

BHAGAVAD GITA

The Global Dharma for the Third Millennium

Chapter 15

Translations and commentaries
by Parama Karuna Devi

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Jagannatha Vallabha Vedic Research Center

phone: +91 94373 00906

E-mail: paramakaruna@aol.in

Website: www.jagannathavallabha.com

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Correspondence address:

PAVAN House

Siddha Mahavira patana,

Puri 752002 Orissa

Chapter 15

Purushottama yoga

The yoga of the Supreme Person

The name Purushottama is composed by the words *uttama* (“supreme, highest”) and *purusha*, a noun that expresses a very complex and deep concept, as we have already commented in previous chapters. In ordinary modern language, *purusha* is used to mean "man" as in the expression *stri-purusha* ("women and men"), but according to Krishna's teachings, all *jivatmans* are *purushas*, because they consist of consciousness and feelings just like the supreme Purusha.

Usually the term *purusha* is translated as "enjoyer", as the characteristic of consciousness focuses on feeling or tasting all the manifestations of existence. In the case of the embodied conditioned soul, the *purusha* tastes the material objects of the senses, while in the case of the liberated soul or the supreme Purusha, he tastes the spiritual sentiments. We have seen in the previous chapters how Krishna has explained the knowledge about *purusha* and *prakriti*, and here we will rise to yet another level, applying the science of *bhakti* to the supreme Purusha.

Purushottama is the Supreme Person, "the best of the *purushas*", and is famous especially in connection with the tradition of Purushottama kshetra, also known as Jagannatha Puri, in Orissa.

The *Vishnu Purana* states: *hiranyareta samdiptam puranam purushottama, sakalam niskalam suddham nirgunam guna sasvatam*, "Lord Purushottama is described in the *Puranas* as effulgent as the Sun. He is all-pervading and transcendently pure, simultaneously undivided and manifesting in innumerable forms, beyond the *gunas* and yet the personification of all qualities."

The *Artha shastra* written by Brihaspati mentions Purushottama kshetra as one of the 8 *vaishnava tirthas* in India, and the *Kriya yogasara* speaks about the "three Deities of Purushottama". The *Vishnu dharmottara* (3.125.21) mentions *udreshu purushottamam*, "Purushottama who resides in Orissa", and the *Kalika Purana* mentions Jagannatha as the consort of Goddess Katyayani. The *Devi Mahatmya* of *Markandeya Purana* mentions Vishnu as Jagannatha in its first chapter: *utthastau ca jagannathas taya mukto janardanah, ekarnave 'hisayanat tatah sa dadrse ca tau*, "The Universal Lord, supporter of all living entities, arose from the Ocean."

In the *Vishnu Purana* (V.33.41) Krishna is called Jagannatha and Purushottama (*krishna krishna jagannatha janetvam purushottama, paresham paramatmanam anadi nidhanam harim*); in the *Vamana Purana* Aditi glorifies Vishnu with the name of Jagannatha, and Purushottama is also mentioned there in connection with Prahlada's pilgrimage. Many other scriptures mention Purushottama as a definition of God the Supreme Person: *Vamadeva Samhita, Skanda Purana, Niladri Mahodaya, Brahma Purana, Kapila Samhita, Padma Purana, Matsya Purana, Vishnu Purana, Vamana Purana, Garuda Purana, Agni Purana, Naradiya Purana, Ramayana, Mahabharata*.

In the *Purusha sukta* the Supreme Purusha is glorified as the omnipresent Soul of the Universe (Virat Rupa or Jagat): *sahasra sirsa purusha sahasraksah sahasra-pat, sa bhumim visvato vrttyathisthad dasangulam, purusha evedam sarvam yad bhutam yac ca bhavyam, utamritatvasyesano yad annenatirohati*, “The Lord of the Universe has thousands of heads, eyes and feet, and entirely encompasses the cosmic creation, surpassing it to a distance of ten *angulas*: he is thus existing everywhere both within the universe and outside the universe. This visible universe (*vyakta*) is the form of the Virata Purusha, the universal Lord that contains everything that existed and that will ever exist in the future. Although immortal, he manifests this form to grace the living entities and offer them the opportunity to reap the results of their own actions.”

The *Mahabharata* (*Anusasana parva*, 135.12) contains the famous *Vishnu sahasra nama stotra* ("the thousand names of Vishnu") where Jagannatha Purushottama has a special position in the initial presentation of the whole *stotra* by Bhishma (*jagat prabhum deva devam anantam purusottamam stuvan namasashrena purusa satatottamah ... tasya loka pradhanasya jagannathasya bhupate visnor nama sahasram me srinu papa bhayapaham ... vishnum vishnum maha vishnum prabhavishnum mahesvaram aneka rupa daityantam namami purushottamam*), besides being mentioned in the text of the *stotra*.

A more technical description of the form of Vishnu called Purushottama is found in the Vaishnava Agamas, specifically in the *Sarada tilaka*, where Isvara is described in three broad categories: the majestic Vishnu, the terrifying Nrisimha and the loving Purushottama. Purushottama is the consort of Lakshmi and is therefore also called Madhava (*ma*, “of the Mother Goddess”, *dhava* “husband”). The particular form of Nila-Madhava that is found at the origin of the story of the manifestation of the

Jagannatha Deities is a Vishnu form holding in his hand a lotus flower on which Mother Lakshmi sits (not to be confused with Brahma, who sits in the lotus born from the navel of Vishnu). This loving aspect of Jagannatha unites the three concepts of conjugal love (as Sridhara for Lakshmi Devi), paramour love (as Krishna for Radha and the *gopis*) and mystic love (as Kama or Bhairava in *tantra*). It is important to remember that all these three aspects must be analyzed on the transcendental level. The *Brahma Purana* confirms that Purushottama is inconceivable through material parameters, and can only be understood by one who overcomes the dualistic mentality in reference to Dharma.

VERSE 1

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।

śrībhagavānuvāca ।

ऊर्ध्वमूलमधःशाखमश्वत्थं प्राहुरव्ययम् ।

ūrdhvamūlamadhahaṣākhamasvattham prāhuravyayam ।

छन्दांसि यस्य पर्णानि यस्तं वेद स वेदवित् ॥ १५-१ ॥

chandānsi yasya parṇāni yastam veda sa vedavit ॥ 15-1 ॥

sri bhagavan: the wonderful Lord; *uvaca*: said; *urdhva*: upwards; *mulam*: the roots; *adhah*: downwards; *sakham*: the branches; *asvattham*: *asvattha* tree; *prahuh*: it is said; *avyayam*: eternal; *chandamsi*: the Vedic hymns; *yasya*: of which; *parmani*: the leaves; *yah*: one who; *tam*: that; *veda*: who knows; *sah*: s/he; *veda vit*: one who knows the *Vedas*.

The wonderful Lord said,

"It is said (there is) an *asvattha* tree whose roots grow upwards and whose branches grow downwards. Its leaves are the eternal Vedic hymns. One who knows it, knows the *Vedas*.

The example of the tree - as the *samsara vriksha* - is mentioned in *Katha Upanishad* (2.3.1) as the banyan whose roots go upwards, but also in *Muktika Upanishad* (2.2.32-37) and *Svetasvatara Upanishad* (6.6). This chapter describes the Supreme Lord as the root of this imperishable banyan tree of the Universe, and explains how to go beyond and find the original treasure.

It is important to understand that there is no contradiction or opposition between the *pravritti marga* of *karma kanda* and the *nivritti marga* of the various aspects of *yoga*. Krishna has already explained that Sankhya (chapter 2) is simultaneously different and non-different from Yoga: *loke 'smin dvi vidha nistha pura prokta mayanagha, jnana yogena sankhyanam karma yogena yoginam*, "O Arjuna, as I have already explained to you, in this world there are two types of beliefs: those who follow Sankhya are connected through knowledge, while *yogis* are connected through action" (3.3), and *sankhya yogau prithag balah pravadanti na panditah, ekam apy asthitah samyag ubhayor vindate phalam*, "Only childish people, and not *panditas*, speak of Sankhya and Yoga as two different paths. In fact one who is firmly situated on either of these attains the final purpose of both" (5.4).

Similarly, the concept of *yajna* is not limited to the ritual ceremonies but encompasses all dutiful actions of human beings: *niyatam kuru karma tvam karma jyayo hy akarmanah, sarira yatrapa ca te na prasiddhyed akarmanah, yajnarthat karmano 'nyatra loko 'yam karma bandhanah, tad artham karma kaunteya mukta sangah samacara*, "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. All 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, remaining free from attachments." (3.8-9)

Even the *sannyasis* and *yogis* who have renounced the conventional rituals need to engage in *yajna*, each in their own specific way according to the activities they have chosen to perform: some worship the Devas, others offer sacrifice itself in the fire of Transcendence, others offer the activities of the senses or the objects of the senses, or the control of the *prana*. Others sacrifice their wealth, or engage in studying the scriptures or following strict vows or austerities," (4.25-30).

In chapter 11 we have seen the description of the Virata Purusha or Virata Rupa as the manifestation of God in this universe, on whom we should meditate according to Krishna's instructions. The *asvattha* (banyan) tree described in this chapter 15 is another perspective of this Supreme Purusha (Purushottama), that manifests as the entire corpus of Vedic knowledge. The *asvattha* tree is particularly interesting because it is practically immortal. It originally starts from a seed, but since the branches become new roots, and the roots spread around and upwards to become branches, the tree can grow very wide and constantly renews itself. So even if some parts of the tree may die, the other branches and root continue to survive and thrive and propagate, expanding the

same body constantly. This is a wonderful example to depict Vedic knowledge, that is and remains One as it keeps growing from the same fundamental principles, but readily adapts to time, place and circumstances with new branches carrying the same vital lymph.

Like the ellipsoid stone or pillar called Lingam, the Tree is a very ancient and universal symbol of Reality in this world, and has been honored as a sacred image by all ancient dharmic cultures. The *stambha* or *jupa shakti* is still installed in the traditional orthodox *yajna salas* as the seat and representation of all Devas, and it is considered that all the *ghi* offered in the sacrificial fire is eaten by this *jupa shakti*. We have already noticed the close connection between Purushottama and Jagannatha ("the Lord of the Universe"), but even more interesting is the connection between Jagannatha and the Universal Tree. Another name of Jagannatha is *daru brahman*, "the incarnation of God as a tree". The word *daru* means both "tree" and "wood" (which is obtained from a tree).

This mention of the *daru* is found in *Rig Veda* (10.155.3): *ado yad daru plavate sindhoh pare apurusham, tadarabhasya durhano tena gaccha parastaram*, "In the beginning, the primeval Lord manifested as the transcendental Daru on the shore of the Ocean, and those who go to take shelter in this Supreme Lord are delivered from all difficulties."

A famous commentator of the *Vedas*, Sayana Acharya (1300-1380 CE), offers this explanation: *ado viprakrista dese kartumanam apurusham nirmatra purushena rahitam, yad daru darumayam purushottamakhyam devata sariram sindhoh pare, samudra tire plavate jalasyopari vartate tad daru he durhano dukhena, hananiya kenapi hantum asakya he stotah arabhasva alambasva upasvety, arthah tena darumayena, evenopasyamanena parastavam atisayena, taraniyam utkristam vaishnavam lokam gaccha*, "On the sea shore, in a place that is not accessible to material vision, God who is beyond the perception of the senses,

exists in a tree form and is called Purushottama. He delivers his devotees from the ocean of material sufferings. O great scholars, take shelter in that tree form of the Lord, and through his worship attain the supreme abode of Vishnu.”

The *Sankhyayana brahmana* also contains a similar verse: *adau yad daru plavate sindhoh pare apurusham, tad alambasva durduno tena yahi param sthalam*, “On the shore of the ocean, the Primeval Lord has manifested as a tree/ wood that is not human. By taking shelter in him, you will attain the supreme abode.”

The *Sankhyayana bhashya* comments: *adau viprakrista dese vartmanam yad daru daru-mayam, purushottamakhyam devata sariram plavate jalasyopari vartate apurusham, nirmatri rahitatvena apurusham tad alambhasva durduno he hotah tena, darumayena devana upasyamanenaiva param sthalam, vaishnavam lokam gacchety arthah*, “The Supreme Lord known as Purushottama has taken a form of tree/ wood and resides on the ocean shore, although he transcends the human level and he is beyond the perception of the senses. O great scholar, you should worship this form of the Lord with the purpose of going to the supreme abode of Vishnu.” A similar verse is also found in the Utkala Khanda of *Skanda Purana* (21.3): *ya esa plavate daruh sindhu pare hy apaurushah, tam upasya duraradhyam muktim yati sudurlabham*, “One who venerates that transcendental tree that floated to the ocean shore, and that is so hard to worship properly, will attain the rarest form of salvation.”

In the Utkala Khanda of *Narada Purana* (52.12) the Lord answers a question by Lakshmi Devi: *pratimam tatra tam dristva svayam devena nirmitam, anayasena vai yanti bhavanam me tato narah*, “In the greatest of all the holy places there is an image of the Lord that was directly manifested. Anyone who sees this form attains my abode.”

The definition of Jagannatha as *daru brahman* also appears in *Padma Purana*, *Brihad Vishnu* and *Tattva yamala: samudrasyottare tire aste sri purushottame, purnananda mayam brahma daru vyaja sarira bhrit*, “In the land of Purushottama on the north shore of the sea, Brahman, the full manifestation of happiness, plays at taking a wooden/ tree body”, *niladrau chotkale dese kshetre sri purushottame, daruny aste cidanando jagannathakhya murtina*, “At Niladri, in the holy place known as Sri Purushottama kshetra in Orissa, the Supreme embodiment of happiness and knowledge manifests in a form of tree/ wood, known as Jagannatha/ the Universal Lord”, *bharate chotkale dese bhu svarge purushottame, daru rupi jagannatho bhaktanam abhaya pradah, nara ceshtam upadaya ya aste mokshaika karakah*, “In Bharata Varsha (India), in the kingdom of Orissa, in that heaven on Earth known as Purushottama, Jagannatha/ the Universal Lord manifests to take away all the fears of his devotees. Although he seems to act like a human being, he is the only one who can give liberation.”

VERSE 2

अधश्चोर्ध्वं प्रसृतास्तस्य शाखा

adhaścordhvaṃ prasṛtāstasya śākhā

गुणप्रवृद्धा विषयप्रवालाः ।

guṇapraṇṛddhā viṣayapraṇālāḥ ।

अधश्च मूलान्यनुसन्ततानि

adhaśca mūlānyanusantatāni

कर्मानुबन्धीनि मनुष्यलोके ॥ १५-२ ॥

karmānubandhīni manuṣyaloke ॥ 15-2 ॥

adhah: downwards; *ca:* and; *urdhvam:* upwards; *prasritah:* extending; *tasya:* its; *sakhah:* branches; *guna:* the *gunas*; *pravridhdah:* developed; *visaya:* the sense objects; *pravalah:* twigs; *adhah:* downwards; *ca:* and; *mulani:* the roots; *anusantatani:* spread out; *karma anubandhini:* bound by *karma*; *manusya loke:* in human society.

"Extending downwards and upwards, its branches develop the *gunas*, the twigs become the sense objects, and grow downwards to become roots and spread even more to bind human beings with duties.

The tree of the universal manifestation is the Tree of Life, also known as the wish-fulfilling Tree (*kalpa vriksha* or *kalpa taru*). It is the manifestation of God's opulence and compassion for the conditioned souls who have so many desires to fulfill, and gives all sorts of fruits. Contrarily to what some people believe, the fulfillment of material desires and the ordinary life in the world are not detrimental to spiritual life or contrary to the religious spirit. In fact, devotional service or the worship of the Supreme is open to all - those who have overcome all desires, those who have unlimited desires, and those who desire liberation (*Bhagavata Purana*, 2.3.10).

However, the universe is a complex and sophisticated project, and a good knowledge of its mechanisms, dynamics and laws is necessary in order to move around effectively and obtain the results we desire. The Vedic scriptures are the "Operating Manual" for the universe, and elaborate clearly and in detail about the proper procedures (or duties, *karmani*) that human beings are expected to follow. The possibilities are endless, with millions of varieties of bodies in which we can incarnate, each with their particular set of senses of perception and action, as well as millions of sense objects, all produced by the infinite combinations of the *gunas* of material nature.

For each desire we want to get fulfilled, there are duties that we must perform as payment of the debt (*rina*) we incur in.

As already explained in the previous chapter (14.18), one can climb upwards or downwards, and each action will develop into further actions carrying us up or down. The branches of this Universal Tree keep producing the permutations and interactions of the *gunas*, and each specific mixture creates the sense objects like innumerable twigs, providing livelihood to all creatures. The leaves of the tree are the Vedic hymns (*chandamsi*, 15.1), that guide us in the pursuit of our desired sense objects according to the particular set of duties determined by our *guna* and *karma* (3.28, 3.29, 4.13). If we try to acquire the sense objects we desire without following and discharging the prescribed duties, we will become bound by the reactions of our activities and the interaction of the *gunas* will make us fall to the lower branches, towards the selfish and degraded activities, where the taste of the fruits becomes bitter.

Previous commentators explain the fruits of this Tree as *dharma*, *artha*, *kama*, *moksha*, but these are only the best and healthiest fruits, growing on the upper branches; on the lower branches we find the opposite type of fruits, such as *adharma* and *anartha*, with the abundance of unhealthy, illusory and temporary joys and sorrows that grow out of them. All positions on this tree remain temporary (8.16); this is indicated by the very name of the *asvattha*, that is explained as *na svah sthasyati*, where *svah* means "tomorrow".

The tree in itself is eternal and manifests in cycles, but we will not be able to stay forever on any of its branches: in the human form of life we get the opportunity to climb up towards the primeval original root, and discover the treasure that is hidden there, beyond Brahma who was the first created being and expanded the universe downwards through the process of secondary creation.

The expression *urdhva mulam* ("roots upwards") indicates that the roots grow upwards and also that the original root is at the top of the tree; previous commentators have observed that such an "upside down" tree is merely a reflection of a real tree on the water, so whatever is lowest here in the material world will be highest in the spiritual world. There is some deep hidden truth in this statement, but it needs to be understood correctly, because someone who has not attained the transcendental level of life could misinterpret it disastrously and even create confusion and scandals among the general public. We should proceed gradually and carefully in the study of the transcendental science, without jumping over important points or cutting corners, because the results will not be the same as those obtained through the proper process.

The *asvattha* tree of Vedic knowledge is not a contradiction of the fundamental principles of ethics and logic; what is ethical in this material world is also ethical in the spiritual world. Truthfulness, compassion, cleanliness and self-control do not lose their value and certainly do not become negative qualities or cause for degradation on the spiritual level: this must be understood very clearly.

Therefore we should stick to what Krishna is actually saying in *Bhagavad gita*, and understand that the roots growing upwards and from the top at the same time refer to the fact that the universe develops from a single root at the highest level (Brahma) and then branches down in so many ramifications. If we want to discover the root, we must therefore rise upwards, and not downwards as we would do with an ordinary tree.

This *asvattha* tree is also very real, and not a mere reflection or illusion. Those who consider this universe as mere illusion are *mayavadis* - people who believe that illusion is the strongest power, and buckle under such power to non-sustainable conclusions described as asuric by Krishna (*asatyam apratistham*

te jagad ahur anisvaram, 16.8). Saying that the *asvattha* tree of Purushottama, the Virata Purusha, is merely an illusory reflection is a very dangerous and misleading statement indeed.

VERSE 3

न रूपमस्येह तथोपलभ्यते

na rūpamasyeha tathopalabhyate

नान्तो न चादिर्न च सम्प्रतिष्ठा ।

nānto na cādīrna ca sampratiṣṭhā ।

अश्वत्थमेनं सुविरूढमूलं

aśvatthamenam suvirūḍhamūlam

असङ्गशस्त्रेण दृढेन छित्त्वा ॥ १५-३ ॥

asaṅgaśastreṇa ḍṛḍhena chittvā ॥ 15-3 ॥

na: not; *rupam*: the form; *asya*: its; *iha*: here; *tatha*: also; *upalabhyate*: can be perceived; *na*: not; *antah*: the end; *na*: not; *ca*: and; *adih*: the beginning; *na*: not; *ca*: and; *sampratistha*: the foundation; *asvattham*: *asvattha* (tree); *enam*: this; *su virudha*: very strong; *mulam*: the root; *asanga*: (of) detachment; *sastrena*: with the weapon; *dridhena*: determined; *chittva*: cutting.

"Its form cannot be perceived from here, as it has no end or beginning or foundation. Its very strong root should be cut with the weapon of determined detachment.

This verse is also very easy to misunderstand. We cannot cut and destroy the tree of the Universal Form: that would be completely impossible. Not only it cannot be perceived (*upalabhyate na*) from

our position (*iha*), but it spreads everywhere for all the innumerable billions of *jivatmans* in the past, present and future - an endless expanse of extremely strong roots and branches. Even if one soul breaks free from the tangle, there would still be innumerable other souls who still live in the tree and will not become liberated until their desires and karmic consequences have been fully exhausted.

This *asvattha* constituted by Vedic knowledge is eternal (has no beginning or end) and cannot be destroyed. Also, it should not be destroyed, and in fact Bhagavan descends personally from age to age, or sends his assistants, to save Vedic knowledge and re-establish its vigor for the benefit of all beings, in accordance to the specific circumstances and the particular audience, so much that to a superficial observer it may seem that such teachings vastly differ from one instance to another.

For example, in *Bhagavata Purana* (3.31.36) we see that Brahman appeared as a stag (*riksha*) to mate with her consort and daughter the Earth, exactly like in the Celtic and pre-Celtic tradition. Varaha appeared in a very distant age, and at that time Varahi was even more popular than him; we know that in vast regions of the planet, Mother Boar was worshiped, and we can still find the traces of that worship. In *Bhagavata Purana* (2.7.37) we also find a verse speaking of a space traveler Buddha dressing in a very attractive way to distract the *asuras* from their galactic wars of conquest. Therefore a thoughtful person who has attentively studied all the available *shastra* and honestly and faithfully practiced and applied their teachings by constantly meditating on the Vedic instructions will notice many small jewels scattered here and there, like stars in a clouded night, that observed in the proper perspective reveal a secret map to a higher dimension of Consciousness that goes completely beyond the intellectual level and into a realm that many will find unbelievable (*acintya*).

Our determination and detachment are required to sharpen our individual intelligence and use it to cut *ourselves* away from the tangle of the tree, becoming able to trace its original root and even go beyond that. It is a major paradigm shift that we can effect only when we understand the nature and identity of the Supreme Purusha, the Purushottama.

There is a famous scene in the film "Matrix", where the protagonist, Neo, is visiting the home of the Oracle, and meets a young boy who is practicing the control of consciousness. The boy, with shaved head and clad in *sannyasi*-like clothing in spite of his obvious Caucasian origin, is bending a spoon by applying the power of the mind, and explains to Neo that he should not try to physically bend the spoon - because that would be impossible. He should rather realize that the spoon does not exist as it appears to be, and the paradigm shift in the consciousness will do the needful. This brilliant artistic inspiration is not far from reality, as we can see in many cutting edge research works both in physics and psychology: when our perception changes, the situation changes around us.

We are consciousness, just like the Supreme Purusha is Consciousness. The Tree of the Universe is simply the expansion or manifestation of consciousness, and the elementary laws of physics only apply to time, space and individuality. Once we cut through the thick layers of *ahankara* and *mamatva* that define time, space and individuality, we are not subject to such laws any more, and we become disentangled from the tree itself.

The weapon required to cut ourselves free is the sharp intelligence that shows us how all the fruits of the tree are temporary and cannot give real happiness (5.22); this realization is called detachment (*asanga*). We have already commented on the particular meaning of the word *sanga* and its opposite *asanga*, because they appear many times in the verses spoken by Krishna

(2.47, 2.48, 2.62, 3.9, 3.26, 4.20, 4.23, 5.10, 5.11, 11.55, 12.18, 13.22, 14.6, 14.7, 14.15, and 15.5, 18.6, 18.9, 18.23, 18.26).

The literal meaning of the word *sanga* derives from *sa* ("together with") and *anga* ("limb, member, part of a body") and extends to all those things that are related to the material body, such as identifications and attachments, especially in regard to activities and qualities. Religious Organizations insist much on the value of *sanga*, or "association", "affiliation", "membership", because of the encouragement and support that the company of good people and favorable social structures can give to individuals, especially in Kali yuga. Therefore *sadhu sanga* ("the association with good people") is recommended as a principle of devotional practice by many teachers.

However, the word *sanga* is not used in *Bhagavad gita* for this purpose; rather Krishna insists that we should become "free from all association" (or anyway, "associated with liberation" only). This is an extremely important point that we need to understand if we want to graduate from materialistic religiosity to the pure transcendental level of *dharma* and true spiritual life.

Genuine *bhagavat dharma*, taught in *Bhagavad gita* and *Bhagavata Purana*, is beyond this materialistic level of religiosity: *dharma projjhita kaitavo atra parama*, "Here we completely reject materialistic religiosity, that is deceitful, and only pursue transcendence", (*Bhagavata Purana* 1.1.2). Of course, not everybody is able to rise to this level, and it would be unwise to try to push people to take this position artificially, out of positive or negative compulsion.

Krishna explicitly forbids us to do so: *na buddhi bhedam janayed ajnanam karma sanginam, josayet sarva karmani vidvan yuktah samacaran*, "A person who has knowledge should not confuse the understanding of the ignorant who are attached to their actions, but

should rather help them to engage in all activities in a spirit of cooperation, giving a good example personally" (3.26).

People who still have material desires should not be pressurized to "give them up" artificially, but rather to pursue them in a dharmic way, according to the detailed instructions (the "Operating Manual") supplied by the *Vedas*. In this way, the natural progression of evolution will carry the conditioned soul through *dharma* to *artha*, *kama* and finally *moksha*, without the danger of degradation.

The roots of the Universal Tree are very strong (*su virudha mula*), and very rightly they should be, because they keep the conditioned souls engaged according to the perfect plan of the divine Consciousness. We should advise and encourage each and every individual in their particular personalized way, because what is powerful medicine for someone will be lethal poison for another, or even for the same person in different circumstances.

Therefore the *dridha* (determination) mentioned in this verse in connection with the cutting of the roots of attachment should be applied with intelligence, and not under the influence of *rajas* or *tamas*. This surgery is extremely delicate, and will bring disaster if performed by unqualified "doctors", who deliberately or unwittingly ignore relevant factors due to carelessness or impersonalism, or because of an overpowering desire for personal selfish advantages, such as increasing the number of disciples and followers, possessions, name and fame, etc.

Spiritual evolution is not a "one size fits all" T shirt. Trying to make everyone fit into the mold by cutting off pieces of bodies or by stretching them to breaking point is not a good idea. The guidance of qualified teachers is required to continue progressing in our dharmic duties and engagements, without losing sight of the final purpose - transcending the cosmic manifestation and attaining

the supreme position. Dutiful religionists should not forget this, to avoid becoming self-complacent and self-righteous: Krishna had already given the warning in verses from 2.42 to 2.46 talking about the *veda vada ratah* and how they are missing the point.

Therefore the learned *brahmanas* must always remember the supreme position of Vishnu in all their rituals and in the performance of all duties: *om tad visnoh paramam padam sada pasyanti surayah diviva caksur atatam visnor yat paramam padam*. This is the verdict of the *Rig Veda samhita* (1.22.20), repeated in several *Upanishads* (*Paingala*, 4.30-32, *Subala*, 6.6, *Tara sara*, 3,9, *Tripura tapani*, 4.13).

VERSE 4

ततः पदं तत्परिमार्गितव्यं

tataḥ padaṁ tatparimārgitavyaṁ

यस्मिन्गता न निवर्तन्ति भूयः ।

yasmingatā na nivartanti bhūyaḥ ।

तमेव चाद्यं पुरुषं प्रपद्ये ।

tameva cādyam puruṣam prapadye ।

यतः प्रवृत्तिः प्रसृता पुराणी ॥ १५-४ ॥

yataḥ pravṛttiḥ prasṛtā purāṇī ॥ 15-4 ॥

tatah: then; *padam*: position; *tat*: that; *parimargitavyam*: must be searched; *yasmin*: where; *gatah*: having reached there; *na*: not; *nivartanti*: come back; *bhuyah*: again; *tam*: that; *eva*: certainly;

ca.: and; *adyam*: primordial; *purusam*: the *Purusha*; *prapadye*: taking shelter; *yatah*: from whom; *pravrittih*: creation/ development/ engagement; *prasrita*: extended; *purani*: very ancient.

"Then, one should search that position from which one does not fall back again, taking shelter in (God), the primeval (being), from whom all this creation has developed.

The word *tatah*, "then", indicates the position of complete detachment, attained by cutting one's material identifications and attachments, including the good and dutiful ones. One can reach this point by sincerely and carefully following Krishna's instructions in *Bhagavad gita* and the other Vedic scriptures; we should remember that it is the tree itself that supplies the handle for the ax to cut through it.

Disentangling oneself from the many branches and twigs does not mean one should abandon it and run away somewhere else. Rather, the freedom we achieve through detachment should serve us truly in our quest for the original root - the Virata Purusha, the Purushottama, who is at the highest position in the Universal Tree. This is indicated by the expression *adyam purusha prapadye*: Vishnu is the real root and cause of *pravritti* as dutiful action (*yatah pravrittih prasrita*) since the dawn of creation (3.10 to 3.16). So cutting this tree to find the root is more like the final harvesting of the very valuable result of all the cultivation - the ultimate purpose of the useful plant itself from the very beginning.

All the activities supported by the Vedic hymns have the ultimate purpose of pleasing Vishnu: *dharmah svanusthitah pumsam, visvaksena kathasu yah, notpadayed yadi ratim, srama eva hi kevalam*, "The occupational duties of a person become simply tiring labor if they do not give rise to the desire to hear about God," (*Bhagavata Purana* 1.2.8), and *atah pumbhir dvija srestha*,

varnasrama vibhagasah, svanusthitasya dharmasya, samsiddhir hari tosanam, "Thus, o best among the twice-born, the prescribed duties according to the *varna* and *asrama* system find their perfection in pleasing Hari" (*Bhagavata Purana* 1.2.13)

Another very interesting word in this verse is *parimargitavyam*, a compound including the word *marga*, meaning "road". The search for the Supreme is like a journey, and once we embark on this road, the final success is guaranteed (6.37 to 6.45).

From a practical perspective, we can search this Universal Tree like a genealogical tree, tracing its origin up to Brahma, the first created being, and to his origin, Maha Vishnu. Brahma is the *prapitamaha*, the great forefather of all human beings as well of all other living entities, and therefore he is considered the prime authority in the universe. At each manifestation cycle, Brahma expresses the Vedic knowledge from within his heart through the direct instructions of Vishnu (*tene brahma hrida yah adi kavaye, Bhagavata Purana* 1.1.1). This direct transmission of knowledge is also possible for all individual souls (10.11) who are sincere enough.

Krishna has already declared that he (Vishnu) is the origin or root of all existences, although he cannot be perceived materially (as he says here, *na rupam asyeha tathopalabhyate*, 15.3) in chapter 10: *aham sarvasya prabhavo mattah sarvam pravartate, iti matva bhajante mam budha bhava samanvitah*, "I am the origin of existence of everything, as everything emanates from me. Intelligent people remember this, and worship me with intense attention", (10.8). The position of Vishnu is therefore higher than Brahma and transcendental to this world, yet omnipresent and perfectly aware of everything. Vishnu resides in the hearts of all beings (10.11, 10.20, 13.18); this chapter will state it again and more forcefully (15.15) and the conclusion of *Bhagavad gita* will again declare it definitely (18.61).

But we also know that Vishnu always resides in his *param dhama*, his supreme abode or position. So if Vishnu is present in the hearts of all living beings, does this mean that all the spiritual world is also present within the hearts of those beings, together with Vishnu? It certainly is. We should not apply the material limitations of time, space and separation to the transcendental Godhead, because he is beyond the grasp of the material senses and mind not only in his aspects of Bhagavan, Paramatma and Brahman (8.9, 11.42, 12.3), but even as Atman (2.25).

A very interesting word in this and other verses (2.51, 8.11, 15.4, 15.5, 18.56) is *padam*, that conveys the meanings of "position, abode, place" and its reinforced form *sampada*, as in 16.3 etc. An extension of this meaning of "position" is "a passage from the scriptures", as in verse, 13.5 (*brahma sutra padais*). Another connected word is *pada* (with a long *a* in first position), that means "feet" or "legs" (see verse 13.14 for example). From this word we also get the word *prapadye* ("taking shelter"), an action that is traditionally symbolized by the gesture of touching the feet or legs of the person we surrender to.

The *pada* or position of Vishnu, the *paravyoma* or spiritual space, is beyond the root of the Universal Tree. In this meaning, the synonym *dhama* is used several times (8.21, 10.12, 11.38, 15.6). When the *jivatman* attains this supreme abode, there is no danger of falling back. This is also confirmed again in 15.6 and had already been stated in 8.21: *avyakto 'kshara ity uktas tam ahuh paramam gatim, yam prapya na nivartante tad dhama paramam mama*, "That is said to be non-manifested, non subject to change, and the highest destination. By attaining it, one does not fall back. That is my supreme abode." On the other hand, those who do not take shelter in the Supreme will have to continue moving around in the Universal Tree, as confirmed in *Bhagavata Purana: ya esam purusam saksad, atma prabhavam isvaram, na bhajanty*

avajananti, sthanad bhrastah patanty adhah, "One who does not worship Isvara, who is the Purusha himself, the source of the *atman*, will fall from his position", (*Bhagavata Purana* 11.5.3).

This had also been explained in chapter 9: *trai vidya mam soma pah puta papa yajnair istva svar gatim prarthayante, te punyam asadya surendra lokam asnanti divyan divi deva bhogan, te tam bhuktva svarga lokam visalam ksine punye martya lokam visanti, evam tryi dharmam anuprapanna gatagatam kama kama labhante*, "Those who know the three *Vedas*, who drink the *soma* and who are purified from all wrongs through the acts of sacrifice, worshipping me in this way pray to attain Svarga. After reaching the pious planets of Indra in heaven they enjoy the celestial pleasures of the Devas. After a long time spent in the enjoyment of Svargaloka, those who have exhausted their virtuous merits fall down again to the level of mortals. In this way, following strictly the path of the three *dharmas* (*brahmana, kshatriya, vaisya*), they develop a lust for desires and they continue to take birth and die", (9.20-21)

VERSE 5

निर्मानमोहा जितसङ्गदोषा

nirmānamohā jitasāṅgadoṣā

अध्यात्मनित्या विनिवृत्तकामाः ।

adhyātmanityā vinivṛttakāmāḥ ।

द्वन्द्वैर्विमुक्ताः सुखदुःखसंज्ञैर्-

dvandvairvimuktāḥ sukhaduḥkhasaṅjñair-

गच्छन्त्यमूढाः पदमव्ययं तत् ॥ १५-५ ॥

gacchantyamūdhāḥ padamavyayaṁ tat ॥ 15-5 ॥

nih: without; *mana*: sense of prestige; *mohah*: illusion; *jita*: having conquered; *sanga doshah*: the defects due to association; *adhyatma*: in the original Self; *nitya*: constantly; *vinivritta*: detached; *kamah*: desires; *dvandvaih*: from dualities; *vimuktah*: completely liberated; *sukha duhkha*: joys and sorrows; *samjnah*: understood/ known as; *gacchanti*: they go; *amudhah*: those who are not stupid; *padam*: position; *avyayam*: eternal; *tat*: that.

"This eternal position is attained by those who have conquered and eliminated the sense of prestige, illusion, and the defects due to identification and attachment. These intelligent persons are always conscious of the true self (*adhyatman*) and so they are completely free from desires, as well as from the joys and sorrows created from duality.

The word *nirmana*, placed in a special position at the beginning of the verse, is particularly interesting. Since *mana* means "honor" and the negative prefix *nih* or *nir* indicates the absence, the general meaning of the word is "lack of honor". Of course, this does not mean that a liberated soul enjoys being disrespected or insulted: it means that s/he does not like being showed special honor, because this could reinforce the *ahankara* and attachment to position and the danger of intoxication that it carries. Therefore genuine devotees and liberated souls only accept those honors that are favorable to the performance of their specific mission, and never demand or even welcome anything more than that. Actually, even a king or a *guru* should show a healthy dose of genuine humility and detachment from honors, because this behavior is inspiring and sets a very good example for their followers.

Krishna has already stated: *yad yad acarati sresthas tat tad evetaro janah, sa yat pramanam kurute lokas tad anuvartate*, "Whatever a great leader does, the general common people follow the example as his activities are implicitly accepted as the authoritative standard by the public" (3.21).

Such consideration is not merely based on good personal character, but it also help preventing the opinion that a leadership position entails special material benefits, such as worship, power, sense gratification, etc, and therefore it should be pursued with such material motivations. Of course this idea is created by illusion, but as we have seen in the previous chapter, *tamas* can easily creep into the best plans and spoil them. A person who is totally free from illusion is naturally modest and humble, because s/he sees clearly that his/ her role in God's plan is merely a small service, enabled by a greater power that supplies all ingredients for the action (18.13-14, 18.19). The same negative prefix *nih* or *nir* applies here to the word *moha* (illusion), as in this verse *mana* and *moha* are compounded in a single expression.

This clear consciousness of one's true position is exactly the opposite of the illusion of *ahankara* and *mamatva*, the defects (*dosa*) of association or identification (*sanga*). Therefore Krishna connects all three factors as one and the same requirement: *nirmana-moha jita-sanga-dosa*, saying very clearly that one needs to become free from the illusion of demanding recognition as the *karta* ("doer") based on *ahankara* and *mamatva*. This point was already stated very forcefully in verse 3.7: *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'."

So now we have clarified what should be eliminated (*neti neti*). What is the positive activity we should engage in? Krishna explains, *adhyatma-nitya vinivritta-kamah*: always focus on the *adhyatma*, the Supreme Soul, the original Atman, and cultivate desires that are perfectly renounced - desires for renunciation and transcendence that are pertaining to the *adhyatma*. We should notice that here the word *kamah* is expressed in the plural form

("desires"); this expression has two meanings, indicating that one should "be free from engagement in cultivating all the different desires", and at the same time one should "desire all those things that are favorable to detachment".

There is nothing wrong in desire in itself, as in fact desire is the natural quality of the *jiva* who strives to reunite with God; the problems come when such primeval desire is not properly directed through consciousness and jumps around without control, running after the sense objects. We could compare desire to a beam of light, that can be focused intensely into a laser effect and perform astounding things, cutting through the thick darkness of illusion and egotism. However, if the beam is not focused enough, we will only be able to see what it shows - the theories and possibilities and the work to be done. On the other hand, if the beam is very concentrated and keeps jumping and running around without control, it will bring destruction and suffering (2.63). If it jumps around without control but is not strongly focused, it will simply dazzle and blind us into a vague confusion typical of *tamas*.

The third line is also logically connected to the previous two. One needs to become free from *ahankara* (*mana*, *moha*, as born from *sanga dosa*) and also from the dualities that are known as joys and sorrows (*sukha duhkha samjnair*), by focusing on the *adhyatma* and directing one's desires towards transcendence only.

Duality is presented as a fundamental defect in many verses (2.45, 4.22, 5.3, 7.27, 7.28), and the solution is to tolerate the constant changes and transformations created by duality, such as joys and sorrows. Trying to avoid the sorrows or increase the joys artificially (with "forceful action" generally adharmic in nature) is not a good solution, because joys and sorrow automatically come as the results of our good and bad deeds, and only good deeds can really neutralize sorrows. So while we sincerely perform our dutiful dharmic actions, we need to tolerate whatever remains of

negative consequences are still coming to us. Not only sorrows, but joys as well can be distracting, therefore one should become detached from them all.

The word *amudha* ("not stupid") is particularly interesting because it implies that *mana*, *moha*, *sanga dosa* and *dvandva* are symptoms of foolishness. Only intelligence (*buddhi yoga*, 2.39, 2.41, 2.44, 2.49, 2.50, 2.51, 2.52, 2.53, 2.63, 4.18, 5.20, 6.9, 6.21, 6.43, 8.7, 10.10, 12.8, 12.14, 15.20, 18.16, 18.29, 18.30, 18.36, 18.57) as the main characteristic of *sattva* can lead us out from illusion and to the supreme position of eternal Transcendence (*padam avyayam tat*).

VERSE 6

न तद्भासयते सूर्यो न शशाङ्को न पावकः ।

na tadbhāsayate sūryo na śaśāṅko na pāvakaḥ ।

यद्गत्वा न निवर्तन्ते तद्धाम परमं मम ॥ १५-६ ॥

yadgatvā na nivartante taddhāma paramaṁ mama ।। 15-6 ।।

na: not; *tat*: that; *bhasayate*: illuminates; *suryah*: the sun; *na*: not; *sasankah*: the moon; *na*: not; *pavakah*: fire/ electricity; *yat*: where; *gatva*: having gone; *na*: not; *nivartante*: they come back; *tat*: that; *dhama*: abode; *paramam*: supreme/ transcendental; *mama*: mine.

"That (supreme position) is not illuminated by the sun, the moon or fire/ electricity. Those who reach that supreme abode, my abode, will not return (here).

Katha Upanishad (2.2.15) contains a very similar verse: *na tatra suryo bhati na candra tarakam, nema vidyuto bhanti kuto agni*, "In that (dimension) there is no (need of light from) sun, moon, stars, lightning or fire". We should not foolishly conclude that because in the spiritual dimension there is no specific source of light, darkness reigns unbroken - it is rather the opposite, as spirit itself is the origin of all the light even in this world. When we speak about the light of sun, moon, stars, fire, lightning and electricity, we automatically imply the existence of darkness that thrives in their absence, because their presence is limited. All such objects are material, and as such they are subject to the law of constant movement and transformation - appearance and disappearance, creation and dissolution. The supreme position (*param dhama*) is beyond such duality.

The word *tat* mentioned in this and the previous verse clearly indicate the supreme Transcendence. The Personality of Godhead is non-different from his abode or position, because the *param dhama* is pure consciousness, the supreme light of intelligence and existence of *visuddha sattva*. There is no shadow or darkness in the supreme Consciousness: everything is clear and thoroughly understood, without limits of separation, time or place. When we become free from the dualistic mentality, we will be able to see this.

This is the reason why there is no need for separate or distinct illumination in this transcendental dimension. The sun (*surya*), the moon (*sasanka*) and fire (*pavaka*) are the sources of light we know in this world, and enable us whatever faculty of sight and understanding our senses can have in this dimension obscured by the cloud of *ahankara* and *mamatva*. The fact is that the spiritual dimension, the *param dhama*, is already present everywhere in the universe, and the material world is merely the region we perceive as covered by the *ahankara* cloud - but it is our vision that is

covered, not the eternal light. This is confirmed by many verses in various scriptures, including *Bhagavad gita*:

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

jyotizam api taj jyotis tamasah param ucyate, jneyam jnana gamyam hridi sarvasya visthitam, "He is described as the light in all radiant things, transcendental to darkness. He is established in the heart of everything, and he is to be known through the cultivation of knowledge." (13.18)

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

yo 'ntah sukho 'ntar aramas tathantar jyotir eva yah, sa yogi brahma nirvanam brahma bhuto 'dhigacchati, "One who is happy within the self, who finds pleasure within the self, who finds the light within the self is a *yogi* who attains the *brahma nirvana* and the existence of Brahman." (5.24)

yatha prakasayaty ekah kritsnam lokam imam ravih, ksetra, ksetri tatha kritsnam prakasayati bhārata, "O Bharata, just like the sun illuminates all this world, in the same way the *kshetri* illuminates the entire *kshetra*." (13.34).

Attaining this *pada* or *dhama* that is constituted by pure light and consciousness requires a radical change of perspective, a true realization of the deepest nature of Reality. It is not sufficient simply to dress up in saffron cloth or white cloth or shaving one's head, because these are merely externals with the only purpose of

alerting the public that we are not interested in ordinary mundane pursuits and subjects.

There are several other verses that state how a *yogi* who has attained this supreme position never falls back again on the material level of understanding (8.15, 8.16, 8.21, 15.4). The liberated personalities who descend in this world from time to time as *avatars* - *svamsa* or *vibhinnamsa*, either direct Personalities of Godhead or his servants - are not falling in material consciousness, and therefore they never leave the *param dhama*.

It is also interesting to note that the word *bhasayate* ("illuminates") is from the same root as *bhasya* or "commentary", meant to illuminate the understanding of the readers. The same meaning is contained in the word *dipika* ("lamp") often used in the titles of commentaries. We should not foolishly think that commentaries are meant to illuminate the original text on which they elaborate: the illumination applies to the intelligence or understanding (*buddhi*) of the readers, who need more explanations to grasp the full meaning.

VERSE 7

ममैवांशो जीवलोके जीवभूतः सनातनः ।

mamaivāṁśo jīvaloke jīvabhūtaḥ sanātanaḥ ।

मनःषष्ठानीन्द्रियाणि प्रकृतिस्थानि कर्षति ॥ १५-७ ॥

manaḥṣaṣṭhānīndriyāṇi prakṛtisthāni karṣati ॥ 15-7 ॥

mama: my; *eva*: certainly; *amsah*: limb/ part; *jiva loke*: in the world of *jivas*; *jiva bhutah*: the living beings; *sanatanah*: eternal;

manah: the mind; *sastani*: the six; *indriyani*: the senses; *prakriti*: in *prakriti*; *sthani*: established; *karsati*: cultivates/ attracts.

"The living being in this world is certainly a limb of my (body), and as such he is eternal. He toils in the material world, struggling with the mind and the senses that are the norm here.

The word *amsa* is particularly interesting. This verse clearly states that all the living entities are eternally "limbs" or "parts" of the body of the Supreme Lord. Not simply children or creatures of God, but parts of his own body. We can probably understand the concept better if we translate *amsa* as "cell" like the cells of our body.

It is common knowledge that an average adult body is composed by approximately 100 thousand billions of living cells, all originated from the single cell of the fertilized egg, carrying the same genetic information but adapted in different forms according to their specific function - bones, muscles, nerves, etc. A body cell can continue to live only temporarily if it is separated from the body, like a spark from a fire that slowly becomes extinguished if it flies out of it (an example offered by *Brihad aranyaka Upanishad*, 2.1.20, *yathagneh ksudra visphulinga*, "just as tiny sparks of fire fly in all directions").

On the spiritual level, of course, there is no real distance or separation and the cell can never die, because God's body is spiritual and omnipresent. The illusion of separation simply covers the light (the consciousness) of the spiritual cell, called *jivatman*, and can be overcome and reverted easily with the return to the proper consciousness. In fact, there is never any real separation - separation is simply perceived due to *avidya*: how can there be *bahir mukha* (a *jivatman*'s turning his face away from God) if Bhagavan is *sarvato mukha* (God's face is everywhere)? So the

difference between *svamsa* and *vibhinnamsa* cells is the quantity and not the quality of consciousness. Therefore there is division (*pariccheda, vibhinna*) and non-division at the same time.

The same definition (*amsa*) is confirmed in Krishna's teachings to Uddhava: *ekasyaiva mama amsasya, jivasyaiva maha mate, bandho 'syavidyayanadir, vidyaya ca tathetarah*, "The *jiva* is a part of me, but is bound by timeless ignorance. However, it can change its position through knowledge" (*Bhagavata Purana* 11.11.4).

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. When the consciousness of the individual cell becomes distorted and does not function in a favorable mode of service, we understand that the cell has become diseased. A cell in our body can only subordinate its individual enjoyment to the enjoyment of the entire body. When all the cells of a body cooperate properly to nourish the body and to keep it in good health, they can automatically obtain the enjoyment and well being they naturally aspire to. Therefore the *jivatman* needs to subordinate his enjoyment to the enjoyment of the Supreme.

Each single cell has a different function in the body, but all cells need to be treasured, protected and nurtured according to their specific needs. This practical consideration of different engagements and requirements, however, is not based on prejudice, but on actual observation of the true potential of each individual. In this sense, the *varnashrama* system is the scientific knowledge that enables us to understand the specific functions of the individual cells in this world, and how they should be nurtured and engaged for the perfect health of the body of the Virata Purusha, that is clearly described as the incarnation of human society.

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

The living entity emanates from the Godhead as a seed (*bija*), an atomic (*anu atman*) spark of the Fire, as a minuscule cell of the body of the Parama Purusha, but it contains the "spiritual DNA" (so to speak) by which he will be able to perfectly develop into a fully fledged spiritual form and personality like Bhagavan.

This is confirmed by the famous *mantra* that we find as invocation in several *Upanishads* of the *Sukla Yajur Veda*, including *Isa Upanishad*: *om purnam adah purnam idam, purnat purnam udacyate, purnasya purnam adayah, purnam evavasisyate*, "From this (Brahman) who is eternally complete (in itself), all complete (*jivatman*) emanate, and even after that, what was complete remains complete." Each and every emanation is complete and perfect in itself, yet the Supreme remains complete and perfect.

Each *jiva* is eternally individual (*jiva bhuta sanatanah*) as confirmed by Krishna already at the beginning of the *Bhagavad gita* (2.12), and can never be destroyed (2.23-24). However, when the *jivatma* enters this *jiva loka*, the world of the *jivas* or the collectivity of the *jivas*, he is under-developed and merely an atomic soul (*anu atma*) that will grow through experience and evolution to a fully fledged spiritual body (*siddha deha*). Its atomic dimension is described by *Svetasvatara Upanishad* (5.9): *balagra sata bhagasya satadha kalpitasya ca*, "if the tip of a hair is divided

into 100 parts, and then again into 100, this can be compared to the size of the *jivatman*".

The *anu atma* can grow into maturity by cultivating his own evolution; this is indicated in the second part of the verse especially by the word *karsati*, that contains a variety of meanings, that include "cultivating" (as in farming and tilling the soil), "struggling", "being aggrieved". For example, farmers are called *karsakas* in *Bhagavata Purana* (10.2041). However, *karsati* also means "attracting", as in the name of Sankarsana, the first emanation of Vasudeva in the material world, who presides over the sense of identification.

This function attracts the conditioned soul to the matrix where he will take birth, like a magnet attracts various material elements, beginning from *ahankara*. The growth of the microcosmic human body is in fact a reflection of the macrocosmic body of the Virata Purusha in the process of universal creation.

After the manifestation of *ahankara* (the sense of identity and doership), material understanding or intelligence (*buddhi*) develops, and from it the mind (*manah*) is manifested. In turn, the mind manifests the five senses of perception (*indriya*) and so on. The *anu atma* is thus attracted into this rich matrix full of opportunities and elements, and develops a body that will enable him to work on his further evolution. The subtle body consisting of the mind and the five primary senses of perception is therefore considered the "establishment" of *prakriti* or material nature, a sort of agricultural or business enterprise in which the *anu atma* becomes engaged as an apprentice worker.

The mind and senses constitute the subtle body of the conditioned soul, and are developed through the activities (*karma*) and association with the material qualities (*gunas*). This subtle body is also called *karana* body because it is the cause of the particular

type of gross body that the conditioned soul will develop for his next birth, based on affinities and tuning. The same will attract the same, and the *guna* and *karma* carried by the subtle body will get an opportunity to manifest on the gross level. In chapter 7, Krishna had described the *jivatmans* born in this world as *para* (spiritual) *prakriti* (nature), by whom the universe is upheld (7.5).

VERSE 8

शरीरं यदवाप्नोति यच्चाप्युत्क्रामतीश्वरः ।

śarīraṁ yadavāpnoti yaccāpyutkrāmatisvarah ।

गृहित्वैतानि संयाति वायुर्गन्धानिवाशयात् ॥ १५-८ ॥

gṛhitvaitāni samyāti vāyurgandhānivāśayāt ॥ 15-8 ॥

sariram: the body; *yat*: that; *avapnoti*: obtains; *yat*: that; *ca api*: and also; *utkramati*: gives up; *isvarah*: the Lord; *grihitva*: accepting; *etani*: all these; *samyati*: goes away; *vayuh*: air; *gandhan*: smells; *iva*: like; *asayat*: from their source.

"The Lord who has entered a body and accepted all these (the mind and senses), then goes out again (with them), like the air carries the scents.

The subject in the verse is called *isvara* ("the Lord"), just like he was called *prabhu* ("the Lord") in verse 5.14 with reference to the same issue (*na kartritvam na karmani lokasya srijati prabhuh, na karma phala samyogam svabhavas tu pravartate*, "The Lord does not create/ manifest the idea of being the cause of the actions performed by other people. Thus he is not engaged by the results of activities. It is only his nature that acts").

We should remember that the *param atman* is the soul of the soul, and therefore he is the one directing the movements of the *jiva atman* and always accompanying him from one body to the other, residing with him in each and every body, one after the other. The *jiva atman* is only the subordinate *atman*, emanation (*prabha*) of the supreme Lord, but since he is of the same nature (*prakriti*), he also can be called Lord, especially in connection with the material body and senses that constitute his own *prakriti*. Both the *isvara* and *atman* are *kshetra jna: idam sariram kaunteya ksetram ity abhidhiyate, etad yo vetti tam prahuh ksetra jna iti tad vidah, ksetra jnam capi mam viddhi sarva ksetresu bharata, ksetra ksetrajnayor jnanam yat taj jnanam matam mama*, "O Kaunteya, this body is called the field, and one who knows this body is called the knower of the field. O Bharata, you should know that I am also the knower of the field who resides in all fields. Knowing the field and the knower of the field is called knowledge. This is my opinion." (13.2-3)

We know from the *Upanishads* (*Mundaka* 3.1.1,2, *Svetasvatara* 4.6,7), that the two *purushas* (the *jivatman* and the *paramatman*) like two birds of the same nature, are sitting on the same tree (the body). One of the two is engrossed in contemplating and eating the fruits of the tree, while the other is simply watching him and waiting for him to realize his glories, which will put an end to all worries (*samane vrikse purusho nimagno anisaya socati muhyamanah, justam yada pasyati anyam isam asya mahimanam iti vita-sokah; dva suparna sayujya sakhaya samanam vriksam parisasvajate tayor anyah pippalam svadv atty anasnann anyo 'bhichakasiti*). The same is confirmed by Krishna while instructing Uddhava: *suparnav etau sadrisau sakhyau, yadricchayaitau krita nidau ca vrikse, ekas tayoh khadati pippalannam anyo niranno 'pi balena bhuyan*, "Two similar birds somehow nested on the same banyan tree; one is eating the fruits (*annam*), the other is not eating, but he is the strongest" (*Bhagavata Purana* 11.11.6).

This is also confirmed in *Vedanta sutras*: *sariras cobhaye api hi bhedena enam adhiyate*, "Both (the *jivatman* and the *paramatman*) are present within the body, as distinct from each other" (*Vedanta sutra* 1.2.20) and *guhā pravistav atmanam hi tad darsanat*, "Both (*jivatman* and *paramatman*) have entered the cave (of the body), but the *atman* is distinct from that (supreme)" (*Vedanta sutra* 1.2.113).

Although the transcendental bird does not get entangled in the fruits of the tree, he still moves from one body to another to accompany the conditioned bird, out of friendship and love. With the same affection, the *jivatman* who is sincerely devoted to the *paramatman* focuses all his attention on the supreme Friend: this is the meaning of the statement *ekam eva dvitīyam*, "one without second".

The word *samyati* means "leaves, travels"; we find it in the same context in verse 2.22: *vasamsi jirnani yatha vihaya navani grihñati naro 'parani, tatha sarirani vihaya jirnany anyani samyati navani dehi*, "Just like a man abandons clothes that have become torn or worn out and acquires other and new clothes, in the same way one leaves the damaged body and accepts another new body."

As we mentioned in the commentary to the previous verse, the *karana* ("causal") body is the subtle sheath composed by the mind and senses according to the *guna* and *karma* developed in previous lifetimes. The word *etani* ("all these") refers specifically to the *guna* and *karma* developed by the conditioned souls, as well as the desires, the memories, the lessons learned, and all the other luggage. Carrying this luggage around (*grihitva*), the conditioned soul moves out of the old body and into the new one, accompanied by the *param atman*.

It is important to understand that the *atman* is never really tied by all this luggage, just like the nature of air is not actually touched by

any scent - pleasant or unpleasant. The odors of air are due to the particles of matter that are carried temporarily, and that easily precipitate back to the ground when they are washed by the rain or sublimated by the heat and light of the sun. The comparison here can be applied to the remembrance, discussion and study of the transcendental science of Godhead, that are like the radiant sunlight and a beneficial rain produced by the correct performance of *yajnas* or sacred actions.

Krishna confirms this same point in his teachings to Uddhava: *manah karma mayam nrinam, indriyah pancabhir yutam, lokal lokam prayaty anya, atma tad anuvartate*, "The mind of the human beings is constituted by *karma*. It moves from one *loka* to another, together with the five senses, and the *atman* follows them, although it is separate from them" (*Bhagavata Purana* 11.22.37).

The teachings of Kapila to Devahuti offer the same view: *dehena jiva bhutena, lokal lokam anuvrajan, bhunjana eva karmani, karoty aviratam puman*, "The *purusha* constantly moves from one *loka* to another, reaping the fruits of its previous actions, because of the bodies designed for the *jivas*" (*Bhagavata Purana* 3.31.43).

The time of death is the most crucial moment of one's entire life, like the final examination test is the most crucial moment of an entire course of studies. One should be ready to face the challenge constituted by this passage, and pass the test. Another very important verse in this regard is from chapter 8: *yam yam vapi smaran bhavam tyajaty ante kalevaram, tam tam evaiti kaunteya sada tad bhava bhavitah*, "O Arjuna, whatever state of existence one remembers at the time of leaving the body, he attains that state of being, because of always contemplating that existence." (8.6). To be on the safe side, we should always keep our consciousness focused on the supreme Consciousness, so that we will always be established on the transcendental level, in any circumstance (8.7).

VERSE 9

श्रोत्रं चक्षुः स्पर्शनं च रसनं घ्राणमेव च ।

śrotram cakṣuḥ sparśanam ca rasanam ghrāṇameva ca ।

अधिष्ठाय मनश्चायं विषयानुपसेवते ॥ १५-९ ॥

adhiṣṭhāya manaścāyaṁ viṣayānupasevate ।। 15-9 ।।

srotram: the organ of hearing; *cakṣuḥ*: the eyes; *sparsanam*: the organ of touch; *ca*: and; *rasanam*: the organ of taste; *ghranam*: the organ of smell; *eva*: certainly; *ca*: and; *adhithaya*: situated in; *manah*: the mind; *ca*: and; *ayam*: s/he; *visayan*: the sense objects; *upasevate*: renders service.

"He becomes settled (there) with the mind and the senses organs - hearing, sight, touch, taste and smell - and renders service to/ through the sense objects.

The most interesting word in this verse is *upasevate*, that should not be translated simplistically as "enjoys" (the sense objects). As we know, the word *seva* mean "service", and *upaseva* is a reinforced form of the definition, as we find for example in *Bhagavata Purana* 5.1.6 with *upasevaya*, "by serving" in connection with the devotional service rendered by king Priyavrata. The Sanskrit word for "enjoys" is *bhunkte* (used for example in verse 3.12 of *Bhagavad gita*), closely related to the word *bhoga* ("pleasure, sense enjoyment, food").

According to the level of consciousness of the *jivatman*, this verse can be therefore interpreted in two different ways, that are not contradictory at all. When the conditioned soul is under the spell of illusion, he serves the sense objects by constantly associating with them - talking about them, hearing about them, remembering them,

working to acquire the credits to attain them, and so on. When the soul turns his desires and consciousness to the supreme Personality of Godhead, he engages his minds and senses in the service of God, as clearly stated in *Narada Pancharatra: hrisikeshahrisikena sevanam bhaktir ucyate*, "Bhakti is the service rendered by using the senses for the pleasure of the Lord of the senses". As we have seen through Krishna's teachings in *Bhagavad gita*, there are different levels on which we can perform this devotional service (4.23, 4.24, 9.27). When our consciousness is still on the neophyte platform we need to support our meditation with material objects, ritual ceremonies, elaborate offerings, etc. However, with constant practice and meditation we can internalize this consciousness and remain always situated in remembering the supreme Personality of Godhead and serving him in our heart, turning our senses and mind into the sacrificial instruments required for the rituals. This is possible only when we have risen above all the three *gunas* of material nature, and our consciousness has become free from all material identifications and attachments. As long as we have *anarthas* ("useless luggage") we will be distracted from this *samadhi* ("constant meditation"). This is confirmed in *Bhagavata Purana* (1.7.5): *yaya sammohito jiva, atmanam tri gunatmakam, paro 'pi manute 'nartham, tat kritam cabhipadyate*, "The *jiva* is transcendental to the 3 *gunas*, but still it can be confused into the false identification with them, and thus it has to suffer the consequences of *anarthas*".

The specific set of senses acquired by the conditioned soul in the new body is directly connected to the particular mixture of the *gunas* and the cumulative effect of the previous activities (*karma*), therefore the combinations can be almost endless: *yah sarvesu bhutesu tisthan sarvebhyo bhutebhyo antaro*, "(the *atman*) in all beings remains within various conditions" (*Brihad aranyaka Upanishad*, 3.7.15).

See for example the huge difference in sense perception and taste between human beings and animals of various species, demonstrated daily by their behaviors and choices. Colors, smells, sounds, tastes are not the same for all bodies; dogs can hear sounds that are above the hearing range of humans (special whistles are made for this reason), and hogs whet their appetite by the smell and taste of excrements. Insects have multiple eyes and feelers that "read" small traces of substances suspended in air, bats use a kind of radar or sonar to avoid obstacles while flying, and cats can see in the dark much better than us and are fond of magnetic fields. Wolves and lions and other predators can recognize the smell the urine of each other at a distance of kilometers and so they can establish the boundaries of their hunting territories. Some animals (such as cats) can be killed by a relatively small dose of vitamin C, which they do not require at all, others (such as cockroaches) do not suffer from the effects of radiation as in nuclear fallout. And there are many more examples like that.

In the scale of evolution, the sense of hearing (*shrotram*) is the most important because it works even during our sleep when the other senses are inert, and travels even through ether in the absence of other elements; it also carries the most delicate and complex messages including the transcendental science (*shabda brahman*). This is the reason why in the process of primary creation the sense of hearing is the first to manifest, together with space (also called ether, or *akash*) and sound.

The sense of sight is based on the development of form and fire and light, represented by the Sun as the main source of radiance in the material universe. The sense of touch is generated by the development of air from space and sound, and creates the feelings of heat from which fire appears. From fire, water manifests with the faculty of taste, and from water earth is created, with the faculty of smell.

Here again we can apply the meaning of *upasevate* as recommended by Krishna in chapter 10 in response to Arjuna's question (10.17): *katham vidyam aham yogims tvam sada paricintayan, kesu kesu ca bhavesu cintyo 'si bhagavan maya*, "O Yogi, how should I know you through constant meditation? O Lord, in which different ways and sentiments should I contemplate you?" (10.17).

As stated in verse 13.18, Brahman is also the object of perception, present not only as the Friend in each living being's heart, but also in every single atom (*jyotisam api taj jyotis tamasah param ucyate, jneyam jnana gamyam hridi sarvasya vishitam*, "He is described as the light in all radiant things, transcendental to darkness. He is established in the heart of everything, and he is to be known through the cultivation of knowledge.")

When we say that the material elements and non-animated objects are *jada* ("inert matter") we are simply making a distinction in relation to the *jiva* ("living being"), but in fact there is no *jada* - everything is Brahman, because *shakti* and *shaktiman* are not different, and even atoms are full of consciousness and intelligence. Paramatman is there within every atom and even in the "void" between atoms, and the elements and all material nature are also *mahat tattva* or *mahat brahma*. According to the *shastra*, the 5 *mahabhutas* (the fundamentals material elements) are also reflections or manifestations (*pratibimba*) of the consciousness of the presiding Devas who are parts of the supreme consciousness.

Thus we return to the symbolism of the Tree of the Universe offered in the first verse of the chapter, that could be interpreted as a reflection of Reality, like the image of the material tree on water. But instead of being separate from the real thing, like an ordinary reflection, the Universal Tree is a reflection-emanation, an image of the original that contains its symbolism and a considerable part of its potency.

The first original Reality is *parabrahman* Vishnu, the non-manifested: from this seed (*bijam mam sarva bhutanam viddhi partha sanatanam*, 7.10) many sprouts appear as the *amsas*, or direct manifestations of the Godhead, that constitute the various aspects (qualities, forms, functions etc) of God. The first separated (*vyakta*) manifestation (*vibhinnamsa*) is Brahma, who is therefore considered the root of the Universal Tree. After Brahma many other separated manifestations are created, and the *jiva atmans* or *anu atmans* come to occupy such bodies or conditions of the being: they attract material elements, and use them as emanations in turn. The process of creation of the individual material bodies and the objects of the senses is similar to the creation of the Universal Tree; each *jiva* travels carrying the subtle body, composed by the mind and senses (15.7-8).

VERSE 10

उत्क्रामन्तं स्थितं वापि भुञ्जानं वा गुणान्वितम् ।

utkrāmantaṁ sthitaṁ vāpi bhujñānaṁ vā guṇānvitam ।

विमूढा नानुपश्यन्ति पश्यन्ति ज्ञानचक्षुषः ॥ १५-१० ॥

vimūdhā nānupaśyanti paśyanti jñānacakṣuṣaḥ ॥ 15-10 ॥

utkrāmantaṁ: leaving the body; *sthitaṁ*: situated; *va*: or; *api*: although; *bhujñanam*: experiencing actively; *va*: or; *guna anvitam*: under the influence of the *gunas*; *vimudha*: stupid people; *na anupasyanti*: are unable to see; *paśyanti*: they can see; *jnana caksusah*: those who have the eyes of knowledge.

"Whether they are leaving the body or remain situated in it, whether they are directing their experiences or passively

following the influences of the *gunas*, those who are stupid are unable to understand (their situation), while those who see with the eyes of scriptural knowledge are able to understand.

Foolish people cannot see the *atman*, because they believe they are the body and mind. This is not merely ignorance, but stupidity as well, because illiterate or totally uneducated persons, too, can feel the radical change that happens when the *atman* leaves the body - even animals can spot the difference between a living being and a dead being.

However, simple natural intelligence will not be able to give us the full understanding of the process of transmigration of the soul, because the *atman* and the subtle body (consisting of mind and senses) are not visible to the eyes. This is why the opposition is between stupidity and knowledge, and not between stupidity or intelligence, or between ignorance and knowledge.

Why is Krishna using this particular expression, instead of just saying "one who has correct knowledge"? Why does he involve the act of seeing? Because there is a big difference between theoretically *knowing* something and actually *realizing* it as if we were seeing it with our own eyes in front of us.

This importance of direct realization is highlighted in many verses of *Bhagavad gita* with the use of the word *pasyati* ("s/he sees") as in 2.29 (to see the soul), 2.69 (to see the night as day and day as night), 5.5 (to see Sankhya and Yoga as one only), 6.30 (to see me - Krishna - everywhere and everything in me), 6.32 (to see everyone as non-different from oneself), 13.28 and 14.19 (to see the Lord in all beings and circumstances), 13.30 and 18.16 (to see all actions are performed by *prakriti*), 13.31 (to see all beings situated in one although appearing separated), and *darshati* as in 2.16 (to see that real is eternal and false is temporary), 4.34 (to see the *tattva* directly), 5.18 and 6.29 (to see all beings equally), 11.4,

11.9, 11.10, 11.45 and 11.47 (to see the Universal Form), 11.50 and 11.52 (to see Krishna's form), 13.9 (to see the sufferings of birth, death etc), 13.12 (to see the value of knowledge).

These *jnana chaksu* ("eyes of knowledge") have been mentioned in other verses as well, both directly and indirectly:

ksetra ksetrajnor evam antaram jnana caksusa, bhuta prakriti moksam ca ye vidur yanti te param, "Those who see - with the eyes of knowledge - the *kshetra* and the *kshetra jna* and the difference between the two, and how to attain liberation from the nature of existence, will reach the Supreme." (13.35),

na tu mam sakyase drastum anenaiva sva caksusa, divyam dadami te caksuh pasya me yogam aisvaram, "However, you will not be able to see me with your physical eyes, therefore I am giving you divine eyes. Look at the wonders of my *yoga* power" (11.8),

sparsan kritva bahir bahyams caksus caivantare bhruvoh, pranapanau samau kritva nasabhyantara carinau, "Keeping outside (his/her concern/ attention) the external (objects/ concerns) and fixing one's eyes to the internal space between the eyebrows, balancing the *prana* and *apana*, controlling the breathing within the nose," (5.27).

By considering the use of these definitions in context with the other verses, it will be easier for us to understand what Krishna means in this verse about the contemplation of the movements of the *atman*. The proper knowledge we have studied in the genuine original scriptures and applied through our own experience is the clear vision that makes us understand when and how a *jivatman* has left the body, and to go where. To know the next destination of the *atman* in its transmigrations is even more important than simply realizing that it has left the body; life in each particular body is nothing but learning and practice for the final test - the

moment of death - when our actual progress will be evaluated and we will get admission in the next class.

We can see in any school that there are different levels of interest for studies in each particular student. This is why Patanjali in his *Yoga sutras* (1.22) explains that a student will attain good results proportionately to the effort invested (*mridu madhya adhimatratvat tato'pi visesah*, "there is a difference according to the intensity of the effort - mild, moderate or strong").

Applied to the present verse, this means that the lazy students just float along passively following the river flow according to the influence of the *gunas*, with a very weak effort, and the results are not very good. On the other hand, a student who makes a sincere effort in actively experiencing the lessons - studying and practicing in a systematic and enthusiastic way - obtains good results more quickly. To see this, we need the proper vision of knowledge (*jnana chaksu*) because foolish ordinary people will think that the lazy student is "cool" and the sincere student is a "nerd". Such idiots (*vimudha*) have no understanding of the purpose of the activities offered by the school, and are actually prolonging their sufferings unnecessarily as they put themselves in a condition in which they will fail their tests and therefore they will have to repeat them again and again. These stupid students simply hate and fear the examinations and tests along the course and at the end of the course, but remain unable to take the proper actions that would lead them more quickly to liberation from what they fear and hate. Fear is one of the prominent symptoms of *tamas* (18.35) and is considered by Krishna a disgraceful contamination (2.35, 2.56, 4.10, 5.28, 12.15, 16.1, 18.8). It confuses the mind and the intelligence, and even the senses (to the point of hallucinations), paralyzes the body and exposes us most vulnerably precisely to those dangers that we are so afraid of. No genuine religion or education can be based on fear.

VERSE 11

यतन्तो योगिनश्चैनं पश्यन्त्यात्मन्यवस्थितम् ।

yatanto yoginaścainam paśyantyātmanyavasthitam ।

यतन्तोऽप्यकृतात्मानो नैनं पश्यन्त्यचेतसः ॥ १५-११ ॥

yatanto'pyakṛtātmāno nainam paśyantyacetasah ॥ 15-11 ॥

yatantah: endeavoring; *yoginah*: the *yogis*; *ca*: and; *enam*: this; *pasyanti*: they see; *atmani*: in the self; *avasthitam*: situated; *yatantah*: endeavoring; *api*: although; *akrita atmanah*: those who have not realized the Self; *na*: not; *enam*: this; *pasyanti*: they see; *a cetasah*: without awareness.

"The sincere *yogis* see this *atman* situated (in the body), while those who are not engaged in the Self remain unable to see in spite of all their efforts, because they do not have the proper awareness.

After establishing the importance of one's sincere efforts (*bhunjanam va gunanvitam*) in acquiring the proper realization (*jnana caksusah*), Krishna immediately clarifies that effort alone is not sufficient - it must be guided by intelligence and proper awareness. Here we could equate effort with *karma* or *yoga*, and awareness with *jnana* or *bhakti* or *buddhi*.

We can push against a door with all our might, and break our fingers or toes trying to tear it down, but the same door can be opened very easily if we know where the key is. Action (*karma*) must always be supported by intelligence (*buddhi*) and knowledge (*jnana*). Similarly, renunciation (*sannyasa*) must be supported by dutiful action (*karma*) and intelligence (*buddhi*). Otherwise it will

all be a waste of time and energy, as confirmed in *Bhagavata Purana: srama eva hi kevalam* (1.2.8), *sramas tasya srama phalo* (11.11.18) and especially *sad varga samyamaikantah, sarva niyama codanah, tad anta yadi no yogan, avahayuh srama avahah*, "All the rules for the control of the mind and senses and body are merely a waste of time and energy if they do not bring us in contact with Reality" (7.15.28).

One needs to follow the proper scientific method clearly described in the original scriptures, as confirmed in *Bhagavad gita* (17.5) and *Bhagavata Purana* (4.18.5): *tan anadriya yo 'vidvan, arthan arabhate svayam, tasya vyabhicaranty artha, arabdhas ca punah punah*, "Those ignorant people who neglect the instructions of the *shastra* begin so many new schemes created by their minds, but they do not achieve success, no matter how long they try."

It is therefore pathetic to see so many so-called "yoga practitioners" putting so much effort in their gymnastic exercises to keep the body healthy and fit, and totally ignoring the actual purpose of *yoga* as explained so clearly in all the genuine original *shastra*. Such poor people are blind because they have no *jnana chaksu* and they can only see physical bodies, because they are *yatanto 'pi akrita atmanah*, "not endeavoring in the work of *atman*" and *acetasah* ("without awareness"). They are *vimudhas* (idiots), no matter how many certificates or even followers they have accumulated to "prove" their proficiency in "yoga".

The expression *akrita atmanah* indicates the absence of spiritual cultivation or spiritual activity, or transcendental realization; used together with *yatanto api* ("in spite of much effort") it highlights the lack of fundamental knowledge and proper guidance and training.

The word *yatah* ("effort", "control") is also the foundation of the expression *yatantah yoginah* ("those who strive for *yoga*"),

indicating the genuine *sadhakas*, who take *yoga* seriously. We find it in verses 2.60, 4.21, 5.26, 6.10, 6.12, 6.15, 6.19, 6.36, 6.43, 6.45, 7.3, 7.29, 8.11, 9.14, 12.11, 12.14, 18.7, 18.9, 18.23, 18.46, 18.47, 18.52, and especially in the following context: *asamyatna yogo dushprapa iti me matih, vasyatmana tu yatata sakyo 'vaptum upayatah*, "I say it is very difficult to attain *yoga* when the mind is not engaged, but there are appropriate methods by which one will be able to control the mind." (6.36), and *santustah satatam yogi yatatma dridha niscayah, mayy arpita mano buddhir yo mad bhaktah sa me priyah*, "The *bhakti yogi* is always contented, engaged in the self with firmness and determination, offering his mind and intelligence to my service. Such devotee is very dear to me." (12.14)

The word *akrita* is the contrary of *krita* ("determined, performed, perfected") that we find in the context of the following verses: 2.50, 4.15, 6.41, 14.16, 15.20, 17.21, 18.13, 18.16. The word *samskrita* (referring to the Sanskrit language) is also in the same etymological area, meaning "completely perfected". In this way we can better understand what Krishna is saying in this verse.

The genuine *yogis* are sincerely engaged in developing the *atman*, from *anu atman* to *svarupa siddhi*, and therefore they always keep their awareness or consciousness (*cetasah*) firmly focused on the realization of Transcendence.

What is "situated in the self" (*atmani avasthitam*)? The subject of these verses is *ayam* ("this"), expressed in verse 9, and refers to the *atman* that travels within the subtle body from one gross body to another, always in the company of the *param atman*. Other verses that express this concept of the *atman* engaged or situated in the *atman* are 2.55, 3.17, 3.43, 5.25, 6.5, 6.6, 6.7, 6.10, 6.15, 6.18, 6.19, 6.20, 6.25, 6.26, 6.28, 6.29, 6.36, 6.47, 7.18, 8.12, 13.25, 13.29. This shows the central place of importance that self realization has in the tradition of *yoga* and Vedic knowledge.

Abrahamic ideologies focus on establishing an official allegiance to a particular set of beliefs, rules and dogma in the worship of God as a separate Being, who has created us and demands our obedience. On the contrary, Vedic knowledge gives the special emphasis on the progressive development of the individual soul and the realization of its nature as a part of the supreme Soul.

Those who do not understand the self (*atman*) will never attain perfection, no matter how hard they strive, especially in regard to rules and regulations or allegiances.

VERSE 12

यदादित्यगतं तेजो जगद्भासयतेऽखिलम् ।

yadādityagatam tejo jagadbhāsayate'khilam ।

यच्चन्द्रमसि यच्चाग्नौ तत्तेजो विद्धि मामकम् ॥ १५-१२ ॥

yaccandramasi yaccāgnau tattejo viddhi māmakam ॥ 15-12 ॥

yat: that; *aditya gatam*: the rays of the sun; *tejah*: radiance; *jagat*: the universe; *bhasayate*: is illuminated; *akhilam*: entire; *yat*: that; *candramasi*: in the moon; *yat*: that; *ca*: and; *agnau*: in the fire; *tat*: that; *tejah*: radiance; *viddhi*: you should know; *mamakam*: from me.

"Know that the radiance that illuminates the entire universe, emanating from the sun, and seen in the moon and in fire, is (actually coming) from me.

The word *aditya* refers to the sun, Surya, the first and foremost among the sons of Aditi, the original Mother Goddess. The word

gatam, "gone", can be applied in more than one meaning: in this case, the radiance that we perceive as coming from the sun is originally emanating from the supreme Brahman. The light is coming through the sun, not just from the sun, as all radiance originally comes from the *atman*.

Only now mainstream scientific researchers are discovering (or re-discovering, more likely) the actual nature of matter and energy, and the secrets of the light within the atom. Even laymen know that atomic explosions liberate a huge amount of light when energy deploys, and that solar rays generate endless electrical power through photo voltaic cells and other methods. Already from antiquity, men had discovered how to instantly produce fire from sun rays through a system of lenses that focused the light.

All the radiance - light and heat - in the universe is ultimately coming from the Sun, including the radiance of the fire and the moon. Ancient cultures at global level worshiped (honored, respected, loved) the Sun, together with Fire: both sun and fire were strong symbols of God, power, and by extension, Time, as they can give life and death, too.

Surya is *sattva* and *satya*, and its *tejas* is God's *vibhuti* providing all necessities of life, directly and indirectly. The sun stirs the activities of creatures and men, and the fire is essential for us to cook, heat, power machines and perform *puja*. The moon is the other side of the power of the sun - the energy that cools and gives juice to the plants, while the direct hot energy creates the solid nutrients. Like the sun produces heat, light, sun rays, the light of the moon and even shade and shadow, the Supreme Consciousness has many apparently different energies (*parasya shaktir vividhaiva srutyate, svabhaviki jnana bala kriya ca, Svetasvatara Upanishad*, "It is said that the Supreme has a variety of energies from his own nature - specifically knowledge, strength and will power", 6.8).

Vishnu Purana (1.3.2) confirms: *saktayah sarva bhavanam, acintya jnana gocarah, yato 'to brahmanas tas tu, sargadya bhava saktayah, bhavanti tapatam srestha, pavakasya yathosnata*. "The energies in all creations are inconceivable for the human capacity of knowledge. They emanate from Brahman, but manifest the creation and all the rest. Such creative energies are comparable to the heat emanating from fire."

The original transcendental light of Brahman (*jyoti*) shines through the sun, the moon and the fire in this universe. The important concept of *tejas* has also been discussed in the commentaries to verses 7.9 and 10.36, where we have quoted the famous verse from *Brihad Aranyaka Upanishad* (1.3.28): *asato ma sad gamaya, tamaso ma jyotir gamaya, mrityor ma amritam gamaya*, "from what is temporary lead me to what is eternal, from darkness lead me to the light, from death lead me to eternal life".

This dazzling light (*jyoti*, *tejas*, etc) of the Brahman constitutes only the rays, or the emanations, from the Supreme Personality of Godhead, manifesting his majestic glories (*aisvarya vibhuti*). Such radiance is difficult to contemplate for the embodied souls; this was clearly stated in verse 12.5 (*kleso 'dhikataras tesham avyaktasakta-cetasam, avyakta hi gatir duhkham devavadbhir avapyate*). Therefore, *Isa Upanishad* (15) prays, *hiranmayena patrena, satyasyapihitam mukham, tat tvam pusann apavrnu, satya dharmaya dristaye*, "O sustainer of life, the face of Truth is covered by a golden veil. Please remove it, to show yourself to the true *dharma*".

The same nature of light and radiance is characteristic of the individual *atman*: *yatha prakasayaty ekah kritsnam lokam imam ravih, ksetra, ksetri tatha kritsnam prakasayati bhārata*, "O Bharata, just like the Sun illuminates all this world, in the same way the *kshetri* illuminates the entire *kshetra*." (13.34), *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." (7.5), *yad yad vibhutināt sattvam śrīmad urjitam eva va, tat tad evavagaccha tvam mama tejo 'msa sambhavam*, "Anything that is good, powerful, wonderful, or glorious, you should encounter, has come to existence as a part of my radiance." (10.41)

VERSE 13

गामाविश्य च भूतानि धारयाम्यहमोजसा ।

gāmāviśya ca bhūtāni dhārayāmyahamojāsā ।

पुष्णामि चौषधीः सर्वाः सोमो भूत्वा रसात्मकः ॥ १५-१३ ॥

puṣṇāmi cauṣadhiḥ sarvāḥ somo bhūtvā rasātmakaḥ ॥ 15-13 ॥

gam: the planets; *avisya*: entering; *ca*: and; *bhutani*: the beings; *dharayami*: I sustain; *aham*: I; *ojasa*: by my strength; *pusnami*: I give nourishment; *ca*: and; *aushadhih*: the herbs and plants; *sarvah*: all; *somah*: the moon; *bhutva*: becoming; *rasa atmakah*: I am the juice/ taste.

"Entering the planets and all beings, I sustain them. By my strength, I nourish all the herbs and plants, and as the moon I become the juice of everything."

The first word in this verse - *gam* - is extremely interesting.

In Sanskrit, it applies to the cows as well as to the planets, especially to Earth, the most important planet in this universe, where the destiny of the conditioned souls is created through choices. Only the human species of life can make karmic choices;

the species both under and above the human level are simply collecting the results of their past activities, for the good or the bad.

God is Consciousness and Existence: from within all states of beings - at macrocosmic and microcosmic level - he sustains their existence according to the plan of the supreme Intelligence. As this Existence is light and radiance, we understand that in this universe all things exist because of the energy and matter from the sun. The word *avisya* ("entering") indicates that the Supreme manifests within the blueprint of each existence, bringing it to being. We should not think that God enters objects that have been already in existence, because that would be a contradiction in terms.

Gam is similar in origin to the Greek word *gea* ("earth"), and it sheds a special light on the deep symbolic meaning of the sacrifices and rituals described in the Vedic *samhitas* and *brahmanas*. The connection between Earth and cows is very strong, as Mother Earth nourishes all her children with her milk in so many forms - see for example the description of the kingdom of Maharaja Prithu in chapter 18, canto 4 of *Bhagavata Purana*. In verses from 9 to 28, Mother Earth supplies all the different types of food that are characteristic of the great *rishis* and *devas*, as well of the human beings, animals, plants and so on.

The term *dharayami* ("I support") also applies to the law of gravity, personified by Sankarshana, also known as Ananta Sesha - whose iconography shows him in the form of a huge many-headed snake. Each and every planet rests on one of his heads, as small as a mustard seed compared to the immense body of Ananta. The power of gravity supports each planet in its orbit and floating and sticking together with the other planets.

Another very interesting word in this verse is *ojas* (*ojasa*). *Ojas* is the *maha dhatu*, the essence of health and power in the *dhatu*.

According to *Ayur Veda*, the main components or factors in the body are called *doshas*, *dhatu*s and *malas*. The *malas* ("impurities") are the waste materials that the body expels regularly - feces, urine, sweat etc - and serve as carriers to rebalance the system. The *doshas* are the "humors", such as *vata* (wind or air), *pitta* (bile or fire) and *kapha* (mucus or water/ earth), that balance each other rather like the three *gunas* (*sattva*, *rajas*, *tamas*): when all the *doshas* are working properly and in a quiet state, the body is healthy. Any imbalance or vitiation of the *doshas* results in suffering and disease. The seven *dhatu*s are *rasa* (lymph, digested fluid), *rakta* (blood), *mamsa* (flesh and muscles), *medas* (fat), *asthi* (bone), *majja* (bone marrow and nerves) and *sukla* (menstrual fluid and sperm, or hormones). The sum total of the energy of all *dhatu*s is called *ojas*; at universal level this same *ojas* nourishes all medicinal principles that bring health (*pusnami ausadhih*). *Bhagavata Purana* (2.10.26) confirms this in the description of the Virata Purusha.

The three vital principles in the body are *prana*, *tejas* and *ojas*, as the subtle counterparts of *vata*, *pitta* and *kapha* and manifestations of air, fire and water. So *prana* is carried mostly by air, *tejas* radiates and heats like fire, and *ojas* gives nourishment and coolness. The original principle of *ojas*, representing God, is present in all creation and especially in medicinal herbs, in the moon and in the juices of life. It is a complement to *tejas*, that represents God as the sun and fire.

We have already seen (4.29-30, 7.8, 10.9) how God is present in the *prana* as the *pranava omkara*, the original nature of the *atman*; we know that *prana* is carried by airs (gross and subtle) in the body. We have also seen (7.9-10, 10.36, 11.19, etc) how God is present as *tejas*, which is also the light and fire to which the *atman* is part - and we will also see in the next verse. Now we see (*rasa atmaka*) that God is present as the *ojas*, that is the *rasa* or taste and

the power of Soma, the moon. *Taittiriya Upanishad* (2.7.1) confirms: *raso vai sah, rasam hy evayam labdhvanandi bhavati*, "That (Brahman) is *rasa*, and by attaining it, one also becomes *rasa*."

Soma is one of the main names of the Godhead in the Vedic *samhitas*, and his worship is at the center of an entire set of Vedic *yajnas* - that have unfortunately been neglected in the course of the centuries. The health of the universe rests on the balance between *Soma* and *Surya*, *ojas* and *tejas*, water and fire - a couple of apparent opposites considered very much central in worship and theology in all ancient cultures, and still in the concepts of *yin* and *yang*.

In particular, *Bhagavata Purana* (5.22.10) speaks about *Soma* as the source of *amrita*, the nectar of immortality; this confirms the verse from the *Rig Veda* (8.43.3) *apama somam amrta babhuma*, "We have drunk the *soma (rasa)* and we have become immortal". Of course the same applies to the transcendental level of *bhakti* - by which the Personality of Godhead is invoked with reference to the Moon, as *Rama chandra* and *Krishna chandra*.

The deeper level of the concept of *soma* as *rasa atmaka* is the foundation of the science of *bhakti*. *Rasa* is the taste or feeling or nature of consciousness that constitutes the very nature of Brahman and Atman; it manifests in various sentiments as *santa*, *dasya*, *sakhya*, *vatsalya*, *madhurya* etc. The all-transcendental *ojas* that nourishes these *rasas* is the *amrita* (nectarine juice) of the names, activities, teachings, qualities, of the Godhead manifested in his *lilas* (*Bhagavata Purana* 1.1.3, 3.5.10, 3.16.6, 3.21.48, 4.7.44, 4.16.1, 4.16.3, 4.16.9, 4.29.41, 5.3.3, 6.9.39, 6.9.41, 7.9.43, 10.14.33, 10.15.50, 10.29.35, 10.85.59, 10.87.16, 10.87.21, 10.88.31, 11.6.19, 11.19.9, 11.19.20, 11.21.39, 12.10.26, 12.13.11, 12.13.14).

VERSE 14

अहं वैश्वानरो भूत्वा प्राणिनां देहमाश्रितः ।

aham vaiśvānaro bhūtvā prāṇināṃ dehamāśritaḥ ।

प्राणापानसमायुक्तः पचाम्यन्नं चतुर्विधम् ॥ १५-१४ ॥

prāṇāpānasamayuktaḥ pacāmyannaṃ caturvidham ॥ 15-14 ॥

aham: I am; *vaiśvanarah*: the fire (in the body); *bhūtvā*: becoming; *prāṇinam*: of all the living beings; *deham*: in the body; *āśritaḥ*: situated; *prāṇa āpana*: *prāṇa* and *āpana*; *samayuktaḥ*: keeping in balance; *pacami*: I cook/ digest; *annaṃ*: the food; *catur vidham*: that is of four types.

"I am the the presence of the Vaisvanara, situated in the bodies of all living beings, that keeps the balance between *prāṇa* and *āpana* and digests all the food, that is of four types.

This verse is confirmed by *Bṛihad aranyaka Upanishad* (5.9.1) in very similar words: *vaiśvanaro yo 'yam antah purusa yenedam annam pacyate*, "that is present as Vaisvanara (Agni) within man and digests the food".

The word *bhūtvā* ("becoming") is particularly interesting here, as it indicates a secondary manifestation of *tejas*, which also is a secondary manifestation, emanation or energy of the Godhead. Of course there is no real difference in quality between the source and the emanations; this Vaisvanara is to Agni what the *jivatman* is to *paramatman*, and the *manipura chakra* within human bodies is to Surya. This *vaiśvanara* is also called *jataragni*, "the fire within the belly". As the *atman* resides in the individual body together with the *param atman*, so the *vaiśvanara agni* resides in the individual body together with the source of the original Fire. In this regard,

we should remember that according to the Vedic categorization, within the description of "fire" we also find all the substances that burn and consume, such as strong acids and metabolic enzymes. This Jataragni or Vaisvanara Agni can therefore be assimilated to the hydrochloric acid and the enzymes of digestion that "cook" the food we consume and dissolve it into their fundamental nutrients and calories.

Agni (corresponding to Pitta) is one of the main names of the Godhead in the Vedic *samhitas* as well, together with Soma (corresponding to Kapha) and Vayu (corresponding to Vata), the Asvini kumaras (the healing principle), Surya (power of life), Indra (direction), Varuna (cleansing), Ritu (the seasons), Aryaman (death), Rudra (destruction), Usha (dawn, the beginning) as well as Vishnu (the transcendental principle).

Within the human body, the eater is *vaisvanara*, Surya, and fire, while the eaten is *soma*, Chandra, and juice or water. Without God we would not even be able to digest and assimilate our food, transforming it into energy. The 4 types of foods mentioned in this verse are those that are swallowed, chewed, licked, and sucked: the criteria of categorization are the amount and balance of the fire (*tejas*) and water (*ojas*) in each type of food.

The same logic applies to the function of balancing (*samayuktah*) of *prana* and *apana* in the body. The two functions of *agni* or digesting and *vayu* or breathing are strictly connected in the process of metabolism or assimilation of nourishment. The symbolism of the Sun and the Moon is not merely a "primitive" idea of "worshiping nature" - it indicates the deepest nature of our bodies and our world as manifestations of the Godhead. This concept has been affirmed in ancient cultures as the microcosm as reflection of the macrocosm, and is in stark contrast with the abrahamic ideologies that demonize the body and the world and deny their spiritual value.

The key of prosperity, happiness and realization is not "the good side winning", but the proper balance of the two halves of Reality - this applies to all the apparent opposites and dualities in the world, such as male-female, etc. This is why *Bhagavad gita* speaks so often about the importance of "overcoming duality" (2.45, 4.22, 5.3, 7.27, 7.28, 15.6, etc).

We need to read this verse in connection with 15.12: *yad aditya gatam tejo jagad bhasayate 'khilam, yac candramasi yac cagnau tat tejo viddhi mamakam*, "Know that the radiance that illuminates the entire universe, emanating from the sun and seen in the moon and in fire, is from me." This brings us to the other meaning of the word *samayukta* in this verse: the life airs (*prana* and *apana*) are directly cooperating with *tejas* and *ojas* for the life and health and power in the body. In the first meaning *samayukta* can be translated as "keeping the balance", while in the second meaning it can be translated as "engaged together with". There is no contradiction between the two meanings.

VERSE 15

सर्वस्य चाहं हृदि सन्निविष्टो

sarvasya cāham ḥṛdi sanniviṣṭo

मत्तः स्मृतिर्ज्ञानमपोहनञ्च ।

mattaḥ smṛtirjñānamapohanañca ।

वेदैश्च सर्वैरहमेव वेद्यो

vedaiśca sarvairahameva vedyo

वेदान्तकृद्वेदविदेव चाहम् ॥ १५-१५ ॥

vedāntakṛdvedavideva cāham ॥ 15-15 ॥

sarvasya: of all; *ca*: and; *aham*: I am; *hridi*: in the heart; *sannivistah*: situated; *mattah*: from me; *smrtih*: memory; *jnanam*: knowledge; *apohanam*: forgetfulness; *ca*: and; *vedaih*: through the *Vedas*; *ca*: and; *sarvaih*: all; *aham*: I am; *eva*: certainly; *vedyah*: I am to be known; *vedanta krit*: the author of *Vedanta*; *veda vit*: he who knows the *Vedas*; *eva*: certainly; *ca*: and; *aham*: I am.

"I am situated in the heart of all/ everything, and from me come memory, knowledge and forgetfulness. I am the purpose of the study of all the *Vedas*. I certainly am the creator of *Vedanta*, and the one who knows the *Vedas*."

Being Existence and Consciousness, God is present in everything and is the source of all knowledge. Just like the sun is the source of light, heat and shadow as well (as the temporary absence of light), Consciousness is also the cause of forgetfulness: the contrast must be present in this material world so that the conditioned souls may have the opportunity to make choices and thus learn and develop. The principle of memory is in the process of desire and choice, by which we are able to learn from our mistakes.

People who do not understand Vedic knowledge are usually baffled by the existence of evil and darkness in the world. Typically they do not believe in reincarnation or in the divine nature of the human soul, and believe that bad things happen to people because God is "inducing them in temptation" in order to test their faith and loyalty and subsequently sentence them to eternal paradise or hell. Since only the brief span of a lifetime is observed, such "testing" appear to be done whimsically, at random, and often with much cruelty and injustice. The professional class of priests in materialistic organized religions aggravate the problem by presenting their congregation with clever ways to solve the problem, mostly through bribing God and the priests with donations or offerings and prayers, or appeasing them with the practice of punishment they call "penance" (17.6) applied on

oneself or others, especially their dependents (children, women etc) for "atonement" or "purification". The first method is inspired by *rajas*, and the second by *tamas*. Another popular trick to "protect oneself from evil", inspired by material *sattva*, consists in wearing talismans or sacred images or objects. However, all these methods are ultimately useless because they do not address the actual issue, that is about the soul's evolution.

We are all required to develop from the stage of *anu atman* (atomic soul) to a fully fledged *siddha deha* (spiritual body). What we learn, remember or forget determines what joys and sorrows we come to face, and all this is part of a plan based on past *karma* - created by our own choices. At each moment, however, we have the opportunity to apply different choices to change our destiny, to deliberately try to remember or forget different things and therefore to change our *karma*.

So although memory and forgetfulness come from the supreme Consciousness, we still have a choice about them; all our past choices and experiences are stored in our subconscious (causal) mind, even if we may not remember consciously. By integrating our subconscious mind with the conscious mind, we can better understand our karmic journey and what we need to do to improve our evolution - in other words, "what is the right thing to do". At that point we may choose.

When we have made our choice, either in the positive or the negative, material nature carries on the activity under the control of God (Consciousness) who is the *antaryami upadrasta* - that we might call the "superconscious" mind or self.

God is therefore the supreme Teacher, the *param guru*, at the same time the Knower and the supreme object of Knowledge (*tattvam yaj jnanam advayam, Bhagavata Purana 1.2.11*). Since he is supreme Knowledge and all knowledge comes from him, he is the

original author of all Vedic scriptures as well as every other bit of wisdom and science that will ever exist, long before even Vyasa or any other Rishi appeared. He is the *veda-vit* ("he who knows knowledge") and the *vedanta-krit* ("he who makes the purpose of knowledge").

The purpose of all *Vedas* (a word that literally means "knowledge") is to attain the knowledge of Consciousness, or the consciousness of Knowledge, as these two are actually One. The entire Universal Tree of knowledge and material manifestation, with all the rituals and duties and sciences, ultimately leads to the supreme Consciousness only. Therefore the *Bhagavata Purana* clearly says: *naiskarmyam apy acyuta bhava varjitam, na sobhate jnanam alam niranjanam, kutah punah sasvad abhadram isvare, na carpitam karma yad apy akaranam*, "When devoid of love for God, scholarship is not beneficial even if it is selfless and free from vanity. This is exactly like the result of one's duty: even if selfless, when is it not offered to Isvara, it is not really auspicious" (*Bhagavata Purana* 1.5.12) and *kim va yogena sankhyena, nyasa svadhyayayor api, kim va sreyobhir anyais ca, na yatatma prado harih*, "What is the use of *yoga* or *sankhya*, *sannyasa*, the study of the scriptures, the auspicious activities, or anything else: if Hari is never remembered, the self will never be appreciated" (*Bhagavata Purana* 4.31.12).

This study of Vedic knowledge must be practiced in the proper way, through sincere dedication and practice, and not merely in an academic approach:

tat sadhu varyadisa vartma sam nah, samradhito bhagavan yena pumsam, hrdis thito yacchati bhakti pute, jnanam sa tattvadhigamam puranam, "Therefore, o great among saints, please instruct us on the auspicious path by which a human being can properly worship Bhagavan, who is situated in one's heart, and after having purified oneself with *bhakti*, receive from him the

knowledge of reality transmitted by the ancient *rishis*," (*Bhagavata Purana* 3.5.4),

yac chraddhaya srutavatya ca bhaktya, sammrjyamane hrdaye avadhaya, jnanena vairagya balena dhira, vrajena tat te anghri saroja pitham, "Simply by listening with faith and love about your instructions, and meditating on them within one's heart, by the strength of knowledge and detachment we will become pacified and attain your lotus feet" (*Bhagavata Purana* 3.5.42),

bhuyas tvam tapa atistha, vidyam caiva mad asrayam, tabhyam antar hrdis brahman, lokan drakasyasi apavritam, "Engage again in the austere search for knowledge, and under my protection, these will disclose all the worlds to you, within your heart, and you will be able to see them" (*Bhagavata Purana* 3.9.30).

Genuine knowledge is revealed through one's heart: this is how the sincere student can perceive the truth of the teachings s/he is receiving externally. This had already been clearly stated by Krishna in chapter 10: *tesam evanukampartham aham ajnana jam tamah, nasayamy atma bhava stho jnana dipena bhasvata*, "Out of my kindness for them, I destroy the darkness of ignorance from within their hearts, by the radiant light of knowledge" (10.11) and *tesam satata yuktanam bhajatam priti purvakam, dadami buddhi yogam tam yena mam upayanti te*, "To those who are always connected to me by serving me with love and devotion, I give the understanding by which they will come to me" (10.10).

This has been the orthodox method since the very beginning of time: *janmady asya yato 'nvayad itaratas carthesv abhijnah svarat, tene brahma hrda ya adi kavaye muhyanti yat surayah, tejo vari mrdam yatha vinimayo yatra tri sargo 'mrso, dhamna svena sada nirasta kuhakam satyam param dhimahi*, "I offer my respect to Bhagavan Vasudeva, from whom the creation of this universe proceeds. He is fully independent, fully conscious of purpose,

directly and indirectly. He inspired knowledge in the heart of Brahma. His nature overpowers even the Devas just like the optical illusions created by heat, water and earth. In this way by action and reaction he always manifests himself as the 'almost reality' of the three creations and all their places of existence. I meditate on him, the supreme truth, always self-sufficient, of whom illusion is just the absence of perception." (*Bhagavata Purana* 1.1.1).

VERSE 16

द्वाविमौ पुरुषौ लोके क्षरश्चाक्षर एव च ।

dvāvimau puruṣau loke kṣaraścākṣara eva ca ।

क्षरः सर्वाणि भूतानि कूटस्थोऽक्षर उच्यते ॥ १५-१६ ॥

kṣaraḥ sarvāṇi bhūtāni kūṭastho'kṣara ucyate ।। 15-16।।

dvau: two (kinds of); *imau*: these; *purusau*: *purushas*; *loke*: in the world; *ksarah*: mortal; *ca*: and; *aksara*: immortal; *eva*: certainly; *ca*: and; *ksarah*: mortal; *sarvani*: all; *bhutani*: beings; *kuta sthah*: permanently established; *aksara*: immortal; *ucyate*: it is said.

"In this world there are two types of *purushas*: those who are mortal and those who are immortal. All the living beings are called mortal, and the immortals are those who have a permanent position.

The focus of this verse is in the two categories of *kshara* and *akshara*. The word *kshara* carries the meanings of "change, modification, failure, falldown, destruction, death" and certainly applies to the material bodies in which the living entity has taken

birth. We may remember here that the word *bhuta* means "having come to being", and that the six major changes of such beings are birth, growth, duration, reproduction, dwindling, and death.

Conversely, *akshara* means "unchangeable, eternal, perfect, established, infallible, always existing, immortal". This definition has not been applied to the description of the *jivatman* in chapter 2, because the conditioned souls who have taken birth in a material body are indirectly subject to its changes and to the failures it entails.

This verse presents 2 categories of *purushas*: 1) the *nitya baddhas*, or individual conditioned souls who identify with the body and therefore suffer for its modifications life after life, 2) the *nitya siddhas*, or individual personalities that are established in their eternal position, from which they never fall down.

Some commentators believe that the definition of *nitya* ("always") refers to an ontological difference in nature of the two categories, and infer that the *nitya baddhas* can never attain liberation (*moksha*). This is incorrect, because such notion is opposed to the fundamental dharmic principle of compassion.

The actual meaning of this application of the term *nitya* is relative, just like we see sometimes the word *bhagavan* applied to great personalities who belong to the *vibhinnamsa* category (but whose consciousness is totally immersed in the supreme Consciousness), or the word *amara* ("immortal") applied to the Devas (for example, in *Bhagavata Purana* 1.15.8, 1.17.15, 2.7.13, 2.7.39, 4.2.4) who live a long life but ultimately will die, too, to leave their post to someone else. Therefore, the *nitya baddhas* can remain conditioned forever if they continue to choose illusion, but they will be able to gradually attain liberation from all conditionings if they consistently make progressive choices. On the other hand, the *nitya siddhas* may also have graduated to *moksha* from a

conditioned position of *nitya baddha* through a sincere and correct *sadhana*, but they are described as "eternally perfect" or "eternally liberated" because they will not fall down again.

In the next verse (15.18), Krishna will state that God is above both categories, therefore we can understand that both such *nitya baddhas* and *nitya siddhas* are individual souls or *vibhinamsas*, "distinct limbs/ cells" of the supreme Body of Consciousness. On the other hand, God himself in his many direct manifestations is defined as *svamsa*, "own limb", or maybe "clone".

The *nitya siddhas* do not have a material body made of material elements, not even subtle elements such as the bodies of the Devas. Their bodies (*siddha deha*) are made of pure consciousness, just like the body of the supreme Purusha, and just like everything else on the spiritual or transcendental level, including the objects (*siddha vastu*).

This is confirmed by several verses:

avyakto 'ksara ity uktas tam ahuh paramam gatim, yam prapya na nivartante tad dhama paramam mama, "That is said to be non-manifested, non subject to change, and the highest destination. By attaining it, one does not fall back. That is my supreme abode." (8.21),

yad aksaram veda vido vadanti visanti yad yatayo vita ragah, yad icchanto brahmacharyam caranti tat te padam sangrahena pravayaksye, "I will tell you in summary about that imperishable destination described by those who know the *Vedas*. That destination is entered by the great *sannyasis* who have become fully detached from material illusion, and who practice *brahmacharya* with the purpose of attaining that position" (8.11).

In this world (*iha loka*), this *akshara brahman* is perceived as the all-pervading Consciousness:

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),

evam satata yukta ye bhaktas tvam paryupasate, ye capy aksaram avyaktam tesam ke yoga vittamah, "The devotees worship you in complete dedication, while others meditate on the non-manifested eternal Reality: which of these two approaches is the highest understanding of yoga?" (12.1),

ye tv aksaram anirdesyam avyaktam paryupasate, sarvatra gam acintyam ca kuta stham acalam dhruvam, "Those who offer their worship correctly and sincerely to the the *akshara*, the indescribable, non-manifested, all-pervading, inconceivable, unchanging, never moving and eternal Existence," (12.3).

Arjuna has recognized Krishna as the personification of this Consciousness: *tvam aksaram paramam veditavyam tvam asya visvasya param nidhanam, tva avyayah sasvata dharma gopta sanatanas tvam puruso mato me*, "I believe you are the imperishable Reality, the supreme object of knowledge, the supreme foundation of this universe, the protector of the eternal unchangeable *dharma*. You are the eternal Purusha" (11.18) and *kasmac ca te na, nameran mahatman gariyase brahmano 'py adi kartre, ananta devesa jagan nivasa tvam aksaram sad asat tat param yat*, "Why shouldn't they offer their respects to you, o great Atman? You are more glorious than Brahma, the first creator (of this universe). O Lord of the Devas, abode of the universe, you are imperishable, because you are above the cause and the effect" (11.37).

We have also seen that the word *akshara* is normally used to indicate the *pranava omkara*: *om ity ekaksaram brahma vyaharan*

mam anusmaran, yah prayati tyajan deham sa yati paramam gatim, "Vibrating 'Om", this one transcendental syllable/ the syllable form of the Brahman, and remembering me, one who departs leaving the body attains the supreme destination" (8.13), and *maharsinam bhrigur aham giram asmy ekam aksaram, yajnanam japa yajno 'smi sthavaranam himalayah*, "Of the great Rishis, I am Bhrigu. Among the words, I am the one syllable. Of the sacrifices, I am the *japa*. Among the established things, I am the Himalaya" (10.25). By extension, because they emanate from the *akshara pranava omkara*, all letters of the alphabet (or sounds) are also considered imperishable: *aksaranam a karo 'smi dvandvah samasikasya ca, aham evaksayah kalo dhataham visvato mukhah*, "Of the letters, I am the A. Of the compound words, I am the *dvandva*. I am Time eternal, the creator, and the omnipresent (consciousness of the universe)" (10.33).

The *Bhagavata Purana* confirms: *tato aksara samamnayam, asrjad bhagavan ajah, antasthosma svava sparsa, hrasva dirghadi laksanam*, "From that *omkara*, the unborn Lord created all the vast range of sounds, the vowels short and long, the semi-vowels, the consonants and so on" (*Bhagavata Purana* 12.6.43).

VERSE 17

उत्तमः पुरुषस्त्वन्यः परमात्मेत्युधाहृतः ।

uttamaḥ puruṣastvanyaḥ paramātmetyudhāhṛtaḥ ।

यो लोकत्रयमाविश्य विभर्त्यव्यय ईश्वरः ॥ १५-१७ ॥

yo lokatrayamāviśya bibhartavyaya īśvaraḥ ॥ 15-17 ॥

uttamah: the supreme; *purusah*: *purusha*; *tu*: but; *anyah*: another; *param atma*: the *paramatman*; *iti*: like this; *udahritah*: it is said; *yah*: who; *loka trayam*: the three worlds; *avisya*: entering; *bibharti*: maintains/ supports; *avyaya*: imperishable; *isvarah*: the Lord.

"But there is another *purusha*, the Purushottama, the imperishable Lord. It is said that he maintains the three worlds by entering into them.

As we know from *Mundaka Upanishad* 3.1.1,2, *Svetasvatara Upanishad* 4.6,7, and *Bhagavata Purana* 11.11.6, within each body live the two *purushas* - the *jivatman* and the *paramatman*; the *paramatman* is Purushottama, always untouched by activity or its results, but supporting the *jivatman* and all the material manifestation that is required to facilitate the *jivatman*'s evolution.

While the conditioned soul eats the fruits of the tree of the body, the liberated soul has moved its attention to the supreme Soul and therefore remains on the same permanent position. However, the supreme Soul remains *uttama*, superior, even to the liberated or perfected soul.

This supreme *purusha* is Purushottama, also known as Isvara ("who controls") and Bhagavan ("who contains all perfections"). Individual souls can only participate to a marginal measure of such glories, either in the conditioned (*baddha*) or in the liberated state (*siddha*).

In the spiritual dimension (*vaikuntha*, *goloka*) the *nitya siddhas* have entered (*avisya* 8.11, 11.54, 18.55, etc) the supreme Consciousness and therefore they participate to this Krishna Consciousness, but they still remain *vibhinamsas*, or "distinct limbs", as confirmed in 2.12. Isvara is still the supreme, as confirmed in the *Upanishads*: *nityo nityanam cetanas cetananam*,

"the supreme eternal and the supreme conscious" (*Katha Upanishad* 2.2.13 and *Svetasvatara Upanishad*, 6.13). Like different cells in our bodies, each individual *vibhinna* participates to the total Consciousness but in its particular function. We cannot say that the hands are more "us" than our feet, or that our stomach is not really part of us, or less important than our head. Even more so, on the transcendental level the various parts of God's spiritual body can function in different ways without the limitations imposed by material consciousness. The *bhava* or *rasa* is one and full of happiness, knowledge and eternity, but still there are subtle hues that enhance the taste of spiritual relationships in *bhakti*. The form of our sentiments for God can be expressed as servitude, friendship, parental affection, conjugal affection and so on, but the fundamental *bhava* is always love that makes us forget everything else.

In this verse, the word *avisya* ("entering") can be connected with the definition of *avatara* ("who descends into this world"). The next word in the verse, *bibharti* ("sustains") is from the same family of the words *bhrit* and *bharta* ("sustainer, support") and illustrates the purpose of the *lilas* of *bhagavan* in this world.

How do the *avatars* sustain the world? *Bhagavad gita* has explained: *paritranaya sadhunam vinasaya ca duskritam, dharma samsthapanarthaya sambhavami yuge yuge*, "I manifest myself *yuga* after *yuga*, to protect the good people, destroy the evil doers and to establish *dharma*" (4.8).

We should not remain confused by the variety of forms, names and activities of the divine *avatars*, because Isvara is *avyaya*, "without modification". All such forms, names and activities exist simultaneously and eternally within the supreme Consciousness, and they become manifested temporarily only because of the nature of this material world, that is subject to time, space and duality.

The word *udahrtah*, "he is described", refers to the wealth of knowledge contained in Vedic scriptures, especially the *Upanishads*, as well as the *stutis* and prayers that celebrate the greatness of Isvara and his powers.

VERSE 18

यस्मात्क्षरमतीतोऽहमक्षरादपि चोत्तमः ।

yasmātkṣaramatīto'hamakṣarādapi cottamaḥ ।

अतोऽस्मि लोके वेदेच प्रथितः पुरुषोत्तमः ॥ १५-१८ ॥

ato'smi loke vedeca prathitaḥ puruṣottamaḥ ।। 15-18।।

yasmat: because; *ksaram*: mortal; *atitah*: beyond; *aham*: I am; *aksarat*: than the immortal; *api*: even; *ca*: and; *uttamah*: superior; *atah*: therefore; *asmi*: I am; *loke*: in the world; *vede*: in the *Vedas*; *ca*: and; *prathitah*: celebrated; *purusa uttamah*: the supreme *purusha*.

"Since I am beyond both the fallible and the infallible beings, I am the supreme Personality of Godhead. For this reason I am known both in the Vedic literature and among the people of the world as the Purushottama.

This chapter explains how the supreme Personality of Godhead manifests in this world for the benefit of the conditioned souls. By following his instructions and remembering his names, qualities and activities, a conditioned soul can become purified and attain perfection.

We have seen that the Supreme Personality of Godhead is the very same Consciousness that is also called Brahman and Paramatma: *vadanti tat tattva vidad tattvam yaj jnanam advayam, brahmeti paramatmeti bhagavan iti sabdyate*, "Those who know Reality say that Transcendence is Reality, the non-dualistic Knowledge that is called Brahman, Paramatma and Bhagavan" (*Bhagavata purana*, 1.2.11).

Just like Brahman is *avikari* ("without transformation"), Bhagavan is also eternally the same although he manifests in many names, forms, activities etc. Because in the transcendental dimension there is no time and space, everything is eternally and simultaneously one, like the Virata Rupa seen by Arjuna (11.13).

Bhagavan enters into the world and spreads like the Universal Tree, but is never entangled in it: *taya vilasitesv esu gunesu gunavan iva, antah pravista abhati, vijnanena vijrimbhita*, "Although he enters within the function of the *gunas*, and seem to be defined by them, he is never affected, because he is always fully conscious of the perfect knowledge (*vijnana*)" (*Bhagavata Purana*, 1.2.31).

We could say that Bhagavan is the "concentrated" form of Brahman: *brahmano hi pratishthaham amritasyavyayasya ca, sasvatasya ca dharmasya sukhasyaikantikasya ca*, "I am the foundation of the Brahman, the immortal, imperishable, eternal Brahman, that is the ultimate *dharma* and happiness, the One Reality" (14.27).

Purushottama is therefore *ksaram atita* and *aksarat uttama*, because for him there is actually no *kshara* or *akshara* - just like the sun is always radiant and luminous, day and night. We, too, will be able to see this constant radiance when we penetrate through the cover of the clouds and we break free from gravity and rise into space, closer and closer to the sun.

This is the real purpose of *yoga*, as Krishna has stated very clearly: *yoginam api sarvesam mad gatenantar atmana, sraddhavan bhajate yo mam sa me yuktatamo matah*, "Among all *yogis*, one who serves me with faith and full concentration, is considered by me as the greatest *yogi*" (6.47).

The real meaning of *bhakti* is to constantly focus on the supreme Consciousness and engage all activities on that level, just like each and every cell of our bodies function properly only when they work selflessly to carry out the activities of the entire body. This is why *bhakti* and *yoga* are totally incompatible with the dualistic mentality that separates us from the other beings and creates envy, cruelty, callousness, hatred, and so on. A true *yogi* and *bhakta* can never have these feelings towards other living beings or behave in such a way as to damage them. Of course this does not mean that s/he cannot hate ignorance and stupidity or cruelty, or s/he cannot kill an aggressor or eliminate what obstructs the material and spiritual progress of people. But the idea of beating someone up because they want to have the *darshan* of the Lord, or stopping the spiritual progress of others in any other way, is inconceivable for a true servant of Jagannatha.

VERSE 19

यो मामेवमसम्मूढो जानाति पुरुषोत्तमम् ।

yo māmevamasammūḍho jānāti puruṣottamam ।

स सर्वविद्भजति मां सर्वभावेन भारत ॥ १५-१९ ॥

sa sarvavidbhajati mām sarvabhāvena bhārata ॥ 15-19 ॥

yah: one who; *mam*: me; *evam*: thus; *asammudhah*: without confusion; *janati*: knows; *purusa uttamam*: the supreme *purusha*; *sah*: s/he; *sarva-vit*: one who knows everything; *bhajati*: worships; *mam*: me; *sarva bhavena*: in all *bhavas*; *bharata*: o descendant of Bharata.

"O descendant of Bharata, one who knows me in this way, without any confusion, as the Purushottama, knows everything and worships me in all beings/ sentiments.

A neophyte in the practice of *yoga* must remove himself from the company of others (6.10), but after attaining the level of Brahman realization (*brahma bhuta*, 6.27), one should overcome the limitations of duality: *sarva bhuta sthitam yo mam bhajaty ekatvam asthitah, sarvatha vartamano 'pi sa yogi mayi vartate*, "The *yogi* who worships me as the One who resides in all existences is situated in me; wherever s/he may go, s/he always remains in me" (6.31). This is the proper vision.

The most important part of the verse is *yah mam*, "s/he to me", expressing the union of consciousness and the focus of our awareness and work. We should train our mind (6.35) to focus on this *advaita jnana* that is Brahman, Paramatma, Bhagavan, and includes all states of being. This is only possible when we drop the delusions (*asam mudha*) that keep us in the foolishness of material identification and attachment, characterized by the limitations of time, space and duality. In fact, this is the one and only point of *Bhagavad gita* and the entire corpus of Vedic knowledge, that develops the endless variety of situations and lessons and tests we face in the "school of life".

Yoga is not about learning how to twist your body into a pretzel or lose weight so that you can enjoy more sense gratification and social acceptance - that is for *mudhas*, who are easily trapped by illusion. No amount of academic titles will help either, as long as

we maintain an asuric mentality: *na mam duskritino mudhah prapadyante naradhamah, mayayapahrita jnana asuram bhavam asritah*, "The evil doers, the foolish, the most degraded, those whose knowledge has been covered by delusion, and those who have chosen an asuric existence do not approach me" (7.15). We are going to learn more about the asuric mentality in the next chapter.

The last part of this verse (*bhajati mam sarva bhavena*) has two levels of meanings: one meaning is the immediate understanding of the presence of God in all beings and situations, and the other meaning refers to the intimate *bhakti rasa* that we can develop in our personal relationship with Bhagavan. In this deeper meaning, *sarva bhavena* can be translated as "in all *bhavas*, with all *bhavas*", where *bhava* means "nature, feeling, sentiment".

There is no limit in approaching Purushottama through the *rasas* or *bhavas*: this relationship is exquisitely personal (*yah mam*) and does not depend on anything external - not even on the *guru's* instructions or lineage, that is merely indicative. The *siddha deha* develops from the *anu atma* according to its original nature, and is only determined by our full satisfaction - when we perceive that we have "grown enough" and that is the position we want to keep.

In this perspective, the realization of Brahman is *sambandha* ("connection") through the supreme Consciousness, Paramatma is *abhidheya* ("knowledge") through the constant instructions we receive from the supreme Guru from within our hearts, and Bhagavan is *prayojana* ("engagement") in the functions of service to the Supreme as his limb or cell (*amsa*).

VERSE 20

इति गुह्यतमं शास्त्रमिदमुक्तं मयानघ ।

iti guhyatamaṁ śāstramidamuktaṁ mayānagha ।

एतद्बुद्ध्वा बुद्धिमान्स्यात्कृतकृत्यश्च भारत ॥ १५-२० ॥

etadbuddhvā buddhimānsyātkṛtakṛtyaśca bhārata ॥ 15-20 ॥

iti: thus; *guhyatamam*: the most secret; *sastram*: the *shastra*; *idam*: this; *uktam*: explained; *maya*: by me; *anagha*: o sinless one; *etat*: this; *buddhva*: by understanding; *buddhiman*: intelligent; *syat*: one becomes; *kṛita kṛityah*: the most successful in accomplishments; *ca*: and; *bharata*: o descendant of Bharata.

"O sinless descendant of Bharata, I have thus explained the greatest secret that is contained in all scriptures. By understanding it, one becomes (most) intelligent and accomplishes the greatest task (in life).

In this verse Krishna addresses Arjuna calling him *anagha* and *bharata*, usually translated as "sinless" and "descendant of Bharata". The meaning of *anagha*, however, should be understood carefully and not superimposed with concepts that are alien to Vedic culture. Just like its synonym *papa*, the word *agha* does not correspond exactly to the English "sin", because it is not based on the same abrahamic ideology, where a human being is condemned because of disobeying the orders of God or the priests. In the Vedic logic, *agha* or *papa* is a black spot on one's character caused by a bad choice, a mistake, an act of weakness, selfishness or ignorance that needs to be counteracted and purified by positive actions. It is also a debt to be repaid, a duty that has not been fulfilled yet: this is the meaning to which we should connect the

expression *krta krityah* "accomplished duties", referred to the supreme success in life.

This chapter has summarized the message of *Bhagavad gita*, showing the realization of Purushottama as the purpose of the entire Universal Tree, the Vedic knowledge and the cosmic manifestation. This was also stated in chapter 4: *sreyan dravya mayad yajnaj jnana yajnah parantapa, sarvam karmakhilam partha jnane parisamapyate*, "O Arjuna, better than the sacrifice of one's wealth is the sacrifice of knowledge. O Arjuna, the entire scope of all the activities must culminate in knowledge" (4.33).

This knowledge is the same explained in *Bhagavata Purana*, where the Lord had stated: *jnana parama guhyam me yad vijnana samanvitam, sarahasyam tad angam ca grihana gaditam maya, yavan aham yatha bhavo yad rupa guna karmakah, tathaiva tattva vijnanam astu te mad anugrahat*, "My supreme knowledge is hidden, and it is applied in practice. Try to understand it while I am explaining it, with its secrets and implications. Let this knowledge be realized by you by my kindness: as it is I who manifest the existence of all forms, qualities and activities." (*Bhagavata Purana*, 2.9.31-32).

This deep knowledge is expressed in the following *catuh sloki* (2.9.33-36):

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

rite 'rtham yat pratiyeta na pratiyeta catmani, tad vidyad atmano mayam yathabhaso yatha tama, "Whatever appears to be of value

or without value, is only in relationship with me. You must know that everything (in this world) is just the shadow of my *maya*, like darkness is a shadow (of light)",

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

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