

BHAGAVAD GITA

The Global Dharma for the Third Millennium

Chapter 16

Translations and commentaries
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Chapter 16

Daivasura sampada vibhaga yoga

The yoga of differentiating between the characteristics of the divine and the demoniac personalities

This chapter of *Gita* is most useful practically in our daily life and personal progress, and continues the extremely valuable instructions that Krishna has given in chapter 14 about the three *gunas*. It will be followed by chapter 17, that explains more specifically how religious people can be classified according to the principles of *daiva asura sampada* and the three *gunas*. Finally, chapter 18 will again summarize the contents of *Bhagavad gita*.

By a general overview of Krishna's logical thread in the dialogue with Arjuna, we can see that he starts by addressing Arjuna's feelings of depression and discouragement, and then he leads him away from the faulty and materialistic ideas about religion (*laukika sraddha*) and towards the correct teachings of the *shastra* about the realization of *atman* and *brahman* and the science of *yoga* in its various aspects.

This is the same journey each one of us needs to take, both at individual and collective level. Still today, many people are confused by foolish and misleading ideas about religion and end up creating a lot of problems, in spite of their good intentions. This chapter will clarify everything.

The famous saying, *sarva dharma sama bhava*, has been very badly misinterpreted by foolish and ignorant people to mean that any belief is equally good, as long as we call it "religion" and contains some notion of "God".

The mistake originally comes from a serious lack of understanding about the word *dharma*, that is stupidly translated as "religion" in the abrahamic sense - a definition that does not include the fundamental respect for the universal and eternal principles of ethics that constitute *dharma*. Indeed, abrahamic ideologies are characterized by the absolute necessity to subordinate these universal and eternal principles of ethics (usually called "conscience" or "human values") in favor of the sense of blind and absolute loyalty and obedience to the orders of God and his priests. Therefore, such ideologies may be called "religions" but certainly not *dharma*.

A widespread ignorance of the actual Vedic knowledge has brought many Hindu activists to try to "reinvent the wheel" by offering novel solutions to the problem of incompatibility between abrahamic ideologies and the concept of *dharma*, so we have seen a vast range of foolish propositions - from "banning the name 'religion'" (that is, banning the use of English language in this particular instance) to "creating new *shastra* to fit the times" to "denying the idea of a God in Hinduism". At best, these are naive and simplistic ideas that will not solve the problem.

True, we need to stop using words without understanding their meaning, and we need to approach the original *shastra* (*sruti*)

without being distracted by obsolete interpretations limited by time, place and circumstances that do not exist any more. But just using the name '*dharma*' will not solve the problem if we keep giving it the same old faulty meaning of 'religion': the problem is not merely in the language, the problem is in the meaning.

The same applies for the real meaning of the terms *daiva* and *asuri*, that are normally translated as "divine" and "demonic". We can choose to use the original Sanskrit without translation, just as we normally do with difficult definitions such as *yoga*, *karma*, *rishi*, *vigraha*, *sannyasa*, *brahmachari*, etc, but that does not exempt us from making an effort to understand the actual significance of the original Sanskrit words.

To do that, we need to disengage the words "divine" and "demonic" from their abrahamic sense, that indicates separate entities who are distinct from human beings and who determine *from the outside* what the behavior of human beings will be. This particular perspective is due to the fact that in abrahamic ideologies a human being can never progress or evolve in consciousness but is always only a helpless sinner, subject to either God (Yahweh, Allah etc) or the Devil (Satan) and their representatives.

In Vedic terminology, *daiva* and *asura* indicate qualities (*gunas*) that are expansions of the original three *gunas* described in chapter 14. The idea that some specific super-human beings come to be called *devas* and *asuras* indicate that such individuals have considerably developed the corresponding qualities and mentality in their own behavior and attitude. This is the meaning of the word *sampada*, "characteristics".

It is important to understand that such *devas* and *asuras* are separate individual *atmans* who are only responsible for their own behavior, and not for the behavior of human beings. Both the

divine and demoniac natures are merely combinations of the neutral energies of the Supreme. Taking birth in a human body constitutes an intermediate position between *devas* and *asuras* because it enables us to choose in either direction, and therefore we will then become a *daiva* or an *asura* person individually because of our choices, as explained in 2.32, 2.43, 7.23, 9.20-21, 9.25, 14.14-15, 14.18, 16.20, 16.22.

Krishna had already briefly introduced the subject in chapter 12: *moghasa mogha karmano mogha jnana vicetasah, raksasim asurim caiva prakritim mohinim sritah*, "(Those people who) entertain delusional desires, engage in delusional activities, and are delusionally convinced of their knowledge but are confused by incorrect awareness, certainly take shelter in the bewildering nature of *raksasas* and *asuras*" (9.12).

Some materialistic speculators have manufactured a theory according to which the definitions of *deva* and *asura* merely indicate two human racial groups, respectively characterized by white and black complexion and identified as the "Aryan" invaders who brought Sanskrit to India, and the original Dravidian inhabitants of the subcontinent. According to this colonial speculation, all the Vedic and Puranic stories and references are reduced to clever and biased propaganda created by the victorious invaders who demonized the conquered and enslaved indigenous peoples and distorted the original historical facts. In this hallucinated perspective, they proceed to "reinterpret" for example the story of Rama versus Ravana as the romanticized adventure of a Caucasian nomadic marauder who needed some good excuse to vandalize the peaceful and happy land of a beloved chief of black-complexioned peoples. They conveniently forget important details of the story - i.e. Rama is always described as black in complexion, and hailing from a highly urbanized civilization with an extremely ancient settlement in Ayodhya.

But over and above all, these superficial scholars neglect to notice that the strict ethical code of Vedic civilization and the divine qualities it values so much.

VERSE 1

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।

śrībhagavānuvāca ।

अभयं सत्त्वसंशुद्धिर्ज्ञानयोगव्यवस्थितिः ।

abhayaṁ sattvasaṁśuddhirjñānayogavyavasthitih ।

दानं दमश्च यज्ञश्च स्वाध्यायस्तप आर्जवम् ॥ १६-१ ॥

dānaṁ damaśca yajñaśca svādhyāyastapa ārjavam ॥ 16-1 ॥

sri bhagavan: the wonderful Lord; *uvaca:* said; *abhayam:* fearless; *sattva samsuddhih:* complete purification of *sattva*; *jnana yoga:* *jnana yoga*; *vyavasthitih:* the specific position; *danam:* charity; *damah:* restraint, control of the senses; *ca:* and; *yajnah:* sacrificial action; *ca:* and; *svadhyayah:* study of the science of the self; *tapah:* austerity; *arjavam:* simplicity.

The wonderful Lord said:

"Fearlessness, the purification of one's existence, the constant application of knowledge, generosity, control of one's senses, engagement in sacred activities and study of *atma vidya*, austerity and simplicity,

The previous chapter ended (15.19) with Krishna telling Arjuna, "One who knows me as the Purushottama knows everything and worships me in all beings."

However, we need to understand what are the external symptoms of such a great soul, as Arjuna had mentioned before (2.54, 14.21). Krishna has listed such qualities in 2.56-57, 12.14-19, 13.8-12, 14.22-25 and in 14.6 he has explained the external symptoms of *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. The description will become even more detailed in this chapter and continue in chapters 17 and 18.

The first quality listed in this verse is *abhaya*, "fearlessness". We have already found it as a fundamental requirement in verses 2.56, 4.10, 5.28, and 12.15. Also, verse 2.35 mentioned fear as a cause for disgrace. But what is fear?

Bhagavata Purana (11.2.37) explains: *bhayam dvitiyabhinivesatah syad isad apetasya viparyayo 'smrtih, tan mayayato budha abhajat tam, bhaktyaikayesam guru devatatma*, "Fear arises when the consciousness is focused on duality (*dvitiya*). One who separates himself from the Lord is confused by illusion and forgetfulness (ignorance). Therefore intelligent people should offer a devotional worship to the Lord, who is the *atman* of the *guru* and the *devas*."

The same is also confirmed by the *Brihad aranyaka Upanishad* (1.4.2), *dvitiyad vai bhayam bhavati*, "fear is born of duality", and *brahman is abhayam*, "free from fear" (4.4.25). So we can understand that fear originates from the ignorance constituted by *ahankara* and *mamatva*, and focuses on the possibility of a loss in these areas of the consciousness. We are afraid of damage to our bodies and mind, or to the bodies and minds of those persons we consider "ours" (family, friends, etc), or to "our" objects (wealth, social position, safety of one's home, etc) or even to "our" mental certainties and beliefs that may be proven false and illusory. Fear usually generates hatred and violence, and is described as a major symptom of *tamas* (ignorance).

On the practical level, such losses may be caused by the mistakes of our own mind and body (*adhyatmika klesa*), by the actions of

other creatures (*adibhautika klesa*) or by the conditions created by the higher powers of the universe (*adhidaivika klesa*), and therefore our mind creates the duality between enemy and friend.

In this perspective, the enemy is someone who gives us sorrow by taking something good away from us (or giving us something unpleasant) and the friend is someone who gives us joy by gifting us with something good (or relieving our sufferings due to unpleasant things). One who has realized Brahman knows very well that both positions are illusory. Each living entity receives the joys and sorrows that are due to his own previous activities (*karma*), and the *atman* is never really touched by any loss, or even by separation of consciousness and interests from the Supreme. If we lose something, it means it was never really ours to begin with (2.16). These were the first elementary teachings offered by Krishna at the beginning of the *Bhagavad gita*.

The expression *sattva samsuddhi* has various levels of meanings, because *sattva* can indicate the *sattva guna*, one's existence (the nature of *sat*), the mind (as a form of existence that survives the gross body), and the *atman* (that exists eternally). The word *samsuddhi* means "complete purification", which applied in this context produces the following translations: 1) "purification of material *sattva guna* into *visuddha sattva* or transcendental goodness", 2) "purification of one's existence through the proper activities and prescribed duties", 3) "purification of one's mind and heart through the proper consciousness and realization" or "a pure heart", 4) "purification of the identity from all material superimposition".

The next expression is *jnana yoga vyavasthiti*. We know that *jnana* means "knowledge", *yoga* means "union, engagement, connection", and *vyavastha* means "position", also used with reference to the *varna vyavastha* (the "occupational position in society").

So *vyavasthiti* means "established position". The translation of the complete expression can therefore be, "being established in union with the Supreme through knowledge", "being consistently engaged in the study of the scriptures", and "being in the category of those people who cultivate knowledge".

Connecting all the three elements of the first line, we understand that a person who has purified his/ her mentality from material identification and realized the Self (*atman/ brahman*) is free from fear and always situated in the consciousness of Reality. By connecting the last element of the first line and the first element of the second line we also obtain something very interesting: *jnana yoga vyavasthiti danam*, that is the gift of distributing solid knowledge - the greatest possible form of charity, as Krishna will state at the conclusion of *Bhagavad gita* (18.68-70). However, this little jewel is very appropriately hidden in the fold between the two lines, because such knowledge is the greatest secret (9.1, 9.2, 11.1, 15.20, 18.63, 18.64, 18.67) and it should not be given to those who are not able to appreciate it (18.67).

The second line of the verse connects *danam* ("generosity" or "charity"), *dama* ("restraint"), *yajna* ("performing the sacred duties", and also "spirit of sacrifice"), *svadhyaya* ("personal study of *shastra*"), *tapas* ("austerity"), and *arjavam* ("simplicity"). While the first line speaks about the mentality or activities of the mind and consciousness, the second line speaks about behavior or the activities of the body. One should be the mirror of the other (due to *satyam* and *arjavam*).

The *danam* recommended in this verse must be supported by *suddha sattva* or at least by *sattva*, and so are the practices of self control, the ritual performances and worship, the austerities and so on. Therefore they are mentioned together with *svadhyaya* and *arjavam*. *Svadhyaya* is the personal study of *shastra* especially about *atma vidya*, while *arjavam* is simplicity, in the sense of

honesty, truthfulness and straightforwardness: these two qualities are transcendental and powerful enough to protect us from all material contamination. As we will see in the next chapter (17), even charity, austerity and religious worship can be categorized according to the three *gunas* as *daivi* or *asuri* (divine or demoniac), and bring results accordingly.

Previous commentators have highlighted the fact that the requirements listed in this verse can be applied electively by category according to the *ashramas* or stages of life. In this perspective, a *brahmachari* must first learn fearlessness and purification of one's existence by firmly establishing himself in *jnana yoga* (applied knowledge, spiritual and material) and by strictly observing the dharmic principles of *yama* and *niyama*.

Then he enters family life as *grihastha* and engages in charity, self control and performance of his sacred duties (ritualistic ceremonies and professional work), and at the onset of old age (*panchasa urdhvam vanam vrajet*, "after the age of 50 one should move to the forest") he enters the order of *vanaprastha* and then *sannyasa*, two stages in which he must concentrate on *svadhyaya* (the study of transcendental *atma vidya* only, foregoing material knowledge), as well as on austerity and simplicity.

Family life, called *grihastha ashrama*, is the most important stage of life because a family man's first duty is to feed and protect all the other members of society, just like the king protects and feeds all the *prajas*. And just like a king, a *grihastha* is entitled to enjoy all types of dharmic sense gratification, but he pays for such goodies by properly discharging his duties.

He is entitled (*adhikara*) to kindle the fire for cooking meals for himself and his family (which includes servants and household animals), but he must honor the fire with a daily *homa*, and must also distribute sufficient food to guests and mendicants - mostly

brahmacharis, *vanaprasthas* and *sannyasis*, but also all meritorious and needy people, as well as stray cows, dogs, crows, and so on.

Similarly, *dama* (restraint) is required specifically for a *grihastha* because of the dangerous nature of *kama* (desire), very well explained in verses 2.62 to 2.64 and 3.37 to 3.40. Desire in itself is not to be condemned (7.11), but our desires should always be purified by the association with the divine that turns sense gratification into *prasada* (2.64, 2.65). This is the meaning of *yajna*, sacred action. Especially in Kali yuga, it is not necessary to engage in very complicated and expensive ritualistic ceremonies; we can successfully perform *yajna* by investing time and resources in any sacred action, including the *japa yajna* (10.25) and the *sankirtana yajna* (10.9), considered the best by Krishna. However, we should not think that all religious activities (*yajna*, *dana* and *tapas*) will bring the same results. As we will see in the next chapter, especially in verses 17.3 to 17.6 and 17.11 to 17.28, only some religious activities are actually beneficial, while some are useless or even detrimental to our progress and to the progress of others.

We should be very careful to avoid misunderstanding about the concept of *arjavam*. True simplicity is born from *sattva*, not *tamas*. Simple does not mean stupid, ignorant, dull, lazy or careless: it means brilliant - clean, beautiful, true, effective. There is a great difference between "simple" and "simplistic". A person who is truly simple-minded is honest and affectionate or friendly to all (*satya saralata prema*). In a society controlled by *asuras*, however, these qualities are usually treated as defects. As *saralata* ("grasping the essence of the issue") and *akapatya* ("freedom from hypocrisy"), *arjavam* ("simplicity, straightforwardness") protects all our religious activities from the evils created by *rajas* and *tamas* as explained in chapter 17.

It is important to understand here that the *devas* who reside on the higher planets are not conditioned souls. They are defined by the same divine qualities that characterize Vishnu, who is also a *deva*. Those who still have a separate feeling in their consciousness/nature, but are situated in *sattva* (the material *guna* of goodness) are allowed to take birth on the higher planets, where they live for a certain number of celestial years, and if they have not graduated to *suddha sattva* (transcendental goodness), they return to the human level to continue their progress (9.21).

However, the primary Devas (the Adityas, Vasus, Rudras, Asvini, Marutas etc, what to speak of Shiva and Brahma) who are in charge of the administration of the universe are direct manifestations of the supreme and complete Consciousness - directly God. They are the various Personalities of the Godhead.

VERSE 2

अहिंसा सत्यमक्रोधस्त्यागः शान्तिरपैशुनम् ।

ahimsā satyamakrodhastyāgaḥ śāntirapaisunam ।

दया भूतेष्वलोलुप्त्वं मार्दवं ह्रीरचापलम् ॥ १६-२ ॥

dayā bhūteṣvaloluptvaṁ mārdaṁ hrīracāpalam ॥ 16-2 ॥

ahimsa: freedom from hatred; *satyam*: truthfulness; *akrodhah*: freedom from anger; *tyagah*: renunciation; *santih*: peacefulness; *apaisunam*: freedom from wickedness; *daya*: compassion; *bhutesu*: towards (all) beings; *aloluptvam*: freedom from greed; *mardavam*: kindness; *hrih*: modesty; *acapalam*: determination.

"freedom from hatred, truthfulness, freedom from anger, renunciation, peacefulness, freedom from wickedness, compassion towards all creatures, freedom from greed, kindness, modesty and determination,

The list of the symptoms of a beneficial personality (*sivam*) continues; it applies both to Bhagavan himself and to all those who have divine qualities.

A person who has realized the *jnana tattva* (*Bhagavata Purana* 1.2.11) as Brahman, Paramatma and Bhagavan, and has become One with God, has no reason for fear, and is always detached from material possessions and engaged in sacred activities (16.1). In this verse we see the other symptoms of such realization, in one's external behavior towards other beings (*ahimsa, satya, akrodha, tyaga, santi, apaisuna, daya*) and in one's attitude towards oneself (*aloluptvam, mardavam, hri, acapalam*).

The first and arguably the most important definition in this verse is *ahimsa*, usually translated simplistically as "non violence". We have elaborated on this word already, as the definition is also found in verses 10.4 and 13.8 (and it will be mentioned again in 17.4). The importance of *ahimsa* is also confirmed in *Bhagavata Purana* (1.18.22, 3.28.4, 4.22.24, 7.11.8, 11.3.24, 11.17.21, 11.18.42, 11.19.33). *Ahimsa* is also mentioned in the *yoga shastra* as one of the fundamental requirements in the *yama* and *niyama* regulations, so much that some saints and teachers have come to present it as "the highest *dharma*" (*ahimsa paramo dharmo*). In this sense, it is equated with *daya* ("compassion") and similar qualities such as *maitri* ("friendliness") etc.

However, the concept of *ahimsa* can be dangerously misunderstood due to the influence of *tamas* (ignorance, laziness, stupidity, inertia, callousness, carelessness, fear, etc). The word *ahimsa* derives from the verb *himsati* ("to hate"), and therefore it

applies to the consciousness or mentality or motivation, and not to the action in itself. Therefore one can remain perfectly situated in *ahimsa* even while killing thousands of beings and destroying objects, if such forceful action is directed against aggressors and obstacles to the progress of people and is applied without personal selfish motivations. In fact, in some circumstances *ahimsa* actually demands sufficiently forceful and even lethal action (that some people could call "violence") in order to protect good and harmless persons and creatures.

However, we need to be honest about our motivations (*satyam*) and apply force without anger (*akrodha*), just like a good surgeon uses a sharp knife to remove a tumor but always keeps a cool head and does not damage healthy cells. We must always be extremely careful not to cause unnecessary pain, injury or death, because such damage will create a karmic debt that must be paid sooner or later.

Satyam ("truthfulness") is actually the supreme and most fundamental principle of *dharma*, the last that remains to support the progress of the universe when all others have disappeared, as clearly stated in *Bhagavata Purana* (1.17.24-25). Without *satyam* ("truthfulness") no other ethical or religious principle can survive or support one's progress.

The word *akrodha* ("freedom from anger") is also very important, and directly connected with *ahimsa* ("freedom from hatred"). The actual meaning of *krodha* applies to the vindictive anger that is born out of frustration of one's selfish desires in attachments and identifications, as beautifully explained in verses 2.62 to 2.63, and in verses 3.36 to 3.41. When there is no selfish desire for one's sense gratification or egotism, the definition of *krodha* does not apply. This freedom from anger is mentioned as a major requirement for *yoga* in verses 2.56, 4.10, 5.23, 5.26, 5.28, and again in 18.53, and *krodha* ("rage") is mentioned many times in

this chapter as a key characteristic of *asuras* or people with a demoniac mentality.

Just like *ahimsa*, the divine quality of *akrodha* does not contradict forceful action against aggressors or obstacles to the progress of society. Sometimes we need to display anger to shake people out of their complacency and stupidity, and convince them to stop their wrongful and damaging activities. This is applied especially to the roles of king, *guru*, teacher and parent, when they are facing stubborn subordinates who will not listen to proper reason and logic. But such anger is only external and temporary, never internal or prolonged, because it is not fed by selfish attachments. Stupid people are often incapable of understanding this point and therefore they praise the behavior of those who externally remain quiet and even smiling, but internally cultivate a seething rage, that is bottled up and festers into poison to emerge later with much greater damage to everyone, exploding into *himsa* ("violence, hatred, injury").

We can see many cases in which great *rishis* and *brahmanas*, as well as *avatars*, openly displayed anger towards aggressors or offenders who were obstructing the progress of the universe, and even cursed them in order to teach them a lesson. However, these great souls were not victim of confusion and frustration, but remained fully conscious and balanced internally, and they were always acting for the benefit of all those who were involved, and never caused any real damage.

This of course does not apply to the anger and violence of a so-called God who sentences his creatures to the eternal torture of hell or kills them indiscriminately and untimely in a flood (or in any other disaster, war etc) when believing that they only have one single life (no reincarnation). There is certainly nothing *daiva* ("divine") in that - there is just hypocrisy (*asatyam*, *kapatya*). This is why the next four divine qualities are described as *tyaga*

("renunciation"), *santi* ("peacefulness"), *apaisunam* ("freedom from wickedness") and *daya* ("compassion") towards all beings (*bhutesu*), especially towards innocent animals and all harmless creatures. A so-called religion that does not develop these characteristics visibly, deeply and consistently in all its followers (what to speak of its "authorities") is nothing but a dangerous fraud.

The divine quality of *santi* ("peacefulness") is created through *dama* (restraint) connected with *tyaga* (renunciation to identifications and attachments, especially regarding the lower *gunas*). The *santi mantra* of *Yajur veda samhita* (36.17) evokes this peacefulness in the entire universe: *om dyauh santir antariksam santih, prthivi santir apah santir ausadhayah santih, vanaspatayah santir visvedevah santir brahma santih, sarvah santih santir eva santih, sa ma santir edhi, om santih, santih, santih*. Here is the translation: "Peace in the sky! Peace in deep space! Peace on earth! Peace in water! Peace in the medicinal plants! Peace in the forests! Peace among all the Devas! Peace in Brahman! Everywhere is peace, peace, peace, only peace."

The word *apaisunam* can be translated as "freedom from wickedness", but it covers a lot of meanings, as under "wickedness" it includes fault finding, backbiting, slandering, and the intention to hurt others. The word *aloluptvam* also conveys several meanings, as *lupta* can refer to booty, or things that have been stolen, destroyed, violated, hurt, lost, and broken. So *aloluptvam* refers to the character of a person who would never commit such bad actions. The word *mardavam*, "kindness", derives from *mridu*, that contains the meanings of gentle, soft, smooth, and benign.

The word *hri* (*hrih*) is translated as "modesty", and contrarily to what many people would expect, it was not listed in the qualities of ideal women (10.34). This word, and its synonym *lajja*, indicate

freedom from arrogance and vanity, and a mild and humble disposition, that enhances the glory of divine personalities. Unfortunately, sometimes it is misinterpreted as "shyness", as in a tendency to hide oneself out of shame, scarce self esteem or even out of fear. We should carefully avoid this mistake, especially because here the word *hri* is coupled with *acapalam*, that means "determination".

A person who is modest but determined is reliable and sees things through, no matter what it takes - not because out of some *ahankara* and *mamatva*, but because of a sense of selfless duty and responsibility. This was confirmed by Krishna in verses from 3.21 to 3.26.

VERSE 3

तेजः क्षमा धृतिः शौचमद्रोहो नातिमानिता ।

tejah kṣamā dhṛtiḥ śaucamadroho nātimānita ।

भवन्ति सम्पदं दैवीमभिजातस्य भारत ॥ १६-३ ॥

bhavanti sampadam daivimabhijātasya bhārata ।। 16-3 ।।

tejah: radiance; *ksama*: forgiveness; *dhritih*: consistency; *saucam*: cleanliness; *adrohah*: freedom from enmity; *na*: not; *ati manita*: expecting great honors; *bhavanti*: they become; *sampadam*: great qualities; *daivim*: divine; *abhijatasya*: of one who has taken birth; *bharata*: o descendant of Bharata.

"radiance, forgiveness, consistency, cleanliness, freedom from enmity, not expecting great honors: these, o descendant of Bharata, are the characteristics of one who was born with a divine nature.

The word *tejas* has already been explained many times, because it has been used as a symptom of divinity in many verses (7.9, 7.10, 10.36, 10.41, 11.17, 11.19, 11.30, 11.47, 15.12). It will also be listed in 18.42 in the characteristics of the *kshatriyas*, while the characteristics of the *brahmanas* are mentioned as *dama* (restraint or control of the mind and senses), *tapas* (austerity), *saucam* (cleanliness), *kshanti* (tolerance), *arjavam* (simplicity), *jnana* and *vijnana* (theoretical and practical knowledge). Therefore we cannot simply translate *tejas* as "vigor", although certainly the divine radiance of power and charisma constitutes a great strength.

The word *kshama* has also been mentioned already in 10.4 and 10.34, with the meanings of "forgiveness", "tolerance" and "patience". In 10.34 it was mentioned together with *dhriti*, a word that is also contained in this verse. *Dhriti* is almost a synonym for *acapalam*, that appeared in the previous verse. The meanings of *dhriti* include courage, steadiness, firm bearing, firmness, stability, joy, satisfaction or contentment, will, resolution, constancy and consistency, as well as reliability. It also indicates any offering or sacrifice performed with clear deliberation. We may remember that *Dhriti* is the name of one of Dharma's wives (a daughter of Daksha). The word *acapala* is less common, and includes the meanings of steady, not fickle, not oscillating, even unmovable - which makes it much stronger than *dhriti*.

The word *saucam* means "cleanliness, sanctity", and it is also one of the fundamental principles of *dharma* as well as a rule of the *yama-niyama* system. It also applies to the cleanliness of the mind, and in this sense it is connected to the other divine qualities mentioned in the verse.

The word *adroha*, which is the opposite of *droha*, means "freedom from enmity and ungratefulness". We found the word *droha* in verse 1.38 in the compound *mitra droha*, "hostile and envious towards friendly people".

Other applications are for example *praja droha* and *guru droha*, where *praja* indicates the subjects of the State and *guru* includes all teachers and well-wishers who are superior to us. In all these cases, we understand that *droha* refers to any unjustified negative attitude and behavior characterized by envy, wickedness, hostility, hatred, ungratefulness - all against innocent and good persons, even against affectionate friends, family members or benefactors.

The expression *na ati manita*, "not expecting great honors", is similar to *apamana* ("lack of respect", as in 6.7, 12.8, 14.25), and *amanitvam adambhitvam* (13.8). A divine personality is not attached to receiving honors or a special position, although he understands when he is being disrespected, especially when such negative attitude is created by ignorance and foolishness - characteristically due to material identification.

Krishna specifically mentions this point in verse 9.11: *avajananti mam mudha manusim tanum asritam, param bhavam ajananto mama bhuta mahesvaram*, "Foolish people disrespect me when I appear in a human form. They have no knowledge of my transcendental nature as the great master of all existences." Krishna is not expressing personal sadness because he has not been worshiped. On the contrary, what he regrets is the fact that ignorant people waste a valuable opportunity to learn something and progress in transcendental realization because they underestimate his teachings.

This lack of attachment to special honors does not mean that one should underestimate the value or importance of one's service or mission, what to speak of disparaging or offending transcendental knowledge. We can see a brilliant demonstration of this point in Jada Bharata's episode in *Bhagavata Purana*, canto 5, from chapter 9 to chapter 14. Under all aspects, Jada Bharata was the personification of humility and detachment from any material considerations of position and respect, but when king Rahugana

scolded him (5.10.6-7) for his irregular walking in carrying the palanquin and threatened to punish him, Jada Bharata replied fearlessly and solemnly, authoritatively correcting the king's attitude and imparting him appropriate teachings about the transcendental science (5.10.9-13). And then he continued to walk irregularly just as he had been doing before, because that was the right thing to do.

Foolish people would probably have expected Jada Bharata to show his humility and lack of attachment to honors in a very different way - specifically apologizing to the king without daring to talk back to him, and starting to walk normally as the king was demanding. But Jada Bharata did not submit to ignorance and arrogance and material considerations of social etiquette, because his knowledge was very clear. We should never confuse humility with lack of confidence or shyness or low self esteem.

Some emotional people are anxious to present themselves as very fallen, or very stupid, or very ignorant, but such propositions are useful only in rare and extreme situations. They should never be used as cheap excuses for escaping from one's duty and justifying laziness and irresponsibility, or even worse, as pretexts to indulge in masochism and self-loathing, and/ or in sadism and emotional abuse enforced on others as "religious training", especially when they are accompanied by hypocritical behavior that belies such great protestations of personal humility.

In such cases, we see the humiliation of subordinates, such as lay people, students, women and children, while the "religious authorities" demand exaggerated honors for themselves, although claiming to be "very renounced and detached".

We see for example the attitude of *sannyasis* who sign their names accompanied by the grandiose titles of *svami* and *maharaja* (respectively "Lord" and "Great King"), but call (and refer to)

women devotees with the epithet of *dasi* ("servant") or at most *devi dasi* ("lady servant").

This is disgraceful especially in India, where the definition of *dasi* is traditionally applied to female house servants, popularly considered in the category of ordinary prostitutes. We have seen that such bad habit is invariably accompanied by other forms of humiliation and mistreatment towards "ordinary persons" for example in accommodation, food, transportation, and all the other instances in which respect or lack of respect are characteristically shown, including access to direct service to the Deities, leadership positions, and teaching/ preaching engagements.

The last part of this verse explains that such divine qualities appear, or are developed (*bhavanti*), in a person who was born with under the influence of divine nature (*daivim prakritim asritah*, 9.13). Krishna has already explained that a person who consistently associates with *sattva* or *suddha sattva* through sincere service to God obtains a suitable body after death (8.6). It is important to understand that such divine qualities are individual, and not merely inherited genetically, therefore we see from many scriptural examples that great divine personalities were born from *asuras* and the other way around. According to Vedic tradition, the *garbhadhana samskara* should be properly performed at the time of conception to attract an elevated soul into the matrix that is sanctified by a higher level of consciousness and auspicious activities.

Astrology can give us some good indications of the character of a person based on the particular time and place of birth, but for all practical purposes it is much better to directly observe the behavior and mentality of each individual, because astrologues can always make mistakes and the birth information could be incorrect.

VERSE 4

दम्भो दर्पोऽभिमानश्च क्रोधः पारुष्यमेव च ।

dambho darpo'bhimānaśca krodhaḥ pārūṣyameva ca ।

अज्ञानं चाभिजातस्य पार्थ सम्पदमासुरीम् ॥ १६-४ ॥

ajñānaṁ cābhijātasya pārtha sampadamāsurīm ॥ 16-4 ॥

dambhah: hypocrisy; *darpah:* impudence; *abhimanaḥ:* conceit; *ca:* and; *krodhah:* rage; *parusyam:* cruelty in insulting; *eva:* certainly; *ca:* and; *ajnanam:* ignorance; *ca:* and; *abhijatasya:* of one who has taken birth as; *partha:* o son of Pritha; *sampadam:* notable characteristics; *asurim:* *asurika* nature.

"O son of Pritha, the characteristics of those born of asuric nature are hypocrisy, impudence, conceit, rage, rudeness, and of course ignorance.

The most important word in the verse takes here the place of honor in the first position, and again it will be mentioned in verses 16.8, 16.17, 17.5, 17.12 and 17.18 as a key concept. Mistranslated by other commentators as "vainglory", *dambha* actually means "hypocrisy, false morality, fraud, deceit, feigning, religious ostentation", and applies specifically to false religionists, who are therefore declared by Krishna himself to be not simply "imperfect", but downright asuric. They are a serious and unnecessary disturbance to society, especially when their conclusions and behavior are contrary to the teachings of genuine *sruti* and *smṛiti*. This is the reason why the only solution to all the problems of human society consists in defeating ignorance (*ajnanam*), here placed at the conclusion of the list as the summary and root of all evils. And ignorance is defeated only through the appropriate study and application of *shastra*.

Unfortunately this symptom of *dambha* is presently observed in the vast majority of so-called religionists in all sects. The *Bhagavata Purana* (7.15.12) specifically elaborates on the various forms of false religion: *vidharmah para dharmas ca, abhasa upama chalah, adharmas sakhah panchema, adharmas jno 'dharmavat tyajet*, "There are 5 branches of *adharmas*: religion that is against the principles of *dharma*, religion against one's nature, religion based on hypocrisy, religion that is not progressive, and religion that is based on lies". According to this verse, false religion is anything that is against the principles of universal ethics such as compassion, cleanliness, etc, or forces people into duties that are against their true individual nature (as in birth prejudice), or relies on theatricals or feigned demonstrations (or a false facade for public relations), or disconnecting theory from practice. Also, a "religion" is false when it is not progressive (moving from lower standards or *upa dharma* to higher levels), or it is based on lies and deceit - for example teaching that lying is good, or manufacturing false teachings for materialistic purposes.

The abrahamic concepts of *taqqiya* (islamic) and *kol nidre* (jewish) are obviously a symptom of their belonging to this category of *vidharma*. Christianity also presents various examples, from its early days in 4th century with Bishop Eusebius (the official propagandist for Constantine); he entitles the 32nd Chapter of his 12th *Book of Evangelical Preparation* as "How it may be Lawful and Fitting to use Falsehood as a Medicine, and for the Benefit of those who Want to be Deceived". To quote another famous ideologist of Christianity, Ignatius Loyola (1491-1556, founder of the Society of Jesus): "We should always be disposed to believe that which appears to us to be white is really black, if the hierarchy of the Church so decides."

Hinduism itself has not been exempt from this contamination, especially in the last few centuries, so much that in the popular

mentality (*laukika sraddha*) hypocrisy has become established as a social and religious virtue, and most people are totally disconnected with the idea of truthfulness and honesty, and cannot even understand that theory is supposed to be put into practice. Other commentators have quoted a verse from the *Varaha Purana* to this effect: *raksasah kalim asritya jayante brahma yonisu*, "in the age of Kali, (many) *rakshasas* (*asuras*) will take birth in *brahmana* families".

The word *darpa* pushes *dambha* even one step further. It means "arrogance, insolence, impudence, haughtiness, desire to be worshiped" and is connected to egotism. The hypocrite *asuras* are not bothering to study (what to speak of practicing) the teachings of genuine *shastra* (16.17, 16.23, 17.6, 17.13) to understand the principles of *dharma*.

However, they arrogantly take the position of teachers, and they are so impudent that they declare themselves as the only legal representatives of religion, and demand that their "monopoly of teaching" be acknowledged and enforced by all means, including physical violence, overt or covert. The word *abhimana* also contains more meanings besides the usual "conceit": it is normally used to refer to arrogance, intention to injure, hostile intention, insidiousness, so it perfectly completes the picture. And the more ignorant one is, the more he is likely to be arrogant and overbearing, in a subconscious effort to compensate for his obvious weakness.

We need to understand what is arrogance by including all the above meanings, because many people tend to apply the label of "arrogance" to healthy qualities such as self-esteem, self-reliance, awareness of the importance of one's good work, clear vision of facts, and firm realization of theoretical and practical knowledge, and so on. These qualities are never harming others, but are actually beneficial to all, individually and collectively.

A person who has a healthy measure of self-esteem will not think that he can teach shastric knowledge without bringing any shastric evidence, but will confidently engage in a deep and sincere study of the texts, and will not be afraid of questions and genuine philosophical debates.

Standing up and speaking up against injustice, untruth or ignorance cannot be categorized as arrogance, even when we are questioning those who are considered established authorities in society. Calling "thief" a thief (when there is actual evidence of the theft) is not arrogance at all. Pointing out a mistake or wrong conclusion or reasoning or some inconsistency is not arrogance - it is a sattvic action based on cleanliness and truthfulness. It is a service to society - that is the body of Purushottama himself.

The actual arrogance is rather in the angry and cruel (*krodha*) reaction of those who feel outraged at the idea that anybody would dare question them or refuse to blindly believe or follow and worship them (or their group, or their leaders). In fact nobody is unquestionable, especially those who occupy a higher position in society and direct or instruct others particularly in the field of religion and spirituality.

The relationship between *guru* and disciple is based firstly on questioning (*pariprasnena*) and only secondarily on service (*seva*), as stated in verse 4.34. Of course, we must present questions in a civilized way, and in the form of interrogation rather than accusation, especially when we do not have actual evidence of wrongful behavior or motivations or conclusions. A truly spiritual or religious person will not refuse to answer questions to explain apparent inconsistencies or mistakes, and certainly will not get angry about such questions or try to take revenge on "upstarts and non-believers" with materialistic means such as violence of any kind, direct and indirect, including police action, court cases, destruction of writings or property etc.

Another important symptom listed here is *parusyam*, that indicates the harsh words and actions that are meant to viciously hurt people on a personal level. The Sanskrit dictionary lists its meanings as "insult, squalor, cruelty, violence, variety (as in special skills)". *Bhagavata Purana* offers more elaboration on the subject: *na tatha tapyate viddhah puman banais tu marma gaih, yatha tudanti marma stha, hy asatam parusesavah*, "Arrows that hit and pierce sensitive points in the body cause less suffering than the cruel words of evil persons that strike and become lodged in the sensitive points of the heart", (11.23.3).

Asuras are specialized in *ad hominem* attacks against those they perceive as "enemies", usually accusing their victims of being "offensive and envious", "full of hatred" or even "mentally unbalanced".

They also try to hit what could be vulnerable points (*marma*) in the victim, especially based on their bodily conditions, taking full advantage of any physical disability or disease, or even gender, race, caste, financial status, etc. And because they have no consideration for truth, they are particularly fond of inventing the most outrageous falsities to slander their victims.

All this comes down to *tamas* and *ajnana* - ignorance - as concluded in this verse as well as in the last chapter of *Bhagavad gita* (18.22 to 18.32), where Krishna will explain that due to *tamas*, people mistake *dharma* for *adharma*, and *adharma* for *dharma* (18.32).

So to distinguish between proper forceful action and asuric action we need to carefully study the *shastra*, including the *Puranas* and *Itihasas*, that are full of practical examples from the lives of great personalities.

VERSE 5

दैवी सम्पद्विमोक्षाय निबन्धायासुरी मता ।

daivī sampadvimokṣāya nibandhāyāsūrī matā ।

मा शुचः सम्पदं दैवीमभिजातोऽसि पाण्डव ॥ १६-५ ॥

mā śucaḥ sampadam daivīmabhijāto'si pāṇḍava ।। 16-5 ।।

daivi: divine; *sampad*: characteristics; *vimoksaya*: leading to complete liberation; *nibandhaya*: leading to complete bondage; *asuri*: *asurika*; *mata*: are considered; *ma*: do not; *sucah*: worry; *sampadam*: characteristics; *daivim*: divine; *abhijatah*: one who has taken birth; *asi*: you are; *pandava*: o son of Pandu.

"The divine characteristics lead to complete liberation, while the asuric characteristics cause complete bondage. Do not worry, o son of Pandu: you were born with divine qualities.

The *daivi sampada*, divine characteristics, listed in these verses are very similar to the characteristics of knowledge listed by Krishna in verses from 13.8 to 13.12: *amanitvam adambhitvam ahimsa ksantir arjavam, acaryopasanam saucam sthairyam atma vinigrahaḥ, indriyarthesu vairagyam anahankara eva ca, janma mrityu jara vyadhi duhkha dosanudarsanam, asaktir anabhisvangaḥ putra dara grihadisu, nityam ca sama cittatvam istanistopapattisu, mayi cananya yogena bhaktir avyabhicarini, vivikta desa sevityam aratir jana samsadi, adhyatma jnana nityatvam tattva jnanartha darsanam, etaj jnanam iti proktam ajnanam yad ato 'nyatha*, "Freedom from the desire for honors, freedom from hypocrisy, freedom from hatred, as well as tolerance, simplicity, the act of approaching the *acharya*, cleanliness, determination, self control, renunciation towards the

objects of the senses, freedom from the sense of doership, as well as the clear perception of the inherent sufferings and problems of birth, death, old age and disease, freedom from attachment, detachment from all association, including the sense of belonging towards children, wife, home etc, as well as equal attitude when receiving the pleasant and the unpleasant, totally and constantly focusing on me through *bhakti yoga*, performing service in a solitary place, without attachment for meeting others, the constant awareness of the original soul, the realization of the value of knowledge: all this is called *jnana*, and anything else is *ajnana*."

In fact Vedic knowledge is non-different from God and the divine position of God. A very famous verse of *Rig Veda* (1.22.20) clearly teaches: *om tad vishnoh paramam padam sada pasyanti surayah diviva caksur atatam, tad vipraso vipanyaya jagrivam sah samindhate visnor yat paramam padam*, "That position of Vishnu is always contemplated by the divine personalities (*suras*) who have divine eyes/ see it in the divine radiance of the Sun (eye of the Virata Rupa). The qualified *brahmanas* who are awakened can reveal this supreme position of Vishnu."

The *suras* mentioned in this verse are the opposite of the *a-suras* described in this chapter as demoniac personalities. Within the category of *suras*, Vedic scriptures list all the Devas who rule the administration of the universe, as well as the qualified *brahmanas* (*bhu-devas*) who are those who know Brahman and behave as Brahman. Of course within this category of *suras* we will not find false religionists who are characterized by *dambha*, because they are *asuras* by definition.

We have already seen in chapter 10 that Krishna recommends the contemplation of the radiant Virata Rupa, by which we will remain always in the supreme Consciousness. Chapter 15 has further expanded this vision of the Virata Rupa as Purushottama, Daru Brahman, the immense banyan tree of the universe. This is

confirmed in *Svetasvatara Upanishad* (3.8-9): *vedaham etam purusam mahantam, aditya varnam tamasah parastat, tam eva viditvati mrityum eti, nanyah pantha vidyate ayanaya, yasmat param naparam asti kincid, yasman naniyo no jyayo asti kincit, vriksha iva stabdho divi tisthaty ekas, tenedam purnam purusena sarvam*, "I know that Purushottama, whose effulgence is the color of the sun that transcends all darkness. One who knows him overcomes death. There is no other path to perfection. There is nothing greater than him, because he is the greatest and the smallest. Like a tree covering the sky, he is alone established in the entire universe, and from him everything becomes manifest."

This supreme Knowledge or Consciousness (*tattvam yaj jnanam advayam, Bhagavata Purana* 1.2.11) is the only path to liberation or freedom:

na hi jnanena sadrisam pavitram iha vidyate, tat svayam yoga samsiddhah kalenatmani vindati, "In this world there is nothing as sacred as knowledge. One who achieves perfect union in this knowledge comes to find full happiness in the Self in the course of time" (4.38),

jnanena tu tad ajnanam yesam nasitam atmanah, tesam aditya vaj jnanam prakasayati tat param, "Those for whom *ajnana* is destroyed in the Self as *jnana*, that Knowledge, as the Sun, reveals that highest reality" (5.16),

tad buddhayas tad atmanas tan-nisthas tat parayanah, gacchanty apunar avrittim jnana niradhuta kalmasah, "Those who realize That, identify with That, remain faithful to That, and fully dedicate themselves to That, attain that liberation from which one never falls back, because their impurities have been cleansed by Knowledge" (5.17).

If we want to become liberated, we must surrender to this supreme Consciousness: *tam ha devam atma buddhi prakasam, mumuksur vai saranam aham prapadye*, "desiring *moksha*, I surrender, illuminating the intelligence" (*Svetasvatara Upanishad* 6.18).

VERSE 6

द्वौ भूतसर्गौ लोकेऽस्मिन्दैव आसुर एव च ।

dvau bhūtasargau loke'smindaiva āsura eva ca ।

दैवो विस्तरशः प्रोक्त आसुरं पार्थ मे शृणु ॥ १६-६ ॥

daivo vistaraśaḥ prokta āsuram pārtha me śṛṇu ।। 16-6 ।।

dvau: two; *bhuta*: beings; *sargau*: (two) creations; *loke*: in the world; *asmin*: this; *daivah*: divine; *asura*: demoniac; *eva*: certainly; *ca*: also; *daivah*: divine; *vistarasaḥ*: elaborately; *proktaḥ*: described; *asuram*: the demoniac; *partha*: o son of Pritha; *me*: me; *srinu*: listen to.

"In this world there are two (types of) created beings - the divine and the demoniac. I have explained about the divine creation. O son of Pritha, listen to me: I will now describe elaborately the characteristics of the *asuras*.

The *daiva* and the *asura* are two two states of incarnated consciousness. When consciousness (*atman*) becomes incarnated, the condition of a living being is created, therefore the *jiva atman* is superimposed with the definition of creature (*bhuta*).

At a certain point in the evolution of the *jivatman*, it takes birth as a human being, and from this position it can develop towards the daivic nature or the asuric nature, and continue in that direction.

This is called *asritya o prapadye* "taking shelter", and it is a matter of individual choice. The word *asraya* derives from *asri* (with a long *a*), meaning "to join, to adhere".

Krishna clearly says that the people who take shelter in the asuric nature never approach him: *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 - those who have chosen an asuric existence do not approach me" (7.15). All these characteristics are typical of the *asuras*. This is confirmed in verse 9.12: *moghasa mogha karmano mogha jnana vicetasah, raksasim asurim caiva prakritim mohinim asritah*, "Entertaining delusional desires, engaging in delusional activities, and delusionally convinced of their knowledge, confused by incorrect awareness, they certainly take shelter in the bewildering nature of *rakshasas* and *asuras*".

On the other hand, those who take shelter in the divine nature are the *suras*: *mahatmanas tu mam partha daivim prakritim asritah, bhajanty ananya manaso jnatva bhutadim avyayam*, "However, o son of Pritha, the great souls take shelter in the divine nature and serve me with undivided attention, knowing that I am the inexhaustible origin of all beings" (9.13). These divine personalities are already advanced in the journey to liberation: *jara marana moksaya mam asritya yatanti te, te brahma tad viduh kritsnam adhyatmam karma cakhilam*, "They take shelter in me, endeavoring to attain liberation from the cycle of birth and death, and come to know that Brahman is everything transcendental. They know transcendence and the duties to be performed" (7.29).

This liberation is *tad vishnoh paramam padam*, "the position of Vishnu", as confirmed in verse 14.2: *idam jnanam upasritya mama sadharmyam agatah, sarge 'pi nopajayante pralaye na vyathanti ca*, "Those who take shelter in this knowledge attain my same

position (of *dharma*), and they are not going to take birth in a next creation. They will also remain firmly established even at the time of the dissolution."

However, we should not hastily conclude that all those who are called atheists are *asuras*, especially when the concept of God that is presented to people is asuric in itself, as we see in abrahamic ideologies. See for example the ritual requested to evoke Yahweh described in the Bible (*Genesis*, 15.9-12): a number of animals were slaughtered and their dead bodies put on an altar - a heifer, a she goat, a ram, a turtle, a dove and a pigeon. The text says, "When the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abraham, and lo, an horror of great darkness fell upon him". And again we see in *Genesis*, 22.1-2, that Abraham is accepted as a true servant of Yahweh when he accepts to slaughter an innocent child, his own and only son, merely to please his master by showing absolute obedience.

The definition of *asura* is explained as *asusu rata asurah*, "*asuras* are those who are (only) attached to their immediate selfish gratification" (gross and subtle). This is also called *indriya trishna*, "thirst for sense gratification", which connects *kama* and *krodha*, the lust for possession, control and domination and the anger that comes when such lust is challenged and frustrated. The height of *dambha* or religious hypocrisy is to call such characteristic as divine, and brand as "demoniac" anyone who does not agree to that.

The genuine concept of God as Vishnu presented in *Bhagavad gita* (13.17) has nothing to do with the character described in the Bible and worshiped by Hebrews, Christians and Muslims.

Some people believe that persons with divine characteristics live on different planets from people with asuric qualities, or in different races or families, but this is not necessarily so, as

demonstrated by many stories narrated by the *shastra*. Even within families and races that traditionally choose asuric values, we find brilliant divine personalities such as Prahlada, Vibhishana, and Bali. However, divine qualities cannot coexist in the same person with asuric qualities: one cannot be on the side of *dharma* and *adharma* at the same time. One could move from the shelter of one nature to the other, by making different choices, but the two natures cannot coexist simultaneously without neutralizing each other. It's like trying to go upwards and downwards at the same time: the result is that one does not go anywhere at all.

Granted, *asuras* can have good material qualities. They may be clever and have considerable knowledge about science and even about the scriptures (as shown in many Puranic stories), but they are not behaving in according to *atma vidya*, transcendental knowledge, and we know that mere erudition is not sufficient (7.15). In fact, false religiousness (*dambha*) and erudition that does not respect *dharma* are much more dangerous than plain honest materialism, as confirmed for example in *Isa Upanishad* (9): *andham tamah pravisanti, ye 'vidyam upasate, tato bhuya iva te tamo, ya tu vidyayam ratah*, "Those who engage in ignorant activities shall enter into the dark region of *tamas*. Worse still are those engaged in the culture of false knowledge."

Dambha (false religiosity based on hypocrisy) is influenced by *rajas* and *tamas*, as we will see more specifically later. As we have seen in the previous verse, the asuric quality of *dambha* tends to build up arrogance (*darpa* and *abhimana*) due to one's external social position or accomplishments. Therefore we will find that *asuras* often boast, "I am a great *sannyasi*", "I am a great *brahmana*", "I am an *asvamedhi*", "I am a great scholar", "I am a great preacher", "I am a great *yogi*", "I am a great *guru*", "I am a senior devotee", "I am a senior/ direct disciple of that great *acharya*", "I am a great *pujari*", and love to be presented as such

by others. However, invariably such claims are nothing but a shallow external identification, a theatrical show.

One cannot really worship or serve God and at the same time callously create sufferings to innocent beings in the pursuit of one's selfish material advantage, either individual or collective, because that is the hallmark of the asuric mentality. As Krishna himself states in *Bhagavad gita*, he is the best friend of all living entities (*suhridam sarva bhutanam*, 5.29, *isvarah sarva bhutanam hrid dese tisthati* 18.61) and remains present in the hearts of all beings (*sarvasya caham hridi sannivisto*, 15.15, *sarva bhuta sthitam*, 6.31).

VERSE 7

प्रवृत्तिं च निवृत्तिं च जना न विदुरासुराः ।

pravṛttiṁ ca nivṛttiṁ ca janā na vidurāsuraḥ ।

न शौचं नापि चाचारो न सत्यं तेषु विद्यते ॥ १६-७ ॥

na śaucam nāpi cācāro na satyam teṣu vidyate ॥ 16-7 ॥

pravrittim: engagement; *ca*: and; *nivrittim*: renunciation; *ca*: and; *janah*: the people; *na*: do not; *viduh*: they know; *asurah*: who are *asuras*; *na*: not; *saucam*: purity; *na*: not; *api*: even; *ca*: and; *acarah*: behavior; *na*: not; *satyam*: truthfulness; *tesu*: in them; *vidyate*: is known (to be).

"Asuras do not have (correct) knowledge about engagement in duties and renunciation. They have no purity, or (proper) behavior, or truthfulness.

This is also confirmed at the conclusion of *Bhagavad gita* (18.30): *pravrittim ca nivrittim ca karyakarye bhayabhaye, bandham*

moksam ca ya vetti buddhii sa partha sattviki, "O Arjuna, only a sattvic person really understands about engagement in duties and renunciation (what should be accepted and what should be abandoned), what should be done and what should not be done, what should be feared and what should not be feared, what is binding and what is liberating".

Everything depends on overcoming ignorance (*tamas*). Whenever *tamas* is present, there cannot be any real advancement, only the delusion of superiority (*hrta jnana, darpa, ati manita*) and false religiosity (*dambha*). Such delusion is not a "small imperfection", but rather a very serious danger both for the individual and for the entire society, because it teaches *adharmam* as if it were *dharma*, and condemns *dharma* by presenting it as *adharmam* (18.32).

Deluded people, who have not understood the teachings of *Bhagavad gita*, believe that false religionists controlled by *tamas* are established on the good path anyway, because they somehow speak of God and perform religious activities, but false religionists are walking on a very different road that leads to the opposite direction, and they are not evolving towards higher levels but sliding into complete degradation (14.13, 14.15, 14.18, 16.20).

Sometimes false religionists even quote *Bhagavad gita* to manipulate people into supporting them. One of their favorite verses is used to justify their adharmic conclusions and behaviors: *api cet suduracaro bhajate mam ananya bhak, sadhur eva sa mantavyah samyag vyavasito hi sah* (9.30). The meaning that they give to this verse is very misleading, and borrowed from abrahamic ideologies. It implies that if one is "praying to God" or "chanting the name of God" and is officially recognized as a member "in good standing" of their church, he must be considered "a saint" even if he is found to be committing the most abominable actions. They say, "it's just a small mistake, a small imperfection".

So they demand that such person should be worshiped, followed, served and obeyed as a saint, who is non-different from God and superior to all the Devas. What is more, they believe that such "saint" has the right to make disciples all over the world and expect everyone to surrender to him and worship him like God himself because he is God's representative or priest (or bishop, cardinal, etc).

In this regard, they sometimes quote *Bhagavata Purana* (11.17.27): *acaryam mam vijaniyam navamanyeta karhicit, na martya buddhyasuyeta sarva deva mayo guruh*, "The *acharya* should never be disrespected, rather he should be considered non-different from me (God). He should never be considered a mortal being, because the *guru* represents the sum total of the divine Consciousness". Of course when the position of "*guru*" or "*acharya*" is assigned solely on the basis of political vote, affiliation to an organization or similar materialistic considerations - and especially when such position does not involve any responsibility towards the disciples - the name is wrongfully applied, because that is not the standard prescribed by the *shastra* for the definition of *acharya*.

As we have explained in the commentary to verse 9.30, the *duracara* or "bad behavior" that we could overlook can only refer to a mere breach in social conventions or to the difficult choice of a lesser damage, not to systematic and consistent wicked and cruel asuric behaviors and conclusions, that are immensely more serious. Also, verse 9.30 uses the noun *acarah* ("the doer"), and not the verb *acarati* ("who does"), therefore it is not stating that the person described in the verse is still committing objectionable acts.

Actually, Krishna has already stated very clearly that one can approach him only after giving up all forms of wickedness: *yesam tv anta gatam papam jananam punya karmanam, te dvandva moha nirmukta bhajante mam dridha vratah*, "Those who have put an

end to all wicked actions, have accumulated good merits, are completely liberated from the delusion of duality and are firm in their determination, actually worship me" (7.28). For this reason, we have given a more appropriate translation of verse 9.30 as follows: "When a person is fully immersed and engaged in true devotional service, without any other concern or desire, must be considered a *sadhu*, even if he used to have a very bad behavior."

The word *sadhu* is also a tricky one, and it should not be used superficially. It certainly does not mean "*acharya*", "*guru*", or even "saint". It simply means "good person", and is generally used to refer to seekers of spirituality, as a synonym for *sannyasi*. There are lots of *sadhus* in India who are certainly not saints, and in fact many of them are using the garb of *sadhu* or *sannyasi* (renounced spiritualist) merely to get some personal material advantages.

In this age of degradation, the position of *sadhu* will be merely based on the arrogance of false religiosity (*sadhutve dambha eva tu*, *Bhagavata Purana* 12.2.5) and the impressiveness of material opulence (*anadhyataivasadhutve*, *Bhagavata Purana* 12.2.5). The incredibly stupid people of Kali yuga (*manda sumanda matayo manda bhagya*, *Bhagavata Purana* 1.1.10) will blindly worship any fraudster who can boast of a big organization, *ashrama* or church - no questions asked, even in front of blatant asuric behavior. Of course, such material success in terms of wealth, followers and political power is gained because these "religious authorities" are very cleverly catering to the expectations and illusions of ignorant people. They do not want students but customers, and they milk them for every penny without taking any responsibility for their spiritual evolution or even their training in knowledge and ethics. In fact they are very careful never to mention the real basic requirements for spiritual progress (*yama* and *niyama*) because all their followers would quickly stop giving money and disappear.

With such disgraceful example from those who are supposed to be the best religionists in society (3.21), the same asuric values become the standard for everyone. Material wealth becomes the only criteria to evaluate a person's nature, behavior, religious position, eloquence and social position (*vittam eva kalau nrinam, janmacara gunodayah, dharma nyaya vyavasthayam, karanam balam eva hi, Bhagavata Purana 12.2.4*). One will be considered a *brahmana* simply because he wears a thread (*vipratve sutram eva hi, Bhagavata Purana 12.2.3*). A person's religious merits and position will be evaluated superficially, merely by the clothes he wears and by his material success, and one will be called a *pandita* just because he is clever and quick in word jugglery and slogans (*lingam evasrama khyatav, anyonyapatti karanam, avrittaya nyaya daurbalyam, panditye capalam vacah, Bhagavata Purana 12.2.4*). People will give greater value to pilgrimages to distant and touristic places (*dure vary ayanam tirtham, Bhagavata Purana 12.2.6*), and good activities will be performed only for the purpose of getting a reputation (*yaso arthe dharma sevanam, Bhagavata Purana 12.2.6*).

The conclusion of the verse (*na satyam tesu vidyate*) highlights the most important point of all, as without *satyam* there can be no true form of religion or progress. *Asuras* consider lying and deceit as perfectly legitimate instruments to obtain selfish material advantages, at individual or collective level. Sometimes they try to justify such tricks by bringing legitimate examples, such as the small half-truths that bring no harm to anyone but might make people happy or even save innocent lives. But then they quietly extend the scope and motives to over-rule compassion and justice, and to take advantage of the good faith and vulnerability of others with false promises or hiding dangerous facts or plans.

When we see contradictions or inconsistencies in the teachings or behaviors of some religious people, we cannot automatically

assume that the wrongful actions are due to "human error", especially if the cases are numerous and include a good number of leaders of that religion. If a religion officially says, "do not kill", and then we see that in its history the vast majority of its leaders have systematically killed several millions of people, and still kill people in the regions under its control, we should understand that we are dealing with *asuras*. If it speaks of love and charity and yet it approves or condones slavery, rape, corporal punishment and persecution of dissenters, we should understand we are dealing with *asuras*.

VERSE 8

असत्यमप्रतिष्ठं ते जगदाहुरनीश्वरम् ।

asatyamapratistham te jagadāhuraniśvaram ।

अपरस्परसम्भूतं किमन्यत्कामहैतुकम् ॥ १६-८ ॥

aparasparasambhūtam kimanyatkāmahaitukam ॥ 16-8 ॥

asatyam: false; *apratistham*: without foundation; *te*: they; *jagat*: the world; *ahuh*: they say; *anisvaram*: without God; *aparaspara*: without cause-effect system; *sambhutam*: come to being; *kim anyat*: what else; *kama*: lust/ desire; *haitukam*: reason.

"They say that the universe is false and temporary, and there is no God and no creation based on cause and effect. For them, the only reason for the existence of the world is mere sense gratification.

We must be very careful in studying this verse, and clear our minds from all possible contaminations from other and non-

compatible ideologies, because there is a serious danger of misunderstanding it.

The universe (Virata Rupa) is the direct manifestation of Brahman/ Paramatma/ Bhagavan in this world, and all Vedic scriptures recommend that we meditate on this glorious universal form of Purushottama. However, we have also seen that all material manifestations are temporary and illusory and as such they have no real existence as we see them (2.16, 8.15). For this reason it is said, *brahma satya, jagan mithya*: Brahman is the only permanent Reality, while the material universe is deceiving because it appears permanent but it is in constant change.

However, only the *asuras* will say that the world is *asatya*, "false", that is fundamentally "bad" in itself, as diametrically opposed to a "paradise" or "spiritual world" that is perfectly good and pure and from which we have somehow "fallen" (as exemplified by the story of Adam and Eve). Only the *asuras* will believe that this world is controlled by an evil power - "the witch Maya" or "the Prince of Darkness" - that is considered "the opposite" of God, always trying (and largely succeeding) to enforce its will upon human beings against the will of God. Based on this misconception, *asuras* launch "holy wars" against "other Gods" with the intention to "destroy" them, by killing their worshipers, annihilating their temples, and obliterating their sacred scriptures and knowledge, and even their memory.

By the way - this practically equates with saying that this world is *anisvarah* ("without God"), because if God is the Absolute, omnipotent and omniscient, nothing can happen outside his plan, and his existence must necessarily include the existence of all forms. If the existence of "other Gods" (*elohim*, in plural form as in the beginning of the Bible) is admitted, then the idea of abrahamic monotheism is not about the universality and the absolute power of one of such Gods (an oxymoron in itself), but rather about the

tyrannical imposition of merely one form (or non-form) and the destruction of all other forms. And if this "one God" is omnipotent, why does he need human beings to do his dirty work and destroy "the other Gods" (even considering such a thing as possible)? If this "one God" wants to send to hell all those who do not believe in him, why do his followers have to persecute, attack and kill such non-believers already in this life? It does not make any sense. We will not find any such nonsense in Vedic scriptures.

The *asuras* who present themselves as "the only true religionists" propagate these nonsensical ideas to justify their own horrible, cruel and destructive activities meant to exploit the world and the creatures who live in it, and they blame "nature" and "the world" for the damage they are making. When the *asuras* claim that the world is *asatya*, *apratistha*, *anisvara*, they mean to say that there is no *dharma* (ethical principles, or conscience) or that *dharma* is irrelevant, and that life in this world has no purpose or meaning. This is a convenient excuse for them to commit any abominable activity for their own selfish material advantage - individual or collective. They even have the impudence to claim that the criminal acts they commit are the only religious work, service to the Supreme Lord.

While sincere and wise scientists recognize the principle of cause and effect, *asuras* claim that the world is *aparaspara sambhutam* - it has no cause, and therefore there is no connection between cause and effect. They claim that everything happens simply by chance, and is automatically produced for no higher purpose, therefore they can destroy whatever they like for their own purposes - that in their eyes have become the supreme purpose by default.

Because they believe that things and people come to existence merely for lust, gratification and enjoyment (*kama hetu*), they might as well as use everything for their own advantage and enjoyment. According to this perspective, a living being is just a

product - a commercial resource - and can be genetically constructed, modified, cloned, sold, owned, exchanged, rented, destroyed, and so on. And *asuras* believe they are entitled to do so out of mere curiosity or experiment, to further their career, increase their wealth and possessions and social position, etc. Of course this madness is first applied to animals, but then it can easily be used for human beings, especially the "lower ones" such as people of other races, prisoners, women, children, or persons who are weaker for some other reason - old age, disease, poverty etc. Because for *asuras* any opinion is as good as any other, they pick whatever best suits their immediate material selfish interest. Even when *asuras* do believe in God (as we will see in chapter 18), they are actually contemplating their own projection and calling it "God". As they create such "God" in their own image, they claim that God created the world and human beings out of selfishness, and that he enjoys cruelty and exploitation. In this way they hope to legitimize their own crimes.

VERSE 9

एतां दृष्टिमवष्टभ्य नष्टात्मानोऽल्पबुद्धयः ।

etām dṛṣṭimavaṣṭabhya naṣṭātmāno'lpabuddhayaḥ ।

प्रभवन्त्युग्रकर्माणः क्षयाय जगतोऽहिताः ॥ १६-९ ॥

prabhavantyugrakarmāṇaḥ kṣayāya jagato'hitāḥ ।। 16-9 ।।

etam: this; *dristim*: vision; *avastabhya*: accepting/ adopting; *nasta*: having lost; *atmanah*: the self; *alpa buddhayaḥ*: very little intelligence; *prabhavanti*: develop/ build; *ugra*: horrible; *karmanah*: activities/ jobs/ enterprises; *ksayaya*: for the destruction/ that will bring damage; *jagatah*: of the world; *ahitah*: without benefit.

"Because they are not intelligent, they accept these beliefs, losing the consciousness of the true self. (On that basis) they develop horrible activities, that unnecessarily cause damage to the world.

The word *dristi* ("vision") comes from the same root as *darshana*, but *dristi* refers here to a delusional vision or hallucination, while *darshana* indicates a particular but valid perspective of reality. Since *asuras* have concluded that the world is false and without a purpose, they believe that any opinion is as good as any other, and they endorse the legitimacy of an ideology merely based on its material success and popularity - on how many people accept and follow it, and how much material benefit it seems to offer to those who accept it. This is why false religionists easily get so many followers. The two main reasons for the disaster are the lack of intelligence (*alpa buddhaya*) and the loss of the consciousness of the real self (*atman*). Both intelligence and consciousness of the self are presented all over *Bhagavad gita* as extremely important.

The expression *nasta atmanam* ("having lost the Self") has various levels of meanings. One is directly connected to the lack of intelligence, because it is intelligence (*buddhi*) that keeps us conscious of who and what we are, of what is our duty and what is unworthy of our purpose in life (*pravrittim ca nivrittim ca*, 16.7, 18.30).

Once this intelligence is lost, we forget ourselves and we fall into delusion, as confirmed in verse 2.63: *krodhad bhavati sammohah sammohat smriti vibhramah, smriti bhramsad buddhi naso buddhi nasat pranasyati*, "Anger becomes confusion, and confusion becomes failing memory. Because of the loss of memory, intelligence is lost, and when intelligence is lost, one falls from his position". On the level of delusion or *tamas*, the conditioned soul becomes victim of asuric tendencies and falls lower and lower into degradation and confusion and suffering.

Scarce intelligence is also the reason why *asuras* cannot really understand knowledge properly; due to delusion, knowledge becomes confused, half baked or half digested, and fails to deliver the desired results in the end. *Asuras* are as irresponsible as children playing with matches without having the first idea of how to put out a fire, and they keep scheming and laboring to make bigger and bigger fires they call "advancement" or "progress" or "development". Instead of creating, they can simply destroy (*kshaya*) without any need or real benefit (*ahitah*), and all their activities are ugly and disastrous (*ugra karma*).

They do not even leave the most sacred and pure things alone. They deliberately pollute sacred rivers and ponds with sewage and industrial waste of all kinds, they destroy sacred mountains and hills, and bulldoze off ancient temples and holy places. They knowingly contaminate the milk of cows with blood and pus and toxic chemicals under the pretext of "better production", and even add gelatin and lard to yogurt and butter to make them "more attractive".

They make sugar whiter by bleaching it with baked bones from slaughterhouses, and obtain golden and silver foil by hammering sheets of these metals between thin layers of the entrails of slaughtered animals. These *ugra karma* enterprises can flourish only because the general mass of people are also fully immersed in *tamas*, and say, "ignorance is bliss".

Those who use the world as a garbage dump or a quarry without caring for the benefit of all creatures cause untold damages with the destruction of the environment. These imbalances cause irregular changes in climate on the whole planet and terrible consequences including cyclones, floods and drought, the melting of glaciers and ice caps at the poles and the consequent rising of the levels of the oceans. The worst situation for the planet and for human society is when such *asuras* artificially take up the

positions of *brahmanas* and *kshatriyas* and control society for their own materialistic and demoniac purposes.

Destruction in itself is not a bad thing. It is required from time to time to clean up the place and eliminate old things that have lost their utility for the progress of all beings, or constitute an active threat. However, there must always be some benefit (*sivam*, "auspiciousness") connected with such destruction, otherwise it is condemned by Vedic knowledge as *ahitah*, "unnecessary". This concept also applies to the antics of the *asuras* in this world, that are allowed in a certain measure and for a certain period of time so that the conditioned souls (*jivatmans*) can develop through experience and choice.

This idea could seem similar to the abrahamic concept, but it is not. While abrahamics believe that the Devil is the incarnation of disobedience to God ("the Rebel Angel"), Vedic knowledge explains that the asuric tendency or nature is merely a lack of enlightenment (*buddhi* and *atma vidya*), just like darkness has no existence of its own and is merely absence of light. Therefore, while abrahamics stupidly invest their energies to fight darkness with sticks and stones and bombs and moralistic legislation, Vedic civilization simply solves the problem by turning on the light of intelligence and knowledge of the *atman/ brahman*. Of the two attempts, the violent exercise of persecution of ideological dissent can only bring more harm to individual and society, causing even more darkness in the form of fear, hatred, hypocrisy, illusion etc, but the Knowledge approach enables us to engage each and every individual or group in a progressive and useful way for society (3.26).

Regarding the concept of *ugra karma* ("horrible activities", "horrible enterprises"), anyone who has information about what is happening in the world today will understand the meaning. We know about bad doctors and iatrogenic damage, bad lawyers and

corrupt magistrates, bad politicians and bad governments, and bad teachers at all levels. We know about bad financial systems and industry creating mindless consumerism, pollution and destruction of resources, artificial organisms and toxic medicines, dangerous genetic engineering and extreme technology for war (chemical, biological, nuclear etc). We also know about artificial junk food and its effects, and also about cruelty to animals and abuse on children and women and relatively weaker human beings. Not many know about the horrors of sex slavery or the kidnapping of little girls and pumping them with hormones so they look sexier to the brothel customers. Or about human organs trafficking. Or about the deliberate "thinning of the human herd" called depopulation, obtained through carefully planned wars and other devices and campaigns. Many skeptics label this type of information as "conspiracy theories" and refuse to consider it seriously, but such an attitude could be dangerous. Some of the perpetrators of such horrible crimes may claim that the destruction they create is not "without benefits", because it generates financial gains, job opportunities, and commercially valuable products and services, but people are not aware of the very heavy karmic price they will have to pay for such activities. Their foolishness can be compared to the classical example of the lumberjack who was sawing at the branch where he was sitting high on the tree.

What should we do then? Of course we must not blindly believe anything that is told us, but we can and should certainly try to investigate and verify rumors about serious dangers. Merely dismissing unpleasant rumors without trying to investigate about them is a clear symptom of ignorance: *aprakaso 'pravrittis ca pramado moha eva ca, tamasy etani jayante vividdhe kuru-nandana*, "O Arjuna, with the increase of *tamas* we find foolishness, laziness, madness and confusion, that tend to get worse and worse" (14.13).

VERSE 10

काममाश्रित्य दुष्पूरं दम्भमानमदान्विताः ।

kāmamāśritya duṣpūram dambhamānamadānvitāḥ ।

मोहाद्गृहीत्वासद्राहान्प्रवर्तन्तेऽशुचिव्रताः ॥ १६-१० ॥

mohādgṛhītvāsadrāhānpravartante'śucivratāḥ ॥ 16-10 ॥

kamam: lust; *asritya*: taking shelter of; *duspuram*: insatiable; *dambha*: religious hypocrisy; *mana*: false prestige; *mada*: illusion; *anvitah*: absorbed in; *mohat*: because of confusion; *grhitva*: accepting; *asat*: non permanent; *grahan*: acquisitions; *pravartante*: they engage; *asuci vratah*: in impure vows.

"Taking shelter in insatiable lust, religious hypocrisy and false prestige, immersed in confused and delusional beliefs, they dedicate themselves to adharmic achievements, and engage in impure religious vows.

Sexual lust as a value in itself (or even the supreme value) is the biggest trap of all. It ensnares our rajasic tendencies and turns them into *tamas*, because it corrupts the genuine and healthy desire for pleasure and happiness into a dark, diseased, selfish and insensitive engagement in exploitation, possession and control of material objects and bodies that is the exact opposite of love. In extreme cases, this obsession for domination can also extend to a subtler mental level, where the *asura* especially enjoys the pain, anguish, fear, horror and despair he has created in other beings. Sometimes this sadistic thrill even substitutes the normal sexual copulation act, as for example in sexual aggressions where the victim is violated with objects, or is treated like a hunter's trophy, disfigured or paraded around as a collectible item, a piece of property or the booty of victory. At this point of degradation, the criminal becomes firmly bound by the chains of *tamas* and is unable to find

the way out from his madness - in fact, he comes to see it as the only possible reality, applicable to everyone.

There is no end to this distorted lust, because it is not connected to genuine healthy physical needs that can be easily satiated. It is a form of greed that feeds on itself, like a fire (*duspurena analena ca*, 3.39), instead of being appeased by the healthy and normal fulfillment of desire (as in eating a wholesome meal) because it is mixed with anger and cruelty and drags the mind from *rajas* to the darkest regions of *tamas*.

Healthy normal sexual desire contains no anger or cruelty, but it grows from love and admiration and respect, and desire to please rather than being pleased, and is never directed to "objects" (or persons treated as objects) but to the soul and beauty as a divine manifestation worthy of worship. It's not about "scoring", "screwing" or "getting laid", and certainly it is not "nasty".

Krishna has already said that while *kama* supported by *dharma* is divine (7.11), the diseased and angry lust is the root cause of all crimes: *kama esa krodha esa rajo guna samudbhavah, mahasano maha papma viddhy enam iha vairinam*, "This is a mixture of desire and anger, originated from *rajas*. It is all-devouring, the cause of great crimes, and the real enemy in this world" (3.37). This "great sin" is the realm of diseased pornography, sado-masochism, "bondage" and humiliation/ punishment sex, performance syndrome and loser syndrome, artificial (usually chemical or medicinal) induction of sexual excitement, and artificial status symbols based on unnatural bodily appearance and sexual "prowess".

In the minds of these pathological psychiatric cases (*mana mada anvitah*), sexual insatiability is considered a virtue and a matter of pride especially at an advanced age. In extreme cases, they even come to consider rape and torture as a "religious merit" or an

"instrument for social order", or claim that it should be a "legal right" (for example to have sex with small children).

It is not uncommon to find fake religionists in this category of lust-obsessed perverts, although in the case of so-called religious leaders such activities are generally performed behind closed doors and denied, minimized or dismissed in front of the public. Of course, in some cases it is also possible that unfounded accusations and rumors are circulated by enemies because of envy and spite. So how can we evaluate each particular situation? It is not difficult. We can ascertain the actual facts simply by examining the level of spiritual realization and the *gunas* of the particular individual as per the teachings of Krishna in *Bhagavad gita*.

A person who is firmly situated in *sattva* or *visuddha sattva*, and has realized *atma vidya*, is transcendental to material bodily identifications and attachments, and demonstrates his knowledge and divine characteristics (*daiva sampada*) in all other aspects of his life. If, on the other hand, we can directly observe asuric characteristics in some other sector of his life, we can legitimately believe that there could be some truth in rumors and accusations about his lustful behavior.

Of course, a sattvic or transcendental person's approach to sex is based on the fundamental principles of *dharma* - i.e. truthfulness/ honesty, compassion/ nonviolence, cleanliness/ simplicity, self restraint and ethical values. He may have a healthy consensual conjugal relationship based on love and affection, because spiritual or religious life does not require celibacy, but he will never take advantage of his position to solicit any type of physical or mental pleasure from his disciples or followers or anyone who is entrusted to him. Such behavior is only found in *asuras*.

Within the *arya* (civilized) Vedic society, *sudras* have no particular religious duty, therefore they can legitimately have

whatever sexual relationship they like, as long as it is not against the fundamental principles of *dharma*, and their employers will take care of the *sudra*'s offspring together with the *sudra* servant himself/ herself as members of the family. A *vaisya* can have as many wives he wants and is able to maintain satisfactorily, and treats wives and children well, engaging them according to their specific abilities and inclinations. A *kshatriya* is bound by religious duty to satisfy any woman who requests sex from him, unless he has previously taken religious vows (*vratas*) that prevent him to do so - the *eka-patni vrata* (monogamous marriage) or in rare cases, total sexual abstinence that can be temporary or permanent (as in the case of Bhishma).

However, the *kshatriya* cannot reject a woman because he does not find her attractive enough; temporary abstinence only applies to specific periods or circumstances, and never depends on the man's preference of one woman rather than another. On the other hand, a *kshatriya* can also legitimately have sexual relationships with any number of women of his choice, provided the principles of *dharma* are not violated; no official ceremony or cohabitation is required, and all children are considered legitimate offspring. However, for the protection of the kingdom, a *kshatriya* king will try to find a suitable wife of appropriate character and disposition, a noble queen who will likely produce a worthy heir to the throne. For this reason, the most qualified *kshatriya* princesses used to choose their husbands in the *svayamvara* tournament, preferring warrior-like prowess over sentimental attraction.

A *brahmana* will only have sexual contact with his *dharma patni*, in the proper frame of religious consciousness, in order to generate children who are endowed with divine qualities. Such a wife was usually found with the help of qualified and wise astrologers who examined the birth horoscopes and verified the compatibility of the union. The father of the bride then entrusted the girl to the care of

the husband, and the newly weds started their religious and spiritual life together in full cooperation, as two halves of the same body.

The expression *grihitva grahan* indicates *lobha* (greed) for non permanent/ material things (*asat*). The desire to acquire permanent/ spiritual things (*sat*) is good, because through an ardent desire for God we attain liberation and perfection. The word *grihitva* literally means "accepting, adopting, taking", while *grahan* means "objectives, achievements".

A *griha* ("home") is not a building but a family circle that grows from the mutual acceptance of husband and wife, children, relatives, friends, professional occupation, etc. Sattvic people have a *sat griha* that facilitates spiritual progress, ethical values, cooperation, love, trust and happiness, while asuric people have *asat grihas*, where lust, greed, sufferings, frustration, deceit, despair, hatred and envy proliferate, causing disasters at individual and collective level. It all depends on our choices.

We should not delude ourselves into thinking that someone cannot be an *asura* simply because s/he is externally engaged in religious vows or practices. Here Krishna clearly states that *asuras* are characterized by religious hypocrisy and normally engage in religious vows based on false prestige (*mana*) and greed (*kama*) for material results. In some cases, *asuras* even resort to the external chanting of spiritual *maha mantras* composed by the Names of God, but their intentions are dirty and they remain unable to open their hearts to spiritual blessings and become purified - so they continue in their abominable activities even after decades of "spiritual *sadhana*".

These impure vows in which *asuras* engage (*pravartante asuci vratah*) are mostly those meant to obtain the power to harm innocent and harmless people and exploit them for one's selfish

material lust and greed. This also includes "child marriages" and all non-consensual unions, irrespective of the official ceremonies involved. Another type of impure vow is based on deceit, false prestige and religious ostentation, such as the impressive austerities or grand donations to some particular religious institution or church/ temple on the basis of personal advantage, such as name and fame or profit. In these religious activities there is no space for actual shastric knowledge or *atma vidya* (16.23, 17.4-6, 18.31-32) and society at large is not benefited. In fact, the wealth donated (especially gold or money) will in some case be used for unethical purposes or inspire criminal activities such as embezzlement, theft, etc.

A classical example of impure religious activity is blood sacrifice of all kinds, especially in the killing of harmless animals. Vedic civilization never required such rituals, but allows them in special cases and it regulates them so that degraded people in *rajas* and *tamas* who crave for meat can satisfy their desire in a controlled way.

Contrarily to what many people believe, the ancient Vedic rituals called *gomedha* and *asvamedha yajna* were not ordinary animal sacrifices, but involved a very complex and deep symbolism that can be easily detected in the original descriptions, where the "animal" of the sacrifice is clearly described as the Virata Rupa itself.

In their biased speculations, colonial writers have mistranslated and in some cases even manipulated the original texts to present Vedic religion as a barbarous, immoral and violent superstition whose substitution with Christianity would save the Indian people, but we know that they had no respect for the basic principles of *dharma*, and their teachings must be discarded without hesitation.

VERSE 11

चिन्तामपरिमेयां च प्रलयान्तामुपाश्रिताः ।

cintāmaparimeyāṁ ca pralayāntāmupāśritāḥ ।

कामोपभोगपरमा एतावदिति निश्चिताः ॥ १६-११ ॥

kāmopabhogaparamā etāvaditi niścītāḥ ॥ 16-11 ॥

cintam: worries; *aparimeyam*: endless; *ca*: and; *pralaya antam*: even to the end; *upasritah*: having taken shelter; *kama upabhoga*: enjoyment of sense pleasures; *parama*: the supreme (goal of life); *etavat*: thus; *iti*: like this; *niscitah*: without doubt.

"They certainly remain immersed in endless worries up to the very end of their lives, because they have taken shelter of mere sense gratification as the supreme purpose of life.

The word *cintam* literally means "fear for worries" and refers to the impermanence of the results obtained through material efforts. *Aparimeyam* means "endless, huge, immeasurable, infinite", and refers to a disproportionate and pathological attachment to materialism and its inherent fears.

In the case of *asuras*, this fear is not just the normal preoccupation about the loss of property and position that inevitably occurs in the course of time or even the danger of untimely losses, but it expands into the conscious or subconscious anticipation of the negative karmic consequences that they will have to pay for the adharmic (*asat*) actions that were performed to obtain such property or position. *Asuras* are always terrified because of their dirty conscience and have a tendency to see enemies everywhere, even when other people have no intention of attacking them. Each *asura* is naturally an enemy to the others, because they pretend to

cooperate and ally but they are just waiting for the opportunity to stab each other's backs and grab the loot. Because they become accustomed to this mentality, they end up projecting it over everyone, including innocent and harmless people (*atmavan manyate jagat*, "everyone thinks that others have his same mentality").

This will be elaborated in the next verses in more details. Over and above all, they are terrified by death, because they strongly identify with their material body, possessions and position, and they are uninterested, if not strongly opposed, to the genuine religious life that is based on the transcendental realization of the *atman/ brahman*. They know that the particular type of degraded sense gratification, lust and greed they have chosen to pursue is only available in a gross material body, and they are willing to go to any length to prolong their own lives in their miserable bodies. This mentality brings to organ transplants, artificial life support, and similar practices including genetic engineering - all asuric practices that do not give any actual improvement in one's life but easily distract one from the real purpose of life.

The word *upabhoga* means "lower pleasures", and specifically refers to the inferior quality of tamasic and rajasic pleasures compared to sattvic or transcendental pleasures (*brahmananda, spanda*). This will also be elaborated in chapter 17 (17.7-10) with reference to the food choices influenced by the various *gunas*. In the specific case of *asuras*, such pleasures are truly abominable and normally inspire disgust, horror and revulsion to any naturally healthy and sane person.

There are several level of asuric consciousness. Some poor conditioned souls are so far gone into the asuric consciousness that we cannot do anything to help them; in fact trying to help them will excite even more anger and violence from their part. Their

only salvation lies in repeated births in lowly and difficult positions, by which they will exhaust their greed for degraded pleasures and at the same time experience a measure of suffering that will gradually teach them to avoid causing pain to others in the future.

Others, who still have some measure of human consciousness, can be helped in this very lifetime by our good example and inspiration, and by the establishment of a positive social environment where sense gratification is available on a more sattvic level. After all, as Krishna has already declared (*param drstva nivartate*, 2.59), one can give up a bad habit only when he finds something better to focus on. Prohibition, repression or artificial abstention will be of no use (3.33) and corporal punishment based on inflicting pain and/ or humiliation on the transgressor will only aggravate the situation because it increases *tamas*, even to the risk of degrading the "punishers" as well, and bonding them into a pathological relationship to their victims, with disastrous karmic consequences.

At a more superficial level, a normal human being can also feel the influence of asuric nature, especially when society is badly directed and everyone is subject to constant aggressions at all levels. It is a temptation and occasionally a good human being might fall into the sticky marshes of *tamas*, thus becoming confused by fears and worries, identifications and attachments, and inferior pleasures. But we all have a choice, at all times, whether we want to take further shelter in divine consciousness or asuric consciousness, and each and everyone of us is responsible for his/ her own choices.

With a very careful balancing act, we can remain in an intermediate position (*tisthanti*, 14.18) for some time and even temporarily escape to safer grounds into material *sattva* (2.43, 6.41, 8.16, 9.20), but if we do not progress further towards

liberation from material identifications and attachments, we will again fall to the level of *rajas* and risk sliding further into *tamas*. Even on the level of material *sattva* and *rajas* there will be worries (*cintam*) and a relatively inferior quality of pleasure, therefore the best solution is to elevate ourselves to the level of transcendental realization, that is characterized by *sat* (eternity), *cit* (knowledge) and *ananda* (happiness). Nothing less will really satisfy the soul.

VERSE 12

आशापाशशतैर्बद्धाः कामक्रोधपरायणाः ।

āśāpāśaśatairbaddhāḥ kāmakrodhaparāyaṇāḥ ।

ईहन्ते कामभोगार्थमन्यायेनार्थसञ्चयान् ॥ १६-१२ ॥

ihante kāmabhogārthamanyāyenārthasañcayān ॥ 16-12 ॥

asa: wishes; *pasa*: ropes; *sataih*: by hundreds of; *baddhah*: bound; *kama*: lust; *krodha*: rage; *parayanah*: always focused on; *ihante*: they desire; *kama bhoga*: the enjoyment of lust; *artham*: for the purpose; *anyayena*: by any means; *artha*: wealth; *sancayan*: accumulation.

"Bound by hundreds of ropes in the form of desires, always immersed in lust and anger, they strive to increase their desires and for that purpose they adopt any means to accumulate wealth.

All these desires are actually ropes that tie the conditioned soul to worries (*cinta*), fear (*bhaya*) and anger (*krodha*), but the deluded fool is proud of them as if they were valuable and prestigious ornaments. The word *baddha* literally means "bound, conditioned", and is the exact opposite of perfection in life (*siddha*).

A prisoner actually has no control over properties or powers or position, but because he is mentally deranged he becomes all the more attached to the things he considers his properties, powers or position, and is ready to commit any crime for their sake.

The word *anyayena* contains the meaning of "by any means" (including illegal means such as begging, borrowing or stealing or robbing) and "from others" (as "from anyone" without consideration of justice or compassion). *Asuras* believe in the principle of scarcity - that the amount of power and opulences in this world is limited and the strongest must appropriate them before someone else does, even if this means violating the rights of others. For them, "might is right" enough.

Since the *asuras* believe that *kama* and *krodha* are values for, and in themselves, they engage completely in pursuing them (*pravartante*, 16.10). Because they have dedicated their life (*parayana*) to this purpose, they become overly attached to their plans, one after the other, always worried about their implementation (*cinta*). Good people make plans too, but they are not excessively attached, because they know that honest and constructive work will produce positive results sooner or later, and if one attempt fails, we can try again and success will come eventually. On the other hand, the *asuras'* work is neither honest nor constructive (*ugra karmani*), and is more an uncertain gamble than a true enterprise, so the amount of fear created is much greater.

One may think that *asuras* are cleverly saving energies and resources by cutting corners, exploiting and cheating others, but it is not so. The word *ihante* means "they desire, strive, work hard" and in fact we observe that abominable enterprises entail a greater deal of effort and sufferings and expenditures, and greater risks of loss, than dharmic professional enterprises. A lot of this effort is spent in fighting against other *asuras* and cheaters of all sorts, and

being beaten by each other. The purpose of the *asuras* is to amass as much wealth as possible, beyond the actual needs of their operations and livelihood, and even more than they will possibly be able to spend, because they lose sight of reality and slide into delusion. What will the *asura* do with 50 personal cars? One or two vehicles are more than sufficient, and the rest will simply sit in the garage and gather dust. Why should someone have 500 pairs of shoes? Good food can be expensive, but it does not cost millions. Most of the objects acquired by very rich people are stowed away and quickly forgotten, never to be used.

In fact, the accumulation of wealth and hoarding of resources (*artha sancayam*) becomes an end in itself, a bitter surrogate to real happiness, and it often causes unnecessary loss and damage and waste of property and materials. The miser sits on a mountain of food and watches it slowly rotting away, because he cannot eat more than what will fill his stomach every day, but he will not tolerate the idea of distributing the excess food to those who are starving and were deprived by him in the first place. And still his greed is not satiated, and he feels frustrated and angry, and prefers to destroy things rather than allowing others to have them.

The example of the ropes (*asa pasa*) is also used to describe the *gunas* or main influences of material nature (*sattva, rajas, tamas*), that create a tangled net in which the conditioned soul is trapped. However, both the categories of desires and *gunas* can be used for our progress and evolution towards liberation and the attainment of perfection in the purpose of life. It is all a question of knowledge.

The adharmic asuric tendencies are the real reason why a society becomes degraded and people face so many problems in their individual and collective lives. Greed and delusional hopes goad the conditioned souls to engage in abominable activities, even against their wishes (3.36), accepting jobs that are contrary to their principles or abilities, and that make them sick physically and

mentally. The same greed and delusional hope attracts foolish people to support depraved politicians in a dirty game of populism and deceit that passes for democracy, and to betray their own family and friends and even their own selves.

VERSE 13

इदमद्य मया लब्धमिमं प्राप्स्ये मनोरथम् ।

idamadya mayā labdhamimam prāpsye manoratham ।

इदमस्तीदमपि मे भविष्यति पुनर्धनम् ॥ १६-१३ ॥

idamastīdamapi me bhaviṣyati punardhanam ।। 16-13।।

idam: this; *adya*: today; *maya*: by me; *labdham*: accumulated; *imam*: this; *prapsye*: I will obtain; *manah ratham*: whatever the mind can imagine; *idam*: this; *asti*: there is; *idam*: this; *api*: also; *me*: mine; *bhaviṣyati*: it will become; *punah*: more; *dhanam*: wealth.

"Today I have acquired all this, and I will get even more, as much as my mind desires. This wealth is mine, and it will increase more and more.

This is the picture of capitalistic society, where the accumulation of resources is considered a value in itself, and new extravagant needs are created artificially just to please the mind that is conditioned and deluded by insatiable greed, lust and anger.

Asuric capitalism is hugely different from the Vedic system of wealth production by *vaisyas* and *kshatriyas*, where accumulation of resources is temporary and instrumental to the benefit of the entire kingdom and all the *prajas*. The excess wealth produced by the *vaiśya grihasthas* is distributed to all other sections of society,

as we have explained in the commentary to the verse 1 of this chapter. The treasury of the king and other *kshatriyas* is also used for the common good - to equip the defense department, build roads, and further the progress of all subjects. Whatever the *brahmanas* obtain as donations, they use only the strict requirements for their modest maintenance, and they distribute the rest to meritorious and needy people in the form of *prasadam*. Under the guidance of *brahmanas*, all *kshatriyas* and *vaisyas* regularly become the *yajamanas* of *yajnas* or religious rituals for the well being and prosperity of all the *prajas*, and in such ceremonies there is always a substantial distribution of good food and other wealth to all, including the animals.

In the asuric economic system, the subjects are exploited and left unprotected: this is a behavior characteristic of thieves, not of rulers, as explained clearly in *Bhagavata Purana: praja hi lubdhai rajanyair, nirghrinair dasyu dharmabhih, acchinna dara dravina, dasyanti giri kananam*, "Losing their wives and properties to such avaricious and merciless rulers, who will behave no better than ordinary thieves, the citizens will flee to the mountains and forests" (12.2.8) and *dasyu prayesu rajasu, cauryanrita vritha himsa, nana vrittisu vai nrisu, sudra prayesu varnesu*, "The kings will mostly be thieves, the occupations of men will be stealing, lying and needless violence, and all the social classes will be reduced to the lowest level of *sudras*" (12.2.13-14). The Kali yuga *avatara*, Kalki, will specifically appear to eliminate all such false rulers: *vicaran asuna ksaunyam, hayenapratima dyutih, nripa linga cchado dasyun, kotiso nihanisyati* (12.2.19). This characteristic of Kali yuga was already detected by Parikshit (*Bhagavata Purana*, 1.17.1-6) when he met the degraded *sudra* dressed as a king, who was cruelly beating a cow and a bull.

The present economic and political system is fundamentally a cheating system, that exploits the weakest *prajas* instead of

protecting them. It is made of multinational corporations that control the fundamental needs of the people - food, medicines, living quarters, energy, basic supplies - in all their stages, from production to retail sales (called "distribution"). The system is carefully engineered as to set lower prices on low quality industrial products that actually damage the health of the consumers and the environment as well, thus creating new business opportunities for the "remedies" to the ensuing problems.

Over and above all, the bank system has taken control of the various world governments, making money without producing anything and encouraging or supporting adharmic enterprises of all kinds, favoring allies and punishing adversaries by manipulating the stock market, lobbying and forcing unjust legislation - especially by making cheap and good healthy things illegal. Racketeering, insider information leaks, black market, usury, financial slavery through debts become normal practices. Wars are carefully planned simply to create business opportunities for weapon manufacturing and civil reconstruction, and to take control of valuable resources of the invaded regions.

The general masses are brainwashed with the myth of consumerism as prosperity, but the quality of life of the members of society steadily decreases. In the end, huge dumps of garbage are created, especially by planned obsolescence and unnecessary complex packaging, while the things that are really important and vital become increasingly difficult and rare, if not impossible to find. The system implacably devours land, water, fuel, mineral resources, food, animals and people through various types of *ugra karma* business, especially with the production of non vegetarian food, that causes immense loss of land and water, as well as numerous diseases.

There is nothing wrong in acquiring valuable resources and objects, because *artha* is one of the main goals of human life

according to Vedic scriptures. However, *artha* must be acquired only after a strict training in *dharma*, and must always avoid violating the principles of *dharma* such as *satya* (truthfulness/honesty), *daya* (compassion), *sauca* (cleanliness) and *tapas* (restraint). Some people believe that a *vaisya* cannot do business without cheating and lying, but this is a dangerous delusion because it opens the doors to *adharma* and *tamas*, with disastrous consequences for the entire society. It is undoubtedly the result of a slave mentality, because under a colonialist government or any predatory government, people are forced to lie and hide their actual wealth and profit, otherwise they will be utterly stripped of everything by their greedy rulers, and maybe even killed.

On the other hand, when the government is based on dharmic (ethical) principles, *vaisyas* can prosper openly without fear, and without any need for cheating or lying. Also, the citizens will not feel the need to accumulate excess wealth because they have no fear for the future, as the entire social system is engineered to support all its members at all times, and the happiness of the people does not depend on tamasic pursuits.

VERSE 14

असौ मया हतः शत्रुर्हनिष्ये चापरानपि ।

asau mayā hataḥ śatrurhaniṣye cāparānapi ।

ईश्वरोऽहमहं भोगी सिद्धोऽहं बलवान्सुखी ॥ १६-१४ ॥

īśvaro'hamahaṁ bhogī siddho'haṁ balavānsukhī || 16-14 ||

asau: that; *maya*: by me; *hatah*: killed; *satruh*: enemy; *hanisye*: I will eliminate; *ca*: and; *aparan*: others; *api*: also; *isvarah*: the

Lord; *aham*: I am; *aham*: I am; *bhogi*: enjoyer; *siddhah*: perfect; *aham*: I am; *bala van*: powerful; *sukhi*: happy.

"I have killed that enemy of mine, and I will kill others, too. I am the Lord and master (of all I survey). I am the enjoyer. I am perfect, powerful and happy.

Asuras have strange ideas about enemies. Their motto is, "one who is not with me is against me". Vedic scriptures define "enemy" as someone who is physically attacking us with hostile intent, but *asuras* consider as enemies not just those who physically attack them, but all those who refuse to submit and worship them, or could be considered competition.

Krishna has stated (12.18) that a devotee should be equally balanced and impartial towards enemies and friends (*samah satrauca mitre ca*), but of course this does not mean that we should never fight back those who attack us or our subordinates.

The meaning of *dharmayuddha*, often mistranslated as "holy war", has nothing to do with the attempt to materially enforce some religious ideology, but it is simply to protect the fundamental principles of ethics and the life of the *prajas* - the harmless, innocent, and good people that support society. A *kshatriya* who dies in such selfless line of duty is immediately elevated to a higher level of existence (2.37, 11.33).

There are precise rules in dharmic battles: a warrior can only fight against an equal opponent, and never attack one who is not willing to fight, including those active warriors who have lost weapons or armor, or are wounded or incapacitated. It is considered adharmic to attack any non-combatants, or to destroy trees or houses or crops. Women, children, farmers and civilians in general are never touched or threatened in any way; there is never any "collateral damage" or "reprisal".

On the other hand, the *asuras*' idea of war is not limited by ethical considerations, and in fact they usually resort to cynical terrorism by attacking, kidnapping and raping women and children, destroying cities and villages, tormenting all peaceful civilians, and resorting to dirty tactics and devious means such as deceit, political games, assassination, slandering and character assassination, blackmailing, betrayal and back stabbing, destruction of innocence and demoralization of the adversaries.

And the scope of their greed is unlimited: they are not content with one village, one city, one kingdom, one nation, or even one planet: they even try to artificially reach other planets to establish their dominion there, too. Ravana planned to build a staircase to Svarga, and our contemporary *asuras* delude themselves and their followers into thinking that if they totally destroy or "consume" this planet, it will still be possible to "export" their way of life on other planets or space stations.

When we speak of "emperor" and "empire" in Vedic civilization, it is about a federation of smaller kingdoms that recognize a leader to whom to rally in times of danger and need, and who will resolve their disputes and guide them in cooperating for the common benefit. The emperor never interfered with the internal affairs of the vassal kingdoms, that freely chose their own kings, social systems, religious institutions and cultural customs.

On the other hand, *asuras* want to completely control the land and the peoples they conquer, and demand to be worshiped above all Deities and authorities, thus uniting both religious and material power directly under themselves.

They cannot tolerate dissent or questioning of any kind, and they take all opportunities to avenge themselves of any real or imagined offense, and even to conduct preventive strikes against any potential future opponents.

For example, Kamsa tried to kill his own sister Devaki when he suspected that her unborn son could one day threaten his position, and even if he was finally persuaded to abstain from such an abominable action, he nevertheless kept Devaki and her husband Vasudeva locked up for many years and systematically killed their children at birth.

By reading the many stories of *asuras* in the *Puranas*, we notice that they demanded to be worshiped as God, and actively persecuted anyone who refused to do so. *Asuras* are characterized by impudent hypocrisy and arrogant belief of their own egotistic divinity, as *isvara* (the Lord) usurping God's position as the owner of all planets, the enjoyer or beneficiary of all actions and the object of worship for all beings (*bhoktaram yajna tapasam sarva loka mahesvaram, suhridam sarva bhutanam, 5.29*).

It is easy to spot the *asura* in the religious field because he invariably usurps the position of God in the worship of his followers, putting up his own pictures and images in the temple and demanding that regular rituals to be performed to them. It becomes normal for his followers to declare themselves *his* devotees or devotees of *his* organization rather than devotees of God, to chant his name instead of God's names, and to follow only the books written by him instead of studying genuine *shastra*. He arranges their marriages, tries to control their sexual life, and holds complete power over their income and possessions - assuming total control over their personal lives, demanding to be given all their wealth and service at any time, in "full surrender".

A genuine *guru*, on the other hand, always keeps a secondary position in the spiritual practices of his followers, and teaches them how to worship God. Sometimes, to facilitate neophytes who have some tamasic tendencies and expectations, a genuine *guru* will allow them to focus on his person in order to develop affection and gratitude for his tutoring, but such leniency should never be

allowed to affect the development of self realization of the disciple or his/ her direct relationship with the Supreme Consciousness. Besides, it should always remain on the level of affectionate family dealings, and not develop into the fearful formal worship demanded by a dictator.

Foolish and ignorant people can easily be misled by clever manipulators who present demons as good people or even as saints, criminals as victims, friends as enemies, and the other way around. For those who are afflicted by a materialistic vision, the enemy is simply someone who seems not to belong to our camp: this perspective gives no space for consideration of *dharma*, justice, or even decency or common sense, but the *asura* still believes he is in a perfectly moral, rightful and legitimate position, because his opinion constitutes the absolute religious truth.

For example, for a hardened rapist, the "enemy" will be a child who finds the courage to subtract him/ herself from his predatory clutches, and who might expose his violent habits by revealing his actions to the public. Therefore in the distorted mind of the criminal, the child "should be eliminated". Anyone else who may protect the child from him will also become his "enemy". Similarly, a witness to a heinous crime will be considered as an enemy by a mafia boss, and in totalitarian regimes anyone who does not subscribe to the government dogma becomes an "enemy of the State" by that very reason, even if he does not take any aggressive action.

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

According to the demoniac mentality, it is. According to the divine mentality, it is not.

Religion should be a personal matter. Religious leaders or *brahmanas* (and especially *sannyasis*) should have zero material power in society, politics, law making, or even possess any property. Whatever donation they are given in the form of land, cows, wealth, grains etc, they should only use what it necessary and dispose of the rest for the benefit of society at large.

Religious imperialism has nothing to do with God, and everything to do with asuric mentality: it aims to control more people by deceit or violence, and preaches that we can get more pleasure in paradise if we eliminate all those who do not convert and submit to our own group.

True *brahmanas* should merely teach and offer consultancies, both in public and in private, and if required, oppose incorrect and detrimental opinions presented as genuine truth. An opinion is physically dangerous only when it presents violent aggression as a legitimate (or the only legitimate) way of life. Bad actions must be counteracted by prevention and forceful opposition, but bad opinions must be counteracted by opinions only - by discussion and debate, preferably in public.

This is the Vedic system. In this regard, out of humility one could feel hesitant in entering such a debate against great personalities - heads of famous religious institutions, teachers with many followers, or powerful social figures. But if these people are taking an adharmic position, no matter what their reasons are, they must be fearlessly challenged and opposed in debate, just like Krishna instructed Arjuna to take arms against his elders on the battlefield of Kurukshetra.

VERSE 15

आढ्योऽभिजनवानस्मि कोऽन्योऽस्ति सदृशो मया ।

ādhyo'bhijanavānasmi ko'nyo'sti sadṛśo mayā ।

यक्ष्ये दास्यामि मोदिष्य इत्यज्ञानविमोहिताः ॥ १६-१५ ॥

yakṣye dāsyāmi modīṣya ityajñānavimohitāḥ ॥ 16-15 ॥

adhyah: prosperous; *abhijana van*: one who has many followers; *asmi*: I am; *kah*: who; *anyah*: other; *asti*: there is; *sadrisah*: comparable to; *maya*: me; *yaksye*: I will perform rituals; *dasyami*: I shall give charity; *modisye*: I will be happy; *iti*: like this; *ajnana*: by ignorance; *vimohitah*: confused.

"Confused by ignorance (he thinks): I have many followers, I am successful and wealthy. Who can be compared to me? I shall perform rituals, I shall distribute charity, and I shall be pleased by the results.

It is said, "power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely". However, as it was noticed by the brilliant author of *Dune*, power itself does not corrupt, but attracts people who are already corrupt or corruptible - individuals that can be considered pathologically imbalanced (*mada anvitah*, 16.10). These are the *asuras*.

Because in Kali yuga the general masses of people are immersed in *tamas*, and believe that wealth and material success are the self-explanatory evidence of sanctity (*Bhagavata Purana* 12.2.2-6), naturally *asuras* will tend to demonstrate their exalted spiritual and religious position and become popular by accumulating wealth, building impressive expensive *ashramas* and temples, gaining as many followers as possible, conducting grandiose and very visible religious rituals with complex and pompous celebrations, and

making a big show of charity distribution. All this, however, is done for the selfish pleasure (*modisye*) and for the aggrandizement and commercial advertisement of himself or his group or organization, with the purpose of increasing the business - getting more followers, more donations, more political weight.

In a smaller degree, these asuric tendencies can be observed among the general population during the traditional religious festivals. Those who are largely influenced by *tamas* are anxious to make a bigger *pandal* than their neighbors, to get the most powerful loudspeakers to make sure everybody notice it, and to purchase the largest and more decorative temporary statues and to conduct the most impressive rituals and processions. However, these *pandal* festivals often become a pretext to unlawfully collect money from the public, purchase food (and usually liquors and other intoxicants) for a small group of organizers, play noisy materialistic music for a few days, and create a sort of temporary social club, while at the end the "used idol" is discarded into the garbage dump.

A much better way to observe such festivals would be for all the local people to unite in cooperation and organize meetings and celebrations at a permanent temple, where the Deity is regularly worshiped all year round. There people will sit together to actually sing devotional songs and especially to discuss about the divine glories, activities, qualities, and teachings. At the end of each such meeting all the participants should be served good quality but simple pure vegetarian *prasadam* food, and offered whatever gifts will be appropriate to the occasion, such as booklets, *malas* etc. In this way there will be no waste or public inconvenience, and the community sense will become stronger.

The importance of permanent temples in the life of civilized society should not be underestimated, but such temples should not become centers of asuric mentality.

The Deities should be served with love and respect, but their decoration is less important than the distribution of spiritual knowledge and consciousness among the members of the community. Putting too much emphasis on expensive materials, paraphernalia and decorations will stimulate the *rajas* and *tamas* (lust and greed) of people, including the priests, and the level of consciousness will fall immediately.

In Vedic times, the *vigrahas* of the Deities were sculpted already complete with clothing and ornaments, and the decoration of the temples was relatively austere although the architecture could be impressive. There was a lot of imagery, but mostly in stone and paintings. People went to visit the temple to raise their consciousness by listening to the chanting of the *mantras* and *stutis*, and by receiving the simple *prasadam* consisting in offered flowers, leaves, *chandana*, and fruits.

The ideal - and transcendental - level of religiosity (*visuddha sattva*) is that large temples should not be built or managed in the name of a group or organization or even a king, but in the name of God only, and everybody could have access and be allowed to serve and worship there. Otherwise it is a private temple and it is not for the glory of God but for one's own pleasure and glory (*modisye*).

People who do not have sufficient knowledge and understanding about the purpose of religious life usually believe that it should be about "doing good deeds", and earning pious merits to counteract the consequences of their bad actions. Therefore they only offer financial support to those spiritualists who make a big show of such public activities, even if only with a few photos and very rare events. This stimulates and reinforces the tamasic and rajasic tendencies of the donors, who can boast - albeit as subordinate doers - of being great and powerful above all others, advertise themselves as important people in society, and feel "pious"

because of the wealth they gave in charity and "earning elevation to paradise" that is a place full of heavenly pleasures. However, this charity is rarely done with respect and the proper consideration. All too often the donors give only stuff they cannot use any more and want to get rid of - stale or damaged food, old clothes, shoes, and other garbage. The actual sattvic or transcendental charity, however, is something else. It is performed quietly and without boasting about it, because it is needed and useful, and to please God as the sum total of human society, without expecting anything in return (17.20-22, 18.25).

The word *abhijanavan* specifically refers to noble ancestry, prominent family, or high caste. This vainglory is found in many other groups who have no understanding of the transcendental science, *atma vidya*, and who identify with the material body. As we have seen many times, this *ahankara* and *mamatva* is the root of all ignorance, and as such, it generates an asuric tendency.

VERSE 16

अनेकचित्तविभ्रान्ता मोहजालसमावृताः ।

anekacittavibhrāntā mohajālasamāvṛtāḥ ।

प्रसक्ताः कामभोगेषु पतन्ति नरकेऽशुचौ ॥ १६-१६ ॥

prasaktāḥ kāmabhogeṣu patanti narake'śucau ।। 16-16 ।।

aneka: many; *citta:* worries; *vibhranta:* tormented; *moha jala:* by a net of illusions; *samavritah:* covered; *prasaktah:* attached; *kama bhogesu:* in the enjoyment of lust; *patanti:* they fall down; *narake:* in a hellish condition; *asucau:* impure.

"Tormented by innumerable anxieties and covered by a net of illusion, (hopelessly) attached to the enjoyment of lust, they fall into a dirty hellish condition.

The word *citta* literally means "thoughts", as in "mental activities". Because this word is coupled with *vibhranta* ("tormented", "burned"), we understand that such laboring of the mind is painful and debilitating. It is not just anxiety, but it also includes schemes, hopes, desires, and resentments, all in a tangled net that completely binds the conditioned soul to ultimate anxiety.

Another word for "anxiety" is *kuntha*, that also means "thorn", as mentioned for example in *Bhagavata Purana* (3.32.17): *rajasa kuntho manasah, kamatmano ajitendriyah*, "their minds full of anxieties because of *rajas*, they remain immersed in lust without restraint". The level of transcendental consciousness is called *vaikuntha* ("without anxiety") or *vigata kuntha yatra* ("where all anxieties are gone") because a self realized soul is satisfied with whatever joys and opulences life delivers, and serenely accepts the fact that he will have to let them go one day. This is possible only when we have overcome the material identification (*ahankara*) and attachments (*mamatva*).

On the contrary, *asuras* have no other purpose than enjoying this body in this lifetime, so their anxiety is all-devouring. It was already mentioned in verse 11 (*cinta*) as a major characteristic of their lives, and here it is repeated again. The expression *moha jala samavritah* literally means "caught in the fishing net of illusion", and illustrates how *asuras* keep very busy trying to weave their schemes and theories and systems, but inevitably end up tangled in their own traps.

Under their false and delusional fantasies of religion (*dambha*), they imagine that they are going to enjoy in heaven because of their righteousness, but even if they call this world "a valley of

tears", they are never really eager to leave it. And when the danger of death approaches, they frantically seek the help of hospitals and doctors to get a few more days of a miserable life. In their deepest heart of hearts, where their silenced conscience sits, they know that they are not going to paradise or Vaikuntha, but they have already sunk into a hellish existence (*patanti narake*), as they have created thousands of Vaitaranis (the symbolic hellish river full of all impure stuff such as blood, pus, bones etc) already on this Earth. Their condition is characterized by *moha* (illusion), *prasaktavya* (excessive attachment) and *asaucam* (uncleanliness).

Their *ugra karma* is religious only superficially, and in fact their rituals and ceremonies are impure because they give more importance to a big show of opulence than to simplicity, honesty and purity. At the moment of death, such position only becomes more apparent, because they lose the shelter of the gross material body they used to hide their bad conscience. What will they do? They have already developed tamasic qualities, and they cannot switch to divine consciousness automatically, even with all the blessings of the priests and churches of the world.

A soul's next destination at death is not determined by any external authority, but only by its actual individual consciousness, determined by its actions during life: *yam yam vapi smaran bhavam tyajaty ante kalevaram, tam tam evaiti kaunteya sada tad bhava bhavitah*, "O Arjuna, whatever nature one remembers at the time of leaving the body, s/he attains precisely that state of being, because of always contemplating that existence" (8.6).

This is particularly true for materialists: *rajasi pralayam gatva karma sangisu jayate, tatha pralinas tamasi mudha yonisu jayate*, "When death comes, those who are under the influence of *rajas* take a new birth among those who are attached to activities, while those who meet destruction while under the influence of *tamas* take birth in matrixes devoid of intelligence" (14.15).

VERSE 17

आत्मसम्भाविताः स्तब्धा धनमानमदान्विताः ।

ātmasambhāvitāḥ stabdhā dhanamānamadānvitāḥ ।

यजन्ते नामयज्ञैस्ते दम्भेनाविधिपूर्वकम् ॥ १६-१७ ॥

yajante nāmayajñāiste dambhenāvidhipūrvakam || 16-17||

atma sambhavitah: egotistic; *stabdhah*: impudent; *dhana*: wealth; *mana*: false prestige; *mada anvitah*: deluded by; *yajante*: they perform rituals; *nama yajnaih*: that are sacrifices only in name; *te*: they; *dambhena*: because of arrogance; *vidhi purvakam*: devoid of knowledge and proper rules.

"Deluded by egotism, impudence, false prestige and (the possession of) wealth, they celebrate rituals and sacrifices that have no real value, because of their hypocrisy and ignorance of the proper purpose and rules.

Krishna continues to describe how the typical *asuras* make a big show of religiosity to impress the foolish and ignorant people and obtain their support, obedience and allegiance.

The expression *atma sambhavita* could be translated as "self-made man", someone who considers himself not accountable to anyone else, even to God, and therefore becomes irresponsible in his actions. Such an *asura* is very opinionated - we could say "over-opinionated and under-informed". He firmly believes he does not need to learn anything, not caring for scriptures, and in his self conceit he does not hesitate to preach principles that are blatantly against the genuine scriptures, against *dharma*, *jnana*, and *vidya*, but he presents his own speculations as "the age-old religious tradition".

Another translation of *atma sambhavitah* is "having a very high opinion of oneself"; this indicates that they consider themselves to be worshipable, so they hijack the people's worship from God to themselves and/ or their group, organization etc. Some of such false preachers even claim to be divine *avatars*, misappropriate "by proxy" the authority of some genuine *acharya* of the past, or manufacture their own God figure or ideology for political material purposes, to better exploit people and resources, and thrive on the general ignorance among the masses about the fundamental principles of *dharma* and *vidya*.

It is true that we cannot put any limit on the number and activities of genuine divine *avatars*: *avatara hy asankhyeya, hareh sattva nidher dvijah, yathavidasinah kulyah, sarasah syuh sahasrasah,* "The manifestations of Hari in this world are innumerable, like the thousands of lakes, rivers and creeks that flow from the ocean of *sattva*" (*Bhagavata Purana* 1.3.26).

But all such *avatars* are always characterized by the same fundamental dharmic mission: *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). Since the principles of *dharma* are eternal and universal (*sanatana*), a true *avatara* is recognized by the fact that he protects the good (harmless, innocent) people, destroys the evil doers and brings back the consciousness and application of the original *dharma*. If some "*avatara*" is not demonstrating these characteristics or his teachings are not compatible with the fundamental principles of *dharma* and the transcendental knowledge contained in the genuine original scriptures, it's better to give him a large berth.

Even those who keep their profile a bit lower, and merely present themselves as *sannyasis* or *babajis*, should be considered *asuras* if their teachings and behavior are against the eternal and universal

principles of *dharma* and *vidya*. We should certainly be very cautious about accepting the authenticity of *sannyasis* who engage in adharmic activities against the rules of *sannyasa*, such as political wrangling and institutional power games, persecution of dissenters or competitors, or even if they simply claim all rights and no duties, living and behaving like kings without bothering to honor the responsibilities that come with a royal position.

A genuine *sannyasi* has no house, no personal properties, no bank account, no pride, no personal servant. He is always happy only to hear and speak about Transcendence. A *sannyasi* cannot engage in politics, trade, business or any material activity to maintain himself, but rather he should simply accept whatever alms are coming spontaneously.

If he is not able to face such austere and difficult life, he should humbly step down, as recommended in *Brahma vaivarta Purana: asvamedham gavalambham sannyasam pala paitrkam, devarena sutotpattim kalau panca vivarjayet*, "In this age of Kali, one should skip five religious traditions: the *asvamedha yajna*, the *gomedha yajna*, the acceptance of the order of *sannyasa*, the oblations to the forefathers, and begetting children in one's brother's wife."

The word *stabdha*, from the root *stha* ("established"), literally means "motionless", and it indicates the foolish, dull and obstinate conceit caused to one's established position, wealth, hierarchy, government recognition, political support, number of followers, race, nationality, antiquity of lineage, caste, etc. It is also translated as "puffed up", or "foolish".

This meaning is reinforced by the expressions *dhana mana*, literally "with consideration/ respect to wealth", and *mada anvitah*, meaning "filled with madness, engrossed, absorbed in madness" and indicating some delusion of grandeur that has nothing to do with genuine transcendental realization and Vedic knowledge. The

last part of the verse confirms: *vidhi purvakam* literally means "lack of knowledge" and "disregard for rules".

One of the grossest transgressions to the fundamental rules of *dharma* and *vidya* is the consumption of non-vegetarian foods, that is contrary to *daya* and *ahimsa* (compassion and non-violence) as well as to *saucam* (cleanliness and purity) and *tapas* (restraint, self-control). No genuinely religious person will indulge in such *adharmas*.

Another serious flaw indicated by *vidhi purvakam* is the lack of understanding of the meaning of the *mantras* chanted (and therefore the frequent choice of the appropriate *mantras*), the gross mispronunciation, and the neglect of important parts of the rituals. Krishna clearly says here that the *yajnas* performed by such foolish people are only for show and name, to become famous and obtain a reputation of religiosity (*yajante nama yajnaiḥ*), and as such they have no real value (17.5-6, 17.11-13, 18.25, 18.32).

VERSE 18

अहंकारं बलं दर्पं कामं क्रोधं च संश्रिताः ।

ahaṅkāraṁ balaṁ darpaṁ kāmaṁ krodhaṁ ca saṁśritāḥ ।

मामात्मपरदेहेषु प्रद्विषन्तोऽभ्यसूयकाः ॥ १६-१८ ॥

māmātmaparadeheṣu pradviṣanto'bhyaśūyakāḥ ॥ 16-18 ॥

aham karam: I am the doer; *balam*: strength; *darpam*: pride; *kamam*: lust; *krodham*: rage; *ca*: and; *samsritah*: having taken residence; *mam*: me; *atma para dehesu*: in their own body and in the bodies of others; *pradvisantah*: they hate; *abhyasuyakah*: envious.

"Taking shelter in *ahankara*, physical/ material strength, arrogance, lust and anger, they show envy and hatred against me, as I reside in their own bodies and in the bodies of others.

The root of the problem is immediately identified in the first word of this verse. It is the *ahankara*, the egotism that deludes the conditioned soul into believing that he is indeed the supreme controller of his life, and the legitimate owner and enjoyer of everything. This *ahankara* is the sense of material identity and is inevitably attached to social position, family position, material qualities and activities, possessions, affiliations, and everything else that pertains to the material body.

Therefore it is only natural that the foolish materialist confused by this delusion (*ahankara vimudhatma kartaham iti manyate*, 3.27) gives great importance to physical strength, fitness and stature and/or material power of any kind (*bala*) as well as to lust for sense gratification and material acquisitions (*kama*), because these are the pride (*darpanam*) of his life. Because bodies are separate from one another, and the pain suffered by one is not easily perceived by another, this identification with the material body causes a strong feeling of duality and selfishness. So whenever one's gratification and domination seems to be threatened, rage (*krodha*) ensues due to hostility (*dvisa*) and envy (*abhyasuya* - as opposite of *anasuya*).

As we have seen in verse 16.14, the *asura* thinks, "Why should someone else enjoy what is supposed to be rightfully mine? Why should someone else be the lord and master (*isvara*) instead of me? I am the legitimate enjoyer (*bhogi*), and I will eliminate any competition."

This is the evidence of his lack of understanding about God. The *asura* thinks that God is a separate person, maybe one more powerful than others, but still an individual person. We see for example in the extensive narration of the Narasimha *avatara* that

the *asura* Hiranyakasipu wanted to see Vishnu directly, because he did not believe that Vishnu is in everyone's heart as Prahlada had said. The main problem of *asuras* has been brilliantly solved there by Prahlada (who was Hiranyakasipu's son): "give up the asuric tendency of seeing others as enemies, because the only enemy is your own mind" (*jahi asuram bhavam imam tvam, Bhagavata Purana 7.7.9*). Hiranyakasipu was so arrogant that he in fact accused his son Prahlada of being an impudent upstart (*durvinita*), the disgrace of the family (*kula bheda kara*), and a degraded (*adhama*) stubborn (*stabdham*) fool (*manda*), because he did not worship Hiranyakasipu's established position (*sasana - sa asana*), as we can see in verse 7.8.5.

So this is the litmus test for all of us, clear as the sunlight in a beautiful day: no matter how religious an *asura* will appear to be, and how boldly he will try to present his official "established" rights and privileges, if he wants to control everyone and considers any dissenters as enemies and tries to destroy them, he is exposing his true demoniac nature. The only external enemy is one who physically attacks us: one who refuses to worship us and to be controlled by us is certainly not an enemy. The very fact that one physically attacks others with such a stupid motivation exposes his lack of spiritual realization, as anyone who becomes violent against a creature is actually violent against God who is present in the hearts of all creatures.

It is a fact that *asuras* are usually considered religious people and offer traditional rituals sacrifices and worship God in their own way - not out of love and devotion, but because they want something in return. Usually *asuras* do not approach Vishnu (7.15) because Vishnu is very strict and does not give blessings to those who are contaminated by asuric qualities. Materialistic persons usually feel it safer to approach more compassionate Personalities of Godhead, especially Shiva Mahadeva, who is also known as

Pasupati or "the protector of *pasu*", that are people whose consciousness is on an animal level. Shiva Mahadeva is also known as Asutosh ("quickly pleased"), and Bholenatha ("the protector of simple-minded people"). Of course this does not mean that Shiva himself is simple-minded, or lower in position than Vishnu: it simply means that he is more compassionate. He is also known as Nilakantha ("blue/ black throat") because of the black stain left by the dreadful *halahala* poison, that Mahadeva deliberately swallowed to save the universe from its lethal effects.

We know that Vishnu is Yajna, the personification of sacrifice, and therefore during their rituals *asuras* will formally offer their homage to Vishnu hoping to get material benefits. However, they will not be able to really approach Vishnu because they are not pure enough to understand him, so they can only come in contact with his manifestations in the material world, such as Mahadeva, Agni, Yajna, the Virata Rupa itself and the various Vishnu *avatars* - such as the Purusha avatars (the Vishnus reclining on the 3 oceans), Narasimha, Varaha, etc.

We see that sometimes people who correspond to the description of the *asuras* by *guna* and *karma* are found to be engaged in the worship Vishnu or Krishna, but such worship is merely external (*nama yajna*) or a simple offering of superficial homage (*namah*) without real surrender (*na prapadyante*). The defining characteristic of *asuras* is that they want to take God's position, and therefore they do not recognize God's supreme position. They only see God (in any form) as a provider of blessings and benefits and forgiveness; they believe they can "use" God for their own purposes, and generally Vishnu appears to them as too powerful to be duped in that way.

Of course *asuras* would have no fear in approaching an *avatara* of Vishnu if this *avatara* appears to be sweet and harmless enough: for example, all the *asuras* flocked around Mohini, and were

certainly more than ready to worship and please her so that they could get from her what they wanted.

The envy and hatred against others that is found in *asuras* is certainly not directed against "saints" only, as some have claimed. Such an interpretation is dangerous because in itself can feed the asuric tendency of dividing people into separate camps and see "enemies" in those who do not submit to such "saints", whether genuine or fake.

Too often this trick has been played to defend fake spiritualists and *asuras* by claiming that those who did not submit to their adharmic demands and ignorant conclusions were simply "envious". In fact, it is very difficult to see how any sane person would be envious of *asuras*, considering the unholy and unhappy life they are leading and the disastrous course that *asuras* are setting for themselves in the future. They should rather be pitied.

Truth has no agenda: a whistle blower who alerts the public against the danger created by powerful criminals should be taken seriously, not superficially condemned as "envious". Proper investigation and analysis should be conducted on the basis of direct observation of the characteristics as explained by Krishna in this chapter.

Then after being duly warned of the danger, each person will make their choice and be responsible for them. No other course of action is required for a sattvic person than making the proper shastric knowledge available to everyone.

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VERSE 19

तानहं द्विषतः क्रुरान्संसारेषु नराधमान् ।

tānahaṁ dviṣataḥ krurānsamsāreṣu narādhamān ।

क्षिपाम्यजस्रमशुभानासुरीष्वेव योनिषु ॥ १६-१९ ॥

kṣipāmyajasramaśubhānāsuriṣveva yoniṣu ॥ 16-19 ॥

tan: them; *aham:* I; *dvisatah:* the hateful; *kruran:* the cruel; *samsaresu:* into the *samsara*; *nara adhaman:* the most degraded human beings; *ksipami:* I send; *ajasram:* for a very long time; *asubhan:* inauspicious; *asurisu:* *asurika*; *eva:* certainly; *yonisu:* into wombs.

"I send these hateful and cruel people, the most degraded among human beings, into a long imprisonment in the *samsara*, to take birth in inauspicious asuric wombs again and again.

There is absolutely no need for anyone of us to run around looking for *asuras* to eliminate them, because God himself in the form of Time will bring them to face the consequences of their bad choices. Again, the only action we are allowed to take is to defend ourselves and our subordinates from physical attacks and to do our best to spread the correct knowledge and understanding of Vedic knowledge.

Under no circumstances we should take the initiative of attacking people - go into war, court cases, or any similar action - because we believe them to be *asuras*.

If these people actually become aggressors (*agnido garadas caiva sastrapanir, dhanapahah, kshetra darapahari ca shadete atayinah*) and attack us or our subordinates with fire, with poison, or holding weapons in hands, or by taking away possessions, land or wife (or other family members), we have all

rights to legitimate defense even with the application of lethal force, but otherwise nobody should be attacked simply because of what they believe or do not believe. If we committed such a mistake, we would become *asuras* in our own right.

Of course exposing the actual crimes of an *asura*, by bringing sufficient evidence to the knowledge of the public, cannot be considered an aggression. Wrong opinions and teachings must be counteracted by correct information, opinions and teachings. Slandering can be counteracted by proving it wrong by one's dharmic behaviors and conclusions. Direct physical aggression should be counteracted by physical force, and indirect physical aggression should be counteracted by preventive measures.

The words *dvisa* ("hateful"), *krura* ("cruel, evil doer") and *nara adhama* ("depraved") are the characteristics of the *asura*, who attacks others unnecessarily and viciously, without any considerations for the fundamental dharmic principles such as compassion, truthfulness, and so on. There is no justification for hatred and cruelty, even towards criminals. Even in extreme cases, when evil and cruel *asuras* attack us, we should always behave with restraint and compassion; this means for example that the women and children of our aggressors should not be harmed in any way, and the amount of force applied against the aggressor himself should be limited to what is really necessary.

We see in *Bhagavata Purana* the example of Indra, who took advantage of the temporary absence of the *asura* Hiranyakasipu to get back the control of the heavenly planets. Having seized the royal palace, Indra captured Hiranyakasipu's wife, who was pregnant, and contemplated the idea of killing the baby before he could grown into a dangerous *asura* like his father. Narada Muni immediately appeared and scolded Indra severely for that unworthy thought; he took the lady under his personal protection in his *ashrama*, and in that spiritual environment the unborn baby

was able to absorb the feelings of love and devotion to God and to listen to his qualities, activities and teachings. So it was that Prahlada became a great divine personality in spite of being the son of a great *asura*.

This is also a warning for us. God (who is none other than Dharma itself) only protects the *devas* because they remain within the boundaries of *dharma* (*dharma eva hato hanti, dharma rakshati rakshitah*, "dharma kills those who try to kill it, and protects those who protect it" (*Manu Smriti* 15.8). The moment we become opposed to *dharma*, *dharma* will start destroying us even if we were situated in a high position, and the moment we become supportive to *dharma*, *dharma* will start protecting us even if we were situated in a lower position. At any moment we can change the course of our life in this way.

Of course, self defense is always justified. If our opponents have already committed a serious violation of the fundamentals of ethics, we can respond in a similar fashion to prevent further damage especially to innocent and good people.

If the only way to stop an aggressor is to terrorize him with an impressive display of ferocity from our part, that is what we must do: to fight against a *rakshasa* we can engage a *rakshasa* or use *rakshasa* strategies, if the human manner of fighting proves insufficient. But when we set out to destroy monsters, we must be very careful not to become monsters ourselves: this is why Krishna says *balam balavatam caham kama raga vivarjitam, dharmaviruddho bhutesu kamo 'smi bharatarsabha*, "O Arjuna, I am the strength of the strong who is free from selfishness and attachment. In all beings, I am desire that is not contrary to *dharma*" (7.11).

VERSE 20

आसुरीं योनिमापन्ना मूढा जन्मनि जन्मनि ।

āsurīm yonimāpannā mūḍhā janmani janmani ।

मामप्राप्यैव कौन्तेय ततो यान्त्यधमां गतिम् ॥ १६-२० ॥

māmaprāpyaiva kaunteya tato yāntyadhamāṃ gatim ॥ 16-20 ॥

asurim: asuric; *yonim:* wombs; *apannah:* attained; *mudhah:* the fools; *janmani janmani:* birth after birth; *mam:* me; *aprapya:* unable to approach; *eva:* certainly; *kaunteya:* o son of Kunti; *tatah:* then; *yanti:* they go; *adhamam:* degraded; *gatim:* destination.

"O son of Kunti, even after taking birth from asuric wombs lifetime after lifetime, these fools remain unable to attain me, because they slide constantly into degradation.

It is important here to understand that the Supreme has no hatred for anyone: *samo 'ham sarva bhutesu na me dvesyo 'sti na priyah, ye bhajanti tu mam bhaktya mayi te tesu capy aham*, "I am equally disposed towards all living beings. I do not hate anyone, and I do not favor anyone. Yet, when someone offers me a sincere service in devotion, I also serve them with love and devotion" (9.29). God is not interested in punishing anyone: *nadatte kasyacit papam na caiva sukritam vibhuh, ajnanenavritam jnanam tena muhyanti jantavah*, "The all-powerful Lord does not consider the good or bad merits of anyone. The problem is only due to the living entities, that are confused because their knowledge is covered by ignorance" (5.15).

The *asuras* determine their own destiny by consistently making disastrous choices, and then God in the form of Time brings them to the consequences of their own actions.

This is why Krishna says, "I cast them into degraded births, lifetime after lifetime".

Such *asuras* remain unable to approach God simply because they do not want to. God is not abandoning them - in fact God never abandons anyone, as the *param atman* continues to accompany the *jiva atman* in all its incarnations, including the most degraded forms of life and even in asuric bodies. At any time, even the worst *asura* is allowed to change the course of his life. Unfortunately, the weight of his previous bad actions has a very heavy inertial mass, and will keep pulling down, lower and lower, and progress in the opposite direction will be extremely difficult and taxing, but it will still be possible. It is said, *kartum akartum anyatha kartum samartha*, "one who can do something can also undo it".

Of course, this freedom of choice exists only at certain levels of life, because in animal and vegetal species the conditioned soul can only exhaust its bad *karma* by enduring hardships, yet this is a progress, too. We could say that this category of *asuras* are the *nitya baddhas* ("eternally conditioned souls") that are sometimes described in Vedic literature. But even for them there is hope, as the opportunity for purification and progress is presented to everyone, even for those who have already taken birth in asuric and inauspicious wombs.

To move from the vicious circle to the virtuous circle we must simply follow the instruction of Prahlada to his father: "give up the asuric tendency of seeing others as enemies, because the only enemy is your own mind" (*jahi asuram bhavam imam tvam, Bhagavata Purana 7.7.9*).

When big *asuras* are blessed with the personal presence and contact of an *avatara* of the Lord, as we see in the stories of *Puranas* and other Vedic literature, we are to understand that such *asuras* are actually special souls and personal companions of

Isvara, who appear with him to assist his activities. Whether they are simply playing the role of Bhagavan's adversaries, or they have obtained such special opportunity because of some extraordinary *punya* or *sukriti*, these souls become instantly purified by the contact with the Personification of Dharma, and attain liberation. This is seen in many episodes of the *Puranas*, from Hiranyakasipu himself to Putana and several others. Many *asuras* were saved by the kindness and compassion of great devotees and self-realized souls such as Narada Muni and others.

Since the root cause of the *asuras'* delusion is ignorance, the best medicine to heal them is genuine knowledge, *daivim prakriti asritah*, that consists in taking shelter in divine knowledge. We have already seen in chapter 9: *moghasa mogha karmano mogha jnana vicetasah, raksasim asurim caiva prakritim mohinim asritah*, "Entertaining delusional desires, engaging in delusional activities, and delusionally convinced of their knowledge, they are confused by incorrect awareness and take shelter in the bewildering nature of *raksasas* and *asuras*" (9.12).

Genuine knowledge is therefore the solution to the problem:

api ced asi papebhyah sarvebhyah papa krit tamah, sarvam jnana plavenaiva vrijinam santarisyasi, "Even if you were burdened by many negative actions, by the greatest possible sins, you will be able to cross the ocean of bad things by the boat of knowledge" (4.36),

yathaidhamsi samiddho 'gnir bhasma sat kurute 'rjuna, jnanagnih sarva karmani bhasma sat kurute tatha, "O Arjuna, just like the blazing fire turns firewood into ashes, similarly the fire of knowledge turns all *karma* into ashes" (4.37),

jnanena tu tad ajnanam yesam nasitam atmanah, tesam aditya vaj jnanam prakasayati tat param, "To those for whom *ajnana* is

destroyed in the perception of the self by *jnana*, that Knowledge, similar to the radiant Sun, reveals that highest reality" (5.16).

VERSE 21

त्रिविधं नरकस्येदं द्वारं नाशनमात्मनः ।

trividham narakasyedaṁ dvāraṁ nāśanamātmanah ।

कामः क्रोधस्तथा लोभस्तस्मादेतत्रयं त्यजेत् ॥ १६-२१ ॥

kāmaḥ krodhastathā lobhastasmādetattrayaṁ tyajet ॥ 16-21 ॥

tri vidham: threefold; *narakasya:* of hellish life; *idam:* this; *dvaram:* the gate; *nasanam:* of destruction; *atmanah:* of the self; *kamah:* lust; *krodhah:* rage; *tatha:* and also; *lobhah:* greed; *tasmat:* therefore; *etat:* these; *trayam:* three; *tyajet:* one should abandon.

"The threefold gate to hellish life and to self-destruction consists of the mixture of lust, greed and anger. Therefore one should abandon these three.

The mixture of lust and anger (or attachment, or greed) is an explosive one, as Krishna has already explained in several verses:

kama esa krodha esa rajo guna samudbhavah, mahasano maha papma viddhy enam iha vairinam "This power is a mixture of desire and anger, and it is born from the quality of passion. Know that it is all-devouring, the cause of great sins, and the greatest enemy in this world." (3.37),

avritam jnanam etena jnanino nitya vairina, kama rupena kaunteya duspurenanalena ca, "O Arjuna, this mixture of lust and

anger can cover even the knowledge of wise persons. It is the perpetual enemy, the all-consuming fire" (3.39),

saknotihaiva yah sodhum prak sarira vimoksanat, kama krodhodbhavam vegam sa yuktah sa sukhi narah, "One who becomes capable of withstanding the onslaughts of this lust and anger before leaving the body is a *yogi* and a happy human being" (5.23),

kama krodha vimuktanam yatinam yata cetasam, abhito brahma nirvanam vartate viditatmanam, "The saintly persons who are completely free from lust and anger and have their consciousness steadily fixed in Brahman, who have realized the Self: for them there is *brahma nirvana* very soon" (5.26),

balam balavatam caham kama raga vivarjitam, dharmaviruddho bhutesu kamo 'smi bharatarsabha, "O Arjuna, I am the strength of the strong who is free from selfishness and attachment. In all beings, I am desire that is not contrary to *dharma*" (7.11),

asa pasa satair baddhah kama krodha parayanah, ihante kama bhogartham anyayenartha sancayan, "Bound by hundreds of ropes in the form of desires, always immersed in lust and anger, they desire to increase their desires and for that purpose they adopt any means to accumulate wealth" (16.12),

ahankaram balam darpam kamam krodham ca samsritah, mam atma para dehesu pradvianto 'bhyasuyakah, "Taking shelter in *ahankara*, physical strength, arrogance, lust and anger, they show envy and hatred against me, as I reside in their own bodies and in the bodies of others" (16.18),

asastra vihitam ghoram tapyante ye tapo janah, dambhahankara samyuktah kama raga balanvitah, "These people engage in

terrible/ horrible austerities, not prescribed by *shastra*, and remain immersed in hypocrisy and egotism, under the sway of lust and attachment" (17.5),

ahankaram balam darpam kamam krodham parigraham, vimucya nirmamah santo brahma bhuyaya kalpate, "One who has become completely free from *ahankara* and *mamatva*, from the sense of material strength, pride, lust, anger and greed, and is peaceful, focuses his desires towards Brahman" (18.53).

We can give up these characteristics of *tamas* by using *rajas* to climb our way up to *sattva*. In other words, one can engage *rajas* in the service of *dharma* through the system of *varnas* and *ashramas* as it will be explained further in the last chapters of *Bhagavad gita*, and remain detached and free from *ahankara* and *mamatva*. The process may be long and difficult, but it is the only solution.

It is also important to understand that the concept of *naraka* is different from the abrahamic concept of hell. *Naraka* is a subtle dimension (known in Vajrayana buddhism as *bardo*) where asuric conditioned souls, who committed violent acts against innocent and harmless creatures, remain for a period between two lifetimes, immersed in a sort of horrible nightmare that runs on their habitual fears and guilt. At some point in time, the confused soul who has become softened and purified by this experience is "fished out" and directed towards a new birth. On the other hand, abrahamic ideologies consider hell as a real and definitive place, where the unfortunate people who have failed to totally obey and please God and his priests are horribly tortured for all eternity, without any hope of redemption. The solution recommended by Krishna is very simple: just drop the asuric luggage of material identifications and attachments, renouncing the greedy lust and the hateful anger. This is already sufficient in itself to break the shackles of *tamas* and asuric nature.

VERSE 22

एतैर्विमुक्तः कौन्तेय तमोद्वारैस्त्रिभिर्नरः ।

etairvimuktaḥ kaunteya tamodvāraistribhirnaraḥ ।

आचरत्यात्मनः श्रेयस्ततो याति परां गतिम् ॥ १६-२२ ॥

ācaratyaātmanah śreyastato yāti parāṁ gatim ॥ 16-22 ॥

etaih: from these; *vimuktaḥ:* completely liberated; *kaunteya:* o son of Kunti; *tamah dvaraih:* from the gates of ignorance; *tribhih:* the three; *narah:* a human being; *acarati:* performs; *atmanah:* for the self; *sreyah:* the benefit; *tatah:* then; *yati:* s/he goes; *param gatim:* to the supreme destination.

"O son of Kunti, a human being who becomes completely free from this threefold gateway to *tamas* is really acting for his own benefit/ is engaged in the transcendental activities, and attains the supreme destination.

By avoiding ignorance (*tamas*), one automatically remains free from lust, anger and greed (*kama, krodha, lobha*). Desire will always be there, because desire is a natural tendency of the soul who wants to engage in union with the supreme eternity, consciousness and happiness (*sat, cit, ananda*), but under the influence of *sattva* or *visuddha sattva* such desire is liberating and elevating the consciousness.

Under the influence of *rajas*, desire ties the conditioned soul to endless activities, that can be directed either to elevation or degradation. When *rajas* is touched by *tamas*, it generates greed and desire (*kama*) becomes lust. Since lust can never be appeased by selfish sense enjoyment, like a fire cannot be extinguished by dousing it with oil, the feeling of frustration creates anger (*krodha*), and anger causes the loss of memory: *kamat krodho*

'bhijayate (2.62), *krodhad bhavati sammohah sammohat smriti vibhramah, smriti bhramsad buddhi naso buddhi nasat pranasyati* (2.63), "anger is born from (frustrated) lust, then anger becomes confusion, and confusion becomes failing memory. Because of the loss of memory, intelligence is lost, and when intelligence is lost, one falls from his position."

Because it is impossible to become totally free from all trace of desire, the solution recommended by Krishna is to remain detached and to soberly accept the pleasant and unpleasant things that life brings: *raga dvesa vimuktas tu visayan indriyas caran, atma vasyair vidheyatma prasadam adhigacchati*, "A person who has become free from the attraction and repulsion for the objects of the senses, maintains the control of himself in his actions and regulates himself (in body, mind and senses) obtains the blessing (of the Lord)" (2.64).

The rules prescribed by Vedic civilization are meant for gradual purification of the conditioned souls, and must be applied scientifically after careful observation of the actual position of the individual in regard to *guna* and *karma*. This is why the distortion caused by birth prejudice creating the degraded caste system is so detrimental to the progress of the individual and society at large: because people are forced into duties and positions that are not suitable to their real nature, and there is no progress. We will see this point in greater detail later in chapter 18.

The expression *acarati atmana sreya* ("acts for his own benefit") is in direct contraposition to *nasta atmanah* ("destroying the self") found in verse 16.9. Krishna had already said very clearly that one should be one's own best friend, and not act as one's own enemy: *uddhared atmanatmanam natmanam avasadayet, atmaiva hy atmano bandhur atmaiva ripur atmanah*, "One should raise him/herself by his/ her own effort, and not degrade him/ herself. Certainly one should be one's own friend, and one can be one's

own enemy as well" (6.5). As the word *atma* can be applied at several levels according to the individual consciousness to one's identity as body, mind or soul, the benefit indicated in this verse covers all the aspects of the being. Of course the highest and truest benefit of the self is the realization of spiritual life.

When we make efforts to convince people to stop harming innocent and harmless creatures, and to give up their asuric tendencies, beliefs and behaviors, we are actually thinking more about the benefit of the criminals rather than the benefit of their victims. Of course we are also concerned about the sufferings of the innocent and harmless creatures, but we know that such sufferings have already fructified on the manifested level, and are more difficult to dispel. It is much easier and effective to prevent the creation of further bad results (*ugra karma*) by stopping the criminal before he can commit more damage.

The Sanskrit word *karma* stems from the root *kr*, which means, "to do", "to take action". Therefore it means "action". In a wider sense, it is also used to indicate "reaction" and "connection between action and reaction". These three are actually very strictly connected: according to the universal laws, each action is followed by an equal reaction in the opposite direction. What we saw, we reap. *Karma* can be compared to agricultural products: the plant that has already sprouted from the seed, but has not produced fruits yet is called *sanchita*, which means "accumulated". It refers to the causal body or karmic body that contains all the karmic reactions; they are also called *kuta* ("established"). They can be destroyed quickly by spiritual knowledge, and more slowly and with more difficulty, by *prayascitta* ("atonement") and *punya* ("meritorious actions").

The fruits of the fully grown plant are called *prarabdha*. The definition refers to the reactions of activities of previous lifetimes, that have already fructified into the present material body, life

circumstances, nature tendencies, etc. They cannot be avoided because they have already manifested; they must be tolerated and can be modified only partially by hard work.

The seeds produced by the fruits are called *vartamana* (or *kriyamana*, respectively "present" and "which are being created"). The definition refers to the reactions to the activities that we are performing now, in this present lifetime, and that have not developed yet. And maybe will not develop at all, if we "roast" them through the process of *bhakti* and *vidya*. The karmic seeds can be destroyed very easily, because each day we can change our choices, and habits formed recently can be changed quickly.

The *agami karma* consists of that *sanchita karma* that has not manifested yet in the form of fruits, but is going to (*phalonmukha* "towards fructifying") in the near future. Actually there is no injustice, nothing happens "by chance": life and destiny follow a scientific law of perfect justice which, once we understand it, will help us get free from all ties and even to close the karmic account once and for all. In fact, the proper understanding of the laws of *karma* and reincarnation give the greatest power to the individual on his/ her own life, facilitating a sense of responsibility and a greater awareness about the consequences of each action we are contemplating.

VERSE 23

यः शास्त्रविधिमुत्सृज्य वर्तते कामकारतः ।

yaḥ śāstravidhimutsṛjya vartate kāmakārataḥ ।

न स सिद्धिमवाप्नोति न सुखं न परां गतिम् ॥ १६-२३ ॥

na sa siddhimavāpnoti na sukhaṁ na parāṁ gatim ॥ 16-23 ॥

yah: one who; *sastra vidhim*: the knowledge of the *shastra*; *utsriyja*: abandoning; *vartate*: goes; *kama karatah*: acting out of lust; *na*: not; *sah*: s/he; *siddhim*: perfection; *avapnoti*: will obtain; *na*: not; *sukham*: happiness; *na*: not; *param gatim*: the supreme destination.

"One who neglects the knowledge of the scriptures and takes up actions based on whimsical desires will not attain perfection, happiness, or the supreme destination."

This verse again highlights the absolute importance of genuine knowledge, that is detailed scientifically and practically in the original scriptures (*shastra vidhi*).

The word *utsriyja* means "neglecting, giving up, ignoring, disregarding", indicating a deliberate choice. The arrogant and egotistic *asuras* believe they are on a perfect position, above the study of the scriptures, and believe that their own foolish and ignorant opinion is at least as much as valid - if not more valid - than the original teachings of the *rishis* and *acharyas* who compiled the *sruti* and *smriti*. Therefore they create new methods and systems and *mantras* and worship rituals, based on their own whimsical desires or the whimsical desires of other conditioned souls, neglecting the actual purpose of Vedic knowledge, and they hope they will be able to attain perfect results, although on the subconscious level they are afraid to be faced with teachings that condemn their adharmic activities.

We should be careful not to misunderstand this point, because there is a deep difference between Vedic tradition and the abrahamic ideologies, known as historically revealed religions and based on specific scriptural texts that are considered the evidence for their own truth and value. Especially in the hands of asuric persons, such "historical" scriptural texts can be considerably manipulated, if not fabricated altogether, and used to deny the

fundamental importance of intelligence, ethical conscience and personal experience.

Even within the Indian cultural and historical sphere, ancient written texts have sometimes been misappropriated and tampered, if not forged, with asuric intentions, but Vedic tradition has a wonderful advantage over other ideologies, because it does not depend solely on some written documents. The tradition of Vedic knowledge is transmitted at a subtler level (*sabda brahman*) and is put into writing cyclically in various ages and according to the time, place and circumstances in which it is presented, so that the people will be able to understand it. *Veda* (knowledge itself) is eternal and cannot be destroyed by burning libraries, because it is inspired again and again at every creation in the hearts of the *rishis* ("those who directly see reality").

This is the reason why Vedic knowledge and realization must be disseminated as much as possible, so that the proper understanding of the principles of *dharma* and *vidya* will be carried and preserved in the living hearts of the self-realized souls. The *Rig Veda* (9.63.5) clearly orders: *krinvanto visva aryam*, "Let us make everybody an *arya*". The word *visva* is uncompromising, indicating that genuine Vedic knowledge is a birthright of all human beings, irrespective of the particular circumstances of their birth - and this universality is the key for the success of the entire mankind. When only a small number of "high caste" Indians have access to the study and practice of Vedic knowledge, the danger of degradation and loss increases exponentially, and adharmic forces will certainly take advantage of the situation, as it has been amply demonstrated in the history of the Indian subcontinent. But when such knowledge is made available to a greater number of people and at global level, it will reverberate stronger and stronger, and raise the general consciousness in India, too: this has also been demonstrated by the Hindu resurgence that started to develop after the 1970s.

This mission of spreading *arya* consciousness cannot be conducted without the knowledge of the scriptures, because the *shastra pramana* (scriptural evidence) is required to support the teachings of the *guru* and the direct realization or experience of the *sadhu*, the good person who is engaged in the spiritual *sadhana*. A *sadhu* - what to speak of a *guru* - must be the incarnations of Vedic knowledge, both *dharma* and *vidya*, so the general people must have some parameters to recognize a genuine teacher from an asuric speculator.

Vedic knowledge is not based on mere faith (*sraddha*), although it is a fact that sufficient faith is required initially in order to actually start practicing the method in the proper scientific way. The process is called "self realization" (*atma darshana*) or direct verification of "self knowledge" (*atma vidya*), therefore it needs to be applied individually in practice (*vijnana*) and not in theory only. This is the reason why the scriptural knowledge must be received from a realized soul (*tattva darsi*, 4.34), if possible from more than one, because mere words cannot actually convey its full meaning, and observation from a number of different perspectives can really help. A genuinely realized soul will be able to facilitate the student to actually experience the transcendental knowledge for him/ her self, and thus become realized in turn.

When a person has established him/her self on the level of genuine transcendental realization, and this realization can be practically observed in his/ her behavior (2.54), then only the meaning of the scriptural descriptions becomes clear and consistent, and one is able to see the difference between apparent contradictions (that can be reconciled in a greater picture) and actual inconsistencies (that expose manipulation or forgery). This means that individual realization is more important than the manuscripts that are historically available to us, and that might have been tampered with.

So whenever we find texts presented as Vedic, where the fundamental principles of *dharma* and *vidya* are disregarded or opposed, we know that they have been forged or tampered with. No genuine *shastra* will give teachings or orders that go against compassion, honesty, selflessness, personal evolution, the search for knowledge, liberation from conditionings, spiritual realization, universality of consciousness and life, the necessity to overcome material identifications and attachments, the importance of understanding the universe and the *gunas*, and the difference between divine and asuric characteristics.

When we speak about Vedic scriptures we refer not to the palm leaves or any other physical support or medium on which words have been written, but to these eternal and universal truths that were transmitted from *rishi* to disciple since the dawn of time. The word *rishi* literally means "seer", and refers to the fact that the compilers of the Vedic texts contemplated Knowledge through a direct act of perception and personal experience, just like Arjuna has seen the Virata Rupa in chapter 11.

It is not simply some theoretical stories or folk lore or record of ancient facts, but it is a genuine revelation of the nature of reality, that is achieved individually by all the sincere students of Vedic knowledge - a fundamental paradigm shift that is called illumination or enlightenment or awakening. After that point, one cannot simply go back to sleep, because his/ her perception of reality has become extremely clear and cannot be confused by anyone or anything.

This experience is explained at the beginning of *Bhagavad gita*: *yada te moha kalilam buddhir vyatitarisyati, tada gantasi nirvedam srotavyasya srutasya ca*, "When this understanding will lead you out of the dense swamp of illusion, you will come to a point where you will be indifferent to whatever has been heard or will remain to be heard" (2.52).

The knowledge contained in Vedic scriptures is not "religious" in the abrahamic sense; it does not present dogma (articles or faith) or give orders to be followed, but it explains how the universe works, at the material and at the spiritual level, and it encourages all students to experiment and verify the theory by putting it into practice. Therefore it is scientific in nature.

On the contrary, abrahamic scriptures are considered an absolute authority in itself even when their contents blatantly contradict the universal and scientific experience and verification, therefore abrahamic ideologies are sworn enemies of science and personal research. The word "heretic", for example, literally means "one who chooses what to believe", or in other words, one who wants to personally verify the merit of the statements given in the scriptures or by the religious leaders, because s/he does not give value to blind faith. Since the entire abrahamic ideology is built on the covenant or pact of allegiance and obedience over any other consideration, the use of intelligence and free will is condemned by abrahamic just like the respect for ethical values and for one's conscience. This is certainly not the case with Vedic knowledge. Krishna will say at the conclusion of *Bhagavad gita* (18.63): *iti te jnanam akhyatam guhyad guhyataram maya, vimrisyaitad asesena yathecchasi tatha kuru*, "I have explained to you this secret knowledge; now think about it and then do whatever you like".

From all this, we can better understand what Krishna is saying in this verse. He is not condemning free thinking and scientific questioning, but rather he is speaking about *asuras* (persons who do not care for ethical considerations) deliberately and stubbornly neglecting or rejecting *a priori* the knowledge contained in the genuine scriptures because it contradicts their personal whimsical plans, selfish interests and desires (*kama karatah*).

Also, we should notice that Krishna does not say that one who neglects the authority of the *shastra* is cursed or should be

punished. He is simply saying that such person will not achieve perfection, happiness or the supreme destination. In Vedic tradition, a person who does not recognize the authority of Vedic scripture is called a *nastika* (agnostic) and three of such *nastika darshanas* are considered traditional perspectives - Buddhism, Jainism and Charvaka's materialism. As long as such *darshanas* are not in violation of the universal and eternal principles of *dharma* and *vidya* they are not in opposition to Vedic knowledge, and they are respected in the spirit of plurality of perspectives. If the contents is good, the package is not so important.

VERSE 24

तस्माच्छास्त्रं प्रमाणं ते कार्याकार्यव्यवस्थितौ ।

tasmācchāstram pramāṇam te kāryākāryavyavasthitau ।

ज्ञात्वा शास्त्रविधानोक्तं कर्म कर्तुमिहार्हसि ॥ १६-२४ ॥

jñātvā śāstravidhānoktam karma kartumihārhasi ॥ 16-24 ॥

tasmat: therefore; *sastram:* the scriptures; *pramanam:* the evidence/ authority; *te:* your; *karya:* of what must be done; *akarya:* of what must not be done; *vyavasthitau:* in determining; *jnatva:* knowing; *sastra vidhana:* the instructions of the scriptures; *uktam:* (as they are) explained; *karma kartum:* to perform activities/ duties; *iha:* in this world; *arhasi:* you should.

"Therefore you should perform your activities in this world according to the directions offered by the *shastra* about determining one's duty.

Vedic scriptures cover both the material and the spiritual knowledge that is required to work and live in this world and

achieve success (*siddhi*) and happiness (*sukha*) as mentioned in the previous verse. This progressive path of human evolution is summarized by the four *purusha arthas* or purposes of human life, described as *dharma*, *artha*, *kama* and *moksha* (see for example *Bhagavata Purana* 4.8.41).

This verse is introducing the contents of the next two chapters, elaborating more about the three *gunas* and how they determine the qualities and tendencies and therefore the duties of each category of human beings.

The expression *karma kartum arhasi* mean "you should do your duty", indicating that the most important thing to progress in life consists in performing one's duty according to *guna* and *karma*, by making an effort to attain one's full potential. This is the process that we follow in any school: each student is examined to ascertain the difference between his development and his potential, and is trained to overcome his shortcomings and defects until he is fully qualified.

All human beings are naturally endowed with some qualities and tendencies due to previous *karma* and association with *gunas*; in all societies we have intellectuals, warriors, merchants and craftspeople, but Vedic society is different because it prescribes a strict training so each individual will become able to perform his duties perfectly.

Without such knowledge and training, the human potential will be wasted and lost, damaging both the individual and society. Intellectuals will be pushed into serving materialistic and degraded rulers, and will be forced to re-discover scientific truths about physics and metaphysics empirically by themselves, a bit at a time, with the danger of mistaking hallucinations for visions and losing track of the importance of ethical principles and conscience. Warriors and kings will be confused by the influence of *rajas* and

fall slaves to their own senses and minds or to adulation and manipulation by clever courtiers, forgetting the well being and protection of the *prajas* and blindly pursuing material conquests and acquisitions out of mere egotism.

Entrepreneurs will become greedy and miserly, accumulate wealth without sharing it with the rest of society, and inevitably come to the point where such material clout will delude them into believing that they are the lords and masters of the world - thus becoming full fledged *asuras*, as we can see very clearly today. *Sudras* will be abandoned to their own devices and will become selfish, arrogant, and violent as only *sudras* can be, and will provide useful mobs ready to be manipulated and exploited. The influence of *tamas* generated by their beliefs, behaviors and choices will grow exponentially because of their sheer numbers and contaminate the other classes too with the asuric mentality, so that the entire society will become hellish.

All this can be avoided and mended simply by the genuine knowledge of *dharma* and *vidya* contained in the original Vedic scriptures, that scientifically explain the cause and effect mechanism (16.8). By understanding this knowledge and using intelligence (*buddhi*), human beings can realize what should be done and what should not be done (*karya akarya, karma kartum*) and become free from the foolishness created by lust, greed and anger. This is the meaning of becoming *arya*, "civilized people". The next two chapters will further elaborate on this essential point.

The word *vyavasthita* means "discussion, debate", as well as "treatise, commentary" and can be applied to the modern definition of "publication", as it refers to the theoretical and practical study of the instructions contained in the scriptures (*shastra pramana*).

Our only purpose in life is to help people to know, understand and apply the genuine original knowledge of the *shastra*, and we do not

care much if some *asuras* or confused people accuse us of being their enemies because of that.

There is a fundamental difference between the Vedic approach and the mainstream academic approach created in the last few centuries by adharmic forces and ideologies. We will find that Vedic scriptures are also studied in the various "Indology" departments of prestigious non-Vedic universities around the world, but the purpose and conclusions are certainly different.

It was pope Onorius IV (1286-1287) who inaugurated in the West the study of oriental languages - not to learn from them about better ideas, but to understand how to fight against the opponents and competitors (enemies) of the Church. The Ecumenic Council of Wien (1311-1312) recognized the importance of Onorius' strategy and encouraged the creation of suitable departments in all the other European universities. Its motivation and inspiration has always been about "learning knowledge to oppose knowledge", or in other words, controlling and manipulating the search for knowledge, and using it for political purposes. With the Protestant reformation started by Martin Luther in 1520, a vast region of Europe rebelled against the power of the Church of Rome but continued to oppose Vedic knowledge - *dharmā* and *vidyā* - as it was not in accordance with the Christian doctrine and in fact came to be considered as "the last and the most subtle and powerful foe of Christianity" (in the words of evangelist A.H. Bowman).

All the academic constructions studied and expanded under the "Indology departments" of mainstream universities are in pursuance of the work of colonial scholars, whose declared aim was to deliberately destroy Vedic knowledge with bad and biased translations and presentations. Sir Monier-Williams (1819-1899, author of the most famous and still popularly used Sanskrit/English dictionary), wrote, "For what purpose then has this enormous territory been committed to England? Not to be the

'corpus vile' of political, social, or military experiments; not for benefit of our commerce, or the increase of our wealth - but that every man, woman and child, from Cape Comorin to the Himalaya mountains, may be elevated, enlightened, Christianized... When the walls of the mighty fortress of Brahmanism are encircled, undermined, and finally stormed by the solders of the cross, the victory of Christianity must be signal and complete."

Indian academia has been built on the same foundations. The famous Scottish Churches College was envisioned by its founder missionary Alexander Duff (1806-1878) as a "headquarters for a great campaign against Hinduism." All educated "high caste" Hindus have studied in expensive Christian academic Institutes, beginning with those dedicated to the "saint" Xavier. We should not be surprised if the students of such schools have developed a maimed, distorted and depraved vision of Vedic knowledge.

Let it be clear to one and all: the study of the Vedic scriptures must be conducted in the proper manner as instructed by Vedic scriptures themselves, according to the *yama* and *niyama* method and from a genuinely realized *guru* who clearly demonstrates by example and precept that he has overcome *ahankara* and *mamatva*, otherwise there will be no proper result - no perfection, no happiness and no attainment of the supreme destination. Only further delusion and development of asuric characteristics and degradation.