

# **BHAGAVAD GITA**

## **The Global Dharma for the Third Millennium**

### **Chapter Three**

Translations and commentaries  
compiled by Parama Karuna Devi

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## Chapter 3. Karma yoga

After explaining the difference between matter and spirit, and the overall concept of Yoga as the balance given by intelligence, Krishna will now elaborate about the science of action or Karma.

The first and foremost meaning of *karma* in Hindu tradition refers to the ritualistic ceremonies that constitute the duty of the *brahmanas*. A fiery controversy has raged for centuries on the two apparent positions, i.e. the *smarta* brahmanism based on *karma kanda*, the ritualistic path presented by the Vedas, and the *sannyasi* "monasticism" based on renunciation and a more philosophical interpretation of Vedic knowledge.

Such controversy, we need to state, is totally unnecessary and was not the purpose of the original expounders of the two apparently contradicting systems of *Purva mimamsa* and *Uttara mimamsa*.

Adi Shankara established the system of Mathas, founded temples for the worship of the Deities and radically reformed the institution of *sannyasa* as a necessary step to counteract the degradation of the brahmanic tradition, that had been hijacked by unqualified people motivated by arrogance, greed and an unbridled lust for sense gratification.

Before Adi Shankara's appearance, there had already been a reaction against this sad state of things, through the successful spreading of Buddhism and Jainism - two doctrines that denied the authority of Vedic scriptures, the need for worship to appease the

various gods and goddesses and for all ritualistic ceremonies as well, including the fire sacrifice.

Buddhism demolished all social barriers, giving no importance to the difference between occupations, family of origin and gender, accepting anyone and everyone to live together in monasteries, to study the sacred texts and write commentaries, to preach and teach to the greater mass of people, and to accept disciples into its active fold.

On the other hand, early Buddhism offered a sterling example of selflessness, seriousness and honesty, demanding total renunciation to sense gratification and an exemplary moral behavior from all its monks, as well as the greatest compassion towards all living entities (including the animals) and a friendly and accommodating approach to all groups of people and needs. Buddhism was not rigid at all, and easily adapted to very different mentalities, leaving everyone free to pursue their previous beliefs and practices - just adding a strictly dharmic behavior, detachment, truthfulness, nonviolence and compassion.

However, in the period when Adi Shankara appeared, the Buddhist tradition, too, had become degraded in various ways. Those who had taken up Buddhism as a reaction against the abuse perpetrated by the brahmins (we use the word "brahmin" to indicate a non-qualified person who has usurped the position of *brahmana* in society) were sometimes carried away by their personal grudges to the detriment of the very same basic Buddhist principles of nonviolence and friendliness to everyone, so they actively attacked Hinduism and Hindus - more or less like it has been happening in Sri Lanka for the past several decades.

Many people believe that Hinduism was hostile to Buddhism and therefore Buddhists had to escape out of India, but the diaspora of Buddhism towards the periphery of Akhanda Bharata or "greater

India" (that in ancient times extended as far as Singapore) was in fact caused by the Muslim invasions that plagued India since the earliest waves of invading marauders.

It was the Muslims who destroyed the famous Buddhism universities, centers of knowledge in all its branches attracting hundreds of thousands of students from the entire ancient world - universities that had stood and prospered immensely under the benevolent rule of Hindu kings and the cooperation of Hindu communities.

In fact, by the time Adi Shankara appeared, Buddhism had become much more powerful than brahmanism, and the faith of people in Vedic tradition had dwindled almost to zero. Adi Shankara revived that faith in the Vedic way - not by persecuting the Buddhists and kicking them out of India, but by introducing suitable reforms into Hinduism itself to bring it back to its pure purpose, at the same time making it much stronger and more attractive for the masses.

However, Adi Shankara was not afraid of going against the "age-old tradition": he introduced new traditions that were totally unprecedented and appeared to be directly at odds with the previous interpretation.

The institution of Mathas, or "monasteries", designed on the Buddhist model, was certainly the most revolutionary action, with its corollaries of *sannyasis* living together in a fixed residence and teaching *brahmacharis*, installing and worshiping Deities that could be visited by the general public, collecting and managing funds for the maintenance of the Matha and temple, organizing preaching functions to the public etc - all occupations that had been the natural and undisputed rights of *grihastha brahmanas*, including the highly transcendental ones such as the Rishis living in their remote *ashramas* in the forests.

The concept of *sannyasa* had been there all along, but at an individual level only, as by the old definition a *sannyasi* gives up all social interactions and responsibilities and even social relevance.

*Jabala Upanishad* (4.1) explains that *brahmacharya* is followed by *grihastha*, *vanaprastha* and *sannyasa*, but that one can also accept the order of *sannyasa* directly from the *brahmacharya* position or from any other subsequent position. Taking *sannyasa* had never been obligatory, but it had been recommended for *brahmanas*. However, it was totally against the aspirations of the later generations of degraded brahmins because it actually required total renunciation (*sannyasa* precisely means "renunciation") and a materialistic person cannot give up the attachment to family or society.

A *sannyasi* cannot have any possession, any fixed residence, or any opportunity for self gratification. He cannot accept disciples, he cannot teach or even mix with other people except for the brief time a householder needs to milk a cow to feed a beggar. A *sannyasi* would not be invited for meals into the house, but was just given alms in his *kamandalu* or *uttariya*, (water pot and upper cloth respectively) generally in the form of rice, fruits, vegetables, and especially milk - considered the most appropriate food for them. A *sannyasi* was not supposed to cook his food, but he was expected to eat raw unseasoned food just to keep the body barely alive, without any concession to taste.

To avoid the possibility of the *sannyasi* becoming too complacent with his means of living, a precise and explicit rule stated that *sannyasis* could never come near women or wealthy or powerful people in society. This observance was also helped by the fact that *sannyasis* were expected to totally disregard the care of their own bodies and clothing, even roaming around naked or scantily covered by rags.

They could not use shoes, umbrellas, or vehicles of any kind, and in general they were expected to do nothing else but just prepare themselves to death through total detachment from all material identification and belongings.

Adi Shankara and his followers changed all that, to the point that a *sannyasi* became a much respected member of society, and was able to use all material facilities to accept great numbers of disciples.

Unfortunately, because as Krishna explains in *Gita* time destroys everything included the genuine religious traditions (4.2), the followers of Adi Shankara messed up, too, and the original purpose of the great *acharya* was lost, leaving both baffled camps engaged in the foolish attempt to prove their rivals wrong. This embarrassing situation confused and weakened Indian society, causing the degradation of the other *varnas*, starting from the royal *kshatriya* order, who became unable to defend their kingdoms.

Several centuries later, the reform process was resumed by the great Vaishnava acharyas such as Madhva and Ramanuja, who also appropriated the Matha system with its reformed *sannyasa* rules, establishing temples and Deity worship for the masses, and creating the idea that a Vaishnava, just like a *sannyasi*, was above the system of *varnas*, that was already transforming into the prejudiced birth caste system.

Specifically, fighting against this caste prejudice problem and the arrogant elitism of brahmins was Ramananda's main reason to break away from the Ramanuja sect, and created the next great wave of reform in Sanatana dharma - the *bhakti* revolution - with famous exponents such as Chaitanya, Mirabai, the Alvars, Tukaram, Namadeva, Kabir, Sura Das, Jnanesvara, and so on.

## VERSE 1

अर्जुन उवाच ।

arjuna uvāca ।

ज्यायसी चेत्कर्मणस्ते मता बुद्धिर्जनार्दन ।

jjāyasī cetkarmaṇaste matā buddhirjanārdana ।

तत्किं कर्मणि घोरे मां नियोजयसि केशव ॥ ३-१ ॥

tatkiṁ karmaṇi ghore mām niyojayasi keśava ॥ 3-1 ॥

*arjuna*: Arjuna; *uvaca*: said; *jjyasasi*: is better; *cet*: if; *karmanah*: actions; *te*: your; *mata*: opinion; *buddhih*: intelligence; *janardana*: O Janardana (Krishna); *tat*: that; *kim*: why; *karmani*: actions; *ghore*: in horrible; *mam*: me; *niyojayasi*: are engaging; *kesava*: O Keshava (Krishna).

**Arjuna said:**

**"O Janardana, O Keshava, if in your opinion Buddhi (intelligence) is superior to Karma (work), why do you (want to) engage me in this horrible action?"**

Krishna has already explained about the nature of the soul as distinct from the material body, and about Yoga as the proper intelligent way to act without being enmeshed in the results of the action. In this chapter, named Karma Yoga, he will explain more about the science of action. Here Arjuna calls Krishna "Janardana" ("he who animates/ inspires people into action") as he had done in the first chapter, to strengthen his question as why Krishna is pushing him towards the ghastly fighting that will ensue in the battle.

Arjuna has followed Krishna's speech attentively, and has understood that Yoga is the science of acting with intelligence,



detached from the results. Now he is arguing that the action awaiting him does not look like a very intelligent action at all: only a madman would want to cause such a wholesale slaughtering of so many active and qualified members of society, who in their death will not be able to continue to perform their proper duties or even pursue the transcendental knowledge by which they could attain liberation.

The teachings of this chapter have been at the center of a bitter controversy between the exponents of *smarta* brahmanism, based on the ritualistic *karma kanda* path, and the shankarite *sannyasis* who follow the path of renunciation and a more philosophical interpretation of Vedic knowledge.

By carefully studying *Gita*, we will find the end of the unnecessary and confusing controversies about the superiority of one method over the other, because we will see that all paths are perfectly compatible and actually they complement each other.

## VERSE 2

व्यामिश्रेणेव वाक्येन बुद्धिं मोहयसीव मे ।

vyāmiśreṇeva vākyaena buddhiṁ mohayasīva me ।

तदेकं वद निश्चित्य येन श्रेयोऽहमाप्नुयाम् ॥ ३-२ ॥

tadekaṁ vada niścitya yena śreyo'hamāpnuyām ॥ 3-2 ॥

*vyamisrena*: contradictory; *iva*: certainly; *vakyena*: by words; *buddhim*: intelligence; *mohayasi*: you are confusing; *iva*: certainly; *me*: to me; *tad*: that; *ekam*: one only; *vada*: conclusion (to be followed); *niscitya*: without any doubts; *yena*: by which; *sreyah*: the highest good; *aham*: I; *apnuyam*: can achieve.

**"My intelligence is confused by your (apparently) contradicting words. (Please give me) one instruction only, that will not create doubts, and by which I will obtain the best result."**

When we see some contradictions, we should never hesitate to question and discuss them, as Arjuna is demonstrating with his very good example here in this verse.

Arjuna had already questioned Krishna's order at the beginning of the second chapter (4, 5, 6, 7, 8), when he had been clearly told that it was his duty to engage in the battle.

Later in *Gita* (4.34) Krishna will recommend that a student should not hesitate in asking all necessary questions (*pariprasnena*) from the teacher in order to properly understand the subject. With all the false teachers and cheaters that mushroom everywhere in Kali yuga, one can never be careful enough.

Contradictions appear because of the dualistic nature of this world, and the limited range of the human senses, mind and intellect. We are not able to see the sun in the night, therefore we make distinctions between light and darkness.

However, the sun always exists and radiates light all the time: it is only our particular position that makes it impossible for our defective eyes to see it. Similarly, Reality contains all relative truths and a multi-dimensional vision can comprehend them all, including the lack of vision that we call ignorance.

We must not confuse the phenomenon of apparent contradictions between relative visions with the actual order of things that requires discrimination between the various levels of Reality. Absolute Reality is the core existence we call Brahman - the omnipresent, eternal, unchangeable, and unlimited awareness.

Brahman manifests all other realities, starting from the divine couple that creates motion by a temporary dualism male/ female, two halves of the same One, that engage in the blissful play of union.

This is the transcendental level where *bhava* or emotion produces *rasas* or tastes.

To enhance the taste, the male and female principles produce a transcendental offspring in the form of the *jivatmas*, the infinitesimal living souls that enter the divine play, either on the transcendental level or on the material level.

The material dimension is then created by the divine couple through the manifestation of the *gunas* and the products of their interactions.

The material play of the *gunas* creates a ladder network on which we can either ascend or descend by choosing *sat* or *asat*, the eternal or the temporary, knowledge or ignorance, light or darkness.

The concept of simultaneous duality and non-duality might be confusing, and this is the reason why we need a strong clear guidance from a realized soul that is able to directly see the greater picture.

The word *sreya* means "better, best" and refers to the proper choice to attain the real benefit. The definition is often mentioned with its opposite *preya*, meaning "what is pleasurable".

It is not difficult to see that people who are attached to the fruits of their actions prefer to choose an action that looks pleasurable rather than another that may bring benefits in some distant future. However, generally this is not a wise choice.

### VERSE 3

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।

śrībhagavānuvāca ।

लोकेऽस्मिन् द्विविधा निष्ठा पुरा प्रोक्ता मयानघ ।

loke'smin dvividhā niṣṭhā purā proktā mayānagha ।

ज्ञानयोगेन साङ्ख्यानां कर्मयोगेन योगिनाम् ॥ ३-३ ॥

jñānayogena sāṅkhyānām karmayogena yoginām ।। 3-3 ।।

*sri bhagavan:* the Lord; *uvaca:* said; *loke:* world/ people; *asmin:* this; *dvi:* two; *vidha:* types; *nistha:* faith/ belief/ chosen path; *pura:* before; *prokta:* said; *maya:* by me; *anagha:* o sinless/ spotless; *jnana:* knowledge; *yogena:* by the engagement; *sankhyanam:* of the followers of Sankhya; *karma:* action; *yogena:* by the engagement; *yoginam:* of the followers of yoga.

**The Lord said:**

**"O sinless (Arjuna), as I have already explained to you, in this world there are two types of beliefs: those who follow Sankhya are connected through knowledge, while yogis are connected through action."**

In this verse Krishna begins by emphasizing the apparent contradiction mentioned by Arjuna. It is interesting to see, however, that he equates the definition of Buddhi (Yoga) with Karma (Yoga).

This reinforces the concept that a *yoga sadhaka* should not be a schizophrenic fool that chooses devotion and throws away intelligence, knowledge, and the sense of responsibility in the performance of one's duty.

Those who preach a separation and rejection of these integral parts of the path of Yoga can only be ignorant fools or dangerous cheaters, because they propagate the idea that a devotee of God can legitimately be a fanatical blind and brainless follower that gives no value to ethical sense, common sense, intelligence, decency, and duties to family and society.

Things get even worse when "pure and exclusive *bhakti*" is presented as "far superior" to intelligence and ethical sense, and that in order to achieve spiritual perfection, or any results at all in one's spiritual progress, one needs to abandon intelligence and ethical sense, and simply "take shelter" in devotional bigotry and blind allegiance to a particular sect, that breeds offensive intolerance towards any other opinion. Of course, this mentality has been hammered into the global population for the last 2000 years, so it's difficult to overcome it.

Arjuna is here called *anagha*, that means "sinless" or "spotless". Just like its synonym *papa*, the word *agha* does not correspond exactly to the English "sin", because it is not based on the same abrahamic ideology.

In the Vedic logic, *agha* or *papa* is a black spot on one's character caused by a bad choice, a mistake, an act of weakness, selfishness or ignorance that needs to be counteracted and purified by positive actions.

The word *loka* means "world" in the sense of "people", as a world is mainly made by its inhabitants. It refers eminently to the material world, where people have opinions and relative visions determined by their particular approach and position of perspective.

Another translation of this verse goes as follows: "O sinless (Arjuna), in ancient times I have expounded this (object of) faith/

belief in two different ways - the Sankhya yoga to those who are attracted to the analytical method of philosophy, and the Karma yoga to those who are more favorable to engaging in action."

This is, in a nutshell, how the famous controversy between *karma kanda brahmanas* and the *sannyasi* philosophers started. Krishna clearly explains here that both approaches are aimed at describing the same Reality to two different categories of people who are attached to their *relative* mentalities.

Here the word *yoga* is associated with three main concepts: *nistha* (faith, belief, chosen path), *jnana* (knowledge) of Sankhya, and *karma* (action) in *yoga*. Of the three concepts, *karma* is presented as the very essence of *yoga*, as the method through which "the yogis proper" connect to the purpose, as opposed to the followers of Sankhya.

This implies a superiority of *karma* in relation to *jnana* - which after all is still just theoretical knowledge, not having attained the higher level called *vijnana*, or applied knowledge. *Jnana* or knowledge is the preliminary step to *buddhi* or understanding; *buddhi* becomes relevant when it turns into practical application or action - *karma*. *Jnana* without *karma* is arid speculation; *karma* without *jnana* is a foolish waste of energy.

However, we should not lose sight of the importance of *nistha*. One should study *Gita* seriously and apply its teachings faithfully, even if only experimentally, otherwise it will be impossible to obtain the true benefits of this path. This requirement does not require blind and fanatical following, but the reasonable measure of trust and faith, that is invested in all the serious and valuable activities everyone performs.

For example, if you want to travel by airplane from Delhi to Bangalore, you need to trust your travel agent and airline company

enough to pay for your ticket before reaching your destination, and even before boarding the plane. This requires a good deal of faith: you must implicitly trust the travel agent to have actually booked a seat for you on the proper day and paid the airlines, and trust the airlines to know where the airplane is going and at what time it is taking off and landing, and so on. If you don't invest this reasonable amount of faith in the proceedings, you will never reach your destination.

Similarly, agnostics and atheists who pride themselves in choosing not to believe in anything, remain totally unable to understand the meaning of *Gita*, Yoga, or Vedic scriptures, therefore they reduce the Hindu religion to a superficial folkloristic and ethnic (i.e. racist) concern, that has no actual meaning, but to which anyone can give any meaning they like.

#### VERSE 4

न कर्मणामनारम्भान्नैष्कर्म्यं पुरुषोऽश्नुते ।

na karmaṇāmanārambhānnaiṣkarmyaṁ puruṣo'snute ।

न च संन्यसनादेव सिद्धिं समधिगच्छति ॥ ३-४ ॥

na ca sannyasanādeva siddhim samadhigacchati ॥ 3-4 ॥

*na*: not; *karmanam*: of the (prescribed) actions; *anarambhan*: not starting; *naishkarmyam*: non-action; *purushah*: a person; *asnute*: achieves; *na*: not; *ca*: and; *sannyasanat*: from renunciation; *eva*: only; *siddhim*: perfection; *samadhi*: *samadhi*; *gacchati*: attains.

**"A person cannot achieve freedom from *karma* by abstaining from the (prescribed) action, just like perfection cannot be achieved simply through *sannyasa* (renunciation)."**

Krishna now moves on to demolishing the walls that divide the two perspectives of Reality and create the illusion of contradiction.

The word *arambha* is very appropriately mentioned here to refer specifically to the ritualistic action, as it is used at the beginning of the ceremonies in the invocation of auspiciousness. However, it is a definition that can be applied to all types of prescribed action. This verse contains a few interesting expressions that require a little more explanation: *naiskarmya*, *karmanam arambha*, *siddhi*, *sannyasa*.

The word *karma* has entered the vocabulary of many languages. In English it is generally interpreted as "fate", "the force generated by a person's actions to perpetuate transmigration and in its ethical consequences to determine his destiny in his next existence".

However, a more technical meaning of the word (usually escaping Western analysts) concerns the "prescribed actions" or "duty" that each individual is required to perform within the *varnashrama dharma* system, and includes both one's occupational job in society and the religious observances of a particular tradition.

*Naiskarmya* implies the freedom from the consequences of action, and is the essential requisite to become liberated from the cycle of repeated births and deaths. However, such freedom can not be achieved by abstaining from action as some people believe.

*Siddhi* means "perfection" and defines the goal of Yoga – and the goal of life. There are various levels of *siddhi*, from the extraordinary powers of control over matter, to the liberation from all material conditionings. Used together with the word *samadhi*, it reinforces the concept of the perfection of life, acquiring a permanent quality of stable consciousness.

*Sannyasa* is the renounced order of life, where one prepares for death through austerities and detachment from everything – family,



social position, comforts, financial security, material pleasures – begging alms for his basic necessities.

According to the traditional rules, a *sannyasi* cannot engage in politics, trade, business or any material activity to maintain himself. He has no house or permanent residence, no assets, no bank account, no pride and no expectations, no personal servant, no personal vehicle, no good clothes (being allowed only a cheap loincloth) or shoes, no personal properties except a walking stick and a small water pot. He even gives up his name and fame as a great scholar or spiritualist.

But this renunciation alone is not sufficient: without the proper knowledge and spiritual realization, a so-called *sannyasi* is no better than any impoverished drunkard, madman or lazy bum.

Foolish people are impressed by the externals and therefore can be easily cheated because they do not care about verifying the actual realization of a so-called *sadhu* or *sannyasi*.

We may here mention the case of Jada Bharata, who had chosen a life of total renunciation and neglect (as *avadhuta*) to avoid developing any material attachment and identification, and therefore externally appeared as a madman or lazy bum.

This is why the servants of king Rahugana employed him to carry the palanquin of the Maharaja.

However, when questioned about the reason of his irregular walking, Jada Bharata manifested his true depth of realization by expounding the science of the transcendental Self, and immediately the king accepted him as his Sat Guru, as a respectable elder.

A superficial evaluation based on external appearances should never be considered as factual evidence.

## VERSE 5

न हि कश्चित्क्षणमपि जातु तिष्ठत्यकर्मकृत् ।

na hi kaścitkṣaṇamapi jātu tiṣṭhatyakarmakṛt ।

कायते ह्यवशः कर्म सर्वः प्रकृतिजैर्गुणैः ॥ ३-५ ॥

kāryate hyavaśaḥ karma sarvaḥ prakṛtijairguṇaiḥ ।। 3-5।।

*na:* not; *hi:* certainly; *kascit:* any; *kshanam:* one moment; *api:* also; *jatu:* at any time; *tisthati:* remains; *akarma:* non-action; *krit:* doing; *karyate:* he does; *hi:* certainly; *avasah:* helpless; *karma:* action; *sarvah:* all; *prakriti:* of nature; *jaih:* created; *gunaih:* by the *gunas* (qualities).

**"Never, at any time, can (a person) remain without acting even for one moment, because (he) is forced to into action by all the *gunas* (tendencies) born from *prakriti* (nature)."**

Krishna continues to explain why action is superior to mere theoretical knowledge: here he states the simple fact that nobody can abstain from action even for one moment, so there can be action without knowledge, but never knowledge without action.

It is important to understand the meaning of the definition of *karma*, action. It does not merely refer to ritualistic performances or activities intended to obtain some gain, but it also applies to the different types of sacrifice (*Gta* 4.23-33) and even to the transcendental actions in divine devotional service to the Supreme.

*Guna* means “quality” as well as “tendency” and *prakriti* is “nature” or “energy”. The three *gunas* are *sattva* (goodness), *rajas* (passion) and *tamas* (ignorance), but the word can be applied to spiritual qualities as well, both referred to the Lord and to the individual soul.

Similarly, “nature” can be considered *apara* (material) or *para* (spiritual) depending on the level of consciousness it manifests. This means that action is a fundamental characteristic of quality and nature, both at the material and at the spiritual levels. At the spiritual level, both the individual souls and the different manifestations or personalities of Godhead are characterized by particular qualities that create opportunities for loving exchanges and service. In both cases, such particular characteristics are manifested or created by *prakriti* or *shakti*.

However, in the case of the personality of Godhead and the relationship with the devotee, Prakriti or Shakti acts in the spiritual or transcendental capacity of Yoga Maya, while in the case of the individual soul acting on the material level with the purpose to enjoy his senses and exploit matter, Prakriti or Shakti acts in the material or delusional capacity of Maha Maya.

In both cases, the individual soul is helpless (*avasah*), because it can only engage in action under the control of Prakriti or Shakti.

## VERSE 6

कर्मेन्द्रियाणि संयम्य य आस्ते मनसा स्मरन् ।

karmendriyāṇi saṁyamya ya āste manasā smaran ।

इन्द्रियार्थान्विमूढात्मा मिथ्याचारः स उच्यते ॥ ३-६ ॥

indriyārthānvimūḍhātmā mithyācāraḥ sa ucyate ।। 3-6 ।।

*karma*: action; *indriyani*: senses; *samyamya*: by controlling; *yah*: s/he; *aste*: remains; *manasa*: by the mind; *smaran*: remembering; *indriya*: senses; *arthan*: objects/ purposes; *vimudha*: foolish; *atma*: self; *mithya*: false; *acarah*: who has a behavior; *sah*: s/he; *ucyate*: is said.

**"One who controls the senses of action but continues to remain attached to the memory of the sense objects, is called a fool and a hypocrite."**

Why such a person is a fool and a liar? Because he thinks about himself as the enjoyer, and that out of his great renunciation he is abstaining from enjoying what is supposed to be his rightful pleasure. It is not sufficient to abstain from engaging our action senses in pleasure: we must realize that we are not the rightful enjoyers. It is not sufficient to decide not to enjoy women: we must come to the platform of seeing women as spirit souls and servants of the Lord.

The word *smaran* does not indicate simply remembering, but also thinking. It is a thinking pattern. A man who is thinking of women as bodies, as objects of enjoyment (even if unfavorably, with scorn, hate or cruelty) will naturally take a new birth as a woman in the material world. It is inevitable, even for those who delude themselves into thinking that they are on the level of "transcendental realization" due to so-called exclusive pure *bhakti* or to a political position in some religious organization.

This verse continues the logical thread from the previous ones: action is superior to mere theoretical knowledge because everybody must act. Abstaining from action in the name of renunciation or knowledge is not only foolish: it is downright impossible. Some people believe that simply accepting the order of *sannyasa* or any other religious dress, one can automatically become qualified and transcendental, but this is a dangerous delusion. "Fake it till you make it" is a sure recipe for disaster, because it is based on a cheating adharmic logic, that Krishna calls stupid.

By "faking it" long enough, the only result you attain is to fool yourself into the delusional belief that you have actually "made it".

If you only listen to people who agree with you, and accuse everybody else of being offensive and an enemy of God, your delusion can only become more and more serious.

*Vimudhatma* is literally “a very stupid person” (*mudha* means "stupid"), who can even fool himself into rationalizing the "legitimacy" of his attachments and desires into some type of excuse or pretext.

*Mithyachara* is one who "acts falsely", indulging in sensual pleasures under some pretext or excuse, while externally condemning sense gratification. Usually the more ardently and viciously he rants against such pleasures, the more secretly attached he is.

As we can see, Krishna is not trimming words or making the pill any sweeter. It is said, *satyam bruyat priyam bruyat*, "one should tell the truth in a palatable manner", but obviously there are some limits to the application of a delicately courteous approach.

It is never an offense to call spade a spade. People may become upset because they are attached to a particular identification or perception of themselves and their actions, but ultimately all illusions must come to an end - the sooner, the better.

Especially when an illusion is very dangerous, and failing to realize and solve the problem can cost us dearly, as in the famous example of a man who is sleeping in a house that is on fire. In such a case, there is not sufficient time to embellish the facts or to take a slow and soft approach.

We should actually be grateful when a person points out a real and serious problem for us, as it is usually easier to see things from the outside, because there is no self-identification. Of course, there is also the possibility that our critic is the one who is under some measure of illusion or delusion and is just projecting his or her own

prejudice or mentality, so the final decision about our life and choices lies in the hands of each and every one of us. Nobody can be held responsible for the actions of another individual.

The *karma indriya* are the "senses of action" or the sense organs – tongue, eyes, nose, ears, and skin – that seek the contact with the sense objects in order to experience pleasure. It is important to understand that the *indriya arthan*, or sense objects, are not responsible for one's attachments or desires, as sometimes people believe. The actions that constitute our prescribed duties are performed through one's senses, mind and body, so when we are planning to perform our duties, including the ritualistic ceremonies, we need to manage our senses and engage them properly. This automatically produces a certain amount of pleasure or suffering, according to the circumstances we are facing. As we have seen in the previous chapter, we should continue to act in our prescribed duties in both cases, not allowing the pleasures or sufferings to distract our attention.

Another important observation is that according to this verse, the simple memory of the sense object is sufficient to confuse the consciousness, even if there is no expression of lust for possession and enjoyment even on the subtle level in the thought process. Such memory is a problem even when the sense object is remembered in a negative feeling - loathing, hatred, repulsion, etc.

There is a famous story about two *sannyasis* who were traveling together; on the way they met a young lady who needed to cross a river in spate to get back home, but was unable to negotiate the strong current.

The younger *sannyasi* kindly helped her through, actually carrying her, to the scandalized surprise of the other. The young lady took leave from the two *sadhus* and they proceeded on their own way. After a few hours of walking silently and brooding over his

unexpressed thoughts, the elder *sannyasi* finally blurted out his criticism against his companion, accusing him of having violated the *sannyasa* rules according to which they were not supposed to associate with women.

"My dear brother," replied the younger *sannyasi*, "I have carried that woman briefly and for the compassionate purpose of helping her get back home safely, but you have been carrying her all these hours, and with no honorable purpose."

### VERSE 7

यस्त्विन्द्रियाणि मनसा नियम्यारभतेऽर्जुन ।

yastvindriyāṇi manasā niyamyārabhate'rjuna ।

कर्मेन्द्रियैः कर्मयोगमसक्तः स विशिष्यते ॥ ३-७ ॥

karmendriyaiḥ karmayogamasaktaḥ sa viśiṣyate ॥ 3-7 ॥

*yah:* s/he; *tu:* but; *indriyani:* the senses; *manasa:* by the mind; *niyamya:* regulating through (*yama* and) *niyama*; *arambhate:* begins (the action); *arjuna:* o Arjuna; *karma:* action; *indriyaih:* senses; *karma-yogam;* the *yoga* of action; *asaktaḥ:* detached; *sa:* s/he; *visishyate:* is much better.

**"But one who regulates the senses through the mind, engaging the senses of action through *karma yoga* without attachment, is much better, o Arjuna."**

Another nail in the coffin of the theory that theoretical knowledge is superior to, and not compatible with, action: here Krishna squarely condemns the fake *sannyasis* and states that a person who lives honestly and unassumingly in family and society but

performs the prescribed duties without attachment for his/her own sense gratification, is much better positioned.

An important factor in the process is the sense of responsibility, to which every individual should be trained from childhood itself. Taking *sannyasa* or any other type of religious order or dress is not a free ticket out of a difficult material situation that we have created by making wrong choices.

We can't use it to bail out from some situation we are unable to make work, to avoid paying the required maintenance to one's wife and children, to escape from creditors, to be pardoned by the judiciary system or to dodge some other basic responsibility.

It is also unhealthy to take *sannyasa* out of sheer frustration towards material life, because "the grapes were too sour anyway". If one takes the vows of renunciation for this reason, it is very likely that he will fall down or at least suffer a lot when the first real opportunity for sense gratification naturally presents itself, and he risks making fools of himself by ultimately renounce renunciation and become a *vantasi*, one who "eats his own vomit".

In fact, it is said that in Kali yuga the acceptance of *sannyasa* is not recommended if not directly forbidden: *asvamedham gavalambham sannyasam pala paitrkam, devarena sutotpattim kalau panca vivarjayet*, "In this age of Kali, five acts are forbidden: the offering of a horse in sacrifice, the offering of a cow in sacrifice, the acceptance of the order of *sannyasa*, the offering of oblations of flesh to the forefathers, and a man's begetting children in his brother's wife." This verse is quoted from *Brahma vaivarta Purana*.

The problem with the false renunciate is that he cannot conceive action without attachment or relationship without lust and exploitation, because he has a material vision and considers



himself the actual *purusha* (enjoyer) of the action. By simply abstaining from what he values as pleasures through the temporary performance of penance, the false renunciate imagines himself to be the supreme Lord in his perfection of renunciation, and thus he falls victim to the last snare of illusion.

The sense gratification the *sannyasi* formally renounces revolves around sex, the greatest energy and pleasure in the material world. Sexual attraction and attachment are a natural instinct found in all living beings, and in civilized human society this instinct is regulated by rules and prescriptions, *samskaras* and duties, involving both the family and society to earn a proper livelihood. Obviously all these responsibilities are a burden, but they are required to maintain the proper selfless consciousness in all the members of the family and society at large, so that the life of each human being can be progressive.

A lazy bum who chooses to artificially accept the order of *sannyasa* in order to escape such responsibilities is actually making a very serious mistake, because the enjoyment propensity does not disappear automatically just because we want it to. Rather, it either becomes secretive and leads to illicit and hypocritical sexual relationships or casual encounters, it creates a distorted psychotic need for sadistic or masochistic practices (usually passed off as "austerities") or it turns into the subtle sex forms of name, fame, power, adoration, prestige, profit and position, usually dragging the *sannyasi* into politics of various types and transforming a Godman or a Godbrother into a mafia-style Godfather.

*Sadhus* in the renounced order of life (belonging to any religious or spiritual tradition) should be real saints, persons who have attained the platform of *brahma bhuta*, and whose association is the most valuable, blessed and pure treasure any human being can find in this world.

Such persons do not see other people as males or females, but simply as spirit souls, parts and parcels of the Supreme and spiritual servants of the only true Purusha, the Personality of Godhead. These great souls are perfectly satisfied in themselves and do not need, expect or ask anything for themselves; they need no sense gratification because they are already situated in the unlimited happiness of Self realization.

### VERSE 8

नियतं कुरु कर्म त्वं कर्म ज्यायो ह्यकर्मणः ।

niyataṁ kuru karma tvaṁ karma jyāyo hyakarmanāḥ ।

शरीरयात्रापि च ते न प्रसिद्धयेदकर्मणः ॥ ३-८ ॥

śarīrayātrāpi ca te na prasiddhyedakarmanāḥ ॥ 3-8 ॥

*niyatam*: prescribed; *kuru*: do; *karma*: action; *tvam*: you; *karma*: work/ duty; *jyayah*: better; *hi*: certainly; *akarmanah*: than not working; *sarira*: the body; *yatra*: maintenance; *api*: even; *ca*: and; *te*: your; *na*: not; *prasiddhyet*: for the perfection; *akarmanah*: without action/ work.

**"You (should) perform the dutiful actions, because action is better than non-action. Without performing one's duties, it is even impossible to maintain the body, that is the vehicle (of the Self)."**

Krishna states very clearly, here and in many other passages of *Gita*, including its conclusion (18.5) that prescribed actions should never be stopped or given up.

What is prescribed action? It is a dharmic activity that is supported by proper knowledge and that supports the universe, performed selflessly and in a spirit of loving service to the Supreme.

Incidentally, according to Krishna, this selfless action is the real symptom of a true *sannyasi* (6.1). The entire 5th chapter of *Gita* will be dedicated to the discussion on *sannyasa* or renunciation.

In this verse Krishna exposes and shames the false spiritualists and religionists who would try to make us believe that they are free from all obligations simply because they refuse to get a job and honestly earn their livelihood, and by being "free" they automatically get the right to be maintained by others. However, this is not an automatic right. There is no such thing as a free meal in this material world, and everybody needs to earn their maintenance by making themselves useful to the social body in some way or other.

Like wild and stray animals, beggars receive leftovers or rely on what Mother Nature sends on their way in the form of forest fruits they pick directly from spontaneous trees that are not cultivated by anyone. Any other food is the product of the work of someone - and by taking it without reciprocating in some way constitutes a theft. In fact, even a *tapasvi* who lives only on wild fruits and leaves should thank Mother Earth and the Devas for such gifts, and offer some prayers and gratefulness in return.

A responsible human being understands that he has many debts to repay - to the Devas that provide the basic facilities of life like fire, water, etc, to his parents and ancestors that created a safe and loving environment to take care of him/ her in childhood, to human society and the good administrators of society that protect him/ her from aggressions and dangers and afford him/ her to work and live in prosperity, to the ancient sages that compiled collections of knowledge s/he can benefit from, etc.

We even become indebted to animals, because we inevitably harm or kill some of them in the course of our daily activities for our maintenance, through ordinary agricultural work, cooking, grinding grains into flour, cleaning house, starting a fire, taking water from a well or pond, cutting wood etc.

Repaying such debts is not difficult: one simply needs to protect the gifts we have received and do his/her part to contribute to the prosperity and progress of society. This also entitles him/ her to a decent maintenance in accordance to his/ her particular needs, as it is also confirmed by *Sri Isopanishad* (1.1).

The celebration of *yajnas* perfectly responds to this requirement, because during such ceremonies the performer distributes food and gifts to everyone, as well as offering the opportunity for spiritual progress to all the participants through the worship to the Personality of Godhead and the recitation of the *shastra*. It is also important to notice that the food and other resources engaged in this sacrifice must be earned legitimately through one's occupational duties. If someone offers worship or sacrifice by using stolen wealth (flowers, food etc) or by creating problems to others (obstructing a passageway, etc), such worship will become totally useless. It is better to offer even one grain of rice, or an ordinary leaf freely available to the public, rather than trying to make a grand offering to God with stolen or ill-acquired goods.

In this verse Krishna also recognizes the true and great importance of the body as the vehicle of the Self. Mistreating the body is not a genuine practice of austerity. Several groups that developed since the beginning of Kali yuga believe and preach that this body should be "punished", "mortified", or even given up as a bad thing.

On the opposite side, there are those who strongly identify with the body and believe that a healthy, strong and fit body is the symptom of a healthy mind and an evolved soul, and that a person who has a

body that is below their standard ideal cannot be spiritually advanced or mentally healthy. Of course both groups are totally off the mark. The body is a valuable vehicle - a wonderful vehicle - but just a vehicle nonetheless.

## VERSE 9

यज्ञार्थात्कर्मणोऽन्यत्र लोकोऽयं कर्मबन्धनः ।

yajñārthātkarmaṇo'nyatra loko'yaṁ karmabandhanaḥ ।

तदर्थं कर्म कौन्तेय मुक्तसङ्गः समाचर ॥ ३-९ ॥

tadārthaṁ karma kaunteya muktasaṅgaḥ samācara ॥ 3-9 ॥

*yajña*: sacrifice; *arthat*: for the purpose; *karmanah*: actions/ duties; *anyatra*: otherwise; *lokaḥ*: world/ society; *ayaṁ*: this; *karma*: action; *bandhanah*: bondage; *tad*: that; *artham*: purpose; *karma*: action; *kaunteya*: o son of Kunti (Arjuna); *mukta*: liberated; *sangah*: from association/ affiliation; *samacara*: perform.

**"Actions must be performed as sacrifice, otherwise in this world they cause bondage (and further) actions. Therefore, o son of Kunti, you should perform your activities for that (purpose of sacrifice), remaining free from (material) association."**

In this famous verse, Krishna introduces another important concept: *yajna*, or "sacrifice". This definition is normally used to refer to the traditional ritualistic ceremonies, and particularly to the fire sacrifice, also called *homa*.

"Sacrifice" literally means "making sacred". By offering something to the Divine or to a higher purpose, we make it sacred and we purify it from any fault, transforming it into a beneficial factor of progress at both individual and collective levels.

As we will see later in the text, there are many layers of meaning in the concept of sacrifice and Krishna will elaborate on several of them. Keeping in mind the previous explanations offered by Krishna on selfless action as Buddhi Yoga and Karma Yoga, we should add that knowledge to the concept of sacrifice, too.

*Yajna* is also a name of Vishnu as the personification of Sacred Action. As Vishnu or Narayana is the transcendental One from whom every other reality emanates, worship to Vishnu is required in all religious ceremonies and auspicious activities, even for those who are attracted to a different Personality of Godhead as their *ista deva*.

It is important to understand that the nature of Vishnu is totally transcendental to the material concept of duality; he is not in competition or even separated from any other Personality of Godhead.

*Mukta sanga* literally means "free from association" or also "in the association of the liberated", where *mukta*, "liberated", applies to everything that is not identified or attached to the material platform.

*Sanga* refers to the position of one's body (*anga*) in relationship with other bodies/ persons, activities or environments, but even more so to being part (*anga*) of something, as in "affiliation" or "membership" of a group, an organization or an institution, community, lineage or tradition. All such denominations (*upadhi*) must be "liberated" (i.e. free from material identification, duality, or sectarianism) otherwise one must become "liberated" from them.

Another translation of the verse gives *lokah* the singular meaning of "one individual"; therefore *ayam* ("this") becomes applied to the person who was described in the previous verses as one who

refuses to work in the name of fake renunciation but, compelled by nature, is forced to act. Such action is under the influence of ignorance, therefore this individual becomes bound by actions because he does not offers his actions to the Supreme, Vishnu, here indicated by the name Yajna. Here is the consequent rendition of the verse: "This person becomes bound by actions that are not meant to (worship/ serve) Yajna. O son of Kunti, engage in work without attachment, to attain him (Yajna)."

### VERSE 10

सहयज्ञाः प्रजाः सृष्ट्वा पुरोवाच प्रजापतिः ।

sahayajñāḥ prajāḥ sṛṣṭvā purovāca prajāpatih ।

अनेन प्रसविष्यध्वमेष वोऽस्त्विष्टकामधुक् ॥ ३-१० ॥

anena prasaviṣyadhvameṣa vo'stviṣṭakāmadhuk ॥ 3-10 ॥

*saha*: together with; *yajnah*: sacrifice/ sacred action; *prajah*: generations; *srishtva*: creating; *pura*: in ancient times; *uvaca*: said; *prajapatih*: the Lord of creatures; *anena*: by this; *prasavishyadhvam*: grow and prosper; *esha*: this; *vah*: your (plural); *astu*: let it be; *ishta*: desired; *kama*: pleasure; *dhuk*: giver.

**"The Prajapati originally manifested the *prajas* (creatures) together with the *yajna* (the sacred action), and said, 'By these (sacred actions) you will become more and more prosperous; these (sacred actions) will supply you with whatever you desire."**

*Prajapati* means "the lord/ protector of the creatures" and usually refers to Brahma, who manifests this particular universe and the

bodies for all living entities taking birth in it, but can also be applied to all the other great personalities who generate creatures or become their protectors. Of course it refers to Vishnu, too, who is the root cause of creation and manifests again and again in this world to offer his valuable instructions to the human beings.

*Praja* means “one who has been generated”; by the simple fact of being born, all living entities become part of the “family” of the *pati* or “protector” of a particular *kshetra* or land.

It is interesting to see that here the creator offers the gift of *yajna* to all the *prajas* as his descendants. Some people afflicted by casteist prejudice try to make us believe that they are the only progeny of Brahma and the great personalities such as Manu, Kardama etc, and they have "their blood in their veins". This is quite funny, because according to the scriptures' version all human beings and even the non-human beings descend directly from Brahma as his children through the generations from his various sons.

But then again, these casteist people do not care much for what is actually written in the *shastra*, as they believe that their own blood is the highest authority and entitles them to believe and teach whatever they want.

The word *prasava* has the meaning of "growing, prospering" and includes the idea of multiplication, because in the beginning of creation the first generations had a lot of resources they could utilize and space to expand. The material world is created precisely for the purpose of accommodating the *jivatmas* who need to evolve through the various levels of life and ultimately qualify for liberation. So the idea "go forth and multiply" is not a wrong concept in itself - it's only when such multiplying generations breed and spread destructively, without a dharmic conscience, that they become a burden on Mother Earth.



It is said that our planet could easily carry more than seven billion peaceful vegetarians in a sustainable development lifestyle, recycling resources and utilizing renewable energy; on the other hand even smaller numbers of war-mongering exploiters who have no respect for nature soon become a cancer that creates immense sufferings for themselves, for others and for Mother Earth.

As we have already mentioned, the civilized and comfortable path of progress described in the Vedic scriptures and tradition starts from *dharma* then develops through dharmic *artha* to dharmic *kama* and then to *moksha*.

The expression *kama dhuk* implies that *kama* or sense gratification is a legitimate benefit – one of the four above mentioned *arthas* of human life and a divine blessing as well.

However, later on (3.37) *Gita* also describes *kama* (together with *krodha*) as the greatest enemy: how to reconcile these two apparently opposite meanings?

The answer is given by *Gita* (7.11): the *kama* that is not contrary to *dharma*, to the principles of religion (that support society and the cosmic order), and is received as *prasada* or gift from God is not only perfectly acceptable but divine in nature, while the *kama* that is deliberately and systematically pursued on the behest of *ahankara* and *mamatva* is the door to a hellish existence.

We can see the example of the Kamadhenu, Mother Cow who is supplying all necessities as per our desires and taste: we can enjoy the healthy pleasures of cow's milk as long as we accept it as a gift in a moderate amount, without trying to impose our artificial domination and selfish profit at the cost of the sufferings of innocent creatures.

## VERSE 11

देवान्भावयतानेन ते देवा भावयन्तु वः ।

devānbhāvayatānena te devā bhāvayantu vaḥ ।

परस्परं भावयन्तः श्रेयः परमवाप्स्यथ ॥ ३-११ ॥

parasparam bhāvayantaḥ śreyaḥ paramavāpsyatha ॥ 3-11 ॥

*devan:* the *devas*; *bhavayata:* having been fed/ pleased; *anena:* by this; *te:* your; *deva:* the Devas; *bhavayantu:* will feed/ please; *vaḥ:* you (plural); *parasparam:* each other; *bhavayantah:* will become nourished/ pleased; *sreyah:* ultimate benefit; *param:* supreme; *avapsyatha:* will obtain.

**"The Devas will be pleased/ fed by you through these (sacred actions), and they (the Devas) will bless/ feed you (in return); in this way both sides will reciprocate in a positive way and you all will attain the highest benefit."**

The particular process mentioned in this verse is reflected precisely by the ritual of fire sacrifice still performed in present days by *brahmanas*. A sacred fire is kindled in a sanctified place (altar) with pure firewood and clarified butter, then it is worshiped as the personification of Agni, who carries the offerings to the various personalities of Godhead.

Then all such personalities are called, one after the other, and to each one of them the oblation of clarified butter and food grains is poured with the appropriate *mantras*. In this way, the performer of the sacrifice becomes directly acquainted, and develops a personal relationship, with the Devas or higher entities that manage the universe. If you are thrilled at the idea of having the President of your nation for lunch, just imagine how wonderful it is to offer lunch to the President of the universe and all his staff.

This creates a personal bond between the performer of the sacrifice and the Devas, as the gift of food is the most basic and intimate exchange, on which all personal relationships are built, beginning from the mother-child bond.

The fire sacrifice is an authentic method to offer food to the Devas through the intermediary of Agni, the fire energy, who delivers the offerings to each one of them. This tradition has been present in many cultures since the very beginning of time - as confirmed in this verse - and it is still valid today just like many thousands of years ago.

The word *devas* mentioned in this verse refers to all the higher personalities who represent the supreme Personality of Godhead in the administration of the universe, and certainly includes Vishnu himself because we know that the fire sacrifice is not complete without the offerings (*ahuti*) poured directly to Vishnu.

Some commentators translate *deva* with the word "demigod", introduced by the Macaulayan education imposed on Indians with the purpose of demeaning the Hindu tradition and the Vedic knowledge as opposed to the "true religion" of Christianity that worshiped the "only real God" with a capital G. In the definition of the western academia a demigod (*demi* meaning "half" in French) was actually a half-god, or the product of the sexual union of a god (with a small "g") with a mortal, like the great heroes of the sacred stories of ancient Greece (such as Heracles, or Achilles etc) and even the "giants" mentioned in the Bible as the progeny of the "sons of God" and the "daughters of men".

According to this understanding, the "demigods" in Vedic tradition would be somebody like the Pandavas - sons of Kunti conceived with divine personalities such as Surya, Yama, Vayu, Indra and the Asvini kumaras. Now we see that no oblations are offered in the fire sacrifice for the Pandavas, so we can rest assured that the

Devas mentioned in this and the following verses are not "demigods".

Rather, the Devas worshiped in the *yajna* are Vishnu first and foremost, then his manifestation in this material world known as Shiva Mahadeva, Vishnu's *guna avatara* Brahma (the creator of this particular universe), Surya (also known as Surya Narayana), and the various archetypal personifications of the powers in the universe - from Agni (Fire) to Bhumi (Mother Earth) to Vayu, Indra, etc, all intimate associates of the transcendental Lord Vishnu. And certainly not "demigods".

Rather, the scriptures describe them as "limbs" or "arms" of the Personality of Godhead: *bahavo loka-palanam* (*Bhagavata Purana* 1.11.26), *indrayo bahava ahur usrah* (*Bhagavata Purana* 2.1.29)

We should be extremely careful not to disrespect any of such great personalities of Godhead, because it would be a terrible mistake - such offense would break the positive and constructive cooperation that brings all blessings on human society, the basic necessities for human life and progress, and ultimately the purification of all activities and the consciousness of all the participants towards the supreme goal of liberation, the real ultimate benefit - *sreyah*.

## VERSE 12

इष्टान्भोगान्हि वो देवा दास्यन्ते यज्ञभाविताः ।

iṣṭānbhogānhi vo devā dāsyante yajñabhāvītāḥ ।

तैर्दत्तानप्रदायैभ्यो यो भुङ्क्ते स्तेन एव सः ॥ ३-१२ ॥

tairdattānapradāyaibhyo yo bhun̄kte stena eva saḥ ॥ 3-12 ॥

*ishtan*: desired; *bhogan*: pleasures/ necessities; *hi*: certainly; *vah*: for you all; *devah*: the Devas; *dasyante*: will give; *yajna*: by the sacrifice; *bhavitah*: pleased/ nourished; *taih*: by them; *dattan*: given; *apradaya*: without giving; *ebhyah*: to these; *yah*: he who; *bhunkte*: enjoys/ eats; *stenah*: thief; *eva*: certainly; *sah*: he.

**“Satisfied by *yajna* (sacred action), the Devas will give you whatever pleasures you desire. One who eats what is given by them without offering anything in return is just a thief.”**

Without the blessings of the Personalities of Godhead, we would not be able to achieve success in our enterprises or even obtain the basic necessities in life. Even if we put in a lot of hard work, we would never be able to create food without depending on the archetypal energies of the universe - like the sun, earth, rain, fire, and so on.

Recognizing this debt towards these powers in the universe is the first step towards sanity, because a human being who understands this basic fact and is grateful and respectful towards the powers of nature will work constructively rather than destructively as we have seen from the results of the non-sustainable model, born from the abrahamic misconception of nature as a lowly and sinful thing to be exploited and dominated like a slave that is considered just as a property, devoid of any personal rights.

Of course sometimes we hear or see people from such abrahamic beliefs appreciating nature as the creation of God and wishing to preserve it instead of sacrificing its resources to the greed of consumerism and corporate profit, but still their purpose is to enjoy nature, not to worship and serve it respectfully and gratefully.

Non-abrahamic cultures, especially those who remained more closely connected to the original respect for nature, often remain(ed) very perplexed when faced with the disrespectful and

exploitative mentality of the "colonizers": how can someone possess land or water to the point of claiming the right to destroy and kill them? These native cultures are most environment-friendly, often matriarchal, sometimes with open marriages, and affording full freedom and respect to all their members along the line of natural ethics and behaviors, by which everyone is intrinsically entitled to take whatever they need but not more than that. Even their relationships with animals and plants are based with a deep respect that does not interfere with the natural needs of the human beings such as eating vegetable or animal foods. In the Vedic tradition, these peoples are known as *vanavasis*, "forest dwellers".

Vedic culture is more urbanized and relies on a more complex and regulated system, where the ethical norms are more demanding because of a greater amount of responsibilities for each member of society. In a sense, we could say that while the *vanavasis* live happily like children who are cared for and protected by Mother Nature, the members of Vedic society are more like dutiful adult sons who take charge of caring for, nurturing and protecting Mother Nature according to the specific orders they have been given, in close cooperation with the higher managerial staff of the universe - the Devas.

Small children feel love and respect for Mother, but adult sons develop a deeper understanding, they are grateful and eager to reciprocate and help. They feel it is wrong to just accept the bountiful gifts of nature without offering anything in return. If Hindus were able and willing to actually put such wonderful knowledge and ideals into practice, they would be the greatest asset for the planet. Unfortunately, for the great majority of Hindus, it's all about theory and nothing about practice. In this verse the word *bhogan* refers to the healthy pleasure that fulfills a real need - such as food.

This same definition is normally used for the food offerings presented to the Deities in the temple.

### VERSE 13

यज्ञशिष्टाशिनः सन्तो मुच्यन्ते सर्वकिल्बिषैः ।

yajñasiṣṭāśinaḥ santo mucyante sarvakilbiṣaiḥ ।

भुञ्जते ते त्वघं पापा ये पचन्त्यात्मकारणात् ॥ ३-१३ ॥

bhuñjate te tvaghaṁ pāpā ye pacantyātmakāraṇāt ॥ 3-13 ॥

*yajña*: sacrifice; *sishta*: leftovers; *asinaḥ*: who eat; *santah*: good people/ by being; *mucyante*: become liberated; *sarva*: from all; *kilbishaiḥ*: contamination/ sin; *bhunjate*: enjoy/ eat; *te*: they; *tu*: but; *agham*: sin/ guilt; *papah*: sinful people/ criminals; *ye*: those; *pacanty*: cook; *atma-karanat*: for themselves.

**"The good people who subsist on the leftovers from the sacrifice/ sacred action are liberated from all consequences, while those who cook for selfish purposes are eating/ enjoying sinful (substances)."**

*Yajna sishta* defines the leftovers or byproducts of *yajna*, the sacred action. On one level, they are the food grains and the other foodstuff that remain at the end of a ritual worship, that always includes a *bhoga* offering consisting of fruits and even cooked preparations, such as the spiceless boiled rice *havisyanna* ("the grains for the *havi*" or fire sacrifice), sweet rice and milk pudding, and so on.

At another level, they are the rightful share of maintenance that we can accept after performing our social duty – the *sudra* is entitled to full maintenance from his employer/ master, the *vaisya* is entitled to enjoying a part of the wealth he produces, the *kshatriya*

is entitled to the facilities required to perform his work (both at the muscular/ physical level and at the mental and social levels), the *brahmana* is entitled to a share or *dakshina* in the celebration of religious rituals and activities and as a gesture of gratitude from the students. On yet another level, the appropriate food that we take to sustain our body and mind in our progressive life aimed at Self realization is considered *yajna sishta*, as such pursuit is also considered *yajna* or sacred action.

The dharmic diet is vegetarian – a means of livelihood that causes the least amount of unnecessary sufferings and complications, and even more important, it perfectly fulfills our nutritional requirements. *Chandogya Upanishad* (7.26.2) states: *ahara suddhau sattva suddhih, sattva suddhau dhruva smritih, smriti lambhe sarva grantihinam vipramokshah*, "By eating pure food, the mind becomes pure. When the mind is pure, one develops a good understanding. When understanding and memory are strong, all the knots of the heart become dissolved."

However, plants, too, are living entities and killing them also entails a karmic consequence that we should not take lightly. We are entitled to our adequate share of maintenance but only as long as we work sincerely for the benefit of the entire universe, as long as we do not simply live for our own sake and to enjoy sense gratification. Again, it is important to understand that this verse does not condemn the natural need for wholesome and pleasurable supplies to the proper maintenance of our body and mind. Sometimes people come to believe that sense gratification is the greatest enemy, and therefore suffering or deprivation must be good things in themselves, so they should be pursued for the sake of one's spiritual progress.

This idea is generally connected to the idea of austerity or *tapasya*, and often extends to other painful or self-damaging or generally repulsive practices that are believed to earn merits and blessings to



those who follow them, sometimes in blind imitation of famous ascetics of the past.

The proper understanding of the issue requires the consideration of some important factors. First of all, the focus of the Vedic system, and especially of the *Gita*, is not about condemning sense gratification but about becoming self-controlled so that we will not become distracted from our proper performance of duties by the pleasure caused by sense gratification or by the sorrow caused by its absence.

Secondly, the search for sense gratification is a natural instinct in all living entities, and it is aimed at the survival of the individual and the collectivity. At the human level, the living entity learns to find pleasure and happiness not only at the physical and mental levels (as plants and animals are able to do) but at the spiritual level as well, so the focus should shift to a progressive direction, and the individual should become able to renounce some sense gratification in order to achieve a greater purpose.

Another very important point is the "demonstration mission". Sometimes, unevolved people have difficulties in believing that there can be something beyond immediate sense gratification, so it might be necessary to shock them out of that complacency by offering an example of extreme renunciation, as in the case of the Aghoris, a particular group of ascetics. However, these practices are only intended as a wake up call for the sleeping souls, and not as the very purpose of spiritual life. Insisting on extreme and shocking renunciation in the practice of austerities is actually condemned by *Gita* (17.14-19). Particularly, verse 19 declares that penance performed through self-torture belongs to ignorance and does not bring good results in the long run.

From the stories told in the Vedic literature we find that such extreme penances are characteristic of *asuras* who are determined

to acquire a greater material power, usually to dominate and oppress others, or even to fight against God and *dharma*.

While it is a fact that such practices can help the individual develop their personal charisma and power in this world, out of a sort of "bank balancing" of *karma*, they are not recommended for those who want to progress spiritually or even obtain a long lasting material benefit.

*Asuras* are usually slain by an incarnation of God after a relatively short career. Ideologies based on asuric ideals have made a cult out of suffering and torture - both self-torture and inflicting pain on others. We should be very careful not to fall into this misconception.

## VERSE 14

अन्नाद्भवन्ति भूतानि पर्जन्यादन्नसम्भवः ।

annādbhavanti bhūtāni parjanyaḍannasambhavaḥ ।

यज्ञाद्भवति पर्जन्यो यज्ञः कर्मसमुद्भवः ॥ ३-१४ ॥

yajñādbhavati parjanya yajñaḥ karmasamudbhavaḥ ॥ 3-14 ॥

*annat:* from the food/ grains; *bhavanti:* come to existence; *bhutani:* all living entities/ types of life; *parjanya:* from the rains; *anna-sambhavaḥ:* all the foods; *yajnat:* from the sacrifice; *bhavati:* comes to existence; *parjanya:* rain; *yajnat:* from sacrifice; *karma:* from action/ work; *samudbhavaḥ:* born.

**"(All) creatures come to being thanks to (food) grains, and (food) grains come into being thanks to rain. Rain comes thanks to the performance of sacrifice, and sacrifice comes to being through work."**

This verse carries much more meaning than it would seem at first sight. Everybody can see that all living entities subsist on food, and cannot even start to develop their new bodies without food, from the very beginning of their existence. This applies not only to human beings but to all animals and even to plants - each seed being naturally equipped with a sufficient supply of nutrients that will enable it to sprout and grow until it can get its food from the external world.

*Anna* is often translated as "food grains" or "rice" but it is a general term that we can apply to all substantial vegetarian foods. Actually even non-vegetarian foods derive from plant foods, because meat is the flesh of an animal that grew up and lived on such vegetable nutrients.

The next fundamental ingredient for life is rain, or water. Plant food can be grown only with the help of rains - we see that in desert regions, where rainfall is very scarce, growing food is extremely difficult. Again, even water extracted from deep wells in places where it hardly even rains, ultimately ended up there in the aquifer because it was collected from the rains that blessed other regions.

The next link of the chain of life - rains coming from sacrifice - may be a little less evident than the previous two (food and water), but it is nonetheless true and important, as all ancient cultures believed. Still in the collective subconscious western cultures carry the idea of the King who is the consort of Earth and makes it prosper by his self-sacrifice, causing adequate rains and timely good weather so that abundant food can be produced for all.

The Vedic approach to this concept is more complex and even more glorious, as each and every civilized human being becomes, through the performance of his sacred professional duty, a working link in the chain of life that supports the entire universe, in close

cooperation with his colleagues and superiors, the Devas that work in the highest jobs of universal administration and maintenance.

In this verse, the last causal link of the mechanism that sustains life consists in the close connection between *yajna* and *karma*, sacrifice and work according to one's social duties. *Karma*, or prescribed action, is not limited to mere ritualistic ceremonies, but must include the performance of one's occupational duties within society as described for the various *varnas*. Celebrating a *homa* - no matter how grandiose or complicated - with resources stolen from others, obtained without working adequately, or gathered through other illicit means, can never be considered a true sacrifice or *yajna*, and it will not have the desired results. The Devas will not even accept the offerings: they are not bound to.

The Smriti explains that the oblations poured into the fire and accepted by the Devas reach the sun and sustain its work in evaporating the clouds and causing them to fall down again on the land as rain. It may seem childish to think that our small fire can give energy to the sun, but yet again, it is the sentiment that counts, and we are indeed like small children compared to God.

When a small child offers some food to his mother or father, nobody will think that such small offering is required to sustain the parents' life and livelihood; it is rather the other way around, as by definition, the child is fed and sustained by the parents, who take care of his needs. But when a parent accepts such loving gift, there is an inspiration and a bonding created in the parents' minds that go much beyond the actual nutritional value of the food offered.

Exclusive devotees of a particular Personality of Godhead - usually devotees of Vishnu or Krishna - sometimes have problems in accepting the idea of offering something to the Devas, because they feel that all their energy should be focused on Vishnu or Krishna only, and that by seeking such exclusive relationship they

will not need to care about anything anybody else, including the Devas.

Such an idea is valid in principle, as Vishnu is the original source of all other Personalities of Godhead that manifest in this world, and therefore a devotee situated on the transcendental platform does not need to concern himself about anything else. He knows that Vishnu - or Krishna, the most intimate form among the many forms of Vishnu - will take care of him under all aspects.

However, we need to warn superficial people against trying to apply this principle with the wrong motivations and without having actually attained the transcendental level, because the effects will be disastrous. Piloting a high-speed airplane is all good and wonderful if you are actually able and qualified to do that, if you do it for the proper purpose (as a useful job that benefits the community) and if you do it in the air - totally detached from the earth. If you try to drive an airplane around the city streets at high speed for the purpose of feeling superior to others (who can merely drive a car) or to impress others, but without being able or willing to let go of the earthly surface and its comforts, you become a serious danger to yourself and to society.

A pure exclusive devotee of Krishna, who refuses to care about the Devas or anybody else, should not try to take anything from the Devas or from anybody else. He should just wait until Krishna sends him food unsolicited.

If he claims that only Krishna exists for him, let him show that nice theory in practice and retire from all other engagements in the acquisition of material power and exploitation of the resources that are supplied by the Devas and other people. Otherwise, he remains a vulgar thief, even if he is claiming he is "stealing for Krishna", because Krishna's instructions are very different, as we can see from this verse.

## VERSE 15

कर्म ब्रह्मोद्भवं विद्धि ब्रह्माक्षरसमुद्भवम् ।

karma brahmodbhavaṁ viddhi brahmākṣarasamudbhavam ।

तस्मात्सर्वगतं ब्रह्म नित्यं यज्ञे प्रतिष्ठितम् ॥ ३-१५ ॥

tasmātsarvagataṁ brahma nityaṁ yajñe pratiṣṭhitam ॥ 3-15 ।

*karma*: work; *brahma*: from Brahma; *udbhavam*: born (from); *viddhi*: know (that); *brahma*: spirit/ Brahma the creator; *akshara*: Imperishable; *samudbhavam*: born (from); *tasmat*: therefore; *sarva-gatam*: omnipresent; *brahma*: Brahman; *nityam*: eternal; *yajne*: in the *yajna*; *pratiṣṭhitam*: is residing/ based.

**"Know that work comes from Brahma, and Brahma comes from the Imperishable, therefore the all-pervading Brahman eternally resides in sacred action."**

One of the most peculiar characteristics of the Sanskrit language is a greater number of letters as compared to the Latin-based alphabet; this makes transliteration a difficult job unless special diacritic marks are used to distinguish for example a "short *a*" from a "long *a*" as in this case. As the word *brahma* in this verse is twice entwined in a *sandhi* that could carry either a short *a* or a long *a*, we must conclude that both meanings can be applicable, at different levels of understanding... and even the first *brahma* mentioned should be considered as a representative of the *brahma* mentioned second in the verse.

The word *brahma* ending with a "short *a*" means is synonym with Brahman, and refers to the spiritual principle, that unchangeable, eternal, and transcendental existence that continues on the non-manifested level.

The same word with a "long *a*" is the name of that subordinate personality of Godhead who is known as the *guna avatara* for passion and the creator/ demiurge of each particular universe. This Brahma (with "long *a*") is born from the lotus flower sprouting from the navel of Garbhodakashayi Vishnu at the beginning of each cycle of creation; he lives 100 of his years (equivalent to one entire cycle of the universe) on the highest planet of this universe, called Brahmaloaka or Satyaloka, and then becomes reabsorbed into the body of Vishnu at the time of dissolution.

As he is the first created being, he receives from Vishnu the knowledge required to develop and manage this particular universe, and a head for each of its dimensions. Our universe has four dimensions, so our Brahma is portrayed as having four heads; other universes may have more dimensions and therefore their respective Brahmas may have an adequate number of heads (symbolically speaking).

Accordingly, Brahma proceeds to speak the *Vedas* - the eternal and universal knowledge both material and spiritual, that will guide all on the path of progress. In this sense, Brahma is identified as the personified form of the *Vedas* themselves.

From the sound vibration, Brahma manifests all the various aspects of the universe and the species of life. From his mind he generates a number of children, including a sequence of Manus and their respective wives/ feminine counterparts. In turn, these *prajapatis* produce all the generations of living entities that populate all the planets in the universe.

Being the ancestor, teacher, creator and administrator of all the living entities in the universe, this Brahma can very well be described as the one who spells the duties and work activities for all.

However, Brahma is a mere administrator, a representative for the real owner of the establishment - the Imperishable, the Brahman, or Vishnu/ Narayana.

The word *Brahman* in this verse indicates the supreme and all-pervading existence and consciousness of which we are all parts. As cells of the immense body of the *virat purusha* (Param Brahman) we have the duty to properly perform our functions – work, duty, or *karma*. This Param Brahman or Personality of Godhead is called *akshara*, “imperishable”, or in other words, transcendental and unchangeable, but from this *akshara* the entire reality of the spiritual and material universes is emanated through constant activity. As part of the Brahman, the Atman or individual soul is also active and by performing his proper duty he participates of the active divinity of God.

From this verse, we get yet another confirmation about the fact that one's prescribed duty is non-different from worship when it is performed in a spirit of service to the Supreme.

## VERSE 16

एवं प्रवर्तितं चक्रं नानुवर्तयतीह यः ।

evam pravartitam cakram nānuvartayatiha yaḥ ।

अघायुरिन्द्रियारामो मोघं पार्थ स जीवति ॥ ३-१६ ॥

aghāyurindriyārāmo mogham pārtha sa jīvati ।। 3-16 ।।

*evam*: thus; *pravartitam*: established; *cakram*: wheel/ cycle; *na*: not; *nuvartayati*: takes up; *iha*: in this world/ life; *yaḥ*: one who; *agha*: sin/ crime; *ayuh*: duration of life; *indriya*: the senses; *aramah*: seeking happiness; *mogham*: without benefit; *partha*: o son of Pritha (Arjuna); *sah*: he (this person); *jivati*: lives.



**"O son of Pritha, one who does not accept to follow this established cycle (of action) is enjoying his senses through a sinful longevity, and his life is useless."**

The word *chakram* means "wheel". A wheel, a circle, is a cycle that has no beginning or end, like the orbit of a planet around its star. The entire universe revolves in cycles, as this is the nature of the material manifestation - always existing, always changing. Each cycle affords opportunities for progress and action, as well as for liberation: it is the best possible plan.

As Krishna has explained in the previous verses, according to the universal law, the human beings and the Devas sustain and nurture one another in a constant cycle that produces sacred activities, preserves the natural order of nature through the seasons and rains, creates resources and especially food supplies, and enables the progressive life for all living entities.

Life is a cycle. It can be meaningful and supportive for the universe when we perform our duty selflessly, or it can be meaningless if we keep uselessly wheeling around without going anywhere when we are just seeking our selfish pleasure.

In a non-progressive society, at a certain level of personal evolution one starts feeling that he is "living for nothing" – surviving to keep a job so that he can work to pay the bills to keep himself in a position to be able to keep the job. Usually such jobs appear totally meaningless as industrialized societies have broken occupational duties down to tiny bits of over-specialization, transforming the human being into a mere insignificant cog in a huge machinery and thus killing the sense of purpose, the sense of completion in the activity, the pride for one's work, intellectual stimulation, as well as creativity, imagination, intelligence and personal progress.

The result is a deep sense of dissatisfaction and unhappiness that is engineered by the advertisement industry to create false "substitution" needs through compulsive consumerism based on real or imagined sense gratification, sense of possession, material identification and attachment.

We can escape this vicious circle that binds us to an endless repetition of births and deaths by offering our actions in the virtuous cycle of reciprocal support with the entire creation through dharmic action.

*Ayur* means "life, health, energy, longevity". The food and the other pleasures we obtain to maintain our life and health should be engaged in the higher mission of working for *dharma*. If they are not, then our duration of life, our good health, the energies and resources that we enjoy and consume are not properly paid for, so life becomes useless and pointless, and even a culpable waste of resources and opportunities.

### VERSE 17

यस्त्वात्मरतिरेव स्यादात्मतृप्तश्च मानवः ।

yastvātmaratireva syādātmatṛptaśca mānavaḥ ।

आत्मन्येव च सन्तुष्टस्तस्य कार्यं न विद्यते ॥ ३-१७ ॥

ātmanyeva ca santuṣṭastasya kāryaṁ na vidyate ॥ 3-17 ॥

*yah:* one who; *tu:* but; *atma:* in the *atman* (the Self); *ratih:* attachment/ love; *eva:* only; *syat:* remains; *atma:* in the *atman*; *triptah:* satisfied; *ca:* and; *manavah:* a human being; *atmani:* in the *atman* (Self); *eva:* only; *ca:* and; *santushtah:* contented; *tasya:* of him; *karyam:* duty; *na:* not; *vidyate:* is known/ there is.

**"A human being who loves the Self certainly becomes satisfied in the Self and peaceful within the Self: for such a person there is no need to perform any action."**

As we were mentioning previously, a person who is fully situated on the transcendental level of consciousness, in the constant contemplation of the One Reality (called Brahman, Paramatma, Bhagavan) does not have any duties to perform because he is not interested in obtaining sense gratification or any other achievement. He is simply happy and satisfied whatever happens.

However, it is very important to understand that this verse does not approve inaction, as it will become evident in the next verses. The person who is situated on the transcendental level does not have any duties to perform because he is already fully engaged in working in transcendental service out of a spontaneous desire to assist the plan of the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

We could say that he is not engaged in a job any more because he has graduated from the position of an employee to that of a son of the owner of the enterprise. For him there is no question of salary or holidays, working hours verification or similar concerns, because his life has become totally devoted to the enterprise. He does not need a salary because all his needs are automatically met by living in the wealthiest family, and he does not need vacations because he simply rests when he is tired and when circumstances afford it, but he is ready to perform the required actions whenever it is necessary.

What is the difference between a job and a hobby? Many people like cooking or gardening as a hobby. Others work as carpenters or weavers or potters in their leisure time, others write novels or teach as a voluntary community service after their working hours at their day job. On the other hand, some people have apparently unusual jobs, such as those who test videogames, or taste ice cream, or

travel in wonderful locations and luxury hotels to rate them, or watch movies to write critiques. Where is the line between hard work and enjoyment?

Usually the difference is that you must work at your job even when you do not feel like engaging in that activity, while a hobby is only a pleasure pursuit - but then again, what to speak of those who choose martial arts or sports as hobbies? If they train only when they like, they will never become good at what they do. Voluntary social workers who offer their leisure time for the care of the underprivileged will easily find out that such engagement is not always pleasurable and easy, but also requires a lot of spirit of self sacrifice. Even a hobby like carpentry requires some effort and sacrifice, otherwise one will remain unable to finish any project.

So basically the point is that a job is a mentality - a level of consciousness - where our work is characterized by the desire to obtain some personal benefits that would not be available to us if we did not put sufficient hard work in the deal. It is not a matter of love and passion, of finding contentment and happiness in the action itself.

The job mentality is the characteristic of the unqualified *sudra*, who is lazy, greedy and exploitative, trying to get as much as possible while giving as little as possible. Therefore he needs to be pushed around and watched constantly even to accomplish very little, because he does not like to work. He does not work out of passion or love.

On the other hand, an evolved human being - even a good *sudra* who is preparing to evolve into a *vaisya* - finds satisfaction in his work and acts more out of a service spirit than to get something for himself. We can make the examples of painters, musicians, craftspeople and other artists, barbers and hairdressers, tailors, or even personal servants who take pride and satisfaction in serving

their masters well. As *sudras*, they need patrons or employers who tell them what to do and regularly take care of their needs, because they are unable to develop some fruitful enterprise on their own and manage their wealth. They simply work with their own hands and not with their brains, but still they can attain perfection and become very useful members of society if they find contentment and pride in performing their duties well.

From that level, another small step, consisting in a greater sense of responsibility, will enable them to graduate as *vaisyas* or entrepreneurs, who are able to market their work successfully and sell a good finished product without depending on the instructions of others.

The three definitions of *rati*, *tripti* and *santosha* apply to different types of satisfaction. *Rati* indicates attachment or love, *tripti* is the happiness derived from the contact with the object of one's attachment or love, and *santosha* is the happiness and contentment that is perceived in oneself.

## VERSE 18

नैव तस्य कृतेनार्थो नाकृतेनेह कश्चन ।

naiva tasya kṛtenārtho nākṛteneha kaścana ।

न चास्य सर्वभूतेषु कश्चिदर्थव्यपाश्रयः ॥ ३-१८ ॥

na cāsya sarvabhūteṣu kaścīdarthavyapāśrayaḥ ॥ 3-18 ॥

*na*: not; *eva*: certainly; *tasya*: of him; *kritena*: by performing a duty; *arthah*: a purpose/ value; *na*: not; *akritena*: by not performing a duty; *iha*: in this world/ life/ body; *kascana*: whatever; *na*: not; *ca*: and; *asya*: of him; *sarva-bhuteshu*: in all the

living beings; *kascid*: anything; *artha*: purpose; *vyapasrayah*: taking shelter of/ depending on.

**"This (person) does not have any reason to abstain from activities/ from the prescribed duty, just like he does not have any reason to perform any duty. In this world he does not depend on any other creature/ situation/ object for any purpose."**

When a person is truly detached, such renunciation applies not only to the selfish action but also to the selfish abstention from action. Krishna has already stated very clearly that in this world (*iha*) one constantly needs to act, even if only to procure one's basic bodily maintenance. This concept is repeated and confirmed in this verse by the word *iha*.

A person who just takes benefits from others without giving adequate and useful reciprocation is just a parasite - a position that is unworthy of the dignity of a human being. It is foolish and dishonest to claim that we do not have any duties to perform because we are on the transcendental level of pure Krishna bhakti - and then demand or expect maintenance from other people.

On the other hand, when the host gets some benefit from the presence of the guest, we can speak of a mutual cooperation and symbiosis: the reciprocation in the "wheel" that Krishna was talking about in the previous verses.

Therefore in this verse Krishna clarifies that a person who is situated on the transcendental level does not live at the expenses of any other being, either Devas or human beings or animals or plants. A parasite takes shelter in the body of the host in order to find its food and enjoyment, but it does not contribute anything positive and rather it can create diseases and other problems, therefore it should be avoided and eliminated.

A *sannyasi* can only beg alms for his food. He cannot demand anything, and certainly not luxuries such as first class flight seats, status symbol gadgets, or any other special material facility. Contrarily to what many people believe, the *sannyasa* vows impose even greater duties and sacrifices than those connected to married life

If one wishes not to marry and engage in family duties because he does not need the opportunities for sense gratification afforded by family life, it is possible to remain unmarried even without formally taking the order of *sannyasa*.

The followers of Chaitanya, for example, traditionally did not take *sannyasa* until the reform introduced by Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati and the creation of the Gaudiya Matha. Even without being *sannyasis*, those *babajis* could fully dedicate themselves to spiritual realization and pure devotion, and they often gave a great example of renunciation and simplicity of lifestyle.

On the other hand, those who take *sannyasa* simply to escape responsibilities and duties and to live a free independent life of sense gratification based on selfish considerations should certainly not be respected as great advanced personalities.

According to the Vedic tradition, one needs to pay one's debts to the ancestors by marrying and generating at least one child - this is considered a precise duty for each man. Furthermore, marriage can be very beneficial and practical: one's social occupation often requires a considerable amount of time and effort to give the proper results, so marriage affords a synergy of mutual support between husband and wife, where the wife takes care of the daily home maintenance chores such as cooking etc. and often assists the husband in his occupation according to the particular *varna* he belongs to, but with the possibility of taking all the necessary time to care for the children and for herself.

In a balanced marriage of two responsible and proactive persons, there is still sufficient freedom and certainly there are many opportunities to practice renunciation and simplicity in lifestyle, as well as spiritual and devotional progress.

As the word *bhuta* also applies to a state of being - a condition of life or situation - we can easily understand that a person who is situated in Transcendence is not taking shelter in any particular state of being, or in other words he does not identify with any position or condition, and remains detached from the pleasures and sufferings afforded by the various situations. Such a person does not see an intrinsic value in any particular situation, because he knows that they will all come and go as temporary phenomena.

### VERSE 19

तस्मादसक्तः सततं कार्यं कर्म समाचर ।

tasmādasaktaḥ satataṁ kāryaṁ karma samācara ।

असक्तो ह्याचरन्कर्म परमाप्नोति पूरुषः ॥ ३-१९ ॥

asakto hyācarankarma paramāpnoti pūruṣaḥ ॥ 3-19 ॥

*tasmat*: therefore; *asaktaḥ*: without attachment; *satatam*: always; *karyam*: duties; *karma*: action/ work; *samacara*: perform; *asaktaḥ*: detached; *hi*: certainly; *acaran*: acting /putting in practice; *karma*: work/ action; *param*: better/ supreme; *apnoti*: obtains; *purushah*: a person.

**"Therefore you should always perform your activities in the proper way but without attachment, because by performing selfless work a man achieves the Supreme."**



Krishna has already stated several times that action should be performed out of selfless duty only, without personal attachment. He is again repeating this concept here, because it is an extremely important concept. In Vedic tradition, repetition is a sign of great importance and should not be underestimated as boring or redundant.

One should perform one's duty even when it requires difficult or painful actions, or it brings us losses or problems of some type. A *kshatriya* has the duty to confront the aggressor without being attached to the idea of being a good compassionate or nonviolent man, and similarly each human being faces similar difficulties in the proper performance of one's duties. The feeling of cleanliness is a good thing and helps us become situated on the level of *sattva*, but we should not remain attached to it to the point that we cannot engage in cleaning our dirty clothes or in other similar duties. A *brahmana* who refuses to do his normal cleaning work because of his "sattvic position" only becomes a dirty person, just like someone who claims that he never needs to take a bath or wash up because he is "clean by nature" or "genetically clean".

In this verse the word *param* means "superior", and it can be applied to the Supreme Reality - Brahman or the direct service to the Supreme Personality of Godhead - or simply to something better, more beneficial, more valuable. Even at this ordinary level, the instruction contained in the verse makes perfect sense - without giving up the inferior object, it is very difficult to obtain a superior one. We need to make space in our lives for better things by letting go of the inferior things that cannot really help us in our progress. Many people like to accumulate objects and end up cluttering their homes and their lives with a lot of useless things, sometimes even useless relationships or engagements or situations. The natural cycle of life requires us to clear up the space in our existence, so that we can welcome better things.

Of course this consideration should not be used as a cheap pretext to escape one's responsibilities - trying to get rid of a burdensome relationship when we have finished exploiting it. A relationship has not exhausted itself unless we have paid our karmic debts in full. If we try to take a "shortcut" we will simply find ourselves in exactly the same situation in the future, in this or in other lifetimes, and we will have to pay until our debts are settled.

It is not very difficult to see when a relationship or a situation has come to the end line: usually the other person who is the object of the relationship wants to leave, or to change the terms of the connection. From our side, we gradually develop the feeling that the relationship is unbalanced or it is not going anywhere, it is not helping us to grow and to improve ourselves. We may also have the feeling that we have "given enough" without getting appropriate appreciation or reciprocation, or that the situation is suffocating us like a prison cell. In such situations, we need to move on. We will certainly find better things.

## VERSE 20

कर्मणैव हि संसिद्धिमास्थिता जनकादयः ।

karmaṇaiva hi saṁsiddhimāsthitā janakādayaḥ ।

लोकसंग्रहमेवापि सम्पश्यन्कर्तुमर्हसि ॥ ३-२० ॥

lokasaṅgrahamevāpi sampasyankartumarhasi ।। 3-20 ।।

*karmana:* by working; *eva:* also; *hi:* certainly; *samsiddhim:* full perfection; *asthitah:* situated; *janaka:* Janaka; *adayah:* and others; *loka:* world/ people; *sangraham:* in general; *eva:* also; *api:* even; *sampasyan:* considering; *kartum:* to do; *arhasi:* you should.

**"Janaka and others (like him) became situated in perfection through the performance of activities. Also, you should consider the benefit of the general people."**

This verse introduces the concept of teaching and inspiring society by our good example, by continuing to work sincerely in this world for the benefit of all, even if we really do not have any duty to perform because we are perfectly satisfied in the Self and we do not wish to obtain anything for ourselves or our associates.

Teaching by example is the best way of teaching, and should always support the presentation of precepts. If you have a bad habit - for example smoking - you can never be effective in telling people that smoking is bad and they should not smoke, because your credibility will be very scarce. When you resort to material forceful means to make sure that you remain the only authority in spite of such serious shortcomings, the general people will be confused and will lose the sense of truthfulness and reality, and you will be the cause of disaster in society.

However, even when you are behaving consistently with what you teach, it is always better to avoid situations where the general people may not be able to correctly understand your actions, because ignorant people have the tendency to observe superficially, misinterpret and utilize such wrong interpretation to justify their own misconduct even when controversial actions were totally uncalled for.

It does not take much to convince lazy bums to follow the example of someone who is apparently not doing anything, even if they just observe their "role model" for the only 10 minutes in the day when he is having a break from an extremely active and tiresome day, even if he has just completed a 100 km running marathon. The lazy bums will take those 10 minutes and stretch them into hours and days and weeks and months and years, showing you the photo of

their "role model" lying down asleep on a sofa, and justifying their own bad habit of regularly sleeping 14 to 16 hours a day, without doing any work even in the remaining hours.

There is a famous story about a very expert veterinarian, who was approached by a young man that wished to become his apprentice. The young man watched the veterinarian and saw him giving some white powder to a cow. Then the vet was called to treat a horse: he just took a mallet and smashed the lump in his throat; the horse was instantly cured. The young apprentice decided he had seen enough: he stole the medicine bag from his mentor, ran away and started advertising himself as a great veterinarian.

First he was called to help a difficult calf delivery: he gave the cow the white powder in the bag, not knowing that it was a medicine to prevent miscarriage and premature birth, so instead of facilitating the delivery he effectively prevented it, and both the cow and the calf died. Next he was called by a farmer whose horse had developed a tumor in his throat: the young man took the mallet and tried to smash the lump, effectively killing the poor animal. He did not know that the horse originally treated by the real doctor had simply swallowed an entire watermelon that had become stuck in his throat creating breathing difficulties, so when the watermelon was skillfully shattered, its pieces were dislodged and moved to the stomach, clearing his windpipes. The ignorant apprentice had no idea that there is a big difference between a small watermelon and a large encysted tumor, because he was convinced that only the external action was significant: he was just an imitator. We need to remember that the world is full of similarly ignorant people.

The Janaka mentioned in the verse is considered to be king Janaka, the father of Sita and father in law of Sri Ramachandra. He is listed as one of the twelve *mahajanas*, or great authorities on *dharma*, together with Shiva Mahadeva, Yamaraja, Brahma, Narada, the Kumaras (considered as one), Kapila, Manu, Prahlada, Bali

Maharaja and Sukadeva the son of Vyasa. Janaka was recognized as *rajarishi*, a saintly king who was very expert in all sorts of knowledge, both material and spiritual. At his court great *rishis* and sages such as Yajnavalkya, Astavakra etc assembled for profound discussions about many subjects; such discussions are narrated in authoritative texts such as *Mahabharata*, *Brihad aranyaka upanishad*, *Maha upanishad*, and *Astavakra gita*.

There is a famous story about king Janaka. It is said that one day Narada was visiting Narayana and they were discussing about the perfection of human life, whether it could be attained from any stage of life in the *varnashrama* system. Narayana declared that it was certainly possible, and he mentioned the example of king Janaka, suggesting Narada to go and see him. When Narada arrived at the court of Janaka, he found the king apparently immersed in sense gratification - surrounded by beautiful objects and people, in a very luxurious palace, enjoying the best in food and drinks and entertainment. Suddenly a palace servant rushed into the hall, informing the king about an emergency to be addressed in the kingdom, and Janaka leapt instantly to his feet, completely lucid and alert, running to his duties without the least hesitation, totally forgetting about his own pleasure or well being. This kind of consciousness is what is required from each and everyone of us. Whatever attachment one can develop in any particular condition of life - not only those damaging and degrading attachments influenced by ignorance and passion, but also the sattvic attachment to peaceful and quiet life, simplicity, renunciation, cleanliness, etc - must be instantly dropped, without a moment of hesitation, when duty calls. This requires a very sharp, alert and stable consciousness, and the constant vision and remembrance of what is really important. If we remain on this level of consciousness, at the time of death we will be able to leave the entire material manifestation behind and attain the supreme destination without any extra effort.

## VERSE 21

यद्यदाचरति श्रेष्ठस्तत्तदेवेतरो जनः ।

yadyadācarati śreṣṭhastattadevetaro janah ।

स यत्प्रमाणं कुरुते लोकस्तदनुवर्तते ॥ ३-२१ ॥

sa yatpramaṇam kurute lokastadanuvartate ।। 3-21 ।।

*yat yat*: whatever; *acharati*: he does/ shows by example; *sresthah*: a leader/ a superior; *tat tat*: that same (thing); *eva*: certainly; *itarah*: another (common); *janah*: the world/ the people/ a person; *sah*: he/ she; *yat*: what; *pramanam*: proof/ evidence/ authority; *kurute*: does; *lokah*: the world/ the people/ a person; *tat*: that; *anuvartate*: follows.

**"Whatever the best (person) does, the general common people follow (the example) as his activities are (implicitly) accepted as the (authoritative) standard by the public."**

In the previous verse Krishna explained that a liberated person should continue to work in this world by properly performing the duties connected to the particular position he occupies, just to give a good example to the general population. Here the instruction is expanded to encourage Arjuna (and all of us who are reading the *Gita*) to become leaders of society by giving the good example of working hard and selflessly.

All societies need leaders. Such leaders do not need to occupy a particular professional position or to have enforcing powers in order to have a positive influence on people: anyone can become a leader just by inspiring others with good deeds, consistency, compassion, wisdom, knowledge, and a dharmic behavior in general.

However, the proper functioning of the social order absolutely requires that the individuals that occupy a position of authority must incarnate a perfect example by their personal behavior in private life as well as by the performance of their administrative or teaching duties. It is not a matter of "can", but a matter of "must". An ignorant and superficial teacher will be the public evidence that schooling is not about acquiring knowledge or understanding. A priest who does not have devotion for God, knowledge of the scriptures or personal spiritual realizations will become the proof that all religion is a farce. A corrupt magistrate will be the living demonstration that justice and good governance are nothing but illusions. Thus the devastating effect of their crimes will be much deeper.

The need for good dharmic leadership starts from the highest position of authority in society - the *brahmana* class of intellectuals, teachers (whatever subject they teach, in the fields of science or religion or history etc), counselors, advisors, consultants, preachers, scholars, researchers, scientists, writers and all those who contribute to shape the public opinion about the values and the ideals to be pursued by the mass of people.

The *kshatriya* ruling class leads a very public life, too, and to the eyes of the simple-minded, government people seem to have even greater authority than the wise souls who have realized Brahman and possess the full spiritual and material knowledge. Therefore all government servants and representatives, from the king to the last tax officer, are naturally considered the leaders and authorities of society and their personal example determines the manner in which the general mass of people judge and follow legality, legitimacy, success and ethical ideals, as well as small everyday actions and choices.

The mass of people always tends to make role models out of those who are considered leaders or successful individuals, not only in

their professional activities but also in their personal lifestyle and even in apparently irrelevant details, such as walking gait, facial expressions, and so on. Such imitation is often done blindly and foolishly, especially by ignorant people that do not have access to the proper and relevant information or do not have the discrimination to understand the many factors of a choice - such time, place and circumstance, as we have already mentioned. Even worse, if the imitation is done by those who have a personal selfish agenda to pursue.

Thus, a bad man who wants to abandon his faithful wife may bring the example of Sri Rama who sent Sita away even if she was innocent. Or a cowardly and weak man who is unable to effectively fight the actual enemy will justify a campaign of secret assassinations of dissenters by bringing the example of Sri Rama who killed Vali from hiding behind a tree. A chronic liar who totally disregards truthfulness will justify himself by saying that Krishna ordered Yudhisthira to tell a lie during the battle of Kurukshetra. It does not matter to them that Rama and Krishna taught and demonstrated strict adherence to dharmic behavior in millions of other instances: bad people will pick one single event that could be misunderstood, they will take it out of context, misrepresent it to prove their faulty theory right, and use it to justify their very wrong behavior.

Two words are particularly important in this verse: *acharati* and *pramanam*. The word *acharati* stems from the same root of *acharya*, "one who teaches by example", normally used to describe the highest level of religious authority. In the ritualistic tradition of *karma kanda*, the *acharya* is the most expert and realized *brahmana* that is meant to verify the proper work of the other three officiating priests, as well as the general performance of the sacrifice. Since the times of Adi Shankara, the title of *acharya* has been used to address founders of religious/ philosophical



movements, great innovative preachers of the Knowledge contained in the scriptures, and those who are educating the masses. The word *pramana* is normally used to refer to the authority of the scriptures or any authoritative evidence, including the direct perception of facts.

The words *janah* and *lokah* are both used in the singular to refer to a group of people or even to a single individual. In this verse, either interpretation may be used to get a correct understanding.

This verse demonstrates that Krishna does not support at all those so-called *bhaktas* who make a show of being transcendental and detached because of their exclusive and pure "*rasika*" devotion, as a pretext for not properly performing their duties and attending to their responsibilities. If they really were such great devotees of Krishna, they would follow his very clear instructions instead of putting up some false pretense of sentimentalistic sainthood for the sake of gaining followers, fame, adoration and profit.

## VERSE 22

न मे पार्थास्ति कर्तव्यं त्रिषु लोकेषु किञ्चन ।

na me pārthāsti kartavyam triṣu lokeṣu kiñcana ।

नानवाप्तमवाप्तव्यं वर्त एव च कर्मणि ॥ ३-२२ ॥

nānavāptamavāptavyam varta eva ca karmaṇi ।। 3-22 ।।

*na*: not; *me*: of me; *partha*: o son of Pritha (Arjuna); *asti*: there is; *kartavyam*: (action to be performed out of) duty; *trishu*: in the three; *lokeshu*: worlds; *kincana*: any; *na*: not; *anavaptam*: that has

not been obtained; *avaptavyam*: that should be obtained; *varte*: I am engaged; *eva*: certainly; *ca*: and (yet); *karmani*: in work.

**“O son of Pritha, in all the three worlds there is (absolutely) nothing that I need to do or that I want to obtain, yet I also engage in (proper) activities.”**

The word *kartavya* means "duty", or "action that should be performed (out of duty)".

Krishna offers himself as a direct example of liberated soul still directly engaged in working in the world: the perfect demonstration of *acharya* - just to make sure that the false *bhaktas* do not try to claim their "higher level of realization" to wriggle out of the tight spot in which the previous verse nailed them. Should they be considered as more highly realized than Krishna?

The words *anavaptam* and *avaptavyam* are also interesting - meaning respectively "something that has not been obtained (yet)" or the residual karmic consequences of previous activities, and "something that is to be obtained", indicating a further desire that will generate fruitive action and future karmic consequences. In other words, Krishna has no handicap to overcome and no aspirations to be fulfilled.

Different groups of people who read the *Gita* have different perceptions of Krishna, according to the ideal they personally aspire to attain - but in all cases, whoever recognizes the authority of Krishna's teachings in this famous scripture is worshiping him with their intelligence (*Gita* 18.70). This is the common platform we should focus on. What difference does it really make, if someone sees Krishna just as a genuinely great teacher that has given up all material identifications, rather than the Supreme Lord himself, as long as Krishna's instructions are understood and followed sincerely?

In fact, there is no contradiction between all these various perspectives because the Supreme Lord is the greatest teacher, and has no material identification. There is nothing that an ordinary *jiva* can do, that the Supreme Lord is unable to do, because even if there is an "excess of qualification" in the case of the Lord, among his perfections we also find the perfect renunciation and humility, so he has no problem in taking an apparently humble role. This exercise will help us in the all-important task of becoming free from the material limitations that condition our way of thinking. Whatever limitation we try to impose on the Personality of Godhead is illusory, even if it is dictated by our affection and respect, by the projection of our own ideals and aspirations - because the Lord is way beyond that. He has no limits.

The expression *tri-loka* is the best demonstration of the collective meaning of the word *loka* as "world" or "people". Traditionally, Vedic cosmology considers three planetary systems or groups of worlds in our universe: the lower planets from Patala to Atala (influenced by ignorance), then the middle planets around Mahatala or Mahitala or Earth (influenced by passion), and then the higher planets up to Satyaloka, the abode of Brahma (influenced by goodness).

We do not need to grab our telescope to identify each of these planetary systems with the physical celestial bodies that are visible from Earth, because some of them are not visible to our eyes or instruments, and some do not appear to be suitable to sustain life as we know it on this planet - their inhabitants don't find this a problem at all, because they have bodies made of different elements, although they are classified among the 400,000 human species.

The Vedic perspective is not very concerned with the composition of the material body: it is focused on the level of consciousness, on the mentality, determined by a specific mixture of the three *gunas*.

The three *lokas* mentioned in this verse are characterized by different levels of human consciousness, exemplified in the microcosm of the human body by the various *chakras*: besides the basic 7 *chakras* that go from the bottom of the spine to the crown of the head, there are 7 lower *chakras* from the thighs, the knees, the shanks, the calves, the ankles, the toes and the soles of the feet. Similarly, the subtle body that can be developed above the head level also contain 7 higher *chakras*, usually depicted by the tall conic crowns or "towering" hairstyle of Devas, Rishis, and the other great personalities of traditional iconography.

### VERSE 23

यदि ह्यहं न वर्तेयं जातु कर्मण्यतन्द्रितः ।

yadi hyaham na varteyam jātu karmaṇyatandritah ।

मम वर्तमानुवर्तन्ते मनुष्याः पार्थ सर्वशः ॥ ३-२३ ॥

mama vartmānuvartante manuṣyāḥ pārtha sarvaśah ॥ 3-23 ॥

*yadi*: if; *hi*: certainly; *aham*: I; *na*: not; *vartevyam*: engaged dutifully; *jatu*: ever; *karmani*: in actions; *atandritah*: very attentive; *mama*: my; *vartma*: manner of engagement; *anuvartante*: they follow; *manusyah*: human beings; *partha*: o son of Pritha (Arjuna); *sarvasah*: all.

**"O Partha, if I ever chose to abstain from the proper activity, all the human beings would follow my example."**

Following the logical thread of the previous verses, Krishna explains that up to the highest level of consciousness in this world - including the divine *avatars* - everybody must engage heartily in working activities that are useful to society, especially those who

wish to be recognized as teachers or leaders. It does not matter exactly what type of work it is: even meditation, when it is done properly, practically and with the right consciousness, actively contributes to the well-being and proper functioning of society, no more and no less than the careful and intelligent work that takes care of garbage disposal, for example.

Krishna's mission will be described early in the next chapter (*Gita* 4.8) as "protecting the good people, destroying the evil doers, and establishing the principles of *dharma*". We are all meant to follow Krishna's example, each one of us in their specific capacity: we should do our best to protect the good and the innocent, oppose and undo the schemes of the evil doers, and give the proper example of dharmic behavior.

These three things must go together. We cannot take upon ourselves the task of destroying the evil doers if we are unable or unwilling to act according to *dharma* and to protect the good and the innocent - or even we are unable or unwilling to tell the difference between good people and evil doers.

Too many people have a wrong idea of "evil doers" - they usually identify them as "the others", or "the enemies", without actually bothering to examine whether such "evil doers" are actually engaged in detrimental and adharmic acts or not. The "good guys" and the "bad guys" are too often defined by biased considerations dictated by politics and sectarianism, which are definitely not the parameters taught by Krishna in *Gita* or anywhere else. "Kill them all: God will know his own" is a typically cynical and mindless approach of abrahamic imperialism and tyranny, that we should never try to imitate.

*Bhagavad gita* contains all the necessary knowledge to understand how to work at our mission in this world, assisting God's mission in whatever capacity we are able to fill.

Logically following the thread of the discussion, it ensues that Krishna's giving a personal example of active engagement means that he also performed *yajnas* and ritual ceremonies as well as the duties connected to a professional occupation. This is confirmed by the *Puranas* and *Itihasas*.

The idea of God and his mode of intervention in the administration of the universe has always been a core issue in the study of theology.

Abrahamic faiths present God as an enlarged figure of father/master/ king, who is preeminently interested in enforcing his arbitrary will over the human beings through rewards and punishments, which include the normal activities of nature such as earthquakes, cyclones etc.

Although, strangely enough, that seems to apply only in a one-way street: when such disasters strike "the faithful" (and they do at least as often as they strike all others), it's not a punishment but a "test". This mentality stretches further to include war and other disasters brought about by the activities of man, especially of men who claim to be representatives of God and therefore "authorized" to enforce punishment on "the unfaithful".

The Vedic view is very different. Creation and destructions are not seen as arbitrary acts of reward or punishment, but as totally natural and neutral events that are engineered in the physical laws of the universe themselves.

Just like all bodies are born and die, all the material manifestations we see are created and destroyed in the course of time, and there is no question of considering such destruction as a punishment.

There is no space for fearful superstition when science understands and explains the laws of nature, including the law of *karma*.

VERSE 24

उत्सीदेयुरिमे लोका न कुर्या कर्म चेदहम् ।

utsīdeyurime lokā na kuryām karma cedaham ।

सङ्करस्य च कर्ता स्यामुपहन्यामिमाः प्रजाः ॥ ३-२४ ॥

saṅkarasya ca kartā syāmupahanyāmimāḥ prajāḥ ।। 3-24।।

*utsīdeyuh:* would become ruined; *ime:* these; *lokah:* worlds/ peoples; *na:* not; *kuryam:* I do not perform; *karma:* work/ duty; *cet:* if; *aham:* I; *sankarasya:* of confused population; *ca:* and; *karta:* the doer/ responsible; *syam:* I would be; *upahanyam:* destroyed; *imah:* these; *prajah:* living entities.

**"If I did not engage in my work, these people/ worlds would suffer a disaster, I would be the cause of degradation in society and of the destruction of these creatures."**

This verse mentions the same *sankara* or "confused population" that was described previously (1.41, 42, 43). Some commentators insist that the definition applies to the "intermingling of castes", but in this verse such interpretation appears even more absurd than it did in the first chapter.

How is Krishna's lack of dutiful engagement in actions in his incarnation supposed to cause the "intermingling of castes"? By mixed caste marriages? By extra-marital sexual relationships? Certainly not. Krishna is not engaged in "morality police raids" or *shaadi* (arranged marriages) organization, or even in caste segregation. He has never been, either in his incarnation 5,000 years ago or even in his capacity as the Supreme Lord. The idea of "caste" segregation to avoid *varna sankara* is totally bogus, and it is never found in any scripture or in the teachings of any genuine *acharya*. It is not even reasonable in the least.

According to such logic, to better avoid such "intermingling" we should have separate cities and regions exclusively inhabited by *brahmanas*, others exclusively inhabited by *kshatriyas*, others exclusively inhabited by *vaishyas*, and others exclusively inhabited by *sudras*. This would be the only way to safely be "segregated" without any chance of ever meeting and interacting. So the only place where you can find food would be the regions inhabited by *vaishyas* (who produce it), while in all the other regions people would have to quickly starve to death because they are not meant to "intermingle" with merchants and agricultural entrepreneurs...

Should the *brahmanas* only teach to *brahmanas*? Should the *kshatriyas* only engage in interaction with *kshatriyas* - never coming in contact with *brahmanas*, *vaisyas*, *sudras* or even external aggressors? Certainly not. And how would the "intermingling of castes" cause the destruction of the *prajas*? It is like saying that having the feet, the hands, the stomach and the head communicating and cooperating together as one functional body is the cause of the destruction of the body itself - while strict segregation of these limbs by separating them from each other is the proper way to have society working and all creatures protected and prospering.

This "bad mix-up" is actually more in the mind of these deluded commentators than anywhere else, and the evidence of such confusion is in the pitiable conditions of the followers of such commentators in the present Hindu society, characterized by utter lack of clarity even on the most basic concepts, desperate denial of the actual facts, ignorance of *shastra* (and everything else) to the point of elevating ignorance to the position of ideal to be followed and enforced, stubborn blind prejudice, gross material bodily identification, cruel mistreatment of women and children, neglect towards Mother Earth and Mother Cow, pollution of sacred rivers and *tirthas*, and horrible public image all around.



It is high time to wash away all such stupid misconceptions and return to the genuine and original understanding of the vedic system. As the father of all living beings, Krishna sees them all as *prajas*, "creatures"; he does not make artificial discriminations based on prejudice. What is Krishna's work, in which he says he is constantly engaged for the benefit of all living entities and the preservation of all the worlds? Protecting the good people (including the innocent animals), undoing the evil doers, and teaching (establishing) the principles of ethics such as correct knowledge, social cooperation, selflessness, progressive life aiming at Self realization, etc.

Of course there are aspects of the work of the *avatars* that make it impossible to imitate, such as being able to drink poison like Shiva or to lift Govardhana like Krishna, but if we understand the motivation behind such actions we can follow in their footsteps, each according to our actual individual capacity.

This verse responds to Arjuna's objections in 1.41, referred to the fact that the battle would mean death for a great number of men who were responsible for the protection and support of their families, societies and kingdoms. Such deaths would cause great problems to their subordinates and therefore create confusion and degradation in society.

Here Krishna objects, stating that family and society actually become degraded and a confused population is created when individuals choose not to perform their dharmic duty, thus establishing a very bad example for their successors and subordinates. If the man of the family dies for a higher cause, his wife and children will have to face some difficulties in life but they will be inspired by his sacrifice, but if the man abandons his duties due to fear or lack of responsibility, his family member will become bitter and cynical.

And if such duties and responsibilities are dumped in the name of a superficial and sentimentalistic "transcendental devotion to God", the results on society will be even worse.

## VERSE 25

सक्ताः कर्मण्यविद्वांसो यथा कुर्वन्ति भारत ।

saktāḥ karmaṇyavidvāṁso yathā kurvanti bhārata ।

कुर्याद्विद्वांस्तथासक्तश्चिकीर्षुर्लोकसंग्रहम् ॥ ३-२५ ॥

kuryādvidvāṁstathāsaktaścikīrṣurlokasaṅgraham ।। 3-25।।

*saktah*: attached; *karmani*: to the actions; *avidvamsah*: those who are without knowledge; *yatha*: like; *kurvanti*: they do; *bharata*: o descendant of Bharata (Arjuna); *kuryat*: should do; *vidvan*: one who has knowledge; *tatha*: like; *asaktah*: free from attachments; *cikirshuh*: that wants to lead; *loka*: the people; *sangraham*: the mass.

**"O Bharata (Arjuna), just like the ignorant people who are attached to (the results of) actions engage in work, a person who has knowledge should work (conscientiously) but without attachment, for the (benefit of) people in general."**

This verse offers another confirmation that action and knowledge are supposed to be united and not separated in the life and precepts of the enlightened and liberated soul who is free from material attachments. Those who fail to follow this path are flatly called by Krishna "ignorant people". So, there is no excuse possible for those who try to escape from their duties by claiming that they are "renounced" or "transcendental".

Even more than that, we find that not only the person of knowledge (who is detached from the enjoyment of the results) should engage in work, but s/he should work with the same determination, enthusiasm and patience that are shown by people who are very attached to enjoying the fruits of their labor.

Again, this verse presents the gist of the social ethos of genuine Hinduism: working selflessly for the collective benefit. This simple precept is the most effective method to ensure perfect harmony, progress and prosperity in any society.

When extended beyond the limits of sectarianism and even beyond the circle of human society, this ethical principle is the answer to the present crisis of the planet. We do not need to squeeze our tiny brains to find "new" complicated solutions besides this golden teaching, because anything that goes against this ethical principle will simply delay or shift the problem, or even aggravate it.

## VERSE 26

न बुद्धिभेदं जनयेदज्ञानां कर्मसङ्गिनाम् ।

na buddhibhedam janayedajñānām karmasaṅginām ।

जोषयेत्सर्वकर्माणि विद्वान्युक्तः समाचरन् ॥ ३-२६ ॥

joṣayetsarvakarmāṇi vidvānyuktaḥ samācaran ॥ 3-26 ॥

*na*: not; *buddhi*: intelligence/ understanding; *bhedam*: difference; *janayet*: he should cause; *ajnanam*: of those who are ignorant/ foolish; *karma-sanginam*: of those who attached to the (results of) actions; *joshayet*: he should engage; *sarva-karmani*: in all actions; *vidvan*: one who has knowledge; *yuktaḥ*: engaged; *samacaran*: showing by practice.

**"A person who has knowledge should not confuse the understanding of the ignorant who are attached to their actions, but should rather (help them to) engage in all activities in a spirit of cooperation, giving a good example personally."**

It is a human tendency to try to convince others about the better value of our own opinion and ideals. However, this course of action rarely brings good results, and rather it can become a terrible waste of time and energy. Even worse, when the concept of democracy is applied without ensuring the proper foundations of knowledge and ethics, it is very likely that the wrong conclusions will be enforced, because the majority of the people is not necessarily constituted by the most intelligent and wisest individuals.

Here Krishna gives us the solution: rather than trying to convince others that they are not situated on the "highest platform", it is much better to help them progress gradually according to their personal inclinations. Of course, this does not apply to the basic distinction between *dharma* and *adharma*, that must be clearly established from the very beginning of everybody's training.

The proper discrimination between *sat* and *asat* is not a matter of opinion - actually *Gita* (18.29-32) will explain that the understanding that cannot discriminate between what should be done and what should not be done (such as saying that all opinions are equally valid) is influenced by ignorance, and the relativistic choice between one opinion and another based on one's personal convenience or material benefit is influenced by passion.

The "difference of opinion" described in this verse is rather about the two paths of philosophical search and ritualistic action, and about the various approaches of *yoga* such as *bhakti*, *karma*, *jnana*, *kriya*, etc, or even about the choice of one's *ista devata* - the particular form of God that one worships and loves.

Discussing about which one of such paths is "the best" is foolish and futile, because different people have different qualities and inclinations, and the supreme goal can be attained by each path - because in the end, all such genuine paths ultimately become one.

The word *yuktah* refers to this proper engagement in a genuine path that has been traced by the original scriptures and by the actual *acharyas* who are truly Self-realized souls. The history of Vedic tradition offers a great number of examples of such Self-realized souls, and at any particular moment in time there is always one of such Self-realized souls available on the planet. By following their personal behavior and precepts, we can gradually become Self-realized, too, and achieve perfection as described in *Gita*.

### VERSE 27

प्रकृतेः क्रियमाणानि गुणैः कर्माणि सर्वशः ।

prakṛteḥ kriyamāṇāni guṇaiḥ karmāṇi sarvaśaḥ ।

अहङ्कारविमूढात्मा कर्ताहमिति मन्यते ॥ ३-२७ ॥

ahaṅkāravimūḍhātmā kartāhamiti manyate ॥ 3-27 ॥

*prakriteh*: of nature; *kriyamanani*: are performed; *gunaih*: by the qualities; *karmani*: actions; *sarvasah*: all; *ahankara*: by the *ahankara* (false identification); *vimudha*: very foolish/ confused; *atma*: self; *karta*: the doer; *aham*: I (am); *iti*: like this; *manyate*: thinks/ believes.

**"All activities are (actually) performed by the qualities of nature, but a foolish person who is confused by egotism thinks 'I am doing'."**

As we have seen already, all genuine paths ultimately become one, just like the various paths that lead to a mountain peak will

ultimately converge in one place. The differences between genuine paths are only apparent, and they are determined by the various possible mixtures of the fundamental qualities of nature. Such differences are inevitable at a certain neophyte stage, when we have not yet established ourselves on the transcendental level of *visuddha sattva*, where *sattva* (goodness) is free from all material attachments and identifications. But the mixture of the *gunas* can and should be changed.

Here Krishna describes such attachments and identifications as foolish - *vimudha*. This is not the only time in *Gita* when Krishna calls spade a spade, as some behaviors can only be described by clear-cut words such as foolishness, ignorance, delusion, cheating, or demoniac activities and mentality. It is true that one should tell the truth by trying to choose palatable expressions (*satyam bruyat priyam bruyat*) but there is a limit to that. A delicate and soft speech will go totally wasted on those who are too thick to appreciate subtleties: you do not need a sledgehammer to break a thin sheet of paper or glass, but you will have to use it when there is a thick concrete wall to be torn down.

The idiot mentioned in this verse is any individual who falls in the delusional trap of trying to put one's tiny material personality (and whatever identification is attached to it) in the center of the universe as opposed to all the other personalities or groups. In Kali yuga, the vast majority of people belong to this description (*Bhagavata Purana* 1.1.10).

The words *ahankara* (*aham*, "I" and *kara*, "do") and *kartaham* (*karta*, "the doer", *aham*, "I") have the exact same meaning: "I am the doer". This precisely describes the delusion of the conditioned soul that falsely identifies with its material position, and develops a vain pride and attachment for the results of action. As a consequence, the conditioned soul experiences both joys and sorrows.

On the other side, a person that performs his duty sincerely in the best possible way, but understanding his material limitations as due to the interaction of the *gunas*, remains sober and happy in all circumstances. Of course, we must be very careful to avoid the cheating mentality that tries to justify adharmic and damaging selfish activities by claiming "I am not the doer - my actions are performed by the *gunas* and Nature".

The *gunas* are always an important factor in every action, whether we want to get the credit and the fruits or not, but we are not meant to be helpless puppets in the hands of the *gunas*: we can and should learn how to work with them and utilize them properly in the performance of our duty. An entire chapter (14) of *Gita* will be dedicated precisely to this subject.

## VERSE 28

तत्त्ववित्तु महाबाहो गुणकर्मविभागयोः ।

tattvavittu mahābāho guṇakarmavibhāgayoḥ ।

गुणा गुणेषु वर्तन्त इति मत्वा न सज्जते ॥ ३-२८ ॥

guṇā guṇeṣu vartanta iti matvā na sajjate ॥ 3-28 ॥

*tattva*: (factual) truth; *vit*: one who knows; *tu*: but; *maha-baho*: (you who have) mighty arms; *guna-karma-vibhagayoh*: the varieties of qualities and activities; *gunah*: the *gunas*; *guneshu*: in the *gunas*; *vartanta*: let them remain; *iti*: like this; *matva*: being aware; *na*: not; *sajjate*: becomes attached/ affected.

**"O mighty-armed (Arjuna), one who knows things as they really are (is able to understand) the various qualities and activities, and therefore he engages the qualities/ tendencies in**

**the interaction with the appropriate qualities/ tendencies: this awareness keeps him free from attachment."**

*Pradhana*, or the total aggregate of the material Nature (*prakriti*), manifests the three modes called *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. These are called *gunas*, or "qualities", and their characteristics and functions will be explained in detail later in the *Gita*. Here Krishna is simply indicating that the Self-realized soul, who knows the truth of Atman/ Brahman, should not identify with the play of the *gunas* that compose the material world, including our material body and mind. Rather, such knowledgeable person should allow the senses to engage in the sense activities but remaining detached from such actions, just like a grown-up and mentally mature baby sitter is able to direct and facilitate the childish playing of toddlers without getting attached to their games or toys.

Once we have become firmly established in the awareness of our true identity of Atman/ Brahman as opposed to the false identity of *ahankara*, we will become able to better work with the *gunas* without getting hopelessly tied up by them.

As long as we identify with the body and mind it will be extremely difficult to control them, just like a person who identifies with the car he drives will not be able to utilize the vehicle in the proper way, or - even more important - to soberly extricate himself from the vehicle when it is no longer useful. *Guna gunesu vartanta*: engaging the *gunas* in the *gunas* is a very interesting expression. Like everything else in the universe, our body, senses and mind are composed of a mixture of *gunas*, the basic components of material nature. The activities in this world and the objects of the senses are also composed by a mixture of *gunas*, and so are the results of the actions. We naturally need to engage our senses with the sense objects in order to perform our duties and even to maintain our body, but we should always be aware of the mechanism, without getting caught up in the cogs of the wheels.



Some commentators translate this verse as meaning that one should not engage in sense gratification but only work in devotional service: this is fundamentally a good concept, although it is not precisely what Krishna is saying in the verse. It is an interpretation, not a translation.

Furthermore, such a controversial idea can easily be misunderstood and distorted by people who have an abrahamic background to mean that we should abstain from all pleasures (including the legitimate, healthy and useful ones) and only engage in penance for the necessary purification of our inherently sinful nature. This misinterpretation can lead to extremely dangerous and delusional conclusions, by which suffering in itself (imposed on others or on one's self) comes to be considered an absolute and independent spiritual merit.

In fact, in both cases (when imposed on others or on oneself) such penances become a very strong type of sense gratification - the worst kind because it is perverted and distorted - and lead to mental diseases such as sadism and masochism, as well as to the morbid obsession for material power and domination. Therefore it is better to stick to the text of *Bhagavad gita* as it really is, and "engage the *gunas* in the *gunas*" in the proper performance of one's duties, without remaining attached either to the pleasure or to the suffering. By learning to discriminate and to properly utilize each component of material nature, we can live in this world in the best possible way and ultimately become free from material conditionings. The important thing is to remember that we are spirit souls, Brahman, and therefore we are not directly involved in such activities, objects and qualities, just like a human being remains distinct from his car and never identifies with it, although he needs to learn about its functioning, take care of its maintenance and provide the proper fuel, and drive it in the proper direction through the suitable route.

In this verse Arjuna is called *maha baho*, "mighty armed" to indicate that physical strength and strenuous effort are not the only factor for success: we need to channel our energy with the utmost attention and awareness, and supported by very solid knowledge.

## VERSE 29

प्रकृतेर्गुणसम्मूढाः सज्जन्ते गुणकर्मसु ।

prakṛterguṇasammūḍhāḥ sajjante guṇakarmasu ।

तानकृत्स्नविदो मन्दान्कृत्स्नविन्न विचालयेत् ॥ ३-२९ ॥

tānakṛtsnavido mandānkṛtsnavinna vicālayet ॥ 3-29 ॥

*prakriteh:* of nature; *guna:* by the qualities; *sammudhah:* delusional/ confused; *sajjante:* become attached; *guna karmasu:* to the qualities (and) to the actions/ to the activities of the qualities (*gunas*); *tan:* they; *akritsna-vidah:* those whose knowledge is insufficient; *mandan:* dull/ stupid; *kritsna-vit:* one who has sufficient knowledge; *na:* not; *vicalayet:* should unsettle/ dislodge/ agitate.

**"Those who are confused by the qualities of nature remain attached to the qualities and the activities/ to the activities of the *gunas*. A person who has the clear knowledge of action should not unsettle the minds of the foolish people who do not have the same understanding."**

Here Krishna repeats the instruction of verse 26, where he stated, *na buddhi-bhedam janayed ajnanam karma-sanginam joshayet sarva-karmani vidvan yuktah samacaran*, "A person who has knowledge should not confuse the understanding of the ignorant who are attached to their actions, but should rather (help them to) engage in all activities in a spirit of cooperation, giving a good example personally."

Whenever we find a repetition in the scriptures, we should understand that it is meant to highlight the special importance of a teaching. It is not a literary weakness, or a boring waste of time and paper. There are no "inferior duties" or "superior duties". There are different duties that are prescribed for people who are in different situations and need to work with the *gunas* in different ways. Defining such different tasks as inferior or superior will easily confuse the conditioned soul in trying to perform a task for which he is not properly equipped, or in developing resentment for the task for which he is actually qualified: both situations are very detrimental for the individual and for society at large, on the material and on the spiritual level as well. On the other hand, the person who believes himself to be situated in a "superior duty" might become self-righteous, arrogant, and blind to the actual facts, causing himself to slide down into those very "inferior" *gunas* he is despising in others.

This verse takes us to a different platform. Just like a teacher carefully engages in the elementary exercises of writing the alphabets on the blackboard not because he wants to get good grades or a golden star, but in order to instruct and help his students, a self realized soul continues to perform the ordinary duties and activities of this world without attachment.

Most students need to be inspired and even goaded forward by the idea of a reward, thinking about the enjoyment that will come from the result of the activity. If we take away this hope and interest, they will simply become lazy and neglectful, and that is not what we want.

So we need to be patient and personalize the teaching according to the particular position and abilities of each individual, while at the same time we need to realize that performing one's duty properly should not be done out of desire for a reward, but it has an absolute and independent value in itself.

This is even more important and true when we deal with people who are not our students, and will not be ready to actually listen to what we want to tell them, but will simply read our advice as an aggression to their own identifications and attachments even if we are simply stating the facts. The more they are attached and identified with their particular mixture of *gunas*, the more dangerous it will be to try to help them.

So shouldn't we take some risk in the performance of our mission - assisting the Lord's mission in protecting the good people, destroying the evil doers and establishing the principles of *dharma*? Of course we should. Only we need to know how to do it.

### VERSE 30

मयि सर्वाणि कर्माणि संन्यस्याध्यात्मचेतसा ।

mayi sarvaṇi karmāṇi sannnyasyādhyātmacetasā ।

निराशीर्निर्ममो भूत्वा युध्यस्व विगतज्वरः ॥ ३-३० ॥

nirāśīrnirmamo bhūtvā yudhyasva vigatajvaraḥ ।। 3-30 ।।

*mayi*: to me; *sarvani*: all; *karmani*: actions; *sannyasya*: by renouncing; *adhyatma*: of the *atman*; *chetasa*: in the consciousness; *nirasih*: without desire; *nirmamo*: without sense of possession or belonging; *bhutva*: being; *yudhyasva*: you should fight; *vigata*: free from; *jvarah*: fever.

**"You should fight (this battle) in the consciousness of surrendering all your actions to me, without selfish desires or sense of possessiveness, and without lethargy/ delirious delusions."**

In this verse, Krishna introduces the concept of the personal relationship in devotional service, a powerful personal motivation that is more effective than logic, the sense of duty, and detached wisdom. It is common knowledge that emotion is much more powerful than intellect, and it surpasses all logic and all other considerations. Thus, just like the uncontrolled emotion of lust and attachment can sweep our mind and senses away from our duty and good understanding, we can reverse the process into a virtuous circle and channel our emotions towards love and devotion, so that our mind and senses will be irresistibly attracted to that same duty, but perceived as a loving service to our true Lord and Master. The propensity to service is present in all living entities. The more selfless it becomes, the more purely it manifests in our actions, from the smallest gestures to the greatest choices in life. This selflessness is also called love.

When we speak about relationships, there is a big difference between attachment and love. Attachment means that we want to get something from the person who is the object of our emotion - pleasure, benefits, satisfaction of some kind - while love means that we only want to give everything, including ourselves, to the person who is the object of our emotion.

Attachment is selfish, love is selfless. Attachment imprisons, love liberates. This spontaneous tendency to love and service is the true nature of the soul, and constantly seeks engagement on various levels according to our particular identification and affinity. When we identify with our body, we tend to try to love and serve bodies. When we identify mostly with our mind, our love and service become channeled on a subtler level and open the doors to a wider awareness of the desires of the object of our sentiment.

Ultimately, when our identification is established on the spiritual level, we become able to see and appreciate, to love and to serve, the spiritual essence/ identity of the person who is the object of our

sentiment, including the Supreme Soul, the *param atma*, the soul of all souls. This is the highest and deepest meaning of *adhyatma cetasa*, "the consciousness of the soul", that becomes "the consciousness of God".

On a more prosaic level, this verse also applies to the perception of Krishna as the authority, the director, or even the military commander. Arjuna has already presented himself as a disciple and student of Krishna (*Gita 2.7*), so it makes perfect sense for Krishna to ask him to simply follow his instructions and to act in his service, dedicating all activities to him.

The expression *sannyasya*, "renouncing", directly refers to the practical mechanism of selfless action: when we renounce something, we offer its enjoyment to someone else, or we make it available to someone else. Krishna does not tell Arjuna to renounce the kingdom by offering it to Duryodhana - he must renounce the kingdom by offering it to a higher purpose and principle: the service to God and society (described as God's body) through the performance of the proper duty. There is not much merit in renouncing something under the pressure of some bully or highway robber, simply because we find ourselves in a weaker position. True renunciation consists in continuing to take the best possible care of the object, but engaging it in the service of God rather than in our own service.

In this verse the word *jvara* (literally "fever") is sometimes translated as "lethargy", because fever takes away strength of mind and body and leaves the patient in a lethargic state. However, since the previous verses expressed the concepts of illusion, confusion, and foolishness, we should remember that fever also affects the perception of the world and the clarity of the mind and senses, creating hallucinations and a delirious attitude that are typical to the people attached to the fruits of the action. On the other side, a person who is attached to the selfish enjoyment of the fruits of the

action will become lazy and lethargic when there is little or no personal benefit to be gained from work.

Thus both the meanings are applicable.

### VERSE 31

ये मे मतमिदं नित्यमनुतिष्ठन्ति मानवाः ।

ye me matamidaṁ nityamanutiṣṭhanti mānavāḥ ।

श्रद्धावन्तोऽनसूयन्तो मुच्यन्ते तेऽपि कर्मभिः ॥ ३-३१ ॥

śraddhāvanto'nasūyanto mucyante te'pi karmabhiḥ ।। 3-31।।

*ye*: those; *me*: my; *matam*: teaching; *idam*: this; *nityam*: always; *anutisthanti*: regularly follow/ situate (themselves) in; *manavah*: human beings; *sraddhavantah*: those who are faithful/ have faith; *anasuyantah*: those who are free from envy; *mucyante*: become free; *te*: they; *api*: even; *karmabhiḥ*: from the activities (and their consequences).

**"Those human beings who always follow this teaching of mine, thanks to their faith and lack of envy, become free from the consequences of actions."**

It will be useful to analyze the meaning of *sraddha*, "faith" and *anasuyata*, "freedom from envy". Faith means being willing to believe something. It does not need to be a blind faith, the determination to unquestioningly believe whatever we are told, something that is unreasonable and should not be demanded of anyone or by anyone. Reasonable faith is rather the opening of our minds and hearts to the possibility of acquiring something good. Everything requires a measure of faith, from the basic education we get in primary school to purchasing packed goods, or making a

flight reservation. We are entitled to make thorough preliminary inquiries about the trustworthiness of the recipient of our faith, but ultimately there are things we need to believe without trying to verify them first, because verification can be done only by experiencing them. For example, when we purchase a packaged product, we can verify the quality of its contents only after having paid its price. When we make a reservation for a flight, we can verify if the travel agency was trustworthy only after we have actually completed our journey.

Envy means finding fault where there is none. It means being unable to appreciate the actual qualifications and merits of others, and desiring to have the same position or a higher/ more powerful position than them. A synonym of envy is malice, or the desire to denigrate and cause damage to others especially if more qualified or successful than us. A person who is envious will never be able to appreciate the objective value of others - including the good things done by others or the good teachings presented by others.

The word *matam* in this verse literally means "opinion", but certainly Krishna's opinion is much more than an ordinary perspective as we find in common people, who can just speculate but do not have a clear and direct perception of Reality. Thus rather than wasting time discussing the personal opinions of this or that conditioned soul, we should get the "opinion" of those liberated souls who can directly see (*darshi*) Reality (*tattva*). This will also be clearly stated in verse 4.34 and other passages.

In the previous verses (3.26, 29) Krishna clearly said that we should not try to oppose opinion to opinion or to change the minds of others by pulling them away from their particular attachments. In this verse he expands the previous explanation, stating that a person who is attached to his own opinion based on identification and possession will not listen with faith to another's opinion, but rather he will find reason to become envious and hostile -



especially if the opinion of the other seems to be better than his own. It may be difficult for a conditioned soul to forgive people for having been wrong, but it is much more difficult to forgive people for having been right: this is the meaning of envy. Unfortunately this envy and lack of faith can also be directed towards liberated souls and even towards the Supreme Lord. For this reason, Krishna will tell Arjuna that this highest knowledge can only be appreciated by those who are free from envy (4.3, 18.64, 67, 71 etc). Even if in the beginning following Krishna's instructions in *Gita* could be difficult, if we have faith and become/ remain free from envy we will eventually succeed. Here this success is described as being liberated from the cycle of *karma*.

Some commentators interpret the word *anasuya* as "free from the tendency to fault-finding", and exploit this verse to claim legitimacy for their own adharmic conclusions and practices. In other words, in their opinion anyone who can see their inconsistencies and damaging conclusions and behaviors must be branded as a "fault-finder" and an "offender", that must be considered unqualified to understand and follow the teachings of Krishna in *Bhagavad gita*. The chances of misinterpretation grow exponentially when the students are induced to forget what is exactly the teaching that Krishna is talking about: that everyone - including the most transcendently realized and highly situated, including God himself - must perform their duties properly and behave according to the rules of *dharma* or ethical conduct in any case, so that the general mass of the people will be inspired by such good behavior. So, when we actually observe a really serious criminal and irresponsible behavior in someone who is passing off as a great transcendentalist, can we be considered unable to understand Krishna's teachings because we are envious as we have "found fault" with a cheater that is giving a very bad example to society at large?

## VERSE 32

ये त्वेतदभ्यसूयन्तो नानुतिष्ठन्ति मे मतम् ।

ye tvetadabhyasūyanto nānutiṣṭhanti me matam ।

सर्वज्ञानविमूढांस्तान्विद्धि नष्टानचेतसः ॥ ३-३२ ॥

sarvajñānavimūḍhānstānviddhi naṣṭānacetasaḥ ॥ 3-32 ॥

*ye*: those who; *tu*: but; *etat*: this; *abhyasuyantah*: (because they are) envious; *na*: not; *anutishthanti*: follow; *me*: my; *matam*: teaching; *sarva*: all; *jnana*: knowledge; *vimudhan*: completely foolish/ confused; *tan*: they; *viddhi*: (you should) know; *nashtan*: destroyed/ lost; *acetasaḥ*: without awareness.

**"However, those who do not follow my teachings because of envy/ malice, are confused in whatever they know. Know that they will (ultimately) meet with destruction because they do not have the proper understanding."**

So Krishna clarifies in this verse that the envious people are not those who can tell the difference between *dharma* and *adharma*, but those who do not follow his teachings to perform one's duty properly in order to give a good example to the general public. However, what will happen to the envious people who refuse to follow God's orders? They simply continue on their way until they develop a better understanding.

God is not interested in punishing us if we fail to follow his orders or to show loyalty to him: this idea of forced, exclusive and blind allegiance is typical of the abrahamic faiths, and if we do not remove it from our frame of reference, it will distort our perception of the teachings of the *Gita*. Here Krishna is not threatening the "non-believers", "unfaithful" or "heretics" with brimstone and hell fire, or with abject slavery and extermination.

He is not a terrorist, he does not want to rule by fear. Rather, he is saying that envy and malice will prevent a person from actually understanding the reality of facts. Someone who lives in denial of reality will certainly have problems, but these are not enforced by a revengeful tyrant as a punishment: they are simply the universal effects of the neutral laws of Nature. Anyone who is envious will behave like a fool and fall prey to confusion, and ultimately cause damage to others and to himself: it does not matter whether he considers himself a faithful believer in the Supreme God or not.

In fact, sometimes envious and foolish people (who see faults where there are none and cannot tolerate to see others live happily and peacefully) refuse to listen to very good teachings, claiming they cannot allow anything that is not authorized by their own religious tradition. They consider their own behavior as a demonstration of loyalty to God, while in fact it is exactly the opposite. God has given us intelligence, a conscience, a natural sense of ethics to help our understanding, and if we do not use them to understand good teachings, we are actually despising God's gifts.

Besides, it is very easy for clever manipulators to present their own faulty, absurd, cruel, destructive and even demoniac conclusions and plans as if they were orders coming directly and personally from God. They just need a sufficient number of followers (procured through whatever means, moral or immoral) to enforce their orders materially.

What is the proof that such orders have really come from God? To avoid this embarrassing question, they introduce the concept of blasphemy (i.e. dissent) and heresy (i.e. freedom of thought) as crimes that can and must be persecuted by law. Such an idea of religion is barbaric and totally contrary to the teachings of *Gita*.

### VERSE 33

सदृशं चेष्टते स्वस्याः प्रकृतेर्ज्ञानवानपि ।

sadṛśaṁ ceṣṭate svasyāḥ prakṛterjñānavānapi ।

प्रकृतिं यान्ति भूतानि निग्रहः किं करिष्यति ॥ ३-३३ ॥

prakṛtiṁ yānti bhūtāni nigrahaḥ kiṁ kariṣyati ॥ 3-33 ॥

*sadrisam*: in accordance; *cestate*: makes efforts; *svasyah*: by his own; *prakriteh*: nature; *jnanavan*: one who has the knowledge; *api*: even; *prakritim*: nature; *yanti*: go (following); *bhutani*: living beings/ situations in life; *nigrahaḥ*: restraint/ repression; *kim*: what; *karishyati*: one can do.

**"Even a person who has the (proper) knowledge must engage in actions according to his own nature. All embodied beings must follow their nature: what can repression accomplish? "**

In the previous verses, the definition of *jnani*, "a person of knowledge", has been used to indicate one who knows the difference between the temporary material objects and the eternal and transcendental nature of the spirit.

The word *prakriti* applies both to the material nature and to the spiritual nature of the *jiva*, because even after liberation each particular spark of the all-pervading Brahman retains an individual personality that will be expressed in the *siddha deha* or *rasa* of his relationship with God. Such individual taste of the *jiva*'s personality is considered the center of the philosophical approach called "personalism" as opposed to the view called "impersonalism". Therefore, the supporters of the personalistic view should not limit the meaning of this verse to the conditioned level of life.

Of course, theoretical knowledge alone is not sufficient: the proper knowledge needs to be applied in practice, through the proper performance of one's duties, free from selfish attachments and material identifications. Nobody should give up his duties to society and family, even if he considers himself (or is considered by others) as situated on the transcendental level of divine consciousness, because as Krishna has just said a few verses ago, even a perfectly liberated soul, even Krishna himself, continues to carefully perform the prescribed duties - in the very least, to give the good example to the mass of people.

Such duties must continue to be assigned according to one's particular natural qualities (both material and spiritual) that are inherent to each individual, because repression and denial are at best useless and at worst very dangerous and damaging.

What an irony, to see so-called personalist spiritualists stubbornly try to artificially enforce duties or renunciation to duties, or even spiritual *bhakti rasas* on the mass of people, with the pretext of transcendental consciousness!

Each individual *jiva* already has a natural personality that should be respected and carefully cultivated in a favorable way. It is absurd and hypocritical to attempt to impose a different spiritual sentiment or *ista devata* on people, treating them as blank slates to be used to write anything on, or even trying to wipe them clean of their natural inclinations.

The Guru gives the "second birth" to the disciple through initiation, but that does not mean that the disciple's soul (including his natural relationship with God) did not exist before that. Only people who do not really understand reincarnation and spirit (because of their material vision, identification and attachments) can fall in such a foolish trap.

## VERSE 34

इन्द्रियस्येन्द्रियस्यार्थे रागद्वेषौ व्यवस्थितौ ।

indriyasyendriyasyārthe rāgadveṣau vyavasthitau ।

तयोर्न वशमागच्छेत्तौ ह्यस्य परिपन्थिनौ ॥ ३-३४ ॥

tayorna vaśamāgacchettau hyasya paripanthinau ।। 3-34।।

*indriyasya:* of the senses; *indriyasya:* of the senses; *arthe:* in the purpose/ object (of the senses); *raga:* attraction; *dvesau:* aversion/ repulsion; *vyavasthitau:* in the interaction/ as ordained; *tayoh:* of them; *na:* not; *vasam:* control; *agacchet:* should go; *tau:* both of them; *hi:* certainly; *asya:* of him; *paripanthinau:* obstacles/ adversaries.

**"Attraction and aversion are ordained/ meant (to result) from the interaction of the senses with the objects of the senses; one should not fall under the control of either of them, because they are both (to be considered as) obstacles (on the path of the performance of duty)."**

The senses and the sense objects were created for the purpose of mutual interaction, and this continues also after one has reached the level of liberation, as long as we have a material body.

This process, however, continues even in the spiritual world in the spiritual body (*siddha deha*) with spiritual senses.

Without utilizing the senses, how is it possible to perform one's duty, or to engage in devotional service to God? It is impossible.

In fact, one of the most famous definitions of *bhakti* is: *hrisikesha hrisikena sevanam bhaktir uvyate*, "to engage the senses in the service of the Lord of the senses" (*Narada Pancaratra*, quoted in *Bhakti rasamrita sindhu*, 1.1.12).

Senses, mind and body do not necessarily have to be material: they have a spiritual counterpart, too, as it is found in the manifestations of God and his direct associates.

It is true that especially in the beginning of the practice of *yoga*, one should train the senses to withdraw from the sense objects, just like a tortoise withdraws its limbs within the shell (*Gita* 2.58), but this is supposed to be a temporary stage. So just like the tortoise cannot even maintain its life if it constantly keeps its limbs within the shell, we need to work in this world - even just to maintain our body. All types of work require the utilization of one's senses, and consequently attraction and repulsion are sure to occur. However, we must continue our work performing our prescribed duties without allowing attraction and repulsion to obstruct our activity.

Many people believe that renunciation and detachment should only be directed against the modality of attraction between the senses and the sense objects, while repulsion or aversion are a positive asset that facilitates proper renunciation. To make an example, some people believe that a man who hates women or talks about women in a despising or offensive way will be a good *sannyasi*. This is not a fact. Rather, this idea is extremely dangerous both for the individual and for society at large. A real *sannyasi* is a person who has realized the spiritual nature of all living entities, does not identify people with their bodies, and remains neutral towards all.

This verse gives the key to the problem: we should not allow attraction or repulsion to control our choices. In other words, we should engage our senses not for our own personal pleasure, but for the proper performance of the action. It is certainly difficult, but it is possible, with constant practice and detachment, when the mind and senses are controlled.

The practice of *yoga* is precisely the training that will enable us to control our mind and senses. It starts with the rules and regulations

called *yama* and *niyama*, principles that must be followed in all the various disciplines of *yoga*.

However we need to remember that *yama* and *niyama* are just principles of engagement, not taboo laws like in some other traditions.

Rules are not established whimsically under considerations of loyalty to a particular group, and must be applied carefully according to time, place, circumstances and person. Even rules and regulations can become obstacles on the path of progress, both because they may stop us from engaging in an activity that is actually favorable to *dharma*, and conversely because sometimes even sattvic legitimate gratification (allowed by the rules) can become an obstacle, when we become attached to material *sattva* or goodness. Therefore we need to cultivate intelligence.

### VERSE 35

श्रेयान्स्वधर्मो विगुणः परधर्मात्स्वनुष्ठितात् ।

śreyānsvadharmo viguṇaḥ paradharmātsvanuṣṭhitāt ।

स्वधर्मे निधनं श्रेयः परधर्मो भयावहः ॥ ३-३५ ॥

svadharme nidhanam śreyaḥ paradharmo bhayāvahaḥ ॥ 3-35 ॥

*sreyan:* better; *sva:* one's own; *dharmah:* natural ethical engagement; *viguṇah:* defective/ without (the proper) qualities; *para:* of others; *dharmat:* from the natural ethical engagement; *su:* very well; *anushthitat:* well accomplished; *sva-dharme:* in one's *dharma*; *nidhanam:* destruction/ death; *sreyah:* better; *para-dharmah:* the *dharma* of others; *bhaya:* fear; *avahah:* bringing.



**"It is better to perform one's own duty even with some imperfections or mistakes, or even if this means meeting with death or destruction, rather than successfully engaging in the duties of others – which is a dangerous choice."**

The principle illustrated in this verse can be understood correctly only in the light of the constant process of progress and evolution inherent in human life, based on learning and becoming more qualified. The message of *Gita* and all the genuine Vedic teachings are aimed at leading each individual to develop and evolve - from the darkness to the light, from mortality to immortality, from material consciousness to spiritual consciousness.

It is difficult to perform one's actual duty, both at the material and at the spiritual level, because it requires us to make a progressive effort, while something that can be performed very easily is certainly below our real potential. By following this principle of striving for progress the individual and society are benefited. It is the same principle of a study course in school, where the students are faced with "difficult" tests and problems as soon as they have come to execute smoothly and perfectly the tests and problems of the previous school years.

Thus, it is better to engage in the tasks specifically assigned to us by a competent authority, even if the result is poor, because it means that we are learning and progressing. On the other hand, engaging in a task that is below our potential will easily bring perfect results: every time that life becomes too easy, we know that we are not advancing. We are wasting time, something that constitutes the greatest possible fear: the valuable opportunity of a human birth is not something that we can afford to squander by leading a complacent and easy life.

Some people misinterpret this verse to mean that one should insist to engage in the job or social occupation (prescribed duties) of

one's ancestors or family of birth even without possessing the actual qualities, tendencies or abilities, or at the cost of wasting one's real good potential and moral integrity, and without caring about the disastrous results of such artificial engagement.

Such interpretation can only bring degradation both for the individual and for the society, because it is based on the cultivation of ignorance and inertia, a quality that confuses the intelligence of people, causing them to mistake *dharma* for *adharma* and vice versa (*Gita* 18.32).

The commentators propounding such disastrous interpretation sometimes even go as far as referring to *bhaya* ("fear") in this verse as the fear of hell, or God's punishment for "breaking the social order" of caste prejudice. This misinterpretation is obviously dictated by their heavy abrahamic cultural superimposition, as many of such scholars were educated in Christian mission schools.

When a similar misunderstanding is applied to the word *dharma* (often mistranslated as "religion", as in loyalty or affiliation to a particular faith or belief) the results become even more destructive, because people develop the idea that they should remain faithful to the beliefs practiced by their fathers, even if such beliefs are faulty and nonsensical. This idea is offensive because it implies that *dharma* can in fact be something that is faulty, unethical, damaging to society and nonsensical - not just because we perceive it as such, due to our limited understanding, but because it was so ordained by God. Of course this interpretation ends up completely distorting the meaning of *dharma*, because many beliefs, practices and occupations that can be found in the world have very little to do with ethics or they may even be totally unethical.

Can there be a criminal *dharma*? Should the son of a thief, a rapist, a fraudster, a bank robber, consider himself bound by divine laws to continue in the degrading, destructive, demoniac occupations of

his father? The casteist interpreters practically claim he should. By following such a faulty logic, for example, Prahlada the son of the demoniac king Hiranyakasipu would have violated *dharma* by becoming a devotee of Vishnu and a *mahajana*, a great authority on transcendental knowledge.

On the opposite side, the "transcendentalist" commentators try to openly disprove Krishna's clear statements by saying that the instruction contained in this verse only applies to the material platform, but when one is declared (or declares himself) a "transcendentally liberated soul", he is free to do whatever he wants, so a *brahmana* can act as a *kshatriya*, or a *kshatriya* can act as a *brahmana* etc. This could be seriously misinterpreted, too, causing great disasters both at individual and at social level. It is true that a liberated soul does not identify with any particular position and will be ready to take up any ethical activity when required for assisting the mission of the Lord. But then there is no more question of *brahmanas* and *kshatriyas*, or *vaisyas* or *sudras* or *mlecchas* - one is merely the servant of God.

When there is still some material identification, the idea of pretending to be "transcendental" can easily appear very convenient, because it can be used as a justification for accepting all the rights of all positions in society and escaping all the relevant duties, often jumping from one position to another and back again, to escape responsibilities, duties and consequences, and run after material benefits and advantages.

The examples of Visvamitra and Parasurama are ill chosen to prove this faulty conclusion, because Visvamitra deliberately left his *kshatriya* identification, position and activities to progress to the natural next stage of *brahmana*, through a very intense self-training, so much that he actually became a qualified *brahmana* - recognized even by the great authority Vasistha. He was not a *kshatriya* "transcendentally" acting as a *brahmana*.

On the other hand, Parasurama never left the position and duties of a *brahmana* even when he engaged in his 21 military campaigns to exterminate the degraded *kshatriyas*, because it is a precise duty of the *brahmanas* to directly remove the bad kings when there is no other option.

And it is interesting to notice that Parasurama never claimed any throne or governing position for himself, as any *kshatriya* would and should have done, because his task was not about the military protection of the *prajas*.

We need to understand that traditionally the *brahmanas* are responsible for the behavior of the *kshatriyas* and have the right and the power to remove them if they become really damaging for the kingdom.

Parasurama was truly a *brahmana*.

## VERSE 36

अर्जुन उवाच ।

arjuna uvāca ।

अथ केन प्रयुक्तोऽयं पापं चरति पूरुषः ।

atha kena prayukto'yaṁ pāpaṁ carati pūruṣaḥ ।

अनिच्छन्नपि वाष्णेय बलादिव नियोजितः ॥ ३-३६ ॥

anicchannapi vārṣṇeya balādiva niyojitaḥ ॥ 3-36 ॥

*arjuna*: Arjuna; *uvaca*: said; *atha*: then; *kena*: by what; *prayuktah*: impelled; *ayam*: this; *papam*: sin/ guilty action; *carati*: does; *purushah*: a *purusha* (enjoyer); *anicchan*: without desiring; *api*: even; *varshneya*: o (scion) of Vrishni; *balat*: by force; *iva*: like; *niyojitah*: constrained.

**Arjuna said:**

**"O scion of Vrishni (Krishna), what (power) then pushes a man to perform sinful/ negative actions, even without his conscious choice, as if compelled by force?"**

Even the best people may commit a mistake. In one moment of weakness or distraction, an ordinarily good person can destroy his entire life, and afterwards bitterly wonder why on earth he has done such a stupid thing. This happens because the individual soul (*jiva atman*) has the propensity to enjoy (*purusha* - both with male and female bodies) but only possesses a very small amount of power compared to the Supreme, so when he tries to dominate Maya he inevitably falls under Maya's strict control.

This also applies to those hopefuls who want to "declare war to Maya" by castigating all expressions of healthy pleasures and freedom of thought, and consider themselves as the "stalwart generals" of a war they cannot possibly win - comparable to the war waged by moths against a roaring fire.

In spite of the glorious vision they have of themselves, they are nothing but upstart little children who are trying to rebel against Mother to impose their own will against hers.

In their patriarchal arrogance and foolishness, they believe that, by fighting against Mother, they are actually doing Father a favor. They project on God their own defects and failures in the field of relationships and conclude that when a woman has power, the man must be "henpecked" and in a disgraceful position.

So they take upon themselves the task of "emancipating themselves" from Mother's control and "making things right" in the balance of power in the universe, by exclusively worshiping the Father and attacking Mother in all her forms.

Mother may humor them for a short time, but only to keep them even more strictly under her control. Later in *Gita* (7.14) Krishna will give very clear instructions on this subject, describing Maya as "his divine power", and recommending that one simply surrenders to him (rather than stupidly trying to fight against Maya).

Arjuna's question should be examined from the perspective created by the previous verses in a logical thread. Krishna has explained that one should engage the senses, mind and body in the proper activities that constitute one's prescribed duty, and such prescribed duty is determined by one's natural inclinations. These actions will not only be effective for maintaining one's body and ensuring one's livelihood, but they will also serve as a training for one's personal progress and evolution, up to the point of liberation.

Is it therefore natural to wonder why so many people fail to proceed on this beneficial path and stray far from it, even causing great sufferings to themselves, and even without really choosing to pursue degradation. With all these facilities and this perfect plan, how can someone fail, and slide down into disgrace? Krishna will reply in the next verses.

### VERSE 37

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।

śrībhagavānuvāca ।

काम एष क्रोध एष रजोगुणसमुद्भवः ।

kāma eṣa krodha eṣa rajoguṇasamudbhavaḥ ।

महाशनो महापाप्मा विद्ध्येनमिह वैरिणम् ॥ ३-३७ ॥

mahāśano mahāpāpmā viddhyenamihā vairiṇam ॥ 3-37 ॥

*sri*: wonderful; *bhagavan*: Lord; *uvaca*: said; *kama*: lust; *esha*: this; *krodha*: anger; *esha*: this; *rajah*: passion; *guna*: quality; *samudbhavah*: born of; *maha*: great; *asanah*: devourer; *maha*: great; *papma*: source of sin; *viddhi*: (you should) know; *enam*: this; *iha*: here; *vairinam*: enemy.

### **The Lord said:**

**"This (power) is (constituted by) 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."**

The fundamental power in this material world, as well as in the spiritual world, is Shakti, also called Maya. In the material world she is called Maha Maya and is the origin of the three material qualities or *gunas* known as *sattva* (goodness), *rajas* (passion), *tamas* (ignorance). In the spiritual world she is called Yoga Maya and is the origin of the three spiritual qualities known as *sat* (eternity), *cit* (consciousness) and *ananda* (happiness).

Power is not bad in itself, just like we cannot blame electricity if we get electrocuted by touching in our rashness and ignorance what we are not supposed to meddle with.

Electricity itself can form a fail-safe circuit to protect us from such danger, if we properly follow the instructions. Also, electricity can manifest as heat or cold, movement or sound or even the ability to process data - for example in water heaters, refrigerators, electric motors, radios, TVs and computers.

We can compare the three material *gunas* to three different frequencies or modes of power - *sattva* helps us to evolve and become better persons, *rajas* endlessly pushes us to pursue success, pleasure and control, and *tamas* dulls our consciousness down into laziness, delusion and madness.

Later on Krishna will elaborate more on this specific topic of the *gunas*, because it is extremely important to understand it.

In this verse, Krishna specifies that the *kama* and *krodha* that impel the conditioned soul into bad actions are expressed by a specific mode: *rajas* or passion. Naturally *rajas* or passion excites material desires for enjoyment and possession, and when such selfish desire is not fulfilled, it turns into anger or rage. This process has already been explained in verses 2.62 and 2.63.

This great enemy of progress is called "great devourer" because it is never satiated: the desire for enjoyment and possession has no limits, when it is followed for its own sake and not in the proper performance of one's ethical duties. One who possesses a bicycle will want a motorcycle, one who possesses a motorcycle will want a car, one who possesses a car will want two cars, and one who possesses two cars will want to get more expensive and luxury cars. Even a man who possesses hundreds of luxury cars, like some Arab sheiks do, is not satisfied and he keeps scheming to get more and more.

Possessing hundreds of very expensive, stylish superfast cars is obviously not a real necessity, but rather an exercise of base lust. One single person can only use one car at the time, and the necessary speed for normal journeys can be achieved by any average decent vehicle; for longer journeys it is better to use more efficient public transportation.

Now, *kama* and *krodha* can also manifest in the modes of *sattva*, when they are properly channeled in the performance of our duty and they do not violate the fundamental principles of *dharma* (truthfulness, compassion, cleanliness, self-control). This manifestation of *kama* and *krodha* is actually desirable because it helps us better perform our duties to family and society, and ultimately in devotional service to the Supreme.



Some commentators give the example of the difference between love and lust, and explain that the soul's original love for God (and all creatures as parts and parcels of God) is transformed into lust by the contact with material nature, like milk is transformed into cheese curds by an acid substance.

So by engaging our senses in service or duty to the Supreme, we can transform lust and rage back into pure love. This is a very good explanation, but it is not sufficient.

A warrior cannot just work on transcendental love; he needs to feel some sattvic rage that is not born out of the frustration of his selfish personal desires but out of legitimate indignation against the aggressors of innocent and good people. Similarly, later in the text (7.11) Krishna will clearly say that lust in the mode of *sattva* or even in the transcendental mode is actually not an enemy, but a very good thing.

### VERSE 38

धूमेनाव्रियते वह्निर्यथादर्शो मलेन च ।

dhūmenāvriyate vahniryathādarśo malena ca ।

यथोल्बेनावृतो गर्भस्तथा तेनेदमावृतम् ॥ ३-३८ ॥

yatholbenāvṛto garbhastathā tenedamāvṛtam ॥ 3-38 ॥

*dhumena:* by smoke; *avriyate:* is covered; *vahni:* fire; *yatha:* like; *adarsah:* a mirror; *malena:* by dust; *ca:* and; *yatha:* similarly; *ulbena:* by the womb; *avritah:* covered; *garbhah:* the embryo; *tatha:* similarly; *tena:* by them; *idam:* this; *avritam:* covered.

**"Like fire is covered by smoke, like a mirror is covered by dirt and like the embryo is covered by the womb, similarly this (consciousness) is covered by these (anger and lust)."**

The three examples in this verse refer to the various degrees of angry lust and their effects on the consciousness of the soul.

It is said that the fire covered by smoke represents the human form of life, in which lust and rage can actually be easily manipulated to get the fire blazing even more brightly. Smoke is usually seen at the beginning of the development of fire, when it is kindled. The more the fire burns, the drier the firewood gets and the less smoke will be produced. Sometimes fire does not give any smoke at all.

The mirror covered by dirt is compared to the condition of animal life, in which the soul's radiance is hidden by layers of immediate material concerns such as eating, sleeping, mating, protecting oneself and one's family, developing social relationships, and so on.

The embryo covered by the womb is compared to the dull life of plants and more elementary organisms, such as microbes etc; in such a situation the living entity is totally blind and unable to do anything else but sucking nutrients and growing.

The more lust and anger we develop in our search for sense gratification, the more dangerous and destructive we become, and the more we lose our freedom, ending up by concentrating only on the feeling of "acquisition", with no other concern.

Animals are certainly more concentrated on acquisition than human beings: they usually spend all the waking hours trying to find some food, with only a limited time reserved for relationships and other concerns. Plants and microbes are even more obsessed, as they feed constantly, day and night, and in fact they do not do anything else.

Some commentators interpret all the three examples to refer to human life; the fire covered by smoke is then the person who has already progressed through the process of self realization and is almost free from material identification and attachments. Just a little breeze is sufficient to sweep away the smoke and let the fire shine fully.

The example of the mirror indicates the ordinary human being, who is usually covered by different concerns in life besides lust and anger, while the foolish and degraded people who live in darkness, ignorance and selfishness are compared to the undeveloped embryo.

### VERSE 39

आवृतं ज्ञानमेतेन ज्ञानिनो नित्यवैरिणा ।

āvṛtaṁ jñānametena jñānino nityavairiṇā ।

कामरूपेण कौन्तेय दुष्पूरेणानलेन च ॥ ३-३९ ॥

kāmarūpeṇa kaunteya duṣpūreṇānalena ca ।। 3-39 ।।

*avritam:* covered; *jnanam:* knowledge; *etena:* by these; *jnaninah:* of one who knows; *nitya:* constant; *vairina:* by the enemy; *kama:* lust; *rupena:* by the form of; *kaunteya:* o son of Kunti (Arjuna); *dushpurena:* never satisfied; *analena:* by the fire; *ca:* and.

**"O son of Kunti (Arjuna), these (lust and anger) cover (even) the knowledge of the wise persons. These are a perpetual enemy, an all-consuming fire."**

Here the insatiable desire of enjoyment for the sake of pleasure itself is called "the enemy of the wise", because the fools consider it a friend that will bestow all sorts of good things; they can

understand its destructive power only after they have become wiser. Wisdom teaches us that it is not good to play with fire carelessly, allowing ourselves to be overcome by its fascination. Those who fall under the control of the desire to possess the fire lose their lives, just like moths become fatally attracted by the heat and light radiated by the fire and end up burning into it.

Yet, fire is a very good thing. It is necessary to cook our foods, to heat our bodies and homes in the winter, to bring light in the dark hours, and even to carry our devotional offerings to God. As the firemen know, the wise application of fire (together with the deep knowledge of the wind and other factors) is even used to stop wild fires by counteracting them. There is a big difference between a genuine need and the whimsical lustful desires that are generated by an uncontrolled mind.

The hunger for sense gratification and domination for their own sake can never be satisfied, just like it is not possible to quench a fire by regularly adding fuel.

On the other hand, the genuine need for sense gratification can be satiated by a reasonable and healthy amount of the pleasures that are beneficial and required for the maintenance of the body and mind. Again, the real point here is not about shunning all sense gratification, but about not allowing it to devour our consciousness and become the most important thing in our life.

Another interpretation of this verse is that *jnana*, as theoretical knowledge, is not sufficient by itself to face the danger of passionate lust and anger: therefore we need to engage our emotions in *bhakti*, and our energies in *karma yoga*. This will harness *rajas* in the service of *visuddha sattva* and thus control it effectively, rather than letting it control the activities of the living entity and drag him into *tamas*.

*Raja guna*, the mode of passion and activity, is a great force that, like all forces, is neutral in itself and can be used for the bad or the good.

### VERSE 40

इन्द्रियाणि मनो बुद्धिरस्याधिष्ठानमुच्यते ।

indriyāṇi mano buddhirasyādhīṣṭhānamucyate ।

एतैर्विमोहयत्येष ज्ञानमावृत्य देहिनम् ॥ ३-४० ॥

etairvimohayatyēṣa jñānamāvṛtya dehinam ॥ 3-40 ॥

*indriyani*: the senses; *manah*: the mind; *buddhih*: the intellect; *asya*: of this; *adhishtanam*: residence; *ucyate*: it is said; *etaih*: by (all) these; *vimohayati*: confuses (in many ways); *esha*: this; *jnanam*: the knowledge; *avṛitya*: covering; *dehinam*: of the embodied (soul).

**"It is said that the senses, the mind and the intelligence are the seats of this (angry lust), as this (angry lust) confuses and covers the knowledge of the embodied beings."**

All those who have a material body (*dehinam*) have senses, mind and intelligence, that are normally fueled by *rajas* or passion. This fuel is required to keep the body in action (out of the lethargy of *tamas*), but as with all combustible substances, its use inevitably exposes us to the dangers of uncontrolled fire.

As we have seen, desire is not bad in itself, but it becomes noxious when it takes an angry quality, when it does not content itself with the *prasadam*, whatever is sent by the kindness of God. Then it becomes the unhealthy center and purpose of life rather than a healthy support to give us strength to continue in our duties.

Angry lust pollutes the senses, the mind and the intelligence, distracting them from the real purpose of life and creating a sort of toxic addiction that requires more and more gratification just to keep going and stealing all energy.

Again, the solution to the problem is to focus the consciousness in *sattva* or *visuddha sattva*, the pure transcendental quality of goodness, as it had already been recommended clearly in 2.45. The sober vision, clarity and enlightenment characteristic of *sattva* will certainly help us to engage *rajas* in a constructive and progressive way.

It is important to understand that lust is not only in the senses or in the physical body: it arises in the mind and keeps the intelligence engaged in the pursuit of sense gratification, possession and domination, and the rage that rises from their frustration. Castigating the body with severe and unhealthy penance is not the correct answer, because as Krishna has already stated, one who abstains from sense gratification but still retains the memory of the sense objects is a foolish cheater (3.7). The solution lies much deeper, in the greater power of the soul that can control the intellect and the mind, as Krishna will clearly state in the next verses.

### VERSE 41

तस्मात्त्वमिन्द्रियाण्यादौ नियम्य भरतर्षभ ।

tasmāttvamindriyāṅyādau niyamya bharatarṣabha ।

पाप्मानं प्रजहि ह्येनं ज्ञानविज्ञाननाशनम् ॥ ३-४१ ॥

pāpmānaṁ prajahi hyenaṁ jñānavijñānanāśanam ॥ 3-41 ॥

*tasmat*: therefore; *tvam*: you; *indriyani*: the senses; *adau*: from the beginning; *niyama*: by regulating (through *yama* and *niyama*); *bharatarshabha*: o best of the descendants of Bharata (Arjuna); *papmanam*: the cause of sin; *prajahi*: give up/ vanquish; *hi*: certainly; *enam*: this; *jnana*: theoretical knowledge; *vijnana*: applied knowledge; *nasanam*: the destroyer.

**"Therefore, o best of the Bharatas (Arjuna), you (should) engage the senses in a regulated way first/ from the very beginning, and then totally abandon/ in order to vanquish this great cause of sinful actions, that can destroy knowledge and wisdom."**

One meaning of this verse is that one should first (*adau*) practice control of the senses and the mind and then ultimately develop complete renunciation. Another meaning of the word *adau* in this verse is "from the beginning of one's life".

As also confirmed by many passages of *shastra*, the training in *dharma* and *yoga* should start from an early age, directly from childhood, so that the individual does not have the opportunity to develop bad habits. This is why young children are sent to the Gurukula to become *brahmachari* students.

The civilized system of Vedic society is also called *varnashrama* because it is composed by four *varnas* or occupational categories and by four *ashramas* or stages of life. The four *varnas* are *brahmanas* (intellectuals), *kshatriyas* (administrators), *vaisyas* (entrepreneurs) and *sudra* (laborers). The four *ashramas* are *brahmacharya* (student life), *grihasta* (family life), *vanaprastha* (retired life) and *sannyasa* (renunciation).

The four *ashramas* are meant to be applied as follows: all the members of the four *varnas* should attend the Gurukula and receive some training as *brahmacharis*; those who are unable to

complete the course of studies successfully because of insufficient qualities and inclination are categorized as *sudras* and they are not required to undertake any religious or material responsibility in society. They may marry and have a family, but they are not required to follow all the rules and regulations and perform all the rituals that are prescribed for *grihasthas*. They can participate to public functions and get the help of *brahmanas* if they want to have auspicious ceremonies in their homes, but this is not compulsory for them.

Students that qualify on the further level, either as *vaisyas*, *kshatriyas* or *brahmanas* receive the *diksha* (initiation) and the sacred thread (*upavita*) that symbolizes that they are competent to perform the ritual ceremonies. They undergo the marriage *samskara* and the subsequent *samskaras* for their children, but only the *kshatriyas* and *brahmanas* are duty-bound to enter the order of *vanaprastha* at the age of 50, to dedicate fully in the pursuit of religious activities.

*Vaisyas* have the tendency to remain engaged in their family and even social occupation for as long as they are able to according their physical and mental health; when they become too old and invalid they retire from work but remain in family to be taken care by their adult children.

*Kshatriyas* and *brahmanas*, on the other hand, are required to leave their family and go to the forest (*panchasordhvam vanam vrajet*) to perform austerities, live very simply on fruits, roots and forest produce, and avoid social interactions. In alternative, they should travel frequently to pilgrimage places in order to purify themselves from attachments and material identifications. Some people believe that the *vanaprastha ashram* is meant to "accumulate wealth", but this is exactly the opposite of what the *shastras* teach. A *brahmana* or *kshatriya* is supposed to be more evolved and therefore detached from material possessions, so when old age approaches he leaves



the house and professional occupation to his adult son and gets serious about preparing for death. The order of *vanaprastha* is open both to husband and wife, and they can continue to live together, but practicing self control and gradual renunciation.

However, only the *brahmana* has the duty to renounce everything and dedicate the last years of his life to great austerities with the purpose of teaching and inspiring society as a *sannyasi*. The order of complete renunciation (*sannyasa*) is generally taken by men at the age of 75, after spending 25 years (from 50 to 75) in the stage of *vanaprastha*. The wife can either become a *sannyasini sadhvi* and live alone just like male *sannyasis* do, or go back to live comfortably but modestly with her grown up children until she dies. Women - like *sudras* - are not required to perform severe austerities, although there is no prohibition in that sense. This is the perfectly scientific way to practice control over sense gratification. However, it is never too late to start controlling the senses in a regulated way - "from the beginning" also means that one can do any time as soon as he realizes the need to do so.

## VERSE 42

इन्द्रियाणि पराण्याहुरिन्द्रियेभ्यः परं मनः ।

indriyāṇi parāṅyāhurindriyebhyaḥ param manaḥ ।

मनसस्तु परा बुद्धिर्यो बुद्धेः परतस्तु सः ॥ ३-४२ ॥

manasastu parā buddhiryo buddheḥ paratastu saḥ ॥ 3-42 ॥

*indriyani*: the senses; *parani*: superior; *ahuh*: are said; *indriyebhyaḥ*: than the senses; *param*: superior; *manah*: the mind; *manasah*: than the mind; *tu*: but; *para*: superior; *buddhih*: intelligence; *yah*: that; *buddheh*: than intelligence/ intellect; *paratah*: superior; *tu*: but; *sah*: he (the *atman/ purusha*).

**"The senses are superior (to this angry lust/ to dull matter), and the mind is superior to the senses. Intelligence is superior to the mind, and he (the soul) is superior to the intellect."**

Some commentators explain the first term of comparison in the verse as dull matter, but in the previous verses Krishna has been talking about the "enemy of the wise", the lust and anger born from the *guna* of passion. In both cases, the senses have the power to engage or not to engage both the material object and the desire, so they are superior to both.

The concept of superiority (*para*) expressed here is not artificial or arbitrary; it is not a mysterious dogma coming from some obscure theological categories that cannot be verified by practical experience. Vedic knowledge is deeply scientific.

The *atman* is the pure identity of the individual, the "I" that remains the same in spite of the constant change of body and situations. Everything else disappears, but the true identity of the living being never changes. We say "my body" and "my mind", because we instinctively perceive a distinct difference between the subject (the "I") and the object (the "mine"). We, as *atman*, have the intrinsic power to control our mind and body, therefore we are superior to them. If we do not control them, it's just because of lack of training and practice.

The *atman* can control the mind by using the intelligence or intellect. The difference between mind and intellect is that the intellect is able to discern between a bad idea and a good idea, while the mind elaborates on everything that is supplied by the senses or contained in its memory files.

However, the mind is superior to the senses because it can think and doubt, accepting or rejecting the impressions supplied by the senses with the functions called *sankalpa* (volition, intention,

thought, reflection, imagination) and *vikalpa* (doubt, indecision, error etc).

We can make the example of a computer: the *atman* is the operator, the intellect is the root system, the mind is composed by all the various software programs, the ten senses are the connections between the computer and the external world - monitor, keyboard, mouse, printer, modem etc - which have both software (subtle) and hardware (gross) components. The body is constituted by the hardware proper. The operator of the computer has the power to give commands to the entire machine. The root system accepts or rejects the software and runs it as required, and the software operates the various connections. The operator can exist without the machine, and similarly the basic system can exist without this or that software. The ten senses are the passive senses of perception (vision, hearing, taste, smell and touch) and the active organs of action (speech, hands, feet, anus and genitals).

### VERSE 43

एवं बुद्धेः परं बुद्ध्वा संस्तभ्यात्मानमात्मना ।

evam buddheḥ param buddhvā samstabhyaātmanamātmanā ।

जहि शत्रुं महाबाहो कामरूपं दुरासदम् ॥ ३-४३ ॥

jahi śatruṁ mahābāho kāmārūpaṁ durāsadam ॥ 3-43 ॥

*evam*: thus; *buddheh*: than intellect; *param*: superior; *buddhva*: understanding; *samstabhya*: establishing firmly; *atmanam*: the self; *atmana*: with the self/ with the mind; *jahi*: vanquish; *satrum*: the enemy; *maha-baho*: o mighty armed; *kama-rupam*: in the form of desire; *durasadam*: formidable.

**"O mighty-armed (Arjuna), thus knowing that (you are/ which is) superior to the intelligence, make yourself stable by your own effort/ focus the mind on the self, and conquer that enemy (that is) the formidable lust."**

After scientifically explaining the nature of uncontrolled desire and its negative effects on the consciousness, and offering the solution to the problem, Krishna encourages Arjuna to follow the best course of action, not because he demands obedience, but simply because it is the best thing to do. Similarly, at the conclusion of *Gita* (18.63), he will clearly tell Arjuna, "I have explained you this knowledge: think about it carefully, and then do what you wish".

Krishna gives great importance to intelligence, encouraging Arjuna (and us as well) to engage it to win the battle of life against uncontrolled lust for enjoyment, possession and domination. Apart from the image of the battle, that is a familiar example to a *kshatriya* like Arjuna, Krishna often mentions the metaphor of the storm, comparing this enemy of uncontrolled desires to a strong wind that sweeps away the mind and senses. In both examples, we can attain success by firmly standing our ground or staying our course with intelligence, without allowing distractions to sweep us away. This obviously highlights the importance of strengthening our own determined intelligence so that it can control the mind and senses. The idea of focusing the Self on the Self (*atmanam atmana*), in its different hues of meanings, certainly gives a clear message in this direction.

This empowerment of the individual does not take anything away from the concept of surrendering to the Divine Plan and tolerating the constant changes of material nature such as joys and sorrows. Some people misinterpret the meaning of surrender and tolerance, presenting them a sort of passive fatalism, a blind and resigned acceptance of whatever destiny is dishing out.

This kind of idea is wrong and creates a serious danger, because it can fool people into falling under the control of unscrupulous and ruthless exploiters who falsely present themselves as "God's representatives" and demand that we surrender to them, renouncing our God given intelligence and personal power.