatma/ Bhagavan Consciousness is *paryapti*, "most complete", while our own consciousness is limited by the concept of separation through time, space and individuality. Therefore the divine Consciousness is *amritam* (immortal), *avyaya* (unchangeable), *sasvat* (eternal), and it is also *dharma* (ethical sense, or "conscience"), and *sukha* or *ananda* (intrinsic happiness).

Each and every one of us can easily experience this supreme Consciousness (in quality if not in quantity) by removing from our awareness all the temporary things that will eventually die or

change (such as material identifications and attachments) and by tuning in with the qualities that constitute the principles of *dharma*. Then we will certainly experience the happiness of Brahman (*brahma ananda*).