

BHAGAVAD GITA

**The Global Dharma for
the Third Millennium**

Chapter Five

Translations and commentaries
compiled by Parama Karuna Devi

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Title ID: 4173066
ISBN-13: 978-1482548419
ISBN-10: 1482548410

published by

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Chapter 5: Sannyasa Yoga

The yoga of renunciation

This chapter speaks clearly about two extremely difficult and misunderstood subjects - *sannyasa* and *yoga* - explaining what actual renunciation is, and what is the true purpose of *yoga*. We will see how the teachings of this chapter do not contradict the teachings of previous chapters but rather they integrate them and make them easier to understand.

The order of *sannyasa* is the fourth stage of life or *ashrama* for civilized people (*aryas*).

In the previous chapter, Krishna has explained the system of *varnas* as a categorization of social duties according to one's qualities/ tendencies and activities/ abilities (*guna* and *karma*), that is part of the greater system called *varnashrama*, including both *varnas* and *ashramas* and detailing their duties to ensure the gradual progress of the entire society.

Quite the opposite of the present degraded caste system based on birth prejudice and disregard for real personal qualities and duties, the *varnashrama* system is meant to support and stimulate the individual's training for progress and development, by setting duties and responsibilities that are progressively more demanding just like the higher classes in school are set lessons and tests that become increasingly difficult and demanding.

The general direction leads from the lower *gunas* (qualities) of *tamas* (ignorance) and *rajas* (passion) towards *sattva* (virtue/ goodness), that is characterized by selflessness, sense of

responsibility and duty, simplicity of life, peacefulness, cultivation of knowledge, cultivation of detachment/ renunciation, wisdom, internal and external cleanliness, and inner happiness and satisfaction that radiates in every aspect of life.

Later Krishna will explain more about the three *gunas* (modes or qualities) of material nature, especially in chapter 14, that is specifically entitled *guna traya vibhaga yoga*, or "the *yoga* of differentiating between the *gunas*". However, already in 2.45 (*nitya-sattva stho*) he had said that one should always remain situated in *sattva*, because the purification of the mind and body and the cultivation of knowledge are the purpose of all the *karmas* and *yajnas*, or dutiful activities and religious rituals

Among the 8 categories of the *varnashrama dharma*, the *brahmana* (for the *varnas*) and the *sannyasi* (for the *ashramas*) are expected to be the highest and most qualified among the human beings; the *brahmana* is one who knows Brahman in theory and practice, while the *sannyasi* has completely renounced all material identifications, associations and attachments. Thus they exemplify the highest level of *jnana* (knowledge) and *vairagya* (detachment), the two main qualities/ practices that enable spiritual and material progress.

Just like it is not sufficient for a man to wear a sacred thread to be considered a *brahmana* if he does not possess the qualities and does not perform the duties as per descriptions in the *shastra*, it is not sufficient for a man to wear saffron colored clothes to be considered a *sannyasi* if he does not possess the qualities and does not perform the duties as per descriptions in the *shastra*.

The instructions for *sannyasis* are found especially in the *Upanishads*, many of which are specifically dedicated to that purpose: *Aruneya Upanishad*, *Avadhuta Upanishad*, *Bhikshuka Upanishad*, *Brahma Upanishad*, *Jabala Upanishad*, *Katha rudra*

Upanishad, Kundika Upanishad, Maitreya Upanishad, Narada parivrajaka Upanishad, Nirvana Upanishad, Para brahma Upanishad, Paramahansa Upanishad, Paramahansa parivajaka Upanishad, Sannyasa Upanishad, Satyayani Upanishad, Teja bindu Upanishad, Turiyatita Upanishad, Varaha Upanishad, and Yajnavalkya Upanishad.

Formally entering the order of *sannyasa* has never been obligatory, but it had been recommended for *brahmanas* to set an example of higher aspirations among the general population. However, with the onset of Kali yuga the social body became increasingly afflicted by degradation and thus the order of *sannyasa* has mostly become a mockery of itself.

According to the original *shastras*, a *sannyasi* cannot have any possession, any fixed residence, any opportunity for self gratification. He cannot accept disciples, he cannot teach or even mix with other people, except for the brief span of 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* (water pot) or *uttariya* (upper cloth), generally in the form of rice, fruits, vegetables, and especially milk - considered the most suitable food. 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 simply prepare themselves to death through total detachment from all material identification and belongings.

Since the rules of *sannyasa* are so strict, it is better to humbly remain in an apparently ordinary position as a *vanaprastha* or *grihastha* or *brahmachari*, rather than venturing into the order of *sannyasa* and then falling from that position.

A person who leaves the order of *sannyasa* to engage again in material life - family, society, business etc - is called a *vantasi*, "one who eats his own vomit" (*Bhagavata Purana* 7.15.36), and a person who behaves in a way that disgraces the name of *sannyasa* is called a *dharma-ha*, "one who kills *dharma*" (*Bhagavata Purana* 11.18.40-41).

VERSE 1

अर्जुन उवाच ।

arjuna uvāca ।

संन्यासं कर्मणां कृष्ण पुनर्योगं च शंससि ।

sannyāsaṁ karmaṇāṁ kṛṣṇa punaryogaṁ ca śaṁsasi ।

यच्छ्रेय एतयोरेकं तन्मे ब्रूहि सुनिश्चितम् ॥ ५-१ ॥

yacchreya etayorekaṁ tanme brūhi suniścitam ॥ 5-1 ॥

arjuna: Arjuna; *uvaca*: said; *sannyasam*: *sannyasa*; *karmanam*: of the activities/ duties; *krishna*: o Krishna; *punah*: again; *yogam*: yoga; *ca*: and; *samsasi*: you are praising; *yat*: that; *sreya*: the

higher benefit; *etayoh*: of the two; *ekam*: one; *tat*: that; *me*: to me; *bruhi*: tell; *su-niscitam*: absolutely without doubt.

Arjuna said:

"O Krishna, you have praised *sannyasa* (renunciation to all actions) and then (you praised) *yoga* (conscious engagement in action). Please tell me which one of these two will, without any doubt, be the best."

In this verse, the definition of *yoga* is opposed to the concept of *sannyasa* as "renunciation to action", highlighting the fact that *yoga* means "engagement in action".

The difficulty of understanding expressed by Arjuna is common to everyone, especially when one finds himself in difficult circumstances. Good theories need to be put on the test of practical application in life - there are so many armchair philosophers and week-end *bhaktas* who like to spend a lazy afternoon in hefty talks or ponderous tomes, but when difficulties arise, all their nice talking and reading is forgotten and they act in very opposite ways, "because this is real life".

The difference between a person who acts out of selfish interest and a person who acts in a transcendently renounced consciousness is not always apparent, because they both engage wholeheartedly and painstakingly in the dutiful action, investing their intelligence, their will power, and the effort of their bodies.

Krishna also says that one should never renounce the performance of one's dharmic duty, yet the position of a *sannyasi* - who has given up all ties to family and society and does not perform any duties - is considered exalted and transcendental.

This is the main focus of *Gita*, and we should not think that the repetition of this concept is boring, because repetition is aimed at

stressing the importance of the teaching, and engraving it into the student's mind, so that it becomes part of his mental structure.

Krishna will repeat this point again and again.

See 6.1: "The real *sannyasi* and the real *yogi* is one who selflessly performs all his duties in society and takes the proper actions where required, without any attachment to enjoy the fruits of his activities - not one who escapes from action in the name of some rules of renunciation."

And 18.2: "Actual renunciation or *sannyasa* consists in giving up the desire for selfish activities. In fact, one should renounce the fruits of all activities: this is defined as renunciation."

And 18.5: "Sacrifice (sacred action), charity and austerity, and one's duties, should never be given up, but must always be performed. Certainly these - sacrifice, charity and austerity - can purify even the wise."

And 18.7-8: "*Sannyasa* is never about giving up prescribed duties. Those who abandon their prescribed duties (with the idea of renunciation) are said to be under the influence of *tamas* (ignorance)", "One who is unhappy about his duties, and gives them up out of fear of physical difficulties, is renouncing under the influence of *rajas* (passion), and certainly does not obtain the (expected) fruits of renunciation".

The answer is that there is no duality between *sannyasa* and *yoga*.

The real *yogi* is also the real *sannyasi*. This is the statement that will open the next chapter (6): "One who performs the (ritual and social) activities constituting his/ her duties without depending on the results of the action is the real *sannyasi* (renouncer) and *yogi*, not one who does not kindle the (sacred) fire and does not engage in activities."

The word *tat* in this verse is very interesting, because with it Arjuna subtly shows that he knows the ultimate purpose to be attained: *tat* ("That"), Transcendence, is the purpose of *sannyasa* and *yoga*.

VERSE 2

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।

śrībhagavānuvāca ।

संन्यासः कर्मयोगश्च निःश्रेयसकरावुभौ ।

sannyāsaḥ karmayogaśca niḥśreyasakarāvubhau ।

तयोस्तु कर्मसंन्यासात्कर्मयोगो विशिष्यते ॥ ५-२ ॥

tayostu karmasannyāsātkarmayogo viśiṣyate ।। 5-2 ।।

sri: the wonderful; *bhagavan*: Lord; *uvaca*: said; *sannyasah*: *sannyasa*; *karma-yogah*: *karma yoga*; *ca*: and; *nihśreyaśa*: of the highest benefit; *karau*: making/ leading to; *ubhau*: both of them; *tayoh*: of the two; *tu*: but; *karma-sannyasat*: than renunciation to activities; *karma-yogah*: engagement of action (in transcendental consciousness); *visiṣyate*: is better.

The Lord said:

"Both these (paths), the *sannyasa* (renunciation) and the *karma yoga* (the *yoga* of action) will bring the best benefit, but the *karma yoga* (the *yoga* of action) is better than the *karma sannyasa* (renunciation to action)."

The best benefit is indicated by the word *nihśreya*, a strengthened form of the word *sreya*.

We have seen previously that *sreya* is the real ultimate and permanent benefit, while *preya* is the immediate gratification, the apparent material benefit.

So *nihisreya* defines the epitome of the ultimate benefit: liberation from material conditionings and the attainment of the transcendental level of consciousness.

Both aspects of *sadhana* (spiritual practice) - *sannyasa* and *karma yoga* - are perfectly compatible with each other, and in fact they are both required to achieve the desired success (*sreya*). As we have seen in the other quotes from *Gita*, real *sannyasa* consists in renouncing the selfish motivation of the activities, rather than abstaining from activities themselves.

However, the simple act of renunciation to the fruits of the activities is not sufficient to attain perfection, because it is a "negative" concept.

We need to eliminate misconceptions in order to properly understand the *tattva*, but the mere elimination of misconceptions is not sufficient to actually understand the subject.

Therefore we need to proceed with a proactive plan, a constructive plan, by which we engage our body, senses, mind and intelligence in positive action that is free from selfish motivations.

To make an example: when we want to cultivate a field, we first need to clear away all the garbage and stones and weeds, and prepare the soil properly, making it level and aerating the superficial layer, and adding the fertilizing substances that are most suitable for that particular cultivation.

This preliminary work will ensure that the plants will grow healthy and strong, and the harvest will be done smoothly and without damages. But that is only the beginning of the work: we then need

to spread the seeds, cover them with some soil and irrigate the land. When the plants have sprouted, we need to continue the cleaning work we have done in preparation - cleaning out the garbage and the weeds, and taking care of the pests that might be attracted to the nutritious and tasty stuff that the plants bear.

Similarly, before we start the process of *sadhana* proper we need to understand the difference between a weed and the useful plant we are growing, and how to keep our grounds clean. But the proper care of the harvest remains our main concern.

What is the harvest here? Service to the Supreme. A *bhakta* could also translate *karma yoga* as "devotional service", because that is the purpose of the action when one is free from selfish motivations.

However, we need to weed out a few misconceptions from this definition.

Devotional service, described more appropriately as *bhakti yoga* (rather than *karma yoga*), requires the proper understanding and realization of what the Divine is, and what are the basic parameters that define the service to the Divine.

When we translate *karma yoga* as "devotional service" we imply that all our regular activities, all our duties to family, society, and the universe, must be performed selflessly in a spirit of service to the All.

It does not mean that we can jump from family life to *sannyasa* and back, or to some strange and new position between them, whenever it is more convenient for us to enjoy something or to escape from something else, or to enjoy the advantages of both positions under the pretext of being "transcendental".

VERSE 3

ज्ञेयः स नित्यसंन्यासी यो न द्वेष्टि न काङ्क्षति ।

jñeyah sa nityasannyāsī yo na dveṣṭi na kāṅkṣati ।

निर्द्वन्द्वो हि महाबाहो सुखं बन्धात्प्रमुच्यते ॥ ५-३ ॥

nirdvandvo hi mahābāho sukhaṁ bandhātpramucyate ।। 5-3 ।।

jneyah: it should be known; *sah*: he/ she; *nitya*: always; *sannyasi*: *sannyasi*; *yah*: he/ she; *na*: (does) not; *dveshti*: hates; *na*: not; *kankshati*: aspires to; *nirdvandvah*: non-duality; *hi*: indeed; *maha-baho*: o Mahabaho ("mighty armed"); *sukham*: easily; *bandhat*: from the bondage; *pramucyate*: becomes completely liberated.

"It should be known that the (real) *sannyasi* (who remains in) permanent (renunciation) does not hate nor aspires to (anything), and/ because is certainly (always) free from duality. O mighty-armed (Arjuna), (such a person) becomes completely liberated from (all) ties very easily."

The expression *nitya sannyasi* implies that the official vow of permanent renunciation should not be taken lightly. In fact in Kali yuga such official vows are not prescribed because most of the degraded people of this age are unable to follow the strict rules of this *ashrama* and usually they end up making a superficial show of sanctity in order to obtain some material benefits from the gullible public.

A temporary practice of *sannyasa* may be taken up by anyone, as an exercise in renunciation and simplicity of life especially during *vratas* (periods of special austerities) or pilgrimages to holy places, but the permanent acceptance of the order of *sannyasa* requires a remarkable level of personal evolution. Only a person who has attained the transcendental level of Brahman realization will be

able to overcome duality and remain undisturbed in front of the many favorable and unfavorable circumstances of life.

A *sannyasi* has no likes or dislikes, is not attracted or repulsed by anything and sees all living entities just as souls and parts of God, without being distracted by their bodily appearance or even by their behavior. He does not pursue sense gratification but he is always ready to engage everything and everyone in the service to the Divine, without ever being confused by external conditions of the body such as gender, caste, age, race and color.

However, to be a *sannyasi* one does not need to leave one's family or job, or dress in a saffron-colored loincloth or stop wearing shoes.

Many times, Krishna repeats that a true *sannyasi* continues to perform the prescribed duties - to one's family, one's professional occupation, etc - but without the selfish motivation of getting a personal benefit, such an increase in profits, name and fame, a high position, etc.

So one who merely changes the external dress and social position in order to avoid the hurdles that come with the proper selfless performance of duties, and to enjoy a total lack of responsibilities, is acting under the influence of the lower modes of material nature.

The expression *sukham bandhat* is very interesting because it contains several meanings. *Sukham* means "easily", in the sense "with ease, comfortably, smoothly, without problems".

According to this meaning, the verse upholds the gradual system of *purusharthas* described in Vedic literature - *dharma*, *artha*, *kama* and *moksha* - that enable the individual to experiment all the opportunities of human life in this world, without remaining entangled in the related activities and their results.

Happiness and ease are not condemned by *Gita*, however, one should not become attached to them, either. In fact attachment to one's happiness and comfort is also a form of bondage, albeit under the influence of material *sattva*.

For example, a person who has developed a strong habit of cleanliness may feel repulsion at the idea of executing some work involving contact with dirty or contaminated things, but this is a conditioning, too.

VERSE 4

साङ्ख्ययोगौ पृथग्बालाः प्रवदन्ति न पण्डिताः ।

sāṅkhyayogau pṛthagbālāḥ pravadanti na paṇḍitāḥ ।

एकमप्यास्थितः सम्यग्भयोर्विन्दते फलम् ॥ ५-४ ॥

ekamapyāsthitaḥ samyagubhayorvindate phalam ॥ 5-4 ॥

sankhya: the Sankhya; *yogau*: and the Yoga; *prithak*: different; *balah*: childish; *pravadanti*: they say/ declare; *na*: not/ never; *panditah*: the *pandits* ("expert in learning"); *ekam*: in one; *api*: although; *asthitah*: situated; *samyak*: complete; *ubhayoh*: of the two; *vindate*: enjoys; *phalam*: the results.

"Only childish people, and not *panditas*, speak of Sankhya and Yoga as two different paths. In fact one who is firmly situated on either of these attains the final purpose of both."

After clarifying that *sannyasa* and *karma* are one and the same path, Krishna here states that *sankhya* and *yoga*, too, are one and the same path. This means that the path of spiritual realization, called Yoga, must be integrated by all the genuine techniques offered by the scriptures - Sankhya, Karma, Jnana, Sannyasa,

Hatha, Dhyana, Kriya, Bhakti, and Buddhi. All these methods are simply ingredients of the one and only path of Yoga: if one is missing, we will not achieve the expected result. This is directly opposing the mainstream ignorant notion that there are "different" paths in the Vedic system, and one who chooses one path cannot choose another at the same time.

The only real difference taught by Vedic knowledge is between *sat* and *asat*, *dharmā* and *adharma*, *sura* and *asura*, *vidyā* and *avidyā*. Otherwise, all genuine dharmic methods are not only compatible, but also complementary, just like the "different" limbs of one single body cannot be detached from the body without losing their purpose. Let's examine the meaning of the various limbs of the dharmic path of Yoga presented in *Bhagavad gita*.

Sankhya is the knowledge of the difference between spirit and matter, that cleans the field from misconceptions.

Karma is the practical engagement in active life in the performance of one's duties, that creates merits or *punya*, increasing *sattva* and therefore the intelligence and ability to achieve success in Self realization.

Jnana is the transcendental knowledge and wisdom that keep us in the proper consciousness; it is also called *svadhyaya*, or study of the scriptures.

Sannyasa is the renunciation to the *ahankara* and *mamatva* - the identification with the material body/ mind (position, etc) and the attachment to material things and relationship (possession, belonging, affiliation etc).

Hatha is the balancing of the two energies of the body and mind - masculine and feminine - that enables us to transcend both and become situated in Transcendental identification.

Kriya is the practice of *sadhana*, the regulated activities that train us in the personal association of the Divine consciousness.

Dhyana is the meditation on the Absolute that includes all realities; it only becomes possible after we have acquired the proper knowledge and consciousness.

Bhakti is the sentiment of love and devotion to the Lord, or *isvara pranidhana*.

Buddhi is the intelligent discrimination that enables us to apply each and every ingredient in the appropriate way.

Recently some clever business people have come up with imaginative definitions such as the “Yoga of laughing” (Hasa Yoga), or the “Yoga of sleeping” (Nidra Yoga), and some people have even patented "Yoga systems" under their own personal names. They have invented Yoga for pregnancy, Yoga dance, Sauna Yoga, sex Yoga, antigravity Yoga, and who knows what else. There is even a special Yoga for dogs that has been (ridiculously) called "Doga". All this bogus stuff has distorted the original concept of Yoga and has no foundation whatsoever in the original scriptures, although most of these speculations claim to get their authoritativeness from the ancient Tradition. If we want to really understand Yoga, we need to go to the source.

VERSE 5

यत्साङ्ख्यैः प्राप्यते स्थानं तद्योगैरपि गम्यते ।

yatsāṅkhyaiḥ prāpyate sthānaṁ tadyogairapi gamyate ।

एकं साङ्ख्यं च योगं च यः पश्यति स पश्यति ॥ ५-५ ॥

ekam sāṅkhyam ca yogam ca yaḥ paśyati sa paśyati ॥ 5-5 ॥

yat: what; *sankhyaih*: by the Sankhya; *prapyate*: is obtained; *sthanam*: position; *tat*: that; *yogaih*: by Yoga; *api*: even; *gamyate*: can be obtained; *ekam*: one only; *sankhyam*: Sankhya; *ca*: and; *yogam*: Yoga; *ca*: and; *yah*: he/ she; *pasyati*: sees; *sah*: he/ she; *pasyati*: sees (correctly).

"The (same) purpose/ position/ place that is attained through Sankhya is also attained through Yoga. One who sees Sankhya and Yoga as the same one thing, is (really) seeing (correctly)."

In this verse, Krishna unequivocally condemns the "different schools" concept taught by mainstream academia and by sectarian "religious" organizations entangled in material politics.

Sankhya is described as the analytical study of Reality, that distinguishes the various categories of existence, and specifically highlights the difference between the material elements of *prakriti* and the conscious being called *purusha*. Yoga is described as the science of action in transcendental consciousness, which consists in the pure awareness of one's own identity as *atman*, and the detached observation and utilization of the material elements that compose the body and the mind.

Therefore, Sankhya and Yoga are not different at all from each other. Sankhya philosophy is not opposed to the Bhagavata philosophy as some may believe, as the knowledge of the categories of Reality can not be opposed to the knowledge of the Supreme Reality.

In fact, by knowing the glories that Bhagavan Isvara manifests in this world, we will become able to appreciate the deep meaning of the nature of Bhagavan - otherwise, our *bhakti* will remain only superficial. This genuine method of study is exemplified in the *Bhagavata Purana* as well as in later chapters of *Gita*, and especially in chapters 11, 13, 14, 15, 16 and 17.

Dismissing the knowledge of the universe as unnecessary or even opposed to the knowledge of the Supreme Personality of Godhead is a dangerous and foolish choice that puts us in the fatal risk of increasing our false ego and arrogance, making us believe that we are too "elevated" for this kind of topics. Without understanding that we are not the material body - the first and foremost teaching of Krishna in *Gita* - there is no point in fantasizing about being transcendently engaged in so many activities in devotional service or even contemplating so-called intimate *lilas*, because all such activities will simply boil down to politics and sentimentalistic cheating. It is true that mere theoretical scholarship will not take us to the transcendental level, but that applies to all philosophical/ theological schools; the same applies to philanthropic activities, to Deity worship, etc. The real difference is in the consciousness, not in the official allegiance to one institution or "school" or another.

In the previous verses, *niskama karma*, or action in selfless service, was declared as better than mere *sannyasa* or renunciation; *sankhya* on the other hand is based on the fundamental knowledge that governs renunciation and action at the same time.

The word *sthanam*, "permanent position, place" mentioned in the verse refers to the liberated position, the platform on which one has transcended material identifications and attachments, and acts from the pure consciousness of the Self, or *atman*. It is a stable and solid position, from which one does not falter or fall into ignorance and delusion.

The words *sah* and *yah* are personal pronouns but do not contain any reference to masculine or feminine gender; they can be translated either or both as "he" and "she".

VERSE 6

संन्यासस्तु महाबाहो दुःखमाप्तुमयोगतः ।

sannyāsastu mahābāho duḥkhamāptumayogataḥ ।

योगयुक्तो मुनिर्ब्रह्म नचिरेणाधिगच्छति ॥ ५-६ ॥

yogayukto munirbrahma nacireṇādhiḡacchati ॥ 5-6 ॥

sannyasah: *sannyasa*; *tu*: but; *maha-baho*: o Mahabaho ("mighty armed"); *duhkham*: suffering; *aptum*: afflicts; *ayogatah*: without *yoga*; *yoga-yukto*: engaged in *yoga*; *munih*: the wise; *brahma*: Brahman; *na*: no; *cirena*: delay; *adhiḡacchati*: attains.

"O mighty-armed (Arjuna), *sannyasa* (renunciation) without *yoga* (proper engagement) only produces misery/ is attained with difficulty; one who is engaged in *yoga* is a *muni* (a wise person) and quickly attains Brahman."

The word *muni* describes a wise person, who remains silent and quiet because s/he is not afraid of silence and solitude. Such a person is focused on inner happiness and detached from external circumstances. This happy state of being is possible only with *yoga*, the proper engagement of the consciousness.

The concept of *sannyasa*, renunciation, is not sufficient in itself to liberate the individual from material identifications and attachments, because the *sannyasi* may still think that he has become a great personality because he has chosen to abstain from pleasures that legitimately belonged to him, and that such sacrifice is putting him above all other human beings, so he is entitled to extra respect and service from the general people.

Krishna has already said (3.6): "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". A person who restrains the senses but still maintains the concept of sense enjoyment and sense objects as connected to his personal gratification (either positive or negative) is a pretender.

In this verse Krishna adds that such a person is also inevitably destined to suffer, because his mind, senses and body miss the pleasures and comforts that he has left behind. The reason was explained in 2.59: the taste for the sense objects remains in the mind, senses and body of a person who still identifies with the material body - the only way to overcome this problem is to be engaged in something better (*param drstva nivartate*). Such engagement is called *yoga*, the art and science of action (2.50), by which one can work happily without being tied by the results of the activities, and thus attain liberation (Brahman).

This result is not obtained simply by showing one's esophagus' movements in public, or by increasing the oxygen intake with deeper and faster breathing - or even getting a fit and trim body and a relaxed mind. All the physical benefits of *asana* and *pranayama*, *mudras*, *kriyas* etc are simply a side effect, not the purpose of Yoga - that otherwise would not be much different from Pilates or jogging, that have the effect of increasing one's bodily identification rather than enabling us to break away from it.

VERSE 7

योगयुक्तो विशुद्धात्मा विजितात्मा जितेन्द्रियः ।

yogayukto viśuddhātmā vijitātmā jitendriyaḥ ।

सर्वभूतात्मभूतात्मा कुर्वन्नपि न लिप्यते ॥ ५-७ ॥

sarvabhūtātmabhūtātmā kurvannapi na lipyate ॥ 5-7 ॥

yoga-yuktah: engaged in *yoga*; *visuddha-atma*: (having) purified one's self; *vijita-atma*: (having) controlled one's self; *jita-indriyah*: (having) conquered the senses; *sarva-bhuta-atma*: the self of all living entities; *bhuta-atma*: the self of existences; *kurvan*: making; *api*: even; *na*: not; *lipyate*: is affected.

"A person who has purified him/ herself through the engagement in *yoga*, conquering the self and controlling the senses, considers him/herself as the *atman* that is the same *atman*/ existence of all living entities. Although engaged (in activities), s/he is never affected (by them)."

The three stages of *yoga* are hereby described in descending order as *visuddhatma*, "purified mind", *vijitatma*, "controlled mind" and *jitendriya*, "controlling the senses". At first we must learn to control the senses - starting with one's tongue, both in speech and eating. In a wider sense, this "faculty of speech" and "faculty of nutrition" expand to the expression of the mind through writing and other means, and to the subtle food we give to your senses and to our mind. So it is very important to control what our senses acquire from the external world and also what our senses transmit to the external world.

As we have seen also in other verses, the word *atman* means "self". According to the particular context, it can refer to the spirit soul or *jivatman*, or to the identification of the living entity, a concept that may extend to the mind. The expression *visuddha atma* in this verse specifically refers to the identification of the *atman*, because by purifying one's identification - establishing one's identification as pure *atman* - also our mind, senses and body automatically become purified because of the fire of Knowledge and transcendental consciousness.

The expression *sarva-bhutatma-bhutatma* may seem redundant, but we know that Krishna is not speaking unnecessarily. It is a

mysterious definition that obviously includes different layers of meanings. We have already seen that the word *bhuta* means both "being" (in the sense of "entity") and "existence", and in fact even the two meanings have a deep connection in English language. A being is something that exists, a state of existence of the consciousness or *atman*.

When the *atman* incarnates in this world, it becomes a "*bhuta*", or "being", as the definition implies a manifestation, a state of existence that has come to be. The beginning of such manifestation can be traced at the beginning of the cycle of creation, while the existence of the *atman* has no beginning. This is the difference between *atman* and *bhuta*.

The expression *bhuta atman* connects the two meanings, resulting in "the Self of all beings"; when repeated twice, the meaning is expanded in the other direction, including the sense that the Supreme Self is the foundation for all beings. Later in *Gita* (7.7) we will find the same concept expressed even more clearly: "There is nothing greater than me, as everything is strung on me like pearls on a thread."

Moving this wonderful metaphor on the level of ontological reality, we can see that the Self of all beings is at the same time the foundation for all states of existence - the two concepts actually expressed in the very same words.

By meditating on this interesting fact, we are blessed with yet another opportunity to understand and realize the true nature of the Atman/ Brahman, and by understanding and realizing Brahman we are never affected by any material circumstance.

VERSE 8

नैव किञ्चित्करोमीति युक्तो मन्येत तत्त्ववित् ।

naiva kiñcitkaromīti yukto manyeta tattvavit ।

पश्यञ्श्रुण्वन्स्पृशञ्जिघ्रन्नाश्नन्गच्छन्स्वपञ्श्वसन् ॥ ५-८ ॥

paśyañśruṇvanspṛśañjighrannaśnangacchansvapañśvasan ॥ 5-8 ॥

na: not; *eva:* certainly; *kincit:* anything; *karomi:* I do; *iti:* like this; *yuktah:* engaged; *manyeta:* he/ she thinks/ should think; *tattva-vit:* one who knows reality; *pasyan:* seeing; *srinvan:* hearing; *sprisan:* touching; *jighran:* smelling; *asnan:* eating; *gacchan:* going; *svapan:* dreaming/ sleeping; *svasan:* breathing.

"One who is a *yogi* thinks/ should think, 'I am not the doer of anything'. One who knows the truth (engages in the activities of) seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, eating, going, dreaming, breathing,

This verse and the next are usually studied together since they constitute a list of activities normally performed in ordinary life, as Krishna has already stated clearly (3.8) that everyone must work, at least to maintain one's body.

Seeing, hearing, touching or using one's hands, smelling, eating, walking or moving, dreaming and breathing are fundamental activities for everyone's bodily survival. The first 5 items on the list directly refer to the sense activities - sight, sound, touch, smell and taste. These fundamental functions of the body enable us to work to provide for our own maintenance, offer the opportunity to enjoy the pleasures of life, and enable us to engage in divine service as well. These activities are considered natural duties - *nitya* (regular) and *naimittika* (specifically required by

circumstances or needed in order to achieve a particular goal) as well as *kamyā* (chosen according to one's personal inclination and abilities).

Even the most basic and daily activities are seriously obstructed by the lack of eyesight, but at times it is difficult to control the eyes because the sense of vision is always attracted by beautiful forms and even by terrifying forms, and the connection between the eyes and the brain is the most direct among all the senses in the body.

The sense of hearing is only marginally less important than eyesight; a deaf person can manage almost all normal activities and take care about a job and a family. However, it is through sound that we are warned of dangers and other events that are happening outside our view's range, and even during sleep, when our eyes are closed. Without the sense of hearing it is extremely difficult to acquire knowledge of those things that are beyond the gross bodily level. A person with a healthy sense of hearing is naturally attracted by nice sounds - the voices of his dear loved ones, the melody of music and song, interesting stories, information on the world, and the acquisition of knowledge.

The sense of touch is not connected simply with the perception of heat and cold, softness or hardness, etc, but it is essential in order to execute any work. It is through touch that our hands manipulate matter and our feet move our body around. In the course of such work, the sense of touch procures pleasure and pain that the Yogi faces bravely without being confused by them.

The sense of smell also carries pleasures and pains on a daily basis, and it is closely connected with our mind's emotions. A bad smell causes depression and irritability, and even a tendency to ignorance and delusion, while a good smell can calm our mind, elevate our thoughts, and even drastically improve our health, as demonstrated by the studies in aromatherapy.

The sense of taste is here represented by the word *asnan*, "eating". In fact, this is the only good sattvic utilization of the sense of taste: to nourish the body and mind with healthy, clean and tasty foods that are a crucial factor in maintaining and improving our health and happiness of mind.

The word *gacchan*, "going", is listed separately from the activities of the basic senses because it can apply to methods of traveling that do not depend on our feet only. A person can and should utilize this faculty both for daily maintenance and for the performance of higher duties, such as traveling to holy places of pilgrimage, going to preach and teach where required, and acquire knowledge.

The activity of sleeping and dreaming may seem less fundamental if compared to the other basic engagements of the senses of this list, but sleep is required to maintain a healthy mind balance, and even dreams are an important part of a person's life. The dreams we experience during our ordinary sleep are required to balance and cleanse our mind from the debris of the day's events - problems, emotions, interactions with other people.

The dreams we experience during our waking time are also useful because they keep our mind open to new things and allow us to perceive subtle realities: it is a natural and elementary form of meditation that can and should be developed into real meditation through the knowledgeable practice of *yoga*.

The activity of breathing is here listed last, as a function that can be both conscious and unconscious, and greatly influences our state of mind, more than all the other sense activities.

All the activities listed in these 2 verses are performed by the body, the senses and the mind, and not by the actual *atman*, because the *atman* is not concerned by such needs. Sometimes we find that our

senses are automatically engaged even without our conscious choice, so we could inadvertently see, hear, touch, eat something bad that is cause of contamination, or even arrive in a bad place, have a bad dream, or suffer breathing difficulties.

But as long as our consciousness remains fixed on the transcendental level or *yoga*, the awareness of Atman/ Brahman, such disturbances will disappear without causing too much damage. However, the body and the mind need to perform these activities in order to remain functional and facilitate our work in Self realization.

The *yogi* has left all identification with the body and mind, and is simply using them like a vehicle. In this verse, the definition of *yogi* is "one who knows Reality", or Atman/ Brahman: this is the only genuine and authoritative requirement for a person to be called a true *yogi*.

The word *manyeta* includes the meaning of "thinking, considering, remembering, being aware of", and the particular grammatical form of the verb suggest that such thinking is expected or characteristic of the *yogi*.

VERSE 9

प्रलपन्विसृजन्गृह्णन्निमिषन्निमिषन्नपि ।

pralapanvisṛjanḡrḥṇannunmiṣannimiṣannapi ।

इन्द्रियाणीन्द्रियार्थेषु वर्तन्त इति धारयन् ॥ ५-९ ॥

indriyāṇīndriyārtheṣu vartanta iti dhārayan ॥ 5-9 ॥

pralapan: talking; *visrijan*: leaving; *grihnan*: accepting/ taking; *unmishan*: opening; *nimishan*: closing (one's eyes); *api*: although;

indriyani: the senses; *indriya-artheshu*: in the objects/ the purposes of the senses; *vartante*: let them be; *iti*: like this; *dharayan*: meditating.

talking, leaving/ abandoning, accepting/ taking, opening and closing (one's eyes), but s/he meditates that the senses should naturally be engaged in the sense objects (and s/he does not identify with them)."

This verse continues the list of the ordinary activities of the senses that are required in order to properly maintain one's body and progress in life, materially and spiritually.

Talking is a very important function, that can further our progress to the highest levels through the recitation of the scriptures and the beneficial discussions that help ourselves and others to improve the quality of our consciousness. However, the tongue is the most difficult sense to control, and sometimes we find ourselves talking more than necessary, or engaging in discussions that are not really beneficial, or having to tell off people for the purpose of correcting them. What we talk about, just like what we hear, can have an enormous influence of our consciousness, identifications, attachments, desires, and concerns.

The work *visrijan*, "giving up", can also be translated as "evacuating", as this physiological function is also connected to our sense of attachment and possession - often people who suffer from constipation are afraid of letting go or losing something.

Similarly, *grihnan*, "accepting", "taking", "holding", can have a variety of meanings in daily life, which includes praise and insult, gain and loss, pleasures and pains of many types. A *yogi* is not afflicted by false ego, therefore he can take a lot from life without being really disturbed. However, this does not mean that a *yogi* should accept or take anything and everything - there are limits to

what one's mind, senses and body can manage, so although he remains undisturbed internally, he should still watch out, just like he remains careful about what he is watching, listening to, touching, sniffing, eating, where he is going, what fantasies he allows his mind to wander in, what he talks about and so on.

The words *mishan* and *nimishan* refer to the opening and closing of one's eyes, which is not exactly the same as *svapan*, sleeping or dreaming as mentioned in the previous verse, or the *visrijan* and *grihnan*, rejecting and accepting, mentioned earlier in this verse. We open and close our eyes as a choice to become directly involved in what is happening around us, in the world - injustice, ignorance, happiness and distress of others, the beauty and the horror, anger, fear, cruelty, emotions, attachments, and all the phantasmagoria of the immense theme park that is the universe in which we live.

A *yogi* does not necessarily remove himself from the world, except for the time when he needs quiet and silence to train himself in meditation. When he has progressed to a stable level of consciousness, the *yogi* can maintain his meditation in more difficult circumstances, that offer the opportunity for performing a useful service to the Supreme. In this regard, the word *dharayan* is particularly important. We know that *dharana* is the first step in actual meditation, a crucial part of the practice of *yoga* (*yama*, *niyama*, *asana*, *pranayama*, *pratyahara*, *dharana*, *dhyana*, *samadhi*). The *dharana* mentioned in this verse concerns the awareness of one's true identity as Atman/ Brahman, detached from the natural activities of the senses.

Another important point made in this verse is that the *yogi* does not stop or abstain from the activities of the senses - something that would only bring suffering, as just stated in verse 6 - but he allows such functions to continue in a way that is useful and beneficial.

VERSE 10

ब्रह्मण्याधाय कर्माणि सङ्गं त्यक्त्वा करोति यः ।

brahmaṇyādhāya karmāṇi saṅgaṁ tyaktvā karoti yaḥ ।

लिप्यते न स पापेन पद्मपत्रमिवाम्भसा ॥ ५-१० ॥

lipyate na sa pāpena padmapatramivāmbhasā ॥ 5-10 ॥

brahmani: in Brahman; *adhaya*: surrendering; *karmani*: all activities/ duties; *sangam*: association/ affiliation/ attachment; *tyaktva*: abandoning; *karoti*: makes; *yaḥ*: he/ she; *lipyate*: becomes affected; *na*: not; *sah*: he/ she; *papena*: by forbidden actions; *padma-patram*: the leaf of the lotus; *iva*: like; *ambhasa*: by the water.

"Surrendering/ connecting/ dovetailing all activities to the Brahman, giving up all (identification and) association, one is never affected by the negative consequences/ sin of bad action, just like a lotus leaf is never affected by water."

Can we translate "Brahman" as "Krishna consciousness" in this verse?

Of course yes, provided that "Krishna consciousness" is based on the constant awareness of one's transcendental identity as spirit soul (rather than the material body) - the very first concept that Krishna has chosen to clearly establish in his teachings in *Gita*. However, if we believe that "*aham brahmasmi*" is an "impersonalist speculation" and that "*sankhya*" (as taught by Krishna in the second chapter of *Gita*) is "opposed to *bhakti*", then we have a serious problem. Couldn't we just call "Brahman" as "Brahman" instead?

By really studying and presenting *Bhagavad gita* as it is, we will be able to achieve the results Krishna is promising. As long as one

believes (on which grounds and on whose authority, it is not clear) that Brahman realization (the overcoming of the false ego or identification with the material body) is opposed or detrimental to the realization and service of Bhagavan, the only result will be a foolish fanatical and superficial sentimentalism motivated by partisan and sectarian affiliation and allegiance.

More trouble than benefit, according to the great *bhakti* authority Rupa Gosvami (*Bhakti rasamrita sindhu*, 1.2.101): *sruti smriti puranadi pancharatra vidhim vina, aikantiki harer bhaktir utpatayaiva kalpate*, "Exclusive devotion to Lord Hari (Krishna) that ignores the teachings of *sruti*, *smriti*, *Puranas* and other Vedic scriptures, as well as *Pancharatra*, is simply a fantasy and an unnecessary disturbance in society."

To tell who is actually "Krishna conscious" in the proper sense (18.66), we need to see who puts the actual teachings of Krishna above the stupid and false matters of bodily identification and categorization, social position, political allegiance, and divisive sectarian speculation and advantage.

Another extremely important word in the verse is *sangam* ("association/ affiliation/ attachment"). Krishna clearly states that we should abandon (*tyaktva*) all association, attachment or affiliation, because these are limiting our identification, by turning it into a material designation. This is also the very same meaning of *bhakti*, according to the famous *bhakti* authority Narada Muni in his *Narada pancharatra* (the very same *Pancharatra* mentioned in Rupa Gosvami's verse together with *sruti* and *smriti*): *sarvopadhi vinirmuktam tat paratvena nirmalam (hrishikena hrishikena sevanam) bhaktir ucyate*, "*Bhakti* is defined as (serving the Lord of the senses through the actions of the senses) in a manner that is totally free from all designations, in the pure dedication to the Transcendence (*tat*)".

Krishna has already warned very clearly about the danger of defining oneself and working in terms of *sangam*, in 3.9, "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 the commentary to that verse we mentioned that "*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 a 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."

Krishna repeats this extremely important instruction also in 4.23, "One who has finished with all associations/ whose association is liberated and whose consciousness is firmly established in knowledge, worships Yajna (Vishnu) in practice (through his actions/ as all his actions become devotional service)/ works in a spirit of sacrifice. The entirety of his *karma* (reactions to actions) is thus destroyed."

Our commentary to that verse was, "The meanings of the word *sanga* ("association") expand to all the fields where the individual associates himself with some kind of identification.

It applies to the people he keeps company with, to the organizations he becomes member of, to the institutionalized religion he belongs to, to the material lineage as in family, society etc. As we have already mentioned, one should either keep association with liberated persons, or become liberated from association and live alone."

Only this freedom from sticky limiting identifications will enable our consciousness to remain always pure, just like a lotus leaf never becomes wet because water simply rolls away from its surface. It has no affinity with muddy water.

VERSE 11

कायेन मनसा बुद्ध्या केवलैरिन्द्रियैरपि ।

kāyena manasā buddhyā kevalairindriyairapi ।

योगिनः कर्म कुर्वन्ति सङ्गं त्यक्त्वात्मशुद्धये ॥ ५-११ ॥

yoginah karma kurvanti saṅgaṁ tyaktvātmaśuddhaye ॥ 5-11 ॥

kayena: with the body; *manasa*: with the mind; *buddhya*: with the intelligence; *kevalaih*: only; *indriyaih*: with the sense organs; *api*: also; *yoginah*: the yogis; *karma*: duties/ activities; *kurvanti*: they do; *sangam*: association/ affiliation/ attachment; *tyaktva*: giving up; *atma-suddhaye*: for the purification of oneself.

"The yogis perform activities with their body, mind, intelligence and senses only, and purify themselves by giving up identification/ association/ attachment."

The three factors defined by *kayena*, *manasa*, *buddhya* are all required for any activity to be successful, on the material and on the spiritual level. When things are done mechanically, with the body only, without the proper engagement of the attentive mind and the awakened intelligence, we just get the empty wrappings of whatever we want to achieve.

However, this verse states that such factors are limited, by saying *kevala*, "only". What else is there, beyond the body, the mind and

intelligence, that is not engaged in the dutiful action? The Atman, whose consciousness rises above the activities of this world.

The word *sanga* is also correctly translated as "attachment". But what is attachment?

It is the belief that we have been the authors of the action, and therefore we are entitled to the enjoyment of its fruits - whether it comes to eating a cake we have baked, or accruing the merit of our welfare work to ourselves as individuals (thus earning social respect, gratitude from the beneficiaries, and/ or a reward in our next life) or as the collective designation we belong to (thus earning political advantages for the institution or group).

But who is really acting? Is it the *atman*, or it is merely the "material package" composed by body, mind, intelligence and senses? If we believe we are the author of the action, the "doer", we identify with these material elements - body, mind, intelligence and senses - that are engaged in the activities by the power and play of the *gunas* or modes of the material nature (*sattva*, *rajas*, *tamas*).

The actual Self is never acting, because all the activities and duties relate to the body and mind only. Most people remain unable to even imagine what the Self is - because once you have excluded the body, mind, senses and intelligence, they can't think of anything else.

The Self as Atman is of the same nature of the Supreme Self as Brahman - a nature called *sat-cid-ananda*, eternity, knowledge and happiness. The Supreme Brahman does not perform any work, but channels his energies to do this work, while remaining in the blissful transcendental awareness. Similarly, the Atman engages his energies - body, mind, senses, intelligence - in the required activities in this world, and in the pure state of awareness, free

from the dark cloud of *ahankara* and *mamatva*, remains in the same blissful transcendental awareness of the Brahman.

This *ahankara* and *mamatva* are also called *kartri-bhoktri-bhava*, or the "feeling of being the doer and the enjoyer". They can be dissipated when we turn our attention to the *atman/ brahman*, by "looking within", beyond the intelligence, the senses, the mind and the body that constitute the external appearance.

As Krishna will clearly state at the conclusion of *Gita* (18.54), it is precisely at this point that we can start talking about real *bhakti*.

Only when we have overcome the material identification and attachments, and our awareness is as transcendental as the awareness of the Supreme, we can really connect at a personal level and develop a devotional relationship. We do not need to "evolve" our soul: this evolution of the consciousness consists in dissipating the ignorance and illusion that is clouding our perception. In this way we become constantly conscious of our original and eternal nature.

As Krishna explained very clearly in the second chapter of *Gita* (from verse 17 onwards, and especially in verses 24 and 25), the *atman* is impervious to any change or transformation.

The *atman* is never touched by material contamination: it only appears covered and obscured, just like the sun in a cloudy sky. Therefore when the cloud of material identification dissipates, we become able to see the *atman* in its original and eternal glory of perfect knowledge and happiness. While remaining on this transcendental consciousness, the *yogi* simply observes the activities of the body, mind, senses and intelligence, and offers them as a sacrifice to the Supreme.

The important expression *sangam tyaktva* can be interpreted in two ways that are completing each other: a) being liberated from (bad)

association and (material identification), and b) associating with liberated people and identifying with the (liberated) pure *atman/ brahman*.

Both choices and practices are essential in order to achieve success.

VERSE 12

युक्तः कर्मफलं त्यक्त्वा शान्तिमाप्नोति नैष्ठिकीम् ।

yuktaḥ karmaphalam tyaktvā śāntimāpnoti naiṣṭhikīm ।

अयुक्तः कामकारेण फले सक्तो निबध्यते ॥ ५-१२ ॥

ayuktaḥ kāmakāreṇa phale sakto nibadhyate ॥ 5-12 ॥

yuktaḥ: one who is engaged (in *yoga*); *karma-phalam*: the fruits of the activities/ duties; *tyaktva*: giving up; *santim*: peace; *apnoti*: achieves; *naiṣṭhikim*: permanent; *ayuktaḥ*: one who is not engaged (in *yoga*); *kama-karena*: motivated by the desire (of pleasure); *phale*: in the fruits; *saktaḥ*: attached; *nibadhyate*: becomes bound.

"A *yogi* gives up the results of activity and (therefore) attains permanent peace. One who is not a *yogi* becomes tied by the results of the action that s/he desired (to obtain) through work."

We have seen that by becoming free from *ahankara* and *mamatva*, the *yogi* remains situated on the level of transcendental consciousness, where the activities are performed by the body, the mind, the senses and the intelligence.

This detachment from the material identification of the "doer of the action" needs to be understood carefully.

Krishna has already explained, and will repeat again in the course of *Gita*, that renouncing the fruits of one's actions does not mean that we should become sloppy, foolish and careless in our duties, or that we should become lazy and avoid performing our duties altogether.

Rather, it means that we engage our body/ mind/ senses/ intelligence sincerely, to do the best job possible, because we consider it as our sacred duty.

Similarly, giving up the results or the fruits of the activity does not mean that we refuse to accept money or other benefits that may derive from the performance of such duties, or that we throw them away as if they were garbage. Krishna has already explained this point very clearly, and introduced the concept of *prasadam*, the pleasure and nourishment that we accept as a divine blessing, a pure and sacred manifestation of the love and compassion of the Divine.

So a Yogi can and should continue to perform his proper duty as per his *guna* and *karma*, and according to the circumstances, without calculating the profit that he may get or the loss that he may suffer. The word *kara* comes from the same root of *karana*, "cause", and indicates that the motivation of the action is the really important point.

In a Vedic society, this selfless performance of one's duties is much easier because money does not exist like in the present industrialized system. However, people may possess valuable objects such as ornaments and various objects made with gold, silver and precious stones, and may even sell them in case of emergency to obtain food, clothing or other essential requirements.

Especially *kshatriyas* are expected to wear such valuable items to increase their strength, health and mental power, but they are periodically required to part company with such wealth in order to celebrate sacrifices and distribute charity according to the circumstances.

Vaisya merchants and traders also use rare and valuable items (such as jewels etc) in their profession, especially when traveling over long distances in their search for goods that are not readily available in the area where they live. But in their case, too, they are expected to give up such wealth in order to acquire the commodities that people need back home.

Brahmanas never accumulate gold or jewels, but utilize all the wealth they may receive to support their work for the spiritual and material development of society.

A *brahmana* never takes a salary from anyone, and especially not from the *kshatriyas*, as such arrangement would put him in the position of a dog that depends on a master and has no freedom.

A *brahmana* that depends financially from the government will be forced to compromise on *dharma* and calculate what to say and what not to say due to political considerations, and this will be his destruction.

Sudras do not accumulate gold or jewels either, because they tend to spend or lose whatever valuable things they acquire; they do not receive a salary from their employers, but all their needs are met adequately - food, lodging, clothing, etc - so they do not need to worry about anything.

However, even in the present industrialized society we can still apply the principles taught in *Bhagavad gita*. Even if we receive a salary for our work, or if we need to earn some money through our professional activities in order to maintain ourselves and our

families, we can still be selfless and remain in the pure and transcendental consciousness of performing our duties as a sacred offering to the Supreme.

VERSE 13

सर्वकर्माणि मनसा संन्यस्यास्ते सुखं वशी ।

sarvakarmāṇi manasā sannasyāste sukhaṁ vaśī ।

नवद्वारे पुरे देही नैव कुर्वन्न कारयन् ॥ ५-१३ ॥

navadvāre pure dehī naiva kurvanna kārayan ॥ 5-13 ॥

sarva-karmani: all the activities/ duties; *manasa*: with the mind; *sannyasya*: by renouncing; *aste*: remains; *sukham*: easily/ happily; *vasi*: one who controls; *nava-dvare*: of the nine gates; *pure*: in the city; *dehi*: one who has a body; *na*: not; *eva*: certainly; *kurvan*: while doing; *na karayan*: does not cause to be done.

"One who has consistently renounced to all the (various) actions in his/her mind remains in happiness in the city of the nine gates that is his body; s/he does not do anything nor causes anything to be done/ never becomes the direct or indirect cause of action."

The expression *manasa sannasya*, "renouncing within the mind", is very useful for understanding the nature, quality and modality of this renunciation.

External renunciation is not important and may not even be required or practical, especially in Kali yuga - the era of hypocrisy

- when so many people make a big show of external renunciation precisely with the purpose of obtaining more material facilities and benefits, a higher social position and even luxury and political power without engaging in honest and useful work for the society.

Real renunciation is manifested in one's consciousness, in the perception of oneself, of the world and of others - we could say, within our mind. That is because our mind is firmly fixed in the transcendental meditation on the Supreme, who is the beneficiary of all sacred actions, the owner of all planets, and the most intimate friend of all living beings (5.29).

This is also called "Krishna consciousness" and has nothing to do with historical affiliations or political allegiances, sectarian dogma or religious hierarchies, endorsement by vote or institutional interests, or any other external concern that still thrives in the minds of people that are still in the bodily concept of life.

The activities that must be renounced in one's mind cover the entire range of duties - the normal duties, the special enterprises aimed at some specific goal for the benefit of society - as well as the activities chosen according to one's liking and of course the forbidden activities. Although one should continue to externally perform those duties that are intended to give a good example to the mass of the people (3.18-26), carefully avoiding all forbidden and selfish activities, Krishna says that in his mind, the *yogi* renounces proprietorship of all activities and duties, including the vedic rituals of the *karma kanda*.

This constant selfless consciousness requires a constant control, because in this world at every step we find the opportunity to fall back into the bodily consciousness of *ahankara* and *mamatva*. Even the compassion and love that a true *yogi* feels for the poor suffering conditioned souls may slide into personal attachment and identification, as exemplified in the story of Bharata.

That powerful emperor renounced his kingdom and royal family to retire into the forest and focus on Self realization, but unwittingly developed an affectionate attachment for a baby deer he happened to rescue, and subsequently had to take another birth as a deer himself because of it.

Thus in this verse the word *vasi*, "one who controls" can apply both to controlling one's mind activities and to controlling the gates of the body - the eyes that connect us to beautiful forms, the ears that tie us to attractive sounds, the mouth that desires good food, the nostrils that catch fascinating scents.

By carefully controlling our mind and senses, we can direct them into the engagement with sattvic forms, sounds, foods and scents, connecting them to the Supreme and purifying our sense activities in this sacred act, in a spirit of renunciation and humble acceptance of God's kind gifts.

The expression *na karayan*, "does not cause (action) to be done", can also refer to a person that does not act personally but gives orders to others to perform a particular activity, or to the individual consciousness that observes the body, the senses, the mind and the intelligence acting on his behalf. The next verse will further elaborate on this point.

VERSE 14

न कर्तृत्वं न कर्माणि लोकस्य सृजति प्रभुः ।

na kartṛtvaṃ na karmāṇi lokasya sṛjati prabhuḥ ।

न कर्मफलसंयोगं स्वभावस्तु प्रवर्तते ॥ ५-१४ ॥

na karmaphalasaṃyogaṃ svabhāvastu pravartate || 5-14 ||

na: not; *kartritvam*: doership/ agentship; *na*: not; *karmani*: activities; *lokasya*: of the people; *srijati*: manifests/ creates; *prabhuh*: the lord; *na*: not; *karma-phala-samyogam*: connection with the fruits of the activities; *svabhavah*: one's own nature; *tu*: but; *pravartate*: acts.

"The lord/ master (of the city of the nine gates, i.e. the body) does not create/ manifest the idea of being the cause of the actions performed by (other) people. Thus s/he is not engaged by the results of activities. It is only his/ her nature that acts."

In the previous verse Krishna stated that a person can continue to live in the body and yet remain untouched by the activities of the body, senses, mind and intelligence, provided his consciousness remains on the level of Transcendence - the genuine Brahman realization - renouncing the false egotism called *ahankara* and *mamatva*, i.e. bodily identification and sense of possession or belonging.

Here Krishna further elaborates, saying that such renunciation enables the Atman to control the body and mind and at the same time to clearly remember that the results of the activities and the activities themselves are carried on by material nature, its laws and influences, its natural tendencies and abilities. This also applies to the activities and the results of the activities performed by other people and by the agents of nature, that bring us pleasures and sufferings of various types, gain or loss, victory or defeat, honor or infamy, and so on.

The *yogi* clearly realizes that all these experiences only concern the body and mind and their qualities and natural activities, so he detaches himself from them, tolerating them as one tolerates the heat during the summer and the cold in winter (2.14). Still, the Self is called *prabhu*, "lord, master", because he needs to control his subjects - the mind, the senses, the organs of action etc.

We should also understand that the word "*prabhu*" is normally used to address the Supreme Personality of Godhead, and it should not be taken lightly.

This concept of transcendental detachment from action and its consequences is very tricky and must be understood carefully, because there are many traps on the way, that have been already indicated by Krishna. Some immature people may be glad to find a good pretext to give up their proper duties under the garb of detachment or transcendental consciousness, abandoning their responsibilities and thus causing great damage to society, family and to themselves.

We must always remember that the entire *Gita* was explained by Krishna to Arjuna with the precise purpose of convincing him to engage in the great battle of Kurukshetra, and to oppose his desire to give up the fight and retire from the kingdom's responsibility to choose an ascetic life in the forest.

Some historians claim that India was invaded and conquered by alien forces - the Islamists and the British colonialist, as well as the Portuguese and the French albeit in smaller measure - because the teachings of Krishna in *Gita* and later the teachings of Adi Shankara and the great *bhakti acharyas* (including Chaitanya) had lured many men of great valor into giving up the active responsibilities in society and especially the protection of the kingdoms, to choose a meditative and renounced lifestyle focused on transcendence.

Such an idea is incorrect. Of course there might have been many foolish and irresponsible people who consciously or unconsciously distorted the teachings of Krishna and Chaitanya (and others) and took the formal order of *sannyasa* or the *babaji vesha* to escape their responsibilities, pretending they had become "transcendental".

But these have been aberrations due precisely to ignorance and gross misunderstanding of the actual path of Transcendence.

Only by sincerely studying the *Bhagavad gita* we will be able to clarify such misconceptions.

VERSE 15

नादत्ते कस्यचित्पापं न चैव सुकृतं विभुः ।

nādatte kasyacitpāpaṁ na caiva sukṛtaṁ vibhuḥ ।

अज्ञानेनावृतं ज्ञानं तेन मुह्यन्ति जन्तवः ॥ ५-१५ ॥

ajñānenāvṛtaṁ jñānaṁ tena muhyanti jantavaḥ ॥ 5-15 ॥

na: not; *adatte*: accepts; *kasyacit*: anyone's; *papam*: demerits/ sins/ guilt; *na*: not; *ca*: and; *eva*: certainly; *sukritam*: merits/ virtues/ credits; *vibhuh*: the powerful (Lord); *ajnanena*: by ignorance; *avritam*: covered; *jnanam*: knowledge; *tena*: by that; *muhyanti*: they become confused; *jantavah*: the people.

"The (all) powerful (Lord) does not accept/ consider the merits or demerits of anyone. It (the problem) is (only due to) the living entities, that are confused because their knowledge is covered by ignorance."

Na adatte means that God is not interested in punishing the sins, mistakes or imperfections of anyone, or in rewarding those who try to please him by virtuous actions. *Karma* is not a punishment or reward by God. It is simply a natural physical law of the universe, like gravity etc. God does not have a "chosen people" and certainly does not order the annihilation or persecution or punishment of those who worship him in "wrong" ways or do not worship him at all. All the mess in human history that is ascribed to "religious

differences" is actually created merely by confused and ignorant human beings - as confirmed by the word *muhyanti*, derived from *moha*, "confusion", "illusion".

Such confusion can be cleared not by engaging in "religious wars" but simply by making sufficient knowledge (*jnana*) available to the people in general. So whenever you find someone who wants to "eliminate" the "wrong spiritual or ideological conclusions" by taking physical action against persons or books etc, you know that they are certainly not following Krishna's instructions. Physical action is only justified against a physical attack by aggressors - and not for any other reason.

All human beings have the same tendencies, and in different traditions we can find different levels of personal inner growth and development.

The lowest level of understanding of religion - the "connection with the Divine" - is shaped around the ordinary relationships of this world, and God is seen as a bigger and more powerful person not unlike the big and powerful persons we may meet in our daily life. This understanding of God is nothing but the projection of a gigantic version of a regular conditioned soul with a material form, material qualities, and a dualistic approach in relationships.

Simple-minded people usually go to worship in their designated cult place, pray and present their offerings and follow the religious rules, because they hope for a reward and fear a punishment. For such people, worship of the image of the Deity is very important because it helps the mind to gradually overcome such limitations.

Public functions and festivals, ritual and ceremonies, pilgrimages etc are also very beneficial, because they help the mind of unevolved people to focus on the concept of Transcendence and religion in a positive way. Whenever such visible engagements are

reduced or removed, out of an ill-advised attempt to "purify the faith", people lose the understanding of the Transcendence and slide into moralism, taboos, or gross materialism, that are much worse than the sticky sentimentalism of the simpletons. Some "Vedic" religious organizations condemn and oppose the worship of the Deities in the temples, using the very same offensive vocabulary ("idols") introduced by abrahamics.

In this way they are deluding themselves into thinking that they are "purifying" and "reforming" Hinduism, but they are simply alienating and dividing people, and confusing the minds of the public.

No wonder they also offensively reject *Bhagavad gita*, together with the *Puranas* and *Itihasas* and even the *Upanishads*, claiming to follow "only the original four *Vedas*", of which they obviously do not understand anything. The results of this irresponsible and foolish preaching can be seen in the present conditions of Hindu society.

This approach might have been useful to please the abrahamic invaders that dominated India at the times when such organizations were founded, but today they are the ones who need to be reformed and purified from their colonial servilism.

Krishna instructs us in *Gita* (3.26) not to confuse the minds of the unevolved people by trying to artificially push them to a "higher level" by "forbidding a lower level", otherwise these *kanistha adhikaris* could be overwhelmed by destructive doubts: " If God is not interested in the sins and virtues of people, why should one abstain from performing bad actions and make efforts to perform good actions? What is the purpose of worship, sacrifice, pilgrimage to the holy places, prayer, and making efforts to improve oneself? What is the idea of devotional service?"

Higher than this level of *kanistha adhikari*, or "neophyte worshiper", we find the *madhyama adhikari*, the "intermediate worshiper", that is able to understand the omnipresence of God, in the heart of all living beings and everywhere in the universe and in all circumstances - as expressed in this verse by the definition *vibhu*, "powerful", also translated as "omnipresent".

The intermediate student of Transcendence has understood the scriptures and the teachings of the genuine *acharyas* and is making an effort to serve the mission of the Divine simply because it is the right thing to do, and not because he aspires to a reward or is afraid of a punishment.

He has a clear perception of the difference between the *sadhu karma* ("good actions") and the *asadhu karma* ("bad actions"), he knows that each action he chooses can elevate or degrade him in his journey, and tries his best to purify his consciousness and to progress in his evolution through experience. He understands that the Param Atman, the Divine that resides in the heart of each living entity, is helping everyone to achieve what they need or want, but that the ultimate purpose of all the experiences of life is to attain the realization of the Self.

Someone might also wonder why God is not interested in the merits and demerits of the individual human beings. Is that because he does not care? Quite the opposite.

God loves each and every living entity (*suhridam sarva bhutanam*, 5.29) and is the father of them all (*aham bija pradah pitah*, 14.4). A good father loves all his children, no matter how qualified or unqualified they may be.

As we can see with several verses of *Gita*, this particular verse finds a very similar version in *Bhagavata Purana* (6.16.11)

VERSE 16

ज्ञानेन तु तदज्ञानं येषां नाशितमात्मनः ।

jñānena tu tadajñānaṁ yeṣāṁ nāśitamātmanah ।

तेषामादित्यवज्ज्ञानं प्रकाशयति तत्परम् ॥ ५-१६ ॥

teṣāmādityavajjñānaṁ prakāśayati tatparam ।। 5-16।।

jnanena: by knowledge; *tu*: but; *tat*: that; *ajnanam*: lack of knowledge; *yesam*: of those (people); *nasitam*: is destroyed; *atmanah*: of the *atman*; *tesham*: of them; *aditya-vat*: like the Sun; *jnanam*: the knowledge; *prakasayati*: manifests/ shows directly; *tat*: That; *param*: Supreme.

"For those in whom *ajnana* (ignorance) is destroyed in the (perception of the) self by *jnana* (knowledge), that Knowledge, similar to the (radiant) Sun, reveals that highest (consciousness/ identity/ reality)."

This verse repeats yet again the importance of transcendental Knowledge, the theoretical and practical realization of the Atman that destroys the ignorance of material identification. The two terms of comparison in the verse are *tat ajnanam*, "that ignorance", and *tat param (jnanam)*, "that Supreme (knowledge)".

Jnana or knowledge is the opposite of *ajnana* or ignorance, but this is not a duality proper.

Ajnana literally means "lack of knowledge", which is the precise definition of "ignorance". Ignorance itself has no real separate existence: it is nothing but the absence of knowledge, just like darkness has no existence of its own but is simply the absence of light, and evil has no existence of its own but is simply the absence of good.

This is the correct perspective from which we become able to understand that this apparent duality is not duality at all.

There is no "bad God" (i.e. Satan) opposed to a "good God": this is a divisive dualistic idea that has created a lot of unnecessary problems in human society, especially creating the concept of "otherness" that is necessarily evil and condemned simply because it is "different" (irrespective of the actual ideologies and behaviors of the two concerned parties). Already the conditioned mind is affected by the delusion of duality, but a path that consecrates duality as the only possible truth is seriously dangerous for the proper progress and evolution of the individual and society.

The proper solution is to make a positive and proactive effort towards *dharma* ("ethical values"), *vidya* ("knowledge"), *sat* ("good").

There is no point trying to fight evil with equally evil policies, or to fight ignorance by banning knowledge, just like it is not possible to bring more sunlight in our world by building walls that block our vision of the sun rays.

The knowledge of the Atman is compared here to the light of the Sun that automatically reveals everything: the Sun itself, the world, and even those who are observing.

Only when one has realized the true transcendental nature of the Self or Atman, s/he will be able to realize the Supreme Self or Param Atman.

Some people are afraid that the Brahman and Paramatma realization will somehow "distract" the mind of the devotee from "devotional service", fueling instead the conceited arrogance that makes one think he has become God himself. This is a foolish fear, created by ignorance and immaturity.

Actually, the genuine knowledge and realization of Brahman and Paramatma is the only protection we have against the temptations of megalomania, because it naturally and directly dissipates the darkness of ignorance and illusion that consists in material identification or false ego.

There is a distinction between *jivatma* and *paramatma*, between *prabhu* and *vibhu*, but it is definitely not a difference in nature.

Both the Self and the Supreme Self are *sat-cit-ananda*, inconceivable through material parameters, and not subject to any material limitation. One who has a material concept of the Self will never be able to understand the Supreme.

VERSE 17

तद्बुद्धयस्तदात्मानस्तन्निष्ठास्तत्परायणाः ।

tadbuddhayastadātmānastanniṣṭhāstatparāyaṇāḥ ।

गच्छन्त्यपुनरावृत्तिं ज्ञाननिर्धूतकल्मषाः ॥ ५-१७ ॥

gacchantyapunarāvṛttiṃ jñānanirdhūtakalmaṣāḥ ॥ 5-17 ॥

tat: That (Atman/ Brahman); *buddhayah*: those who have such intelligence; *tat-atmanah*: those who identify with That; *tat-nishthah*: those who have faith in That; *tat-parayanah*: those who are dedicated/ devoted to That; *gacchanti*: they go; *apunah-avrittim*: they do not fall back; *jnana*: by knowledge; *nirdhuta*: destroyed/ removed; *kalmashah*: impurities/ contamination.

"Those who understand/ realize That (Transcendence), identify with That, remain faithful to That, and fully dedicate themselves to That, attain that liberation from which one never

falls back, because their impurities have been cleansed by Knowledge."

The word *tat*, "That", is one of the most recurrent definitions for Transcendence, especially in expressions such as *tat tvam asi*, "you are That" and *om tat sat*, "That Transcendence is eternal". It refers both to Tattva and Para Tattva, i.e. to Atman and Brahman.

Gita also uses this definition of Transcendence in many important verses such as 2.17 (*tat viddhi*), 3.19 (*tat artham*), 4.39 (*tat parah*), 5.5 (*tat yogaih gamyate*), 5.16 (*tat param*), 7.1 (*tat srinu*), 8.21 (*tat dhama paramam*), 10.39 (*tat aham*), 11.37 (*tat param*), 13.13 (*tat pravakshyami*), 13.14 (*tat sarvatah*), 13.16 (*tat avijneyam*), 13.17 (*tat jneyam*), 13.18 (*tat jyotih*), 15.4 (*tat parimargitavyam*), 15.5 (*tat padam avyayam*), 15.6 (*tat dhama paramam*), 15.12 (*tat tejah*), 17.23 (*om tat sat*), 17.27 (*tat arthiyam*), 18.5 (*tat yajnam danam tapah*), 18.20 (*tat jnanam*), 18.55 (*tat anantaram*), 18.62 (*tat prasadat*), 18.77 (*tat samsmritya*).

Tat is the root for the word *Tattva*, or Reality.

The concept of Transcendence, *Tat* or *Tattva*, is described as Brahman, Paramatma and Bhagavan: *vadanti tat tattva vidad tattvam yaj jnanam advayam, brahmeti paramatmeti bhagavan iti sabdyate*, "Those who know Reality say that Transcendence is Reality, the non-dualistic Knowledge that is called Brahman, Paramatma and Bhagavan" (*Bhagavata purana*, 1.2.11).

The supreme importance of this knowledge, the realization of Transcendence, is stressed again in this verse as the most important factor in the purification of the consciousness and the attainment of the perfection of life.

The expression *apunah avrittim* is very important, as it gives assurance about the permanent nature of the purification and liberation promised as a result of the attainment of Transcendental

realization. There are two types of liberation: one is temporary, and the other is permanent.

Temporary liberation is obtained at the end of a cycle - the duration of one's body or the duration of Brahma's body, that consists in the entire universe. When the material body ceases to exist because its allotted time has expired, we become free from its limitations and sufferings, and we experience a state of existence that is very difficult to understand for those who are still identified with their gross bodies.

However, the conditioned soul still remains with the subtle body that is composed of ego, mind and intelligence, and contains the seeds of material incarnation in the form of material desires and identifications - the *karana* body - that are described in this verse as *kalmashah* - impurities.

During the time of the maintenance of the universe, this *karana* body becomes attracted to the particular circumstances where it can manifest its qualities and tendencies (*guna* and *karma*), and there it starts to develop another gross body. The interval between the death of the previous body and the birth of the new body may vary according to several factors, but it is usually short.

When the entire universe dies at the end of Brahma's life, the *karana* bodies of the conditioned souls do not have the opportunity to express their *guna* and *karma* in a new material vehicle, so all the subtle bodies of the living entities are absorbed into the Karana Ocean, into the Karanodakasayi Vishnu or Narayana, where they remain in the blissful state of passive *brahmananda* ("spiritual happiness") until the next cycle of manifestation of the universe. Such *brahmananda* is however temporary, because the conditioned souls still have some impurities that need to be removed through the process of Self realization.

VERSE 18

विद्याविनयसम्पन्ने ब्राह्मणे गवि हस्तिनि ।

vidyāvinayasampanne brāhmaṇe gavi hastini ।

शुनि चैव श्वपाके च पण्डिताः समदर्शिन्ः ॥ ५-१८ ॥

śuni caiva śvapāke ca paṇḍitāḥ samadarśinaḥ ॥ 5-18 ॥

vidya: with divine knowledge; *vinaya*: and with gentleness/ humility/ lack of arrogance; *sampanne*: endowed; *brahmane*: in the *brahmana*; *gavi*: in the cow; *hastini*: in the elephant; *suni*: in the dog; *ca*: and; *eva*: certainly; *sva-pake*: in the dog-eater; *ca*: and; *panditah*: learned persons; *sama-darsinah*: see equally.

"The *pandits* (wise learned persons) look with equal (friendliness) to the *brahmana* who is learned and gentle, to the cow and the elephant, as well as to the dog and to the (uncivilized) dog eater."

The expression *sama darsinah* is the key to this verse, and contains several layers of meanings, making this verse one of the most important ones in *Bhagavad gita*.

The first and foremost meaning, that naturally appears from the context of the discussion in the previous verses, applies to the nature of Atman/ Brahman, that is exactly the same in all living entities, no matter what their body and even what their behavior is. A true *pandita* or *panda* perceives himself and others as Atman/ Brahman, therefore he does not disrespect anyone and he does not mistreat anyone. When he offers respect and friendship to other living entities, it is because he sees the many cells of God's bodily limbs in the various components of the universal society, and at the same time s/he sees the Atman as the pure Self on an educational

journey of incarnations, and the Paramatman within every single body as the most intimate and dearest friend of all living beings (5.29).

The "equal vision" of the true *pandita* is free from prejudice as well as from separatism, because it is not based on bodily identifications and evaluations - it is based on the same perspective and consciousness that the Supreme Personality of Godhead has. A true *pandita* is only contemplating the question of how s/he can work for the benefit of everyone, because s/he sees every living entity as a cell in the Body of God. Each single cell has a different function in the body, but all cells need to be treasured, protected and nurtured according to their specific needs. This practical consideration of different engagements and requirements, however, is not based on prejudice, but on actual observation of the true potential of each individual.

There are great differences between a human being, a cow, an elephant and a dog, as these bodies really belong to different genetic programs. For example, a cow has four stomachs, an elephant can crush down a big tree just by pushing it, a dog sweats through its tongue only, and a human being is capable of complex and articulated speech.

Their actual abilities really set them apart, therefore the *pandita* will not try to milk the *brahmana* or ask philosophical questions from a dog, and will not expect the elephant to be content with the amount of food a human being requires.

However, this verse distinguishes the two examples of human beings - the qualified *brahmana* and the uncivilized person - not on the basis of birth, but on the basis of actual behavior. Recognizing a cow from an elephant or from a dog is not difficult, but all human beings have the same genetic potential; there are some minor differences due to the various races but such ethnic genetic

differences have no relevance in regard to the behavior of the individuals. Just like a dog is always a dog - no matter what breed or color he is, he will always go after a dog treat and lick his own butt - all human beings have the natural capacity to overcome the material identification and attain Transcendence.

Krishna will clearly confirm this later (9.32), saying that not only *brahmanas* and saintly kings have the potential to attain the highest perfection in Transcendental realization (*param gatim*), but also women, *vaisyas*, *sudras*, as well as all those who were born in sinful or uncivilized circumstances or degraded families (*papa yonayah*, and even *sva pakah*). This effectively covers all types and levels of human beings, none excluded.

However, the inherent potential of the human form of life must be put to good use. It is not sufficient to be able to do something in order to get the credit for having done it: we must actually perform the action. Therefore this verse clarifies a definite functional difference between the learned and gentle *brahmana* on one side and the dog-eater (literally, “one who cooks dogs”) on the other side, almost as if they belonged to different species of life, because they have very different behaviors. On the other hand, a so-called *brahmana* that is not learned and humble is actually an uncivilized person, especially if his food habits are not regulated by the dharmic considerations of compassion and cleanliness - or in other words, if he is not a vegetarian.

The criteria to classify human beings into functional categories are here stated as: 1) knowledge, 2) kindness/ freedom from arrogance, 3) food habits. In fact, these are the three major factors intelligent people consider when evaluating the possible engagement of an individual.

The *pandita* is well aware of the practical qualities and activities (*guna* and *karma*) of each individual being, and is capable of

engaging each and every individual being in the service of the Supreme in the best possible way.

But because these different circumstances are not evaluated in terms of the personal benefit that the *pandita* could get from the various individuals, he sees no real fundamental difference between them.

VERSE 19

इहैव तैर्जितः सर्गो येषां साम्ये स्थितं मनः ।

ihaiva tairjitaḥ sargo yeṣāṃ sām्ये sthitaṃ manaḥ ।

निर्दोषं हि समं ब्रह्म तस्माद् ब्रह्मणि ते स्थिताः ॥ ५-१९ ॥

nirdoṣaṃ hi samaṃ brahma tasmād brahmaṇi te sthitāḥ ॥ 5-19 ॥

iha: here; *eva*: certainly; *taih*: by them; *jitaḥ*: conquered; *sargah*: rebirth; *yesham*: of them; *samye*: in equanimity; *sthitam*: established; *manah*: the mind; *nirdosham*: without defect; *hi*: certainly; *samam*: equanimity; *brahma*: Brahman; *tasmad*: therefore; *brahmaṇi*: in the Brahman; *te*: them; *sthitah*: established.

"Those who, in this very life/ body, have vanquished rebirth, have a mind that is established in equanimity. This equal vision is certainly pure/ free from all defects, because the same (pure) Brahman is (in all that exists). Thus they are (firmly) established in Brahman."

The word *iha* means "here", and can be applied to the particular body where one is residing, as well as this world where we live. A derivate meaning is "in this lifetime", and indicates that one does not need to take another and more qualified birth in order to attain the perfection of Brahman realization.

Sometimes we hear Indian materialists stating that one needs to be born in a so-called high caste, or in a male body, in order to become able or qualified to engage in the pursuit of Transcendental realization. This is really a stupid idea, and finds no confirmation in any *shastra* or by any genuine *acharya*. All human beings are equally entitled to directly pursue this crucial purpose of life, as Krishna clearly states in *Gita* (9.32).

The word *sargah* means rebirth as well as creation or manifestation; it comes from the same family of the word *srijami*, "I manifest myself" (4.7). A new body where we take birth is the manifestation or creation of the subtle desires and material identification that we carry in our *karana* body. As the previous verses explain, when such subtle body has been purified from all contamination, there is no need to take another material body - and therefore we can say we have conquered rebirth.

A person that has attained this level of pure transcendental consciousness can be equally benevolent towards all living entities, because s/he does not evaluate them in terms of the personal attraction or repulsion (pleasure or displeasure) s/he can get from their bodies, but s/he sees the Supreme Soul in every heart, and each Atman as an equally powerful and glorious spark of Brahman.

This verse refers to a *yogi* that has already attained the Transcendental realization and has therefore gone beyond the early need to isolate himself from the world in order to train his mind in steady meditation. The intermediate and advanced stages of *yoga* shift from the passive meditation called *dharana* to the active meditation called *dhyana*, and the best way to carry on this *dhyana sadhana* consists in going among innocent and sincere people and engaging them in discussions about Transcendental knowledge and realization, and in loving service of Transcendence.

In the course of this transcendental and sacred activity, the *yogi* has the opportunity to manifest his equanimity towards all the living entities he meets.

VERSE 20

न प्रहृष्येत्प्रियं प्राप्य नोद्विजेत्प्राप्य चाप्रियम् ।

na prahr̥ṣyetpriyaṁ prāpya nodvijetprāpya cāpriyam ।

स्थिरबुद्धिरसम्मूढो ब्रह्मविद् ब्रह्मणि स्थितः ॥ ५-२० ॥

sthira-buddhirasammūḍho brahma-vid brahmaṇi sthitaḥ ॥ 5-20 ॥

na: not; *prahrishyet*: rejoices; *priyam*: what he likes; *prapya*: by obtaining; *na*: not; *udvijet*: becomes disturbed; *prapya*: by obtaining; *ca*: and; *apriyam*: what he does not like; *sthira-buddhih*: steady intelligence; *asammudhah*: free from confusion; *brahma-vit*: one who knows Brahman; *brahmani*: in Brahman; *sthitah*: situated.

"A *brahma-vit* (one who knows the Brahman) does not become elated in obtaining what is pleasing/ desirable and does not become agitated in obtaining what is unpleasant/ undesirable. S/he has a steady intelligence and is free from illusion, because s/he is firmly situated in Brahman."

It is normal and legitimate that the body and mind will feel joy or sorrow because of the circumstances they face, because this is a natural consequence of the contact between the senses and the objects of the senses.

Krishna has clearly said (2.14) that we should simply tolerate them. He does not say we should stop feeling them, or suppress our emotions and fall into denial of our problems. He does not say that

one who feels joys and sorrows is a fallen materialist. Rather, he says that we should not be confused by these joys and sorrows to the point that we lose consciousness of our real nature.

The word *prahrishyet* indicates elation, a feeling of overwhelming joy that leaves our mind confused and unable to see things clearly.

On the opposite end of the emotional range, the word *udvijet* indicates a disturbed state of mind that is too busy trying to cope with suffering, and therefore creates confusion and a feeling of illusion. In this case, too, our excessive emotions constitute an obstacle to the proper function of our mind.

It is perfectly possible to control one's emotions and thought processes by channeling them in the proper useful direction and letting them flow away without remaining attached to them or even cultivating them.

The important thing is to learn how to observe such emotions in a detached and objective way, without becoming identified in them: this happens normally when we are firmly situated in the transcendental consciousness, but it is also possible simply with some steady intelligence. After all, joys and sorrows are temporary feelings, and can disappear very quickly.

Pleasant and unpleasant are extremely relative concepts, because what is *priyam* or "dear" to someone may not be "dear" to someone else, or to the same person in different circumstances.

Cold water, for example, can be very pleasing to drink when the weather is very hot, and very unpleasant if thrown at us in the middle of winter. This concept will be repeated again in later verses.

VERSE 21

बाह्यस्पर्शेष्वसक्तात्मा विन्दत्यात्मनि यत्सुखम् ।

bāhyasparśeṣvasaktātmā vindatyātmani yatsukham ।

स ब्रह्मयोगयुक्तात्मा सुखमक्षयमश्नुते ॥ ५-२१ ॥

sa brahmayogayuktātmā sukhamakṣayamaśnute ।। 5-21 ।।

bahya-sparseshu: in external contacts; *asakta-atma*: one who is not attached; *vindati*: finds pleasure; *atmani*: in the *atman*; *yat*: that; *sukham*: happiness; *sah*: s/he; *brahma-yoga*: by the Brahma Yoga; *yukta-atma*: connected himself; *sukham*: happiness; *akshayam*: permanent/ inexhaustible; *asnute*: experiences.

"Unattached to the contact with the external (things), s/he finds happiness in the pleasure of the Self. Such a person is engaged in Brahma yoga, and enjoys inexhaustible happiness."

What is Brahma Yoga? It is simply the "engagement in Brahman consciousness".

Everyone wants to be happy: it is a natural and legitimate aspiration, as well as the actual true nature of the Self. However, in order to find happiness, we need to know where to seek it.

Materialists, or people who are conditioned by external circumstances, try to find happiness in the contact of the senses with the objects of the senses, because they identify with the senses and with the body. Unfortunately, such pleasure or happiness is illusory because it quickly turns into suffering.

We can make the example of a very thirsty man that comes to the ocean and, seeing all that water, drinks his fill. The effect will be exactly the opposite of what he was trying to obtain, and his thirst

will increase because of the salt contained in the water. No matter how much sea water he will drink, he will remain thirsty. The salt in sea water could be compared to the material identification and attachment that confuses the mind and leads one to believe that it is possible to find real happiness in material sense gratification.

On the other hand, the inner happiness we find in the Atman is like fresh and pure water that comes from an inexhaustible source, and can give us the healthy satisfaction we long for.

Once our deep thirst for happiness is quenched with the pure and holy water that springs from the feet of the Supreme Brahman, our intelligence becomes clear and our consciousness steady, and we become able to experience the contact with the external things in a more balanced and sober manner.

A good vegetable soup can be described as "salted water", but it can be beneficial when taken in the small amount necessary for the proper maintenance of our body and mind; in the same way we can utilize sense gratification prepared in the proper way and purified from harmful components, and consume it in the required amounts only.

As we have already explained earlier in the text, *Gita* does not condemn healthy sense experiences or pleasures, because as long as we have a material body we will also have senses (and a mind, that is sometimes called the sixth sense) and we will need to take care of them. The important thing is to remember that such sensory experiences will be temporary and strictly functional to facilitate and support our work in this body, and that they do not constitute the real source of our happiness.

We can make another example: many people dream about getting a car, but their purpose is not to acquire a useful vehicle that enables them to get from home to their workplace in a reasonable time and

without unnecessary complications and efforts. Rather, they dream that the possession of such status symbol will reinforce their identification as successful individuals, and will make them truly happy. So they get the best automobile they can afford according to their financial condition. After the initial enthusiasm, they realize that they are not really happy, and instead of understanding that happiness cannot be found in material objects themselves, they conclude that they got the wrong type of car: what they need to become really happy is a particular type of automobile - a red Ferrari, or some latest model luxury car. So they beg, borrow or steal, and in the end they get the car of their dreams. Again, the pleasure lasts for a brief time, then sooner or later they feel dissatisfied. Even if they do not try to acquire a new and even more expensive vehicle, some day their car will start giving mechanical problems or will be stolen, or crashed, or lost in some other way, and then they will be devastated because they invested too many expectations of happiness in the wrong place - a temporary material object.

The same thing applies to those who seek happiness in intimate relationships with others, in the good health and good looks of their own bodies, or in some other temporary material situation. Sooner or later the fun will be spoiled by the inevitable decay or loss, and the suffering will begin.

The correct approach is to utilize whatever comes to us, but remaining detached from the sense of identification and possession that could derive from such things - either gross objects or subtle objects.

As the French saying of popular wisdom goes: *tout passe, tout lasse, tout casse, tout se remplace...* "everything ends, everything becomes boring, everything breaks, and everything can be replaced".

The only inexhaustible thing, the only unlimited source of happiness is the Atman/ Brahman, that is eternal and unchangeable. Therefore by practicing Brahma Yoga, the active meditation on Transcendence, we can become really happy in all conditions of life.

VERSE 22

ये हि संस्पर्शजा भोगा दुःखयोनय एव ते ।

ye hi saṁsparśajā bhogā duḥkhaṇayonaya eva te ।

आद्यन्तवन्तः कौन्तेय न तेषु रमते बुधः ॥ ५-२२ ॥

ādyantavantaḥ kaunteya na teṣu ramate budhaḥ ॥ 5-22 ॥

ye: those; *hi*: certainly; *samsparśa-jah*: born from the contact (of the senses with the sense objects); *bhogah*: pleasures; *duhkha-yanayah*: the matrix of suffering; *eva*: certainly; *te*: them; *adi-antavantah*: having a beginning and an end; *kaunteya*: o Kaunteya (son of Kunti); *na*: not; *teshu*: in them; *ramate*: rejoices; *budhah*: one who is intelligent.

"Those pleasures that derive from contact with (the sense objects) are the cause for future sorrow because they have a beginning and an end. Therefore, o son of Kunti, an intelligent person does not seek happiness in them."

In this verse the concept of contact between the senses and the sense object is repeated, to distinguish material pleasure from transcendental pleasure. The happiness of Brahman is natural and spontaneous and does not require a physical contact, because Brahman is everywhere. On the other hand, material pleasure requires sensory contact (and we should remember that the mind is included in the senses).

This important point had already been presented by Krishna in the very beginning of his instructions (2.14).

The expression *dukha yonaya*, "the origin of sufferings", can be interpreted at many levels. The word *yoni*, or "matrix", suggests that in order to enjoy the pleasures procured by the contact of bodily senses with a gross object, one needs to take birth in a gross material body, with all its limitations and conditionings and problems.

This, in itself, is the root cause of all material suffering.

Another meaning is related to the science of the *gunas* explained in *Gita*. Desire for sense gratification is born from passion, *rajo guna*, and it is a scientific fact that suffering is the inevitable result of all endeavors based on *rajas* as a value in itself. Later (*Gita* 14.16) Krishna will clearly say that *rajas* fructifies in sufferings (*rajasas tu phalam duhkham*). Such is the nature of this world that only detached and dutiful action performed in the proper enlightened and attentive consciousness (*sattva*) can actually bring happiness.

Another meaning of this verse is that the sexual pleasure that drives the natural instincts of all living entities is actually a flimsy delusional surrogate to the actual pleasure and contentment that derives from the union between the two components of our own individual being - *purusha* and *prakriti* - the male and female energies, or the two hemispheres of our brain. The internal union between the two halves of our Self does not require any *sparsa* ("touching"), but its counterpart on the gross physical level does, and that is where suffering is created.

In any case, the main point of the verse is that material pleasure cannot be trusted because it is temporary and illusory. Trying to build our happiness over it would be like trying to build a permanent house on temporary foundations - a very foolish attempt

that is naturally destined to failure, sooner or later. On temporary foundations we can only build a temporary shelter that is solely aimed at a temporary functional purpose - and from which we can detach ourselves easily and without pain or sense of loss when the purpose has been served and the temporary construction is not necessary any more because we are moving on.

The word *ramate*, "rejoices", indicates the feeling of delight that one seeks to fulfill one's own desires and aspirations. The best place to seek for such happiness is the transcendental nature of the Atman (*atma rama*) and the transcendental relationship with the transcendental Supreme Brahman (Rama), that is the actual source of all happiness for everyone.

VERSE 23

शक्नोतीहैव यः सोढुं प्राक्शरीरविमोक्षणात् ।

śaknotīhaiva yaḥ soḍhum prākśarīravimokṣaṇāt ।

कामक्रोधोद्भवं वेगं स युक्तः स सुखी नरः ॥ ५-२३ ॥

kāmakrodhodbhavaṁ vegam sa yuktaḥ sa sukhī naraḥ || 5-23 ||

saknoti: is capable; *iha eva*: even here; *yaḥ*: he; *soḍhum*: to tolerate/ to withstand; *prak*: before; *sarira-vimokshanat*: being liberated from the body; *kama-krodhah*: of lust and anger; *udbhavam*: generated by; *vegam*: the impulse; *sah*: he; *yuktaḥ*: a *yogi*; *sah*: he; *sukhi*: happy; *narah*: human being.

"One who here (in this life/ body), before becoming liberated from the body, is capable of withstanding the onslaughts of lust and anger, is a *yogi* and a happy human being."

The key expression in this verse is *iha eva*: already in this lifetime, in this body.

The characteristics of *kama* and *krodha* have already been described in detail in 3.37: "This (power that pushes a man to perform sinful/negative actions) 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 impulse of *kama* in the body is observed as enthusiasm, attraction, a strong emotion that can make one's hair stand, or cause tears, blushing, widening of the eyes and/or the smile, a slight dropping of the jaw, shivering of the limbs, a feeling of weakness similar to fainting, temporary speech impairment, confusion of the mind, an outburst of shouting or exclamation, and modification of the breathing pattern

The impulse of *krodha* in the body can have similar symptoms, especially the modification of the breath pattern, temporary speech impairment, confusion of the mind, an outburst of shouting or exclamation, and even tears, but also perspiration, change of color of the face due to modification in blood circulation (not only blushing, but becoming pale as well), reddening of the eyes, and trembling of the limbs.

Already in 2.62 Krishna had shown the connection between sense perception and the emotions of lust and anger: "By thinking about the objects of the senses, a person associates with them, by association desire develops, and from (unfulfilled) desire anger arises."

In the previous verses we have seen that the material joys and sorrows created by the contact between the senses and the sense objects are characteristic of the material body, and that the

dissolution that the body gives a temporary relief from such problems, while the overcoming of the material identification - the root cause of the creation of the material body - takes one to the permanent liberation and pure undisturbed transcendental happiness. This verse further explains that anyone who has a material body will inevitably experience these sense activities, and the natural consequences of such pleasant and unpleasant contacts between senses and sense objects will create the impulses of desire and anger.

The difference between a *yogi* and a non-*yogi* is that a *yogi* remains detached (i.e. non-identified) from these natural functions of the body and mind, and thus develops a higher level of sense control and tolerance towards the sensory experiences. Such detachment created by the power of transcendental consciousness is wholesome and substantial, and does not depend on external circumstances or supplies, unlike the artificial and temporary detachment achieved by consuming intoxicating substances, drugs or medication.

Someone could think that since the cessation of the allotted period in a particular body offers a respite in the form of a temporary liberation, it is better to commit suicide and thus shorten the "jail term" that one has to spend in the prison of an ailing material body, tormented by desires and anger. Unfortunately, this is not a good solution.

Every particular lifetime constitutes a "course" in life's school, where we are supposed to learn some lessons and repay some debts. If we try to escape before completing the scheduled program, leaving unfinished jobs behind, it is very likely we will remain trapped in an intermediate dimension that is variously perceived and interpreted by different cultures. Some call it a "limbo", some call it the "ghost dimension" or *pretaloka*, some call it Bardo, but everyone agrees it is not a pleasant experience

because the subtle body still identifies with the previous material body - position, relationships, possessions - and still feels desires, lust, thirst, hunger, anger etc, but is unable to act them out or relieve them without a gross body.

This verse also warns that it is not wise to wait until the time of death to start thinking about spiritual realization. Liberation from conditionings must be attained before the time of death, otherwise it won't be attained at all.

VERSE 24

योऽन्तःसुखोऽन्तरारामस्तथान्तर्ज्योतिरेव यः ।

yo'ntahsukho'ntararamastathantarjyotireva yah |

स योगी ब्रह्मनिर्वाणं ब्रह्मभूतोऽधिगच्छति ॥ ५-२४ ॥

sa yogi brahmanirvanam brahmabhuto'dhigacchati || 5-24 ||

yah: he; *antah-sukhah*: happy inside; *antah aramah*: finding pleasure inside; *tatha*: as well as; *antah-jyotih*: whose light is inside; *eva*: certainly; *yah*: he; *sah*: s/he; *yogi*: a yogi; *brahmanirvanam*: the peacefulness of Transcendence; *brahma-bhutih*: the position of Brahman; *adhigacchati*: attains.

"One who is happy within (the self), who finds pleasure within (the self), who finds enlightenment/ the light within (the self) is a yogi who attains the Brahma Nirvana and the existence/ realization of Brahman."

Brahma nirvana and *brahma bhuta* are two interesting expressions.

Sometimes uninformed people believe that *nirvana* (the cessation of material agitation) is a characteristic Buddhist concept, or an "impersonalistic" idea that needs to be opposed, but we find that Krishna speaks of *nirvana* as genuine spiritual realization (5.24, 25, 26, 6.5) and the very purpose of *yoga*.

So if we claim to recognize the authority of Krishna and *Gita*, we should respect his teachings and accept the validity of the definitions he presents.

The word *nirvana* literally means "without wind" and defines the state of consciousness that is firmly radiant and undisturbed like a flame sheltered from the wind. A synonym for *nirvana* is *nirvikalpa samadhi*.

Of course this *nirvana* is not a void, an absence of all activities and thoughts. The state of quiescence it refers to applies to the constant and unnecessary chattering of the mind, that prevents us from actually concentrating on what is important.

A flame without the wind does not cease to exist, or to burn, or to radiate light - on the contrary, it burns better, with a brighter light, and is much more useful. Similarly, *brahma bhuta*, or the "existence/ being of Brahman" applies to the transcendental consciousness that is free from material identifications/ attachments. Such consciousness is the first preliminary step for any further exploration of the Divine: the final instruction of *Gita* (18.54) states that only from this level of consciousness one can develop true *bhakti*.

We must therefore understand that the level of Brahman, the transcendental spiritual consciousness, is not something we should despise or fear, but rather the goal we need to concentrate on.

The word *aramah*, "finding pleasure", contains a dynamic aspect, indicating the idea of sporting, doing something for the pure

pleasure of it. It is closely connected to the concept of *lila*, "playing", that applies to the transcendental activities manifested by Bhagavan.

The expression *antah jyoti* indicates that the *yogi* attains the level where does not depend on external sensory perception to acquire knowledge and enlightenment, because of the direct contact with the Param Atman. Once the chattering of the mind and ego have ceased, and the intelligence is steady like a flame undisturbed by wind, the natural radiance of the Atman and the Param Atman will be revealed from within.

VERSE 25

लभन्ते ब्रह्मनिर्वाणमृषयः क्षीणकल्मषाः ।

labhante brahmanirvāṇamṛṣayaḥ kṣīṇakalmaṣāḥ ।

छिन्नद्वैधा यतात्मानः सर्वभूतहिते रताः ॥ ५-२५ ॥

chinnadvaidhā yatātmānaḥ sarvabhūtahite ratāḥ ॥ 5-25 ॥

labhante: they obtain; *brahma-nirvanam*: the Brahma nirvana; *rishayah*: the Rishis; *kshina-kalmashah*: cleansed from impurities; *chinna-dvaidha*: having cut off doubts; *yata-atmanah*: having controlled themselves; *sarva-bhuta*: for all living beings; *hite*: in beneficial work/ to the benefit; *ratah*: engaged/ dedicated/ attached.

"The (wise) seers (of Reality) attain the *brahma nirvana* (because) have been purified from (all) sins/ faults and have cut off (all) doubts (dualistic illusions), engaging themselves in (work for) the benefit of all living beings."

We have seen in previous verses the definition of the word *muni*, used by Krishna as a synonym for *yogi*. This verse offers the definition Rishi, "those who see (Reality)", a synonym for the definition *tattva darshi* we found in verse 4.34.

In vedic tradition, the Rishis are wise men that directly realized the Knowledge of Transcendence and expressed it in the various scriptural texts they compiled. This definition can apply both to men and to women: the feminine form of the noun is Rishika, from which the name of the city Rishikesh derives, "Lord of the Rishikas", being dedicated to Mahesvara Shiva.

Some people believe that such Rishis were special because of their noble birth and ancestry, but this is not the actual point; in fact in the history of Vedic knowledge there were some Rishis that came from ordinary or degraded families. One famous example is Satyakama Jabala, whose story is described in the *Chandogya Upanisad* (4.4.1-5). He was the son of a single mother who worked as a maidservant for many different people and had no idea who the father of the boy was (generally maidservants also moonlighted as prostitutes). Another famous example is Valmiki Rishi, the compiler of the *Ramayana*, who came from a family of street robbers. What to speak of Veda Vyasa, who was born out of wedlock from a woman from the fishermen community.

However, to be considered a Rishi one needs to fit the description given in this verse: become purified from all sins and faults, cut off all doubts and dualities, and engage sincerely in working for the benefit of all. Such great souls deserve all respect, whatever was their birth.

The expression *kshina* means "diminished, reduced", and indicates the process of gradual purification called *anartha nivritti*, by which one strengthens the influence of *sattva* and then rises to the level of *visuddha sattva*, or transcendental purity.

The expression *dvaidha*, "doubt", conveys the meaning of a dualistic illusion, by which one is torn between two opposite positions and does not know which one is the true or good one.

Krishna has already stated in chapter 4 (40, 41, 42) that chronic doubts prevent all progress: "For one who is plagued by uncertainty there is no happiness in this world or in the next... cut through all doubts by (the sword of) knowledge... using the sword of knowledge to slash off all these doubts that were born from ignorance and are infesting the heart."

The expression *sarva-bhuta-hite ratah* refers to all activities that are performed for the benefit of all the living beings; real welfare work should not create unnecessary sufferings to one category or groups of beings for the purpose of facilitating the pleasure and profit of another category or group. There is always a better way to work for the benefit of all, and we need to carefully consider all the factors, and keep in mind the permanent benefit or *sreya*, that is more important than the temporary benefit called *preya*.

VERSE 26

कामक्रोधवियुक्तानां यतीनां यतचेतसाम् ।

kāmakrodhaviyuktānām yatīnām yatacetasām ।

अभितो ब्रह्मनिर्वाणं वर्तते विदितात्मनाम् ॥ ५-२६ ॥

abhito brahmanirvāṇam vartate viditātmanām ॥ 5-26 ॥

kama-krodha-vimuktanam: of those who are completely free from lust and anger; *yatinam*: of those who are renounced/ regulated; *yata-cetasam*: who control their consciousness; *abhitah*:

guaranteed; *brahma-nirvanam*: the peacefulness of Transcendence; *vartate*: is there; *vidita-atmanam*: of those who have known/realized the *atman*.

"The saintly persons who are completely free from lust and anger and have their consciousness steadily fixed (in Brahman), who have realized the Self: (for them) there is *brahma nirvana* very soon/ in whatever way."

The word *yati* is a synonym for *sannyasi*, a person who has become completely free from *ahankara* and *mamatva* - material identification and sense of possession or belonging - and therefore is beyond all scope of lust and anger.

Since *krodha*, anger, is generated from *kama*, lust, and *kama* arises from the desire of possessing a sense object for the gratification of the material body and mind, the only way to completely uproot this enemy of peaceful and happy life is to move on a higher platform, already amply described by Krishna in the previous chapters, where such lust cannot arise. We have already seen that a renounced person humbly accepts as *prasadam*, for the maintenance of his body and mind, whatever sense gratification he receives without too much effort. This is the idea of regulating one's sense gratification: be satisfied with what comes on its own accord in the course of the performance of one's proper duties.

Those who have formally accepted the *sannyasa* order of life must practically demonstrate this concept in its extreme form, by renouncing all possessions and social position, including their name and home, and survive from day to day by begging alms for their food, traveling constantly so that they do not develop a depending relationship with any particular place or people.

A *sannyasi* cannot have a permanent address or a bank account, movable or immovable properties, or even valuables he could sell

in case of emergency. His clothing consists of a simple *kaupina* or loincloth and a shawl made from discarded rags picked from the street, and his ornaments consist of a *kanthi mala* or *japa mala* (string of beads) made from the wood of *tulasi* or the seeds of *rudraksha*, and the *tilaka* made from clay or ashes. No Sony, Seiko or Samsonite are contemplated in the characteristic equipment of a *sannyasi*. A *sannyasi* should not even wear shoes or carry an umbrella - what to speak of traveling executive class in airplanes and having diamond jewelry on silken clothes, or employing a personal cook or masseur (or masseuse). He can never engage in politics, trade or any type of business or relationship with people who are engaged in such fields.

Of course, this formal acceptance of the rigid rules of *sannyasa* is not intended for the degraded and weak people of Kali yuga. In fact it is strongly discouraged if not forbidden, as clearly stated in *Brahma vaivarta purana: asvamedham gavalambham sannyasam pala paitrkam devarena sutotpattim kalau panca vivarjayet*, "In the age of Kali, five acts are not to be performed: the horse sacrifice, the cow 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."

We can therefore safely assume that there are very few genuine *sannyasis* - if any at all - and that for the most part, the people that are considered *sannyasis* are simply spiritual practitioners that do not engage in family life but live in some *ashrama* or *matha*, depending on some religious institution for their maintenance and working more or less diligently or effectively for the propagation of spiritual activities and functions. They do not get a salary but their basic maintenance needs and their work instruments are provided by the *matha*.

Unfortunately not all such people are actually sincere: the fraud mentality can exist in many degrees and at various levels. Some

are just looking for easy food, quiet sleep, little work, sufficient respect from the society and sometimes good opportunities for sense gratification, with no responsibilities and liabilities.

In time they can become frustrated, dry, cruel, insensitive, rough, proud and engage in institutional politics and power games, and some may even become cynical hypocrites, who simply take advantage of their artificial dress to shamelessly exploit innocent and ignorant people for their personal sense gratification and profit, and when they do not obtain money, facilities or adoration (which they think is due to them simply because of their dress), they get angry and revengeful.

This is why this verse specifies *yata cetasam*, putting the emphasis on the fact that the definition of "renounced person" has nothing to do with the externals, but everything to do with the level or mode of consciousness or awareness.

Other interesting expressions in the verse are *abhitah* - meaning "guaranteed, very soon, in one way or another" - and *vidita*, "those who know", coming from same root as *vit* and *veda*.

VERSE 27

स्पर्शान्कृत्वा बहिर्बाह्यांश्चक्षुश्चैवान्तरे भ्रुवोः ।

sparsāṅkṛtvā bahirbāhyāṁścakṣuścaivāntare bhruvoḥ ।

प्राणापानौ समौ कृत्वा नासाभ्यन्तरचारिणौ ॥ ५-२७ ॥

prāṇāpānau samau kṛtvā nāsābhyantaracāriṇau ॥ 5-27 ॥

sparsan: sense objects; *kṛtvā*: making; *bahih*: externally; *bahyan*: external; *cakshuh*: the eyes; *ca*: and; *eva*: certainly; *antare*: inside; *bhruvoh*: of the eyebrows; *prana-apanau*: the *prana* and the

apana; *samau*: balance; *kritva*: doing; *nasa-abhyantara*: inside the nostrils; *carinau*: that are moving.

"Keeping outside (his/her concern/ attention) the external (objects/ concerns) and fixing one's eyes to the internal space between the eyebrows, balancing the *prana* and *apana*, controlling the breathing within the nose,

The previous verses described a *yati*, a *sannyasi*, that has completely overcome all material identification and sense of possess, and is striving only for permanent liberation from the prison of the body. In other words, a *sannyasi*'s only concern is about preparing himself for death.

Of course, this approach and purpose does not correspond with the mentality and activities of the so-called *sannyasis* of Kali yuga, that are actually monks who simply live in a monastery, not unlike their Christian counterparts. In fact, this sad state of affairs has created among many people the general idea that in fact a *sannyasi* is nothing more than a Christian monk or friar.

Unfortunately all along history Christian monasteries have set an extremely low standard of spiritual realization and behavior, and this cultural superimposition has vastly contributed to the degradation of Hindu standards as well.

It was Adi Shankara who established the system of *mathas*, radically reforming the institution of *sannyasa* as a necessary step to counteract the degradation of the brahmanic tradition, and incorporating the new concept of "monastery" introduced by Buddhism. In this system *sannyasis* started living together in a fixed residence and training *brahmacharis* as "new/ apprentice monks", collecting and managing funds for the maintenance of the *matha*, organizing preaching functions to the public etc - all occupations that had previously 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.

We should not forget that the *sannyasi* described by Krishna in *Gita* is not the monk-type religionist who lives in a *matha*, but a real *sannyasi* who lives alone without shelter - a very important point, that will be repeated several times later on. Without understanding this crucial point, the instructions given in the next chapter on the practice of the Yoga of meditation will be horribly distorted, creating a fantasy of sense gratification that is a mixture of luxury monastery and fitness spa, where monks dedicate all their time to the care and improvement of their material bodies, through physical well being and fitness exercise techniques, eating expensive and rare biodynamic foods in a trendy diet prepared by expert cooks, sleeping on specially made futons and orthopedic beds, and so on.

When the concept of meditation enters this golden fantasy of Beverly Hills Yoga, it becomes a series of relaxation techniques to delude the mind into believing that this material world is actually a place of happiness and peace, that the purpose of life is to feel good inside one's material body, and that the best time of the day is when we can dream about the fairy-tale sunlit meadows full of flowers and the rosy clouds at dawn on the ocean beach that we are told to visualize in our minds to improve our "spiritual well-being".

Such practice of "yoga and meditation" is as much as a *sadhana* as watching any of the many fantasy films produced by Hollywood studios. It's a mental movie, nothing but a mental projection, that belongs to *tamas* rather than *sattva*, even if the room where we spend our fantasizing time is well-aerated and lit, the floor is clean and there are perfumed incense sticks burning in some artistic incense holder.

If we wash away the fancy misconceptions and come back to the solid reality described in *Gita*, we will find an unkempt elderly man, who lives in the open without any shelter like any homeless bum and eats whatever scarce food he can obtain by begging, and whose only concern is to carry his awareness beyond the material level so that he can leave his body without having to take another birth. Another extremely important clue in this regard is the description offered by Krishna in this verse about the *pratyahara* and *pranayama* of the ancient science of Kriya yoga. *Pratyahara* means withdrawing one's attention internally, excluding all external disturbances from one's consciousness and even the memory of external objects. So, we are not supposed to meditate on meadows, forests or beaches. But what does it mean to focus one's attention "internally"? Should we visualize our bodily organs - lungs, brain, blood in the veins? Certainly not. Those are external things, too, as the material body is just the outer covering of the Atman. What should we meditate on, then? On the Atman, or even better, on the Param Atman, that is the inner soul of our soul.

Pranayama means equalization of breathing: controlling breathing until all breathing stops. It is not meant to increase the oxygen flow to the brain so that we can become more brilliant at our managerial careers, or to quicken the metabolism so that we can eat more caloric food without gaining pounds of anti-aesthetic weight - all with the purpose of getting more and better opportunities for sexual relationships.

We have already mentioned the two brain hemispheres - the male and the female - that control each one side of the body, and respectively the logical and emotional faculties.

The particular practice of *pranayama* described in this verse is aimed at having both nostrils work simultaneously, something that only happens spontaneously at times of great balance between the two hemispheres. When the male energy and the female energy

within a single body are perfectly balanced, the individual becomes free from the sexual attraction and impulses, and the awareness remains stable and undisturbed, able to properly focus on Self realization.

VERSE 28

यतेन्द्रियमनोबुद्धिर्मुनिर्मोक्षपरायणः ।

yatendriyamanobuddhirmunirmokṣaparāyaṇaḥ ।

विगतेच्छाभयक्रोधो यः सदा मुक्त एव सः ॥ ५-२८ ॥

vigatecchābhayakrodho yaḥ sadā mukta eva saḥ ॥ 5-28 ॥

yata-indriya-manah-buddhih: having controlled the senses, the mind and the intelligence; *muniḥ*: the Muni; *moksha-parayanah*: (fully) dedicated to liberation; *vigata-iccha-bhaya-krodhah*: having gone beyond (all) desire, fear and anger; *yah*: he; *sada*: always; *muktah*: liberated; *eva*: certainly; *sah*: he.

controlling the senses, the mind and intelligence, the *muni* (the silent sage) who is fully dedicated to *moksha* (liberation), free from all desires, fear and anger, is certainly always liberated."

A *muni* is the "silent sage" that has lost all interest and concerns for the external world. Therefore he is free from desires and hopes, fear and anger, and his senses, mind and intelligence are perfectly undisturbed and under control. The practice of silence (*mauna vrata*) is one of the most fundamental exercises, especially for beginners in Yoga, because without restraining the speech it is very difficult to restrain the mind. Everything first appears in the mind, and when it is expressed by speech it becomes "objectivized", taking up a stronger sense of reality.

This is also the reason why the practice of *mantra japa* is so important.

There is a difference between a *muni* and a dumb person who would like to speak but is unable to. Using sign language or making inarticulate sounds in imitation of ordinary speech is not admissible in the practice of *mauna*, either, as the silence should also include the activities of the mind.

A merely external show of silence, that is not subordinated to the meditation on the Supreme Self, will simply create a tamasic sense of inertia and ignorance, and if the "practitioner" ever wakes up from this slumber, the spark of *rajas* will create frustration and clashes with other people. There are several examples of "*mauni babas*" in India who made a big name for themselves by remaining silent for years, and ended their silence by getting angry with followers over trifles, or by breaking their continence vows, or with similar acts that revealed how their lack of actual realization and inner peace. In a previous verse (3.6) Krishna had already described such people as *vimudha* (fools) and *mithyacara* (pretenders).

What the *muni* seeks is simply *moksha*, permanent liberation - not followers, not name and fame, not a career in politics, not large donations, not palatial temples or *ashramas*, not the credit of being able to do welfare work, not government recognition. Because he has finished with the material world, when the emaciated and neglected body fails him, he will not call an ambulance to be carried to the hospital and beg the doctors to "save his life". And nobody else will call the ambulance for him because he lives alone, far from human habitation, according to the specific instructions given by Krishna in *Gita* in the next chapters.

If we want to bring the authority of the Vedic scriptures, and especially the *prasthanas traya*, and especially the *Gita*, to build

credibility for what we are doing, then our first priority should be to carefully study the *Gita* and understand the actual system. However, since the vast masses of people are abysmally ignorant about the actual *shastra*, and in fact most do not have any interest in reading them, it is easy for cynical cheaters and charlatans to take advantage of the vague and distorted information of the general population and claim to "represent Hindu orthodoxy" in their unauthorized conclusions and behaviors. Anyone who has the correct vision of the ethics of actual Hindu orthodoxy, i.e. the genuine teachings of *shastra* and original *acharyas*, has the duty to speak up and do his part to save society from going to hell in the name of religion.

VERSE 29

भोक्तारं यज्ञतपसां सर्वलोकमहेश्वरम् ।

bhoktāraṁ yajñatapasāṁ sarvalokamaheśvaram ।

सुहृदं सर्वभूतानां ज्ञात्वा मां शान्तिमृच्छति ॥ ५-२९ ॥

suhṛdaṁ sarvabhūtānāṁ jñātvā mām śāntimṛcchati ॥ 5-29 ॥

bhoktaram: the beneficiary; *yajna-tapasam*: of sacrifices and austerities; *sarva-loka-mahesvaram*: the great Lord of all the worlds; *suhridam*: the close friend; *sarva-bhutanam*: of all living beings; *jnatva*: knowing; *mam*: me (as); *santim*: peace; *ricchati*: attains.

"(One who) knows me as the enjoyer/ beneficiary of *yajna* (sacrifice) and *tapas* (austerity), the great Lord of all the worlds /all people, and the dearest friend of all beings, attains peace."

Here is another extremely famous verse of *Gita*, that one great commentator called "the peace formula", capable of bringing real and lasting peace to individuals and societies as well.

Usually people fight over benefits and glory, domination, material possessions or relationships, out of greed for position and property, for jealousy, revenge, and similar reasons.

So if everyone agrees that *ahankara* and *mamatva* are impurities to be abandoned, and that we should treat everything and everyone respectfully as property and relations of God, the usual reasons for fighting dissolve into irrelevance.

After all, we are all working for the same Boss, who is a very nice person and wants everybody to be happy.

It is not possible to obtain peace through adharmic solutions, simply by substituting one bad and selfish ruler with another bad and selfish ruler, one defective ideology with another defective ideology. If we examine them, all ideologies claim to be aimed at bringing prosperity and happiness to society, and peace is often the reason presented as the motivation for ruthless wars.

On the other hand, by recognizing that Param Atman is the actual beneficiary of all sacred actions and sacrifices, the creator and proprietor of everything (not only on this planet but in the entire universe) and the best well-wishing friend of all beings, people become more peaceful.

Unfortunately, in Kali yuga there are many greedy and egotistic people who claim to be the representatives (or worse, the sole representatives) of God, and they are authorized to "dominate, own and collect tribute" in the name of the Lord of all planets and beneficiary of all actions. This inevitably leads to endless conflicts, oppression and sufferings, because it places faulty human beings in the position of God, even in the name of serving God.

Each of the groups believes and claims that they are the (only) qualified and authorized "true representatives" of God, and of course since God himself cannot be called to appear in a court of law to make a declaration in the usually legal way in front of a judge and a court, and since there is no fax or courier service between this world and heaven, they expect that any document presented to substantiate these claims of monopoly over transmitting God's orders should be taken as unquestionably valid, merely on the word of the "representatives" themselves.

Those who refuse to blindly accept such unsubstantiated claim are accused to be offenders, non-believers, heretics, etc. The general method used by these delusional and tyrannical "theocracies" relies on material power - political, military, financial, etc. In Kali yuga, most people will believe that might is right, so the entire purpose of religious consciousness as presented in this verse becomes horribly distorted into a totalitarian oppression.

What is the difference between someone who oppresses people and enforces adharmic actions and laws by claiming that he is directly God, and someone who oppresses people and enforces adharmic actions and laws by claiming that he is the sole representative of God? No difference.

God is one, but the theocratical leaders are many, and usually each of them believes he has the monopoly on the understanding of God's orders. Sometimes these deluded people even come to the conclusion that their God is the only good one, and there are "other gods" that are bad and should therefore be persecuted and eliminated by the followers of the "good God". The history of the last 2500 years is the proof that such delusional doctrines are extremely dangerous and destructive.

How to solve the problem? Vedic knowledge, Vedic civilization, offers the answer to the dilemma: the genuine representatives of

God never claim any material power on society - no political power, no military power, no legislative power, no law enforcement power, even no financial power.

Brahmanas can only act as advisors and teachers, and can never have any material power on society, what to speak of *sannyasis*, who have absolutely no social position or relevance.

All religious persons should only concern themselves about giving good advice to people - all people, not only the rulers - on how to progress in their own personal spiritual lives, about the universal principles of *dharma* (properly called *sanatana dharma* because they apply to all, at any time in history and in any place) and about what is written in the genuine *shastra*. Nothing else. Each individual will have to apply the teachings in his/ her own life, never to the lives of others.

The government powers reside in the King only, and the king has no power over the religious beliefs and practices of the subjects. The only difference between an ordinary *raja* and a *rajarishi* is that a *rajarishi*, a saintly king, personally gives the perfect example of a Self-realized person and always behaves according to the ethical principles of *dharma*. No king would ever tell people what form or non-form of God they are supposed to worship, and how. In the history of India, there have been many good kings that gave the same protection and patronage to different dharmic religious traditions, within Hinduism and even outside it, as for Buddhism and Jainism. A king is supposed to protect all religious people, without making any ideological discrimination.

The only concern of *kshatriyas* is to protect the *prajas* and the kingdom from aggressors, from the criminals that try to commit violence against others. In this work, there is no need for many laws - good people will behave properly without being forced by laws, and bad people will always try to get around the laws to

commit their crimes. The only principle that the King needs to apply is to stop aggressors. Not even punishing them, as in the Vedic system there are no prisons or courts or lawyers: if the criminal surrenders and repents, he is either pardoned or banned, depending on the seriousness of his crime.

It does not matter what these aggressors profess to believe, even if they think that God has ordered them to rape and murder innocent people and pillage or steal properties, the *kshatriya* is only concerned about the act in itself, the rape and the murder and the stealing. The king has the duty to stop aggressions and violence, and he does that without leaving much space to the rationalization that the criminals may try to offer to justify their bad actions.