

BHAGAVAD GITA

**The Global Dharma
for the Third Millennium**

Chapter Six

Translations and commentaries
by Parama Karuna Devi

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Chapter 6: Dhyana Yoga

Dhyana yoga means "the *yoga* of meditation", and offers instructions that people usually connect with Hatha Yoga or Kriya Yoga, and some people call Astanga Yoga.

Krishna, on the other hand, describes it as *dhyana* or meditation because the only purpose of the *asana*, *pranayama* and *pratyahara* is to facilitate *dhyana* or meditation.

What is meditation? Meditation is the ability to control one's mind and engage it in a beneficial and purposeful way. Most of the problems people face everyday are due to a lack of control of one's mind. Loneliness, depression, difficult or unhealthy personal or social relationships, fears, worries, phobias, hatred, jealousy, failures in enterprises, addictions of all kinds, stress, anxiety, aggressiveness, confusion, resentment, guilt, regret, envy, lust, self-loathing, insecurity, and even unethical behaviors can be solved simply by learning how to operate one's mind.

Of course, controlling our own mind can influence the minds of other people only marginally, therefore when other people refuse to do their own part for the benefit of everyone even if our requests are reasonable, we can remove ourselves from the situation, choosing to speak up about the reasons, or to avoid unnecessarily conflict by remaining silent.

In any case, a person who has controlled his/ her mind is acting consciously, deliberately and responsibly, making a choice in full awareness of the consequences of his/ her actions, therefore s/he remains the master of his/ her own life.

The general mass of conditioned people, who do not control their minds, become easily prey of those who want to control the minds of others, or in any case they remain the slaves of their own whimsical mind and senses, victimized by their tyranny and oppression, and besides the inevitable sufferings that are inherent in the things of the material world, they are unnecessarily tortured by their own mind and senses.

All these problems can be solved by properly learning meditation. Everyone is capable of meditation. Without this faculty, it would not be possible to perform even the most fundamental tasks of life: working, studying, solving practical problems, making choices. That's what people usually mean when they say, "switch your brain on"... and we could add, "when the brain is functioning, keep it going in the proper direction". Whenever we get a machine or appliance, before trying to utilize it we should understand its functions and proper operation, otherwise we will not get the perfect result in our job, and the machine can also get damaged in the process. Our mind is the most complex and wonderful machine, therefore it is essential to understand how it works and how we can use it in the best way.

Although meditation is an instinctive process, like breathing, moving, walking, talking, eating etc, we can learn its science and art, and use it in the best possible way to transform our lives and attain success in all enterprises. Like any muscle, the mind must be trained properly and exercised with intelligence and regularity, so that it can become able to perform its intended work. Those who do not control their minds through the practice of meditation cannot progress in life, either materially or spiritually.

In the last decades there has been some incorrect information and ideas circulating in the name of meditation, so that many people have come to confuse various concepts. Meditation is not daydreaming, fantasy, relaxation, creative visualization, or

mechanical repetition of some affirmations, although these are all good exercises for the mind and may be useful for one's mental balance and health.

Actual meditation in the practice of *yoga*, called *dhyana*, is the focused concentration of the mind on the Transcendental Reality, by which all other movements of the mind are dissolved in the contemplation of the Atman/ Brahman, the eternal existence of knowledge and happiness.

It is supported by the preliminary requisites such as *yama* and *niyama* (life habits), *asana* (control of the body), *pranayama* (control of breathing) and *pratyahara* (withdrawal of attention from external objects).

When the external objects are excluded from the attention of the mind, it is possible to really focus on the object of meditation: this stage is called *dharana*, "holding the focus", or "getting the mind under control".

The next step consists in driving the mind in the proper direction, contemplating Reality without the veils of illusion and distraction, and coming to the point of realizing it, understanding it deeply: this stage is called *dhyana*.

By constant practice, this deep meditation and state of awareness becomes spontaneous and uninterrupted - a position that is also called *sthita prajna*, "solid knowledge" - and thus it is called *samadhi*, "constant meditation".

VERSE 1

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।

śrībhagavānuvāca ।

अनाश्रितः कर्मफलं कार्यं कर्म करोति यः ।

anāśritaḥ karmaphalam kāryam karma karoti yaḥ ।

स संन्यासी च योगी च न निरग्निर्न चाक्रियः ॥ ६-१ ॥

sa sannyāsī ca yogī ca na niragnirna cākriyaḥ ॥ 6-1 ॥

sri-bhagavan: the wonderful Lord; *uvaca*: said; *anasritah*: without depending on; *karma-phalam*: the results of work; *karyam*: duties; *karma*: activities; *karoti*: he does; *yaḥ sa*: he is; *sannyasi*: a (true) *sannyasi*; *ca*: and; *yogi*: a (true) *yogi*; *ca*: and; *na*: not; *nir-agnih*: one who does not have (contact with) fire; *na*: not; *ca*: and; *akriyah*: one who does not engage in duties.

The Lord said,

"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 dutiful activities."

The true *sannyasi* and the true *yogi* is one who selflessly performs all his/ her duties in society and all the suitable actions when they are required, without any attachment to the enjoyment of the fruits or results of his/ her activities.

One who refuses to perform the needed actions by claiming he is following the rules of renunciation is a fake. Similarly, one who dutifully performs, according to the fundamental principles of *dharma*, the appropriate ritual and social activities as required by

the time, place and circumstances, without being attached to the results or the identification as the author of the action, is the true *sannyasi* and the true *yogi*, not one who merely abstains from lighting the sacred fire and engaging in honest practical work.

This is another very famous verse, often partially quoted (especially the first part). We have already seen that *asritah* means "depending". A devotee depends on the Lord, not on the results of his own activities.

Sometimes *ashritah* is translated as "taking shelter", and *asraya* is translated as "shelter", but it is an expression that can be confusing. When we think of "shelter", we associate the idea with the image of a building where we will be protected from rain and wind, heat and cold, wild animals and other dangers.

However, this kind of shelter is only temporary, and we normally get out of it to go about doing our business. On the other hand, when one depends on someone or something, it is a permanent concern, to which all one's actions are subordinated.

The expression *karyam karma* refers to the dutiful actions, that a person is required to perform according to his position in society and family: the *brahmachari*, the *grihastha* and the *vanaprastha* are supposed to regularly perform the *homa* or fire sacrifice, and keep a sacred fire (*vaishnava agni*) from which the kitchen fires are lit.

No *homa*, no cooked food.

The expression *niragnih* indicates that persons engaged in renunciation from family and social life (*sannyasa*) do not keep a fire; they do not perform the fire sacrifice rituals because they do not have the financial means to support them, and they do not cook because they subsist on the food leftovers he obtains by begging alms from the homes of householders.

Usually such alms consist in food that has already been cooked, or that does not need to be cooked, like rice flakes (*chuda*), fruits, milk, etc.

The word *akriya* refers to someone who is not bound to perform any actions, rituals, work, etc, because he has no more responsibilities towards family and society, and has lost all desires to gain personal benefits, either for this lifetime or for the next.

Because he has renounced all plans and desires, and simply depends on God, he does not need to make separate efforts to acquire anything: *yas tv atma-ratir eva syad atma-triptas ca manavah, atmany eva ca santushtas tasya karyam na vidyate, naiva tasya kriterartho nakriterneha kascana, na casya sarva-bhuteshu kascid artha-vyapasrayah*, "A human being who loves the Self certainly becomes satisfied in the Self and peaceful within the Self: for such a person there is no need to perform any action. This person does not have any reason to abstain from activities, just like he does not have any reason to perform any duty. In this world he does not depend on any other for any purpose." (*Gita* 3.17, 18).

The *karya karma* mentioned in the verse are the *nitya karmas* that must be performed regularly, like the *homa* (fire sacrifice) and the occupational duties according to the *varnas*, as well as the *naimittika karmas* or the particular rituals and activities that are performed to obtain a particular religious purpose, like the birth of a son etc.

In the beginning of *Gita*, Arjuna had expressed the desire to renounce his position as a *kshatriya* and retire to the forest as a *sannyasi*: in the previous chapter Krishna has vividly illustrated the real practice and purpose of *sannyasa* to clarify all misconceptions, and here he concludes that there is no need for the externals of *sannyasa* in order to attain the ultimate purpose of life.

VERSE 2

यं संन्यासमिति प्राहुर्योगं तं विद्धि पाण्डव ।

yam sannyaśamiti prāhuryogaṁ taṁ viddhi pāṇḍava ।

न ह्यसंन्यस्तसङ्कल्पो योगी भवति कश्चन ॥ ६-२ ॥

na hyasannyastasaṅkalpo yogī bhavati kaścana ।। 6-2।।

yam: that (which is); *sannyasam*: *sannyasa*; *iti*: like this; *prahuh*: they say; *yogam*: *yoga*; *taṁ*: that (is); *viddhi*: you should know; *pandava*: O Arjuna (son of Pandu); *na*: not; *hi*: certainly; *asannyasta-sankalpah*: without giving up expectations; *yogi*: a *yogi*; *bhavati*: becomes; *kascana*: nobody.

"O son of Pandu (Arjuna), (you should) know that what is called *sannyasa* (renunciation) is actually *yoga*, because no one can ever become a *yogi* without giving up all expectations."

After establishing that there is actually no need to take the formal vows of *sannyasa* and retire from active life, and that *yoga* (Karma Yoga) is superior to Sannyasa Yoga, Krishna repeats that the only true renunciation consists in not depending on expectations. Such renunciation is not based on the lack of opportunities, because in that case renunciation disappears as soon as the opportunity for sense gratification arises. In other words, it is possible to distinguish a true *sannyasi* from an ordinary beggar that is under financial stricture, by observing his reactions when he is offered some money.

The expression *asannyasta-sankalpah* can mean "without giving up expectation" and also "without deciding to remain renounced", and "while remaining determined not to give up (attachment and material identification)".

This variety of meanings can be applied to the different degrees of determination by which a *sadhaka* is pursuing the practice of Yoga. In his *Yoga sutras*, Patanjali says in this regard: *drishthanushravika-vishaya vitrishnasya vashikara-sanjna vairagyam*, "Renunciation is the consciousness in which one steadily controls the thirst for the objects that are seen or heard" (1.15). And again: *tivra-samveganam asannah, mridu-madhyadhimatratvat tato 'pi visheshah*, "An intense desire will quickly take (the *sadhaka* to success), but (such desire for success in *yoga*) can be differently described as soft, medium or strong" (1.21, 22)

Vairagya is a synonym for *sannyasa*, and *sankalpa* is the act of determination or will power that gives permission to the mind, the intellect and senses to develop a desire for the sense objects.

The definition of *sankalpa* was also given in 4.19 as "determination" and will be repeated again in verses 6.4 and 24. A synonym is *arambhah*, that we find in verse 12.16 used in a very similar context.

VERSE 3

आरुरुक्षोमुनेर्योगं कर्म कारणमुच्यते ।

āruruṣṭormuneryogaṁ karma kāraṇamucyate ।

योगारूढस्य तस्यैव शमः कारणमुच्यते ॥ ६-३ ॥

yogārūḍhasya tasyaiva śamaḥ kāraṇamucyate ॥ 6-3 ॥

aruruṣṭoh: one who wants to climb up; *muneh*: the *muni*; *yogam*: *yoga*; *karma*: action/ duty; *karanam*: the means; *ucyate*: it is said; *yoga*: *yoga*; *arudhasya*: of one who has climbed up; *tasya*: of him;

eva: certainly; *samah*: equal disposition (to all types of activities); *karanam*: the means; *ucyate*: it is said.

"For a *muni* who has just begun the practice of *yoga*, activity is said to be the means. For one who has ascended the staircase of *yoga*, equanimity is said to be the means."

What is medicine for someone is often unhealthy for someone else who is in a different condition. In the beginning of the *yoga* practice, the mind and senses need constant engagement in beneficial activities to avoid sliding into inertia, callousness, neglect and laziness, and into the development of bad habits such as gossiping, etc.

On the other hand, a person who has developed the second nature of positive engagement through constant practice needs to turn one's attention to the inner activity, exploring the transcendental consciousness of the Self without being distracted by the external temporary circumstances.

Another meaning is that in the beginning of one's spiritual journey we need to have accumulated sufficient *punya*, or "good *karma*", because a person that is devoid of good merits will usually find lots of difficulties in the process of self-growth.

However, at a certain stage the good material merits take a back seat in comparison to the direct exploration of the inner Self, while insisting in engaging in materially meritorious activities can have the opposite and detrimental effect of distracting one's attention from the actual goal and reinforcing one's ego instead of overcoming it.

In this verse *yoga* is compared to a staircase that is gradually climbed in different stages of practice, and with different sets of rules. However, it is very interesting to notice that the beginner or neophyte in the practice of *yoga* is called a *muni*, "a silent sage".

One would tend to think that it is not possible to engage in activities while following the strict rules of the *sadhana* of silence. Therefore, we need to understand that such recommended activities are not ordinary work, and that the meditative silence is not the ordinary abstention from speech. A beginner that is starting to climb the staircase of *yoga* must concentrate on the specific *kriyas* or activities, given by the Teacher in order to train his consciousness in the proper way. Such *kriyas* are not merely physical exercises such as *asanas* or *mudras*, but include active engagement in the normal duties of life - to earn a livelihood and maintain one's body must also become an integral part of our *yoga* practice, and similarly our relationships with other people and circumstances must be strictly controlled under the category of engaging in activities.

Silence thus becomes a mental attitude more than merely restraining the speech. It means learning to shift one's attention from the endless opportunities of egotistic engagement and mind chattering, and rather focusing on the true purpose of life and the spiritual object of our meditation, even while we are engaged in apparently trivial occupations.

This training requires constant vigilance and an expert guidance. A Yoga Teacher is not simply someone who shows you how to bend and stretch your body or breathe in a deeper way - this would be a gym teacher only. A true Yoga Teacher has the responsibility to assist each student in the deep transformation of their lives and awareness, up to the point of liberation from all material identifications, attachments and conditionings: the cessation of all material activities. If he is unable to fulfill this role, he should not usurp the definition and content himself of being called physical trainer. The word *karanam* is translated as "means" or "cause", in the sense that it indicates the cause of success in that particular attempt as well as the motivation for embarking into it.

VERSE 4

यदा हि नेन्द्रियार्थेषु न कर्मस्वनुषज्जते ।

yadā hi nendriyārtheṣu na karmasvanuṣajjate ।

सर्वसङ्कल्पसंन्यासी योगारूढस्तदोच्यते ॥ ६-४ ॥

sarvasaṅkalpasannyāsī yogārūḍhastadocyate ॥ 6-4 ॥

yada: when; *hi*: certainly; *na*: not; *indriya-artheshu*: in the sense objects; *na*: not; *karmasu*: in the activities; *anushajjate*: engages/ is attached; *sarva-sankalpa*: all desires/ imagination/ intentions; *sannyasi*: one who has renounced; *yogarudhah*: on the top stairs of *yoga*/ established in *yoga*; *tada*: then; *ucyate*: he is said.

"Indeed, when one does not become attached to the objects of the senses or to the activities, and renounces all expectations, s/he is said to be advanced in *yoga*."

The gradual process of *yoga* is aimed at dissolving the bondage of ego, the identification with the material body and position, and even with the merits of good pious activities. Such pious activities are mainly performed with the purpose of obtaining some benefit - either the material benefit of attaining the heavenly planets, or the spiritual benefit of becoming able to actually engage in the spiritual journey. All these fall into the category of *sankalpa*, or "intention, expectation, purpose".

The performance of *karmas* and *kriyas* is essential in the first stages of human progress because without the sincere performance of one's duties and religious activities and rituals, a human being remains focused on the mere animal propensities, such as sense gratification, eating, sleeping, mating, taking care of family, getting a place in society, protecting oneself and one's kith and kin, accumulating wealth to provide for the future, playing and having

fun, and expressing artistic tendencies. All these activities are found in various degrees in animals and even in plants. So, what's the real difference between an animal and a human being? Religion.

Unfortunately, the idea of "religion" has become burdened with a lot of negative semantic luggage, especially connected with the oppressive nature of dogmatic and intolerant faiths that are aimed at controlling the people for political or otherwise material purposes, and are often cause of stupidity and ignorance, remarkable cruelty and unnecessary sufferings.

This is the reason why many people have become "allergic" to the very idea of religion, sometimes declaring themselves atheists or agnostics, or becoming followers of some other non-religious ideology such as materialism, scientism, communism, capitalism, nationalism, feminism, or "cultural manifestations" such as performing or figurative arts, music, literature and philosophical speculation, sports, gastronomy, pet care, sexual/ romantic experimentation, tourism, folklore, and so on.

Although such pursuits have nothing wrong or bad intrinsically, they do not constitute the actual purpose of human life, and when cultivated as the center of one's life and interest, they distract us from the very valuable opportunity that we have been offered: Self realization. The word "religion" comes from the Latin *religare*, "to connect, to unite", which is the very same meaning of the word "yoga". All the pursuits we have listed above come under the category of *sankalpa*, or "imaginative path to achieve happiness", but we cannot find true happiness unless we find our own Self and we connect with our deep, original and pure nature of *sat-cit-ananda*. This is the only pursuit that really distinguishes human beings from animals, and that offers the extremely valuable opportunity for liberation, of freedom from material conditionings.

No cultural manifestation or "way of life" can offer us such exceptional blessing: materialism, scientism, communism, capitalism, nationalism, feminism, performing or figurative arts, music, literature and philosophical speculation, sports, gastronomy, pet care, sexual/ romantic experimentation, tourism and folklore will simply give us a temporary satisfaction, but they will tie us to material identification and attachments, thus condemning us to the continuation of the cycle of birth and deaths. They can only become beneficial when they are harnessed into the proper direction, i.e. development of a sattvic mentality and life style, which in turn will lead us to awareness of our real nature and Self realization. They are simply means, while *yoga* is the end.

VERSE 5

उद्धरेदात्मनात्मानं नात्मानमवसादयेत् ।

uddharedātmanātmānaṁ nātmānamavasādayet ।

आत्मैव ह्यात्मनो बन्धुरात्मैव रिपुरात्मनः ॥ ६-५ ॥

ātmaiva hyātmano bandhurātmaiva ripurātmanaḥ ॥ 6-5 ॥

uddhared: one should save; *atmana*: by himself; *atmanam*: himself; *na*: not; *atmanam*: oneself; *avasadayet*: one should degrade; *atma*: oneself; *eva*: certainly; *hi*: indeed; *atmanah*: oneself; *bandhuh*: friend; *atma*: oneself/ one's mind; *eva*: certainly; *ripuh*: enemy; *atmanah*: oneself.

"One should raise him/ herself by his/her own effort, and not degrade him/ herself. Certainly one could be one's own friend or one's own enemy."

In this verse, as in most other contexts, the word *atman* can mean "oneself", "the sense of identification (ego)", "the mind" or even

"the soul". Each individual should be the best friend of him/herself. We need to learn to understand and know ourselves, to be loving and supporting with ourselves, to respect, appreciate and trust ourselves first - because whatever we are seeking in others is already within ourselves. If we do not like our selves, if we do not live happily with our own selves, it will be impossible to find sufficient validation, support and happiness in or from others.

When we become enemies of our own selves, life becomes extremely dangerous, degrading and even intolerably painful, because we can never leave our own company at any time. One can really become one's worst enemy, because of a mistaken sense of one's identity and an uncontrolled mind, and this will perpetuate suffering and imprisonment practically without end, and with incredible sufferings.

It is due to lack of self-esteem and self-acceptance, and distorted sense of guilt and self-punishment, that one becomes constantly negative and refuses to accept even legitimate good things that come his way - praise, encouragement, and happiness. The worst hell is within one's own mind. Even any other enemies that we may have are such only because we have made them enemies, consciously or unconsciously, directly or indirectly.

This verse highlights the great importance of the sense of responsibility and power over one's own life - what we could also call self-esteem, self-reliance, or self-empowerment.

Many confused people have come to believe that religion or spiritual life entails "abandoning" oneself to a higher power, in a sort of passive surrender in which one renounces all responsibilities and personal power, and always depends on someone else, delegating one's life and choices on others - usually seen as some "authority", especially "religious authority", "*guru*", or some imaginative projection they call "God" or "destiny".

This is not what Krishna is teaching. Spiritual progress cannot be delegated to anyone else: it is our personal responsibility only. When we choose a spiritual master, we must make a responsible choice, and we must make sure that the teachings of such master are genuine and beneficial. A *guru* may take responsibility to guide the disciple, and pay the consequences if he does not perform his duties properly, but ultimately each and every individual must make the effort for spiritual progress. At school, no student can learn passively without making any effort, or expect someone else to learn for him. Similarly, spiritual realization is a very personal journey, and each one of us needs to develop the proper knowledge, realizations, and good behavior.

The idea that one only needs to accept a *guru* or a "savior" in order to attain spiritual perfection, without making any personal effort to improve one's Self realization is a dangerous fantasy that might cost us the valuable opportunity of a human life.

VERSE 6

बन्धुरात्मात्मनस्तस्य येनात्मैवात्मना जितः ।

bandhurātmātmanastasya yenātmaivātmanā jitah ।

अनात्मनस्तु शत्रुत्वे वर्तेतात्मैव शत्रुवत् ॥ ६-६ ॥

anātmanastu śatrutve vartetātmaiva śatruvat ॥ 6-6 ॥

bandhuh: friend; *atma*: oneself; *atmanah*: of oneself; *tasya*: of him; *yena*: by him; *atma*: oneself; *eva*: certainly; *atmana*: by oneself; *jitah*: conquered; *anatmanah*: one who has not (conquered) oneself; *tu*: but; *satrutve*: out of enmity; *varteta*: behaves/ acts; *atma*: oneself; *eva*: certainly; *satru-vat*: like an enemy.

"One is his/ her own friend when s/he has conquered oneself, but one who is not self-controlled behaves as his own enemy."

The purpose of controlling one's identification is to improve oneself and cultivate the best qualities and habits, not to torture and deprive oneself of legitimate happiness and peace.

When we speak about the difference between friend and enemy, the most important factor is considering whether the behavior of the person is favorable or unfavorable towards us. Therefore we recognize a friend because he is helping us to progress in life, supporting us in difficult times, offering good advice and gifts, inspiration and encouragement, and good company. The problem with whimsical material identification and an untrained mind is that they demand our allegiance and service even to our risk and detriment, without caring for our real benefit, and even remaining callous to our sufferings. However, when we have overcome material identification and trained our mind properly, we can organize, integrate and harmonize our assets and utilize them for our material and spiritual progress. Thus we behave as our best friend.

The concept of *jitah*, "conquered", implies that one who conquers should know what he has conquered and should be able to use it properly. It is a positive conquest, much like conquering the heart of someone and developing a loving relationship. It should not be a hostile takeover, an oppressive colonialist or totalitarian regime - rather, it should be the benevolent government of a virtuous, just and affectionate king that considers his subjects as his beloved *prajas*, or children.

We should never forget that we are supposed to make friends with oneself, that is with one's mind. In this process, we cannot ignore the power of one's subconscious mind. Our conscious mind is only a small part of the totality of our identification - some have

calculated that it is not more than 10% of our entire subtle body. Just like an iceberg is submerged for the greatest part of its mass, and only the tip is visible above the water, similarly our subconscious mind remains submerged under the waters of awareness, but it constitutes the largest part of our identification, including all the memories of our past lifetimes.

On the physical level, it is common knowledge that only a small percentage of the brain is generally used in ordinary life, while 70% up to 85% of the brain remains inactive in most people.

Vedic knowledge, and especially the scientific texts of *yoga* teach that the human mind is actually capable of doing extraordinary things, when properly trained - including manipulating the structure of matter and traveling through space and time.

The "self" that we need to conquer and harmonize includes the body and the senses, the "lower self" that constitutes a valuable vehicle and instrument for our material and spiritual progress.

Mind, senses and body can be compared to a tiger that we can ride, but only after having tamed her and made her into a good friend. This requires great care and balance.

As Krishna already explained, we need to keep the tiger reasonably fed and rested, and in good spirits. We cannot hope for success in such a difficult and dangerous enterprise if we starve the tiger or torment her denying her the proper rest and other basic necessities. Verses 6.16 and 17 say, "O Arjuna, *yoga* is not (possible) for one who eats too much or does not eat at all, or for one who sleeps too much or does not sleep at all. For one who consciously controls his food intake, who is balanced in moving around, who makes controlled efforts in working/ performing one's duties, and is regulated in sleeping/ dreaming and keeping vigil, *yoga* becomes the destroyer of sufferings."

VERSE 7

जितात्मनः प्रशान्तस्य परमात्मा समाहितः ।

jītātmanah praśāntasya paramātmā samāhitah ।

शीतोष्णसुखदुःखेषु तथा मानापमानयोः ॥ ६-७ ॥

śītoṣṇasukhaduḥkheṣu tathā mānāpamānayoḥ ॥ 6-7 ॥

jita-atmanah: one who has conquered himself; *prasantasya*: one who is peaceful; *parama-atma*: the Supreme Self; *samahitah*: has become manifest; *sita-ushna*: cold and heat; *sukha-duhkeshu*: in happiness and distress; *tatha*: as well as; *mana*: in being respected; *apamanayoh*: in being disrespected.

"The Paramatma/ Supreme Self manifests in/ is accessible to one who has controlled himself and has attained peace/ is contented in heat and cold, in happiness and in distress, and in honor/ adoration and dishonor/ spite as well."

The first part of *Bhagavad gita* (chapters 2 to 4) focused on the realization of Brahman - telling the difference between matter and spirit, realizing the *jiva*'s eternal spiritual nature, the transcendental knowledge of Atman/ Brahman, and the renunciation to material identification and attachments. In chapter 6 we move from the realization of Brahman to the realization of Paramatma, that will be explored at length in chapters 6 to 11, with a growing emphasis on *bhakti*. Chapters 12 to 18 will focus on the realization of Bhagavan and the development of a personal relationship between the devotee and the Lord.

Continuing the conversation thread from the previous verses, Krishna tells Arjuna that a *yogi* is peaceful and happy because he turns his attention to the inner Self and is detached from external concerns and dualities. The problem of dualistic mentality will be elaborated all along the *Gita* as a cause of confusion and

disturbance that could distract the *yogi* from his meditation on the Supreme Transcendental Reality.

Such feeling of duality is due to the limited perception of the senses and the mind, that try to come to terms with the constant transformation of the material world. Just like the cycle of seasons brings heat and cold, the maturation of the seeds of our past choices and actions brings temporary joys and sufferings (5.22) that are due to the contact of the senses with the sense objects: "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."

At the very beginning of Krishna's teachings to Arjuna (2.14) we found a very similar verse: "O son of Kunti, the contact of the senses (with the sense objects) causes joy and distress just like (cold in) winter and (heat in) summer. Such feelings are temporary: they come and go, o descendant of Bharata, and you should just try to tolerate them (without being confused and distracted from your duty)." Also in 2.38 the same concept was reinforced: "If you fight this battle while remaining equally disposed (unattached and prepared) to joy and sadness, gain and loss, victory and defeat, you will never be touched by sin."

VERSE 8

ज्ञानविज्ञानतृप्तात्मा कूटस्थो विजितेन्द्रियः ।

jñānavijñānatṛptātmā kūṭastho vijitendriyaḥ ।

युक्त इत्युच्यते योगी समलोष्टाश्मकाञ्चनः ॥ ६-८ ॥

yukta ityucyate yogī samaloṣṭāśmakāñcanaḥ ॥ 6-8 ॥

jnana: knowledge; *vijnana*: wisdom (applied knowledge); *tripta*: satisfied; *atma*: oneself; *kuta-sthah*: one who is firmly situated; *vijita-indriyah*: one who has conquered the senses; *yuktah*: engaged (in *yoga*); *iti*: like this; *ucyate*: it is said; *yogi*: a *yogi*; *sama*: equally; *loshtra*: a lump of soil; *asma*: stone; *kancanah*: gold.

"A person who finds satisfaction in the theory and practice of knowledge remains stable and unmoved (because) s/he has controlled his/ her senses. This person is connected (with the Supreme) and is called a *yogi*. S/he is impartial to clay, stone and gold."

The definitions *jnana* and *vijnana* refer to theoretical and practical/applied knowledge respectively. As we have already seen, mere theory is not really going to help much. We need to individually develop the actual realization of knowledge and experience it in practice, making it an integral part of our own life and mentality.

This direct realization of knowledge remains undisturbed in the various circumstances of life, because it gives greater satisfaction than the ordinary material sense gratification.

The pleasure we find within the Self (5.24, *antah sukhah, antah aramah*, 5. 21, *vindati atmani yat sukham*) is the supreme pleasure described in 2.59 (*param drstva*) by which we become able to give up the temporary and limited joys of the material world.

A peaceful and satisfied mind has no reason to run here and there after the *vriddhis*, the modifications of the thoughts, emotions and desires, and therefore remains stable (*kuta-stha*) in Knowledge.

This stability in Knowledge has been described as *acalah* (not moving) in verse 2.53, *sthita dhiih* (firm meditation) in 2.56, and *prajna pratishthita* (established in wisdom) in 2.57, 58, 61.

Such stability is been compared (6.19) to a flame that is not disturbed by the wind, also described as *nirvana* ("without wind") in 5.24, 25, 26 and 6.15 (*sa yogi brahma nirvanam, labhante brahma nirvanam, abhito brahma nirvanam, santim nirvana paramam*). Another synonym of the word *nirvana* is *nirvikalpa samadhi*.

This stability of the transcendental consciousness in detachment from material activities and dualities is also described in other verses, such as: *brahma bhuta prasannatma* (18.54), *nirdvandvo hi maha baho* (5.3), *sarva karmani manasa sannyasya* (5.13), *na kartritvam na karmani* (5.14), *nirdosam hi samam brahma* (5.19), *sthira buddhir asamudho* (5.20), *sa brahma yoga yuktatma* (5.21), *vigateccha bhaya krodho* (5.28), *iccha dvesa samutthena* (7.27), *te dvandva moha nirmukta* (7.28), *visanti yad yatayo vita ragah* (8.11), *iccha dvesah sukham duhkham* (13.7).

The most famous definition of Yoga in Patanjali's *Yoga sutras* is "the cessation of the fluctuations of the mind": *yogah citta-vritti-nirodhah*, by which the perception is established in its true *svarupa* (inherent form): *tada drastuh svarupe avasthanam*.

It is not easy to understand this transcendental consciousness, because the people who are accustomed to thinking in material terms tend to confuse it with the tamasic or ignorant indifference or the rajasic selfish cynicism. Impartiality to clay, stone and gold means that each and every thing should be engaged properly in *yoga* without prejudice - just like verse 5.18 explained that every person/ living being should be engaged properly without prejudice: "The *panditas* (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."

In this regard, it is important to notice that the Deities of the Godhead can be sculpted either in clay, stone or gold, and the

results of the worship of the Deity will be the same, irrespective of the material in which the *vigraha* was fashioned.

Only a foolish and ignorant materialist will give more value to a divine *vigraha* made of gold than to a divine *vigraha* made of stone or clay.

Sometimes we see that artisans tend to put more effort and care in working with expensive materials - such as gold or rare wood - and they do not give any attention when they work with inexpensive and readily available materials such as clay or bamboo, but this betrays a self-defeating mentality that is afflicted with laziness, spite and foolishness.

What really matters is the use that we make of things, the effort by which we perform our duties - no matter how humble - in the best possible way. This will really make us perfect persons.

VERSE 9

सुहृन्मित्रार्युदासीनमध्यस्थद्वेष्यबन्धुषु ।

suhṛṇmitrāryudāsīnamadhyasthadveṣyabandhuṣu ।

साधुष्वपि च पापेषु समबुद्धिर्विशिष्यते ॥ ६-९ ॥

sādhuṣvapi ca pāpeṣu samabuddhirviśiṣyate ॥ 6-9 ॥

su-hrit: well wishers; *mitra*: friends; *ari*: enemies; *udasina*: neutral people; *madhya-stha*: intermediaries/ mediators; *dveshya*: the envious/ hateful; *bandhushu*: the relatives; *sadhushu*: to the good people; *api*: even; *ca*: and; *papeshu*: to the bad people; *sama*: equal; *buddhih*: intelligence; *visishyate*: he is the best.

"The highest (*yogi*) is one who is impartial/ unprejudiced towards a benefactor, a friend, an enemy, a neutral person, a mediator, an envious person, a relative, a good person and a sinner."

Just like we should be able to remain equally friendly towards a gentle and learned *brahmana*, a cow, an elephant, a dog and a dog-eater, and to recognize the proper value of clay, stone and gold, we should become able to look beyond the temporary confusion and illusion of those who see the world and others in terms of duality.

A person who is deluded by *maya*, or "that which is not (what it seems)", evaluates people in terms of the pleasures and displeasures he can obtain from them, and therefore creates the concept of friends and enemies. Such concept is illusory because it is temporary and it relates only to the material identifications and attachments. This does not mean that friendliness and enmity are non-existent. Duality and illusion actually exist and have an effect on our activities: they produce results and in turn such results bring joys and sorrows, creating the circumstances in which a deluded person makes more materially-oriented choices and perpetuating the cycle of birth and deaths.

Sometimes the word *maya* is translated as "that which is not", and this translation conveys the idea of a mere projection of images that has no substance and effects. For example, a mirage in the desert shows us the presence of water where in fact there is none - it is simply the movement of hot air that trembles and reflects the light imitating the movement and reflection of a water surface. There is no moisture in that place.

However, the actions and the identifications of human beings actually create consequences, albeit temporary - we can compare them to a cloud, that collects humidity from the land and the water reservoirs and then precipitates it in the form of rain.

After a rain shower, the clouds disappear and therefore we can say that their existence was illusory, but the rainfall reaches the soil and imbibes it, stimulating the growth of vegetation, which in turn will feed the animals and the human beings.

Similarly, the Atman is the real person or Self in all the people we see and meet. The Atman has no friends or enemies, relatives or position in society, and is never touched by material relationships. In one lifetime, two people can be sworn enemies and in a next lifetime they can become friends, lovers or siblings or family members - in fact this is usually the system by which they can learn to understand the reality of life.

Life is a school where we are supposed to learn about how to progress and become perfect persons, and the most difficult lessons concern personal relationships. A negative relationship with someone is a test for us to develop good qualities and realizations, and become detached, compassionate and benevolent towards all - because all living beings are merely parts and parcels of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. This gradual evolution of the consciousness through the Knowledge of *yoga* takes us from the platform called *kanistha adhikari* (neophyte worshiper), on which we are still plagued by duality, material identifications and attachments, to the platform called *madhyama adhikari* (intermediate worshiper), on which we become able to recognize the intentions and behaviors of people, using our intelligence to serve the divine mission.

Beyond this level, a Self realized *yogi* who is firmly established in the transcendental vision is able to see the eternal *atman*, and understands that enmity and affection are temporary circumstances. Thus the *uttama adhikari* (advanced worshiper) is able to tolerate and forgive more easily, and remains always free from resentments - that are also attachments, albeit in a negative mode.

Of course, this does not mean that he is stupid or that he likes to be cheated or attacked or mistreated. An *uttama adhikari* is not a masochist dedicated to martyrdom; he will not choose to remain exposed to mistreatment but will take the proper distance from ill-motivated people, as soon as he has verified what the real situation is. He may offer opportunities, because he wants to help people to improve themselves, but such windows of opportunities will not remain open forever and without conditions. Also, he will forgive, but not forget, because forgetting is an act of ignorance that would expose him to more unnecessary sufferings and damages.

He will concentrate his awareness on positive thinking and proactive choices, all focused on the true value of life and action - that is the sacred offering in service of the Supreme - without wasting his time and energy in brooding or blaming, but he will not delude himself into thinking that a venomous scorpion can become a good room-mate, if only you are nice to him. Feeding snakes with milk and bananas only increases their poison.

It is interesting to study the specific meaning of the various definitions offered by Krishna in this verse about the behaviors and intentions of people.

The expression *su hrit* means "having good heart" (i.e. sentiments) towards someone. It is often translated as "well wisher", but such translation is not exactly precise.

The word *mitra*, "friend", indicates affection, companionship and a feeling of positive relationship. This sentiment is the recommended attitude towards all living beings - that are *jivatmas* on the very same journey we are going through.

The expression *madhya stha* refers to someone who takes a position in the middle, who would like to bring peace and harmony between factions.

This sentiment or attitude is possible only when one has become detached from his own personal identifications and attachments, and can see and act in a selfless way.

When influenced by *tamas* or *rajas* rather than by *sattva*, this attitude can be a blind and foolish stubbornness that refuses to take sides out of a wrong notion of "impartiality" that chooses to ignore the consequences of bad actions, or by the fear of retaliation from the "bad guys" or by the attachment if the "bad guys" happen to be their family members or friends or allies.

However, these neutral people should know that refusing to take the proper action in defense of *dharma* is also an action that will bring them consequences.

The word *bandhu* means "relative", or "kith and kin" - in other words, it indicates a person that has some natural ties with us due to attachment or affinity.

It generally applies to family members and clan members, either by birth or by adoption or marriage.

In this sense it is particularly appropriate when kindly referring to those unqualified people who have taken birth in a good family, such as the *brahma bandhus* or *kshatra bandhus*, "relatives" of *brahmanas* or *kshatriyas*.

The two words used to indicate hostile persons are *ari* (one who stabs you in the back) and *dvesyah* (one who is openly hateful).

A Self realized *yogi* is not blind or stupid, and can see the true character of a person, just like he is able to recognize a scorpion, but he is not interested in investing energy or time into hatred and resentment.

VERSE 10

योगी युञ्जीत सततमात्मानं रहसि स्थितः ।

yogī yuñjīta satatamātmānaṁ rahasi sthitaḥ ।

एकाकी यतचित्तात्मा निराशीरपरिग्रहः ॥ ६-१० ॥

ekākī yatacittātmā nirāśīraparigrahaḥ ॥ 6-10 ॥

yogi: the *yogi*; *yunjita*: should engage (in *sadhana*); *satatam*: constantly; *atmanam*: on the Atman; *rahasi*: in a secluded /isolated place; *sthitah*: settling/ staying; *ekaki*: alone; *yata*: controlled; *citta-atma*: the consciousness of the self; *nirasih*: without desiring anything; *aparigrahaḥ*: without possessing anything.

"A *yogi* should constantly practice (meditation) on the Self by living alone in a secluded place, carefully keeping the mind and the consciousness under control, free from expectations and from attachments (to material acquisitions)."

The previous verses clearly stated that the perfection of *yoga* is about overcoming the temporary and superficial vision based on material identifications and attachments that present a dualistic evaluation - friend or enemy, good or bad, dirt or gold. True, the realized *yogi* is equally benevolent towards those who are good people and those who are bad people, but he prefers to avoid all of them. He likes to stay in the company of the Atman only.

Krishna stresses the fact that one can remain in such a transcendental vision only by living alone in a secluded place, giving up all sense of exclusive belonging and association. This point is not easy to understand and to accept, because the conditioned mind needs support and nurturing from friends, and protection from enemies.

When an ordinary person thinks about living alone, without identification or attachment or association, his mind is attacked by the fear of loneliness and abandonment. A non-evolved person constantly needs the validation and reassurance supplied by the "clan" to which he belongs, and the noise of the crowd that gives him a pretext not to listen to his own conscience. Most ordinary people are terrorized by silence and solitude, because they cannot bear facing the emptiness and dissatisfaction of a materialistic life.

Rajasic or passionate people live in large cities just like ants and bees live in large colonies, preoccupied only by the animal requirements for survival and pleasure, by the instinct of accumulating, building, keeping themselves busy and having fun.

Life in a metropolis is a constant battle, and street-savvy city people soon learn to fight to survive - to get a good seat on a crowded bus, to avoid being run down by speeding taxis and other vehicles while crossing chaotic roads, to get the best bargain on the market or in the mall, to secure the best and most lucrative and prestigious job, to avoid areas infested by muggers and drug addicts, to elude corrupt and aggressive policemen, and so on.

Starting from the earliest childhood, a "city boy" (or girl) learns how to defend himself and survive in the asphalt jungle, and such skills are often sustained by the consumption of stimulants such as coffee or tea or stronger drugs, that give the "extra edge" to remain ahead of the others in the rat race. As they are over-excited by passion, city people also feel the need to consume substances that help them relax and sleep, from harmless herbal teas to strong liquors or Valium or other legal or illegal drugs. All this exacts a heavy toll on the body and mind of city folks, and creates a lot of sufferings and numbness.

A sattvic person may prefer to live in a quiet place, away from the disturbance of ignorant and noisy people, and choose a residence

in a natural environment decorated by nice and useful trees and plants, reservoirs of clear water, and the pleasurable chirping of the birds. He likes spacious, well lit and well aerated houses, preferably with gardens of sweet-scented flowers, where he can enjoy life in a civilized way together with his family and friends.

However, *Gita* teaches that attachment to *sattva* binds the human being to material happiness through material conditions and arrangements, and therefore to rebirth in the material world. The level of *suddha sattva* does not depend on external circumstances but focuses on the inexhaustible inner happiness of the true Self, and therefore the *yogi* prefers to live alone, in order to avoid all negative and even positive disturbances to his deep meditation. When living alone, one only needs to be concerned about one's own mind, while when living among others, one needs to be always wary of the minds of others as well.

Ekaki, or "living alone", is an important rule in the practice of *yoga* that will be repeated again in *Gita* (13.11, 18.52). When a particular instruction is repeated three times, it is considered an extremely important point.

This will come as a surprise to many people, who believe that *ashramas* and *mathas* are the ideal places to practice *yoga*, or even the "only possible/ authorized" places, and that *yoga* cannot be legitimately practiced anywhere else.

In fact, the "gregarious" practice of *yoga* tends to lose its original purpose and meaning, and to shift the focus towards the "pecking order" in the chicken pen - establishing the social position and influence, or political power of each individual within the Institution or group, and to the constant comparison between one's own "performance" and the performance of other inmates that live or practice in the same group. Thus the entire situation becomes a farce, a mockery of the actual genuine spiritual life.

Granted, in Kali yuga the genuine practice of *yoga* is not easy, as Arjuna himself will declare in the next verses (6.33, 34). Living alone and without the support and protection of like-minded people requires a tremendous control of one's mind, that is almost impossible to attain for an ordinary person and sometimes even for advanced spiritualists.

We should remember that this practice of Kriya Yoga or Dhyana Yoga is the path chosen by a *sannyasi* that is preparing to leave his body and therefore retires into the forest to perform austerities. Going to live into the forest means living alone, without the benefits of the support and protection and supplies that we can get in urban or semi-urban settlements.

Krishna has stated at the beginning of the chapter (6.1) that the true Sannyasi and the true Yogi does not need to stick to the external trappings and rules of the description, but is characterized by the genuine renunciation that comes from the dissolution of material identifications and attachments. We can apply the same principle here. In this overcrowded world, where the demographic explosion is gradually turning forests into cities and there are hardly any isolated places any more, we can attain genuine solitude within ourselves, by dissolving our identifications and attachments to family, clan, community, nationality, and so on.

VERSE 11

शुचौ देशे प्रतिष्ठाप्य स्थिरमासनमात्मनः ।

śucau deśe pratiṣṭhāpya sthīramāsanamātmanah ।

नात्युच्छ्रितं नातिनीचं चैलाजिनकुशोत्तरम् ॥ ६-११ ॥

nātyucchritaṁ nātinīcaṁ cailājīnakuśottaram ॥ 6-11 ॥

sucau: in a clean; *dese*: place/ land; *pratishthapya*: settling; *sthiram*: permanently/ firmly; *asanam*: sitting place/ residence; *atmanah*: oneself; *na ati*: not too much; *ucchritam*: elevated/ high; *na ati*: not too much; *nicam*: low/ under; *caila*: soft cloth; *ajina*: (deer) skin; *kusa*: *kusa* grass/ straw; *uttaram*: on top.

"Having established his/ her residence in a clean/ pure place, s/he should settle firmly on a seat that is neither too high nor too low, with (layers) of cloth, deerskin and *kusa* grass."

Sucau dese means "pure place" and applies to the environment, that must be clean and pure, characterized at least by *sattva guna*, if not by *suddha sattva*. It is extremely difficult to practice *yoga* among neighbors who are dirty (physically and/ or mentally) and/ or in a country where the government does not value purity and cleanliness.

Big cities are not a very congenial place to practice *yoga* because they are necessarily dirty because of the dust, smoke, garbage and sewage produced by the daily activities aimed at physical survival.

People must eat and therefore they must use toilets. The drainage from such toilets is also accompanied by the dirty water used for cleaning bodies, clothes, cooking pots, floors, streets, commercial and industrial places etc. The simple act of walking around or traveling in vehicles raises dust and circulates various kinds of pollutants and contaminants that end in the streets - such the droppings and other bodily excretions of animals of all kinds, from birds to rats, if not of larger animals. Cooking and eliminating biodegradable garbage - such as vegetable peels, rotten or dry leaves, etc - also creates fumes, smoke and dust, and non-biodegradable garbage becomes even more persistent and noxious when we try to eliminate it. However, the production of all this garbage is inevitable and becomes more and more overwhelming when the density of the population increases.

We can certainly improve the situation by applying wise policies, such as recycling and purification installations, an effective garbage disposal service, proper plumbing, de-centralization etc, but the mere number of people in any city presents a serious challenge to the purity of the place. The need for cleanliness also applies to subtler factors, such as noise pollution (very loud noise), visual pollution (unpleasant views), and electro-magnetic pollution (excessive radiation from electrical and electronic devices and transmission lines).

Social pollution consists of the presence of bad people, who have a materialistic, lusty, hostile, greedy and/ or criminally inclined mentality, that creates a negative feeling in the neighborhood. Such negative mentality also manifests in the form of prejudice, self-righteousness, arrogance, selfishness, excessive curiosity and interfering tendencies, and even other manifestations that sometimes are mistakenly considered symptoms of a "good neighborhood".

All these forms of pollution depend in great measure on the type of government and civil administration of the area, as the general mass of people naturally follow the example established by the leaders (3.21). Usually in a degraded place, the government people are the most corrupt of all.

A clean and pure place is where our mind can easily find peace and contentment, without feeling constantly threatened.

Sacred places or places of pilgrimage are naturally surcharged with positive feelings and energy, because the people living or traveling there are inclined to a spiritual consciousness and benevolence towards all living beings.

They are always graced by sacred rivers or large reservoirs that ensure sufficient clean water for the purification of the body and

the mind, and usually by forests or groves where a *yogi* can find some peaceful solitude for meditation. This is why the stage of life where one leaves home and family to travel to holy places is called *vanaprastha*.

This verse recommends that the *asana* should be comfortable and safe, so that the body will not distract us with any disturbing sensation.

Again, we need to understand that the physical exercises of *yoga* are meant to train the body to become as inactive as possible, so that we can focus our meditation on Transcendence, which is the true purpose of *yoga*. The place where we are sitting should be firm and stout, so that there will be no danger of tottering or falling down. If it is too high or too low, we will also be distracted.

In another sense, this can also refer to one's self-perception, meaning that we need to remain balanced and sober and not think of ourselves as too good or too bad, too high or too low, since the word *asana* has several meanings, including "position", "place" or "residence", although the primary meaning indicates the sitting place and the body posture.

The animal skin mentioned in *Gita* and shown in traditional iconography of Yogeshvara Mahadeva, for example, has the purpose to keep insects and snakes away.

Such skin can be obtained from any sizeable animal - deer, tiger, lion etc - that died naturally in the forest or was killed by *kshatriyas* during hunting expeditions.

A *yogi* does not need to kill anyone. An active *kshatriya* goes hunting for the purpose of controlling the population of dangerous wild animals that might attack people and damage the crops.

VERSE 12

तत्रैकाग्रं मनः कृत्वा यतचित्तेन्द्रियक्रियः ।

tatraikāgram manah kṛtvā yatacittendriyakriyah ।

उपविश्यासने युञ्ज्याद्योगमात्मविशुद्धये ॥ ६-१२ ॥

upaviśyāsane yuñjyādyogamātmaviśuddhaye ।। 6-12।।

tatra: there; *eka-agram*: strongly focusing one's attention; *manah*: the mind; *kṛtvā*: making; *yata-citta-indriya-kriyah*: practicing renunciation in one's consciousness, senses and activities/controlling the activities of the consciousness and the senses; *upaviśya*: sitting; *asane*: in the residence/ seat/ in the body posture; *yuñjyat*: one should engage; *yogam*: in *yoga*; *atma-visuddhaye*: for the purification of oneself.

“Sitting there, s/he should carefully focus her/ his mind on the practices required for the control of the consciousness, engaging in *yoga* for the purification of the self.”

Again, the true purpose of *yoga* is stated very clearly in this verse: the practice of *yoga* must be performed with the sole aim of purifying oneself from the contamination of material identification and attachments, through the control of the consciousness, the mind and the senses. Not once in *Gita* or in the genuine *yoga* literature it is said that *yoga* has the purpose of relaxing the mind or to acquire health or physical well-being.

The practices required to control the mind and focus it on the meditation on the Supreme can be chosen according to the capabilities of the *sadhaka*. There is not one practice "one size fits all". Just as each *sadhaka* will feel attracted to a particular form of the Supreme - called *ista deva* or "desired (form of) God" - there

are also specific practices that are most suitable for the particular situation, inclination and inspiration of each *sadhaka*.

The expression *eka-agram* clearly indicates that we must forget all other concerns and purposes (*sankalpa*, 4.19, 6.3) and abstain from all other activities. The degree of concentration of our mind will determine the swiftness and ease by which we will attain the desires result in *yoga*. Actually, if we want to get any good result, *yoga* must be a full-time occupation.

In 2.41 Krishna had already warned that one should not try to think about too many things at once, because concentration will become dispersed. This especially applies to spiritual *sadhana*: we should concentrate on one *mantra* at a time, on one *ista-deva* at the time, on one *rasa* or devotional sentiment at a time.

Sometimes people are afraid of neglecting some form of Godhead in favor of another, so they fill their home altars with dozens of Deities, they chant *japa* with many different *mantras*, read different *shastras* and recite different *stutis* to different Personalities of Godhead. This is not bad in itself, but the danger is to disperse one's attention and devotion by diluting them into a rather superficial homage, without actually developing a true attraction or personal relationship with any form of the Godhead.

This is why Adi Shankara sang, *ekam sastram devaki-putra-gitam, eko devo devaki-putra eva, eko mantras tasya namani yani, karmapy ekam tasya devasya seva* - "Let there be one scripture (for all): the *Gita* of Krishna (the son of Devaki); let there be one Lord (for all): Krishna (the son of Devaki); let there be one *mantra* (for all): his (many) names; let there be one duty (for all): service to him."

Probably the most universally popular form of the Lord is Jagannatha - that appears accompanied by Balabhadra, Subhadra

and Sudarshana. This form manifests the main aspects of the Godhead - Vishnu/ Krishna, Shiva and the Mother Goddess - and therefore is called the "Lord of everyone", because everyone is happy to worship Jagannatha.

According to one's personal inclination, one can worship other forms or Personalities of the Godhead, even in different periods of one's lifetime, and there is no contradiction because all forms are ultimately One. As Krishna will explain in 9.23, all the various forms of *ista devatas* are actually different manifestations of Krishna, and not opposite or competitive Gods.

To avoid the dangers of sectarianism, Adi Shankara Acharya preached that everyone should respectfully meditate on the five main forms of the Godhead - Vishnu, Shiva, Durga, Surya and Ganesha - keeping in mind that they are all strictly connected to each other.

Vishnu or Narayana is the transcendental Parama Purusha that exists eternally beyond the cycles of manifestation of the material universes. Shiva is Vishnu when he descends into the material world to interact with Mother Nature. Surya is the manifestation of Vishnu/ Shiva that is visible before the eyes of everyone in this world.

Adi Shakti, the Mother Goddess, takes various forms, names and activities for different purposes, and she is known respectively as Durga, Mahalakshmi, Mahasarasvati, Mahakali, Gayatri, Lalita, Lakshmi, Sarasvati, Kali, Chandi, Parvati, Bhairavi, Annapurna, Matangi, Bhumi, Siddhi, Santoshi, Sita, Radha, etc.

Ganesha is the son of Shiva and Parvati, the "son of God" that represents the progress that develops from divine intervention in the world, and therefore he is remembered at the beginning of all activities, to remove the obstacles and bring auspiciousness.

This *pancha devata puja*, however, does not require a person to perform the same worship for all these forms of the Godhead; it is rather a dutiful act of paying respect to these great Personalities before engaging in the worship and service to one's *ista devata*. Thus there is no contradiction between the prescription of *pancha devata puja* and the exclusive devotion to Krishna shown by Adi Shankara in his famous verses: in fact, this is the true form of exclusive devotion to Krishna, because it is free from foolish offenses as it does not disrespect the other Personalities of Godhead.

VERSE 13

समं कायशिरोग्रीवं धारयन्नचलं स्थिरः ।

samaṁ kāyaśirogrīvaṁ dhārayannacalaṁ sthiraḥ ।

सम्प्रेक्ष्य नासिकाग्रं स्वं दिशश्चानवलोकयन् ॥ ६-१३ ॥

samprekṣya nāsikāgraṁ svaṁ diśaścānavalokayan ॥ 6-13 ॥

samam: equally balanced/ straight/on the same line; *kaya*: the torso of the body; *siro*: the head; *grivam*: the neck; *dharayan*: keeping; *acalam*: without moving; *sthirah*: firmly; *samprekshya*: looking/fixing the eyes; *nasika-agram*: in front of the nose; *svam*: one's own; *disah*: (all) directions; *ca*: and; *anavalokayan*: not looking (here and there).

"Keeping the body, the head and the neck in a straight line, one should remain still, focusing one's attention in front of one's nose, without looking in any (other) direction."

The expression *nasikagram* does not suggest that one should twist one's eyes to try to see the tip of one's own nose or even the root of

one's nose, but simply that one should avoid looking around or even watching anything that moves. The gaze should remain fixed just in front of us, either on the form that is the object of our meditation (such as a *yantra*, a *murti*, etc) or by turning our attention towards the inner contemplation.

The sense of sight/ vision is a very restless instrument, and tends to jump here and there, pulling the mind behind it. If you notice, very few people have a straight gaze: most people tend to move their eyes a lot, and this usually indicates a very short attention span. By unfocusing one's gaze, the attention is removed from the contemplation of the external objects and of anything that may happen in front of oneself. This is another description of the practice called *pratyahara*, "withdrawing the senses from the sense objects".

Keeping head, neck and back in a straight line helps the circulation of energy within the body, easing the breathing, balancing the weight of the head and avoiding excessive strain on the spine and other bones and muscles. This enables the *sadhaka* to remain still for a longer time without feeling discomfort.

Sitting in the *padmasana* ("lotus position") or *sukhasana* ("easy position") is the best choice for meditation, but if for some reason sitting up is problematic, one may also choose the *savasana* ("corpse position") that simply consists in lying down on the back, supported by a level surface that can keep head, neck and back on a straight line.

In fact, this position is excellent to keep the entire body on a straight line, as mentioned in the verse. When we sit, only the torso can remain straight, while the legs and arms are necessarily bent at some degree. For a beginner or for a person who has physical problems this may slow the process of meditation because it is still a relative unstable position and the weight of the body parts can

create a tension. However, when we are lying down in the *savasana*, gravity works in our favor, anchoring all our body parts to the ground, making relaxation easier. This position is particularly useful for astral traveling, or "out-of-body-experiences".

The word *achalam*, "without moving", is important because one can overcome the feeling of bodily identification more easily when the body is not attracting any attention from the mind. Bodily movements are distracting the mind as much as the feelings of discomfort, therefore they must be stopped. Ultimately, the *atman* consciousness must become easily detached from the bodily consciousness so that the *sadhaka* experiences the real nature of the Self.

VERSE 14

प्रशान्तात्मा विगतभीर्ब्रह्मचारिव्रते स्थितः ।

praśāntātmā vigatabhīrbrahmacārivrate sthitah ।

मनः संयम्य मच्चित्तो युक्त आसीत् मत्परः ॥ ६-१४ ॥

manah saṁyamya maccitto yukta āsita matparaḥ ।। 6-14।।

prasanta-atma: satisfied in oneself/ in the *atman*; *vigata*: gone; *bhīh*: fear; *brahmachari-vrate*: in the vow of *brahmacharya*; *sthitah*: firmly; *manah*: the mind; *samyamya*: controlling/ conquering; *mat-cittah*: the consciousness focused on me; *yuktah*: engaged; *asita*: should remain/ sit; *mat-parah*: dedicated to me/ devoted to me.

"Conquering fear and practicing contentment, firmly established in the *brahmacharya*, controlling/ engaging the mind, (one should) sit/ remain (still), connecting the consciousness with me, and contemplating me (as the goal)."

It is impossible to avoid looking here and there (*disa-anavalokayan*) unless one has completely conquered fear, lust and greed. On the other hand, when one has realized the pure eternal existence of Brahman, and the presence of Paramatma in the hearts of all living beings and in all situations, the mind is satisfied in itself because it finds all happiness in the Atman. Thus the eyes do not feel the need to wander here and there, and the consciousness remains undisturbed and peaceful.

The *brahmachari vrata*, the "vow of acting as Brahman", requires a complete paradigm shift, from the bodily identification to the transcendental identity of the Atman that is exactly the same in all beings. The meaning of *brahmacarya* is something more than simply controlling or abstaining from sex life - it really means being able to see persons instead of men or women. It means thinking and acting on the level of Brahman, the position of transcendental spiritual realization, where all living entities are seen equally as eternal spirit souls, and we understand that their bodies are simply an outer temporary covering.

When one considers all *jivatmas* - oneself included - as pure spirit souls, glorious and perfect manifestations of Brahman, and finds happiness in the Atman/ Brahman, there is no question of seeking sexual identification, sexual relationships or sexual pleasure.

Baudhika brahmacarya (celibacy of the intellect) is a way of thinking and seeing people, considering them and treating them as the transcendental Brahman. Besides, a person who is situated on the level of Brahman realization also understands that matter (including bodies) is a product of Brahman, energy of the Supreme Lord and therefore sacred. The Lord resides in the heart of all living entities, and this makes every body a temple of the Divine.

Vacika brahmacarya (celibacy of speech) means abstaining from vulgar or sexual expressions, sexual stories, allusive remarks etc.

Success in *saririka brahmacarya* (celibacy of body) and control of sexual energy and desire is helped by avoiding foods prepared or cooked by people who are engrossed in sex life or negative thinking or behavior, avoiding rajasic or tamasic foods (i.e. spices, excess sugar, stimulants, onion, garlic etc) and avoiding the company of materialistic people.

One should also bathe regularly, wear clean clothes, and practice some specific *yoga asana*, *pranayama* and *bandha* exercises. Still, the *sadhaka* needs to work constantly to keep the mind under control (*samyama*) by engaging it in positive meditation on transcendental and divine forms, names, activities etc.

The root of the word *samyama* is the same of the words *yama* and *niyama* (the abstentions and prescriptions that constitute the first step in *yoga* practice), but with the added meaning of "engagement", that is also intrinsic in the very definition of *yoga* ("union").

The expressions *mat-cittah* and *mat-parah* clearly affirm that the purpose of meditation is to concentrate one's attention on the Supreme Personality of Godhead, the "me" to whom Krishna refers.

The *sadhaka* has now graduated from the Brahman realization to the Paramatma realization, and is realizing that Paramatma is indeed Bhagavan.

Cittah indicates the consciousness or awareness, while *parah* indicates the dedication or priority in life.

A true *yogi* is conscious/ aware of Krishna (as *brahman*, *paramatma* and *bhagavan*) and puts Krishna at the top of his priorities in life.

VERSE 15

युञ्जन्नेवं सदात्मानं योगी नियतमानसः ।

yuñjannevaṁ sadātmānaṁ yogī niyatamānaśḥ ।

शान्तिं निर्वाणपरमां मत्संस्थामधिगच्छति ॥ ६-१५ ॥

śāntim nirvāṇaparamāṁ matsaṁsthām adhigacchati ॥ 6-15 ॥

yunjan: engaging; *evam*: like this; *sada*: always; *atmanam*: oneself; *yogi*: the *yogi*; *niyata-manasah*: having controlled the mind; *santim*: peace; *nirvana-paramam*: the supreme *nirvana*; *mat-samstham*: situated in me; *adhigacchati*: attains.

"Practicing/ engaged in this way (focusing) on the Atman, the *yogi* that has controlled/ engaged the mind attains the peace of the supreme Nirvana, abiding in me."

After indicating the consciousness of the Supreme Personality of Godhead as the goal and purpose of *yoga* meditation, Krishna is defining this stable consciousness as *nirvana paramam*, "the supreme *nirvana*", where the mind remains undisturbed and perfectly balanced. This balance does not need to be static: it can very well be dynamic, and in fact dynamic meditation is the next step in the *yoga sadhana*.

The *sadhaka* has realized the values of *yama* and *niyama*, assimilating them through practice and habit into his regular nature. He has mastered and overcome the body through the practice of the postures and the awareness of his true identity as *atman*, and has regulated his breathing and his emotions through the practice of *pranayama*. He has learned how to detach and withdraw his senses from the sense objects through the practice of *pratyahara*, and to focus his attention unswervingly on the transcendental object of meditation through the practice of *dharana*, or passive meditation.

It is now time to attain perfection in the practice of *dhyana*, or active meditation, that consists in raising the consciousness on a purely transcendental level, where all activities eternally exist and unfold in an unlimited present. It is common knowledge that the spiritual world, also called Vaikuntha ("without anxiety") is not subject to the limitations of time and space, but not many people have a clear realization of what this beautiful concept actually means.

Vaikuntha is not a geographical place that one reaches from going from "here" to "there". There is no need for vehicles, there is even no journey required because there is no distance to cover. It's already everywhere. Similarly, its existence is not subjected to the passing of time. There is no past and no future, but only an eternal present that contains everything simultaneously. Transcendental forms are not subject to birth, growth, decay, old age, disease or death: they exist eternally and their manifestation always contains all the unlimited possible variations simultaneously.

The word *yunjan* means "engaging, concentrating", and is from the same root of *yoga*. *Nirvana paramam* is the "supreme Nirvana", the liberated state of deep meditation on the Supreme Self that can be attained when the mind is pacified and controlled. This supreme peace is also called *moksha*, or liberation. Some uninformed people translate *moksha* with "salvation", not realizing that such word expresses a Christian concept that is profoundly different from the Vedic concept.

The expression *mat-samsthan*, "situated in me", refers both to the peace and *nirvana*, and to the consciousness of the *yogi*. It is a continuation of the thread *mat cittah*, *mat parah*, *mat sthanam*, that Krishna has described in the previous verses. But who is the "me" that Krishna is talking about? The next chapters will offer the answer to this very important question.

Some people believe that *nirvana* is a negative concept, that should not be used in the *bhakti* context, but obviously they do not give sufficient value to this verse and the other verses in *Gita* where Krishna teaches that *nirvana* is the purpose of life and equates it with Krishna Consciousness.

VERSE 16

नात्यश्नतस्तु योगोऽस्ति न चैकान्तमनश्नतः ।

nātyaśnatastu yogo'sti na caikāntamanaśnataḥ ।

न चातिस्वप्नशीलस्य जाग्रतो नैव चार्जुन ॥ ६-१६ ॥

na cātisvapnaśīlasya jāgrato naiva cārjuna ।। 6-16।।

na-ati: not too much; *asnatah*: one who eats; *tu*: but; *yogah*: yoga; *asti*: there is; *na*: not; *ca*: and; *ekantam*: even once; *anasnatah*: one who does not eat; *na*: not; *ca*: and; *ati-svapna*: sleeping too much; *silasya*: one who has the habit; *jagratah*: one who does not sleep; *na*: not; *eva*: certainly; *ca*: and; *arjuna*: o Arjuna.

"O Arjuna, yoga is not (possible) for one who eats too much or does not eat at all, or for one who sleeps too much or does not sleep at all."

Krishna has gone a great length to clarify that the *yogi* must constantly meditate on the transcendental Self, Atman/ Brahman, and become detached from the body, sense organs and mind. He has also recommended the control of mind and senses, and this requires the regulation of diet and sleep as well as other life habits. However, as long as one has a material mind, senses and body, it is necessary to take care of them with adequate food and rest, especially in the earliest stages of the practice of *yoga*.

The mind and senses are like tigers: starving or mistreating them will not help us in the taming process, but will rather create a tension that will cause more problems.

We need to understand the difference between an actual need and a whimsical desire: we should not run after whimsical desires, but we should not neglect actual needs either, because a neglected need becomes repressed and inevitably transforms into some kind of obsession, that is much more dangerous especially because it usually takes different misleading and pathological forms.

Eating is the basic need for all those who have a material body - including the plants and the micro-organisms. A *yogi* should eat to live, not live to eat, and choose sattvic foods that are favorable to the process of *yoga* - simple foods that are healthy, fresh, nutritious and tasty, but cheap and easy to collect.

These qualities can be found in a good vegetarian diet, especially in a society where the production of food is properly organized by applying the concepts of local subsistency farming, environmental biodiversity for cultivations, gentle organic methods for fertilizing and defending crops against pests, multiculture or permaculture, respectful and compassionate dairy farming, natural and small scale methods for food processing and preservation, and sustainable development in general.

Since the practice of *pranayama* is meant to slow down metabolism, the *yogi* needs less food, but fasting should only be to decrease one's ego, not to increase it. The process of fasting helps to minimize one's needs and detach oneself from the body, and on the physical level it can be very beneficial for the purification and healing of all those diseases that are created by the accumulation of undigested food and toxins. There are many different types of fasting, and one needs to properly understand the situation of his/her own body and mind to apply the various rules.

Some people take fasting to the extreme and even abstain from swallowing the saliva produced by their own mouth. Since it can certainly impress simple-minded people, this practice can be used to encourage the general population by demonstrating that it is actually possible to control the senses and the mind. However, such staunch performance should be handled carefully, to avoid the risk of *abhimana* and *ahankara* spoiling its results, and also to avoid the risk of artificially imposing it on persons whose body and mind are not suited for strict austerities.

Forced fasting can create serious problems because the individual becomes weak physically and mentally, and can be victimized by negative emotions and thoughts. Another dangerous practice is strict fasting suddenly followed by large feasts, usually with a lot of heavy fried foods and sweets: this creates a very bad reaction both physically and mentally, and is the cause of many serious diseases.

Too much eating means eating not for the proper maintenance of body and mind, but for the pleasure of eating, a form of lust that can never be really satisfied because the mind always demands more. In today's society, food has become loaded with too much emotional and social luggage, including the artificial obsession for "good bodily shape and health". Ironically, the more one focuses on this obsession, the more the bodily identification creates negative emotions in the personality, and the more unbalanced one becomes in connection with food consumption. This also causes other and worse problems with drinking, smoking, intoxicating substances etc.

All eating disorders, from bulimia to anorexia, that is from the obsession with eating to the rejection of eating, come from the same basic distortion that charges the act of eating and the image of food with misplaced and damaging emotions, covering a wide range of issues from low self-esteem to the feeling of rejection,

passive aggressiveness, emotional manipulation, self-torture, guilt, fear, etc. A *yogi* should never fall in such traps: as Krishna has already said in 3.27 and 5.8-9, all the activities of the body and the senses should be brought back to their basic meaning only, and not given too much importance, either positive or negative.

Similar considerations apply to the practice of *jagran*, a particular form of austerity that consists in keeping awake, sometimes for the entire night - a very popular tradition especially on the occasion of the celebration of Maha Shiva ratri. This "fasting from sleep" should be used carefully and sparingly, and always remembering that its purpose is the purification of the consciousness and the development of a devotional sentiment towards Isvara.

Remaining awake through the night and meditating on the radiance of the Brahman, symbolized by the *dipa* (*ghi* lamp), brings the light of Knowledge into the darkness of material consciousness, and enables us to experience the feeling of freedom from the bodily limitations. This purpose is best served by actively engaging body, senses and mind in a favorable service to God - by singing *bhajans*, by watching religious re-enactments, by making garlands for the Deity, by performing active worship, by cooking food to be offered as *prasada*, and so on.

VERSE 17

युक्ताहारविहारस्य युक्तचेष्टस्य कर्मसु ।

yuktāhāravihārasya yuktaceṣṭasya karmasu ।

युक्तस्वप्नावबोधस्य योगो भवति दुःखहा ॥ ६-१७ ॥

yuktasvapnāvabodhasya yogo bhavati duḥkhaḥā ॥ 6-17 ॥

yukta-ahara: (one who) eats according to the *yoga*; *viharasya*: one who moves around; *yukta-cestasva*: one who makes regulated efforts; *karmasu*: in activities/ duties; *yukta-svapna-avabodhasya*: one who is regulated in sleeping and keeping awake; *yogah*: *yoga*; *bhavati*: becomes; *duhkha-ha*: destroying sufferings.

"For one who consciously controls his food intake, who is controlled in moving around, who makes controlled efforts in working/ performing one's duties, and is regulated in sleeping/ dreaming and keeping vigil, *yoga* becomes the destroyer of sufferings."

The key word in this verse is *yukta*, "connected". All our actions should be performed in connection to the practice of *yoga*, with consideration for the higher purpose of the human opportunity of life. This means that intelligence, or the proper awareness, should govern all our activities and choices.

Eating, moving around, working and sleeping are basic activities that cannot be neglected, because they are required to maintain one's body (3.8). Other activities, such as mating and defending, that are instinctive and prominent in the lower species of life, can be minimized on the level of the human form of life and especially through the practice of *yoga*. In fact, a *yogi* that has realized Brahman and Paramatma becomes situated on a higher level of awareness, where mating and defending are not required any more and even appear to be delusional behaviors. However, eating remains a basic need and manifests in many ways, including the need for water, air, solar light, and even food for thought and food for the soul.

A *yogi* can shift the focus of the act of eating towards sattvic and transcendental (*prasadam*) foods, or even towards subtler dimensions such as the absorption of pranic energy or spiritual energy. However, this act of nourishment remains a necessity.

The word *viharasya*, that refers to the "moving around" of the *sadhaka*, is sometimes translated as "recreation" as in the natural desire to enjoy pleasant walks or journeys to beautiful and interesting places. One may travel for pleasure or for business, or decide to move to some other place for a better life, or to embark in a knowledge quest, or to engage in a teaching/ preaching tour.

However everybody needs to move around - from the commuting worker in the industrialized metro city to the tourist seeking an exciting experience in places never seen before, from the homeless vagabond to the traveling salesman, from the political refugee to the exchange student, from the *sannyasi* that wanders to collect alms for mere survival, to the *rishi* that walks through the virtuous forest to gather fruits and flowers for the worship of God. Whether such traveling covers thousands of kilometers or just few meters from a bed to a computer desk, or even switching from one TV channel to another, this "moving around" implies a choice, an impetus for action, a need for change.

The subsequent word, *cestasya*, that refers to "making efforts", is strictly connected to the idea of "moving around". All progressive actions require an effort, therefore we should consider this definition as referring to *karmasu*, "in the actions", covering all positive, useful and dutiful activities (*karma* as opposed to *vikarma*).

One should therefore make sincere efforts to perform one's duties according to one's particular position, whether these apply to the daily care of one's body and its extensions (clothing, personal items, living quarters, family, etc), to the sacred service to society and occupational responsibilities, to the higher engagement in personal growth and self-improvement, to the acquisition of knowledge, or to the overcoming of material conditionings and identifications.

All such efforts must be balanced and consciously monitored so that they can harmoniously and effectively support our own progress and the progress of others - always remembering the actual purpose of life and work.

As we have already elaborated, the regulation of sleeping and dreaming is also required. A *yogi* has learned to control the mind, and this enables him to enjoy timely and peaceful sleep, for the purpose of restoring the proper functionality of body and mind. Both excessive sleep and sleeplessness are caused by the improper engagement of the mind that remains connected to the wrong thoughts and emotions, such as fear, anxiety, agitation, depression, etc. In all his/ her activities and choices, a *yogi* is always conscious and careful, and makes sure that the valuable opportunity of human life is utilized in the best possible way - for even one minute of time is extremely important.

This *avyartha kalatvam*, the utmost attention to every single action and every single moment, is the key to the progress in consciousness.

VERSE 18

यदा विनियतं चित्तमात्मन्येवावतिष्ठते ।

yadā viniyataṁ cittamātmanyevāvatiṣṭhate ।

निःस्पृहः सर्वकामेभ्यो युक्त इत्युच्यते तदा ॥ ६-१८ ॥

niḥspṛhaḥ sarvakāmebhyo yukta ityucyate tadā ॥ 6-18 ॥

yada: when; *vinitayam*: controlled; *cittam*: consciousness; *atmani*: on the Atman; *eva*: certainly/ only; *avatisthate*: remains; *nisprihah*: devoid/ detached; *sarva-kamebhyah*: for all desired things; *yuktah*: engaged (in yoga); *iti*: like this; *ucyate*: it is said; *tada*: then.

"When the consciousness is trained to focus firmly on the Atman, free from the desire for the various types of sense pleasures, it is said to be (properly) engaged (in yoga)."

This verse describes the ultimate step in the practice of *yoga*, called *samadhi* or "constant spiritual awareness". When the consciousness (*citta*) is actually fixed in the supreme Nirvana, it becomes completely detached from the sense objects that continue to revolve in the material world. This is the true position of a *yogi*. Anyone who claims to be teaching *yoga* must be instantly recognizable for his/ her constant concentration and awareness of the Transcendental Reality, as *Gita* has been explaining in all these chapters. A *yogi* - what to speak of a *yoga* teacher - must treat all living beings as Atman/ Brahman, without making any distinctions on the basis of the body such as color, family of origin, nationality, financial situation, position in society etc.

The intelligence, mind and senses of the genuine *yogi* are deeply immersed in the contemplation of transcendental happiness and therefore have no interest in pursuing any other *sankalpa* or determination to act to obtain some personal result. There is no more *karta*, no more *arambhah*, no more *sankalpa*, no more duality related to time and space and separation, which are all illusions of *maya*. The only reality is the permanent nature of the Atman/ Brahman, and the harmonization of the Atman with the Brahman, the individual intelligence with the supreme intelligence.

The body continues to perform the required duties assigned on the basis of qualities and tendencies and position, but their routine performance is automatic, especially when the subconscious has been properly integrated and harmonized with the conscious and superconscious for the attainment of the main purpose of life.

The proper performance of duties is not necessarily impaired by this different awareness and shift of priorities; rather it may even

be improved because of the absence of selfish motivations and inner conflicts. The best practical example is offered by the behavior of the *gopis* of Vrindavana that were ecstatically in love with the wonderful Krishna. Day and night they kept thinking about him, but because their sweet love was a private secret, externally they were very careful to perform all their duties properly, so that nobody suspected something else was going on.

We should not think that the *gopis'* relationship with Krishna is/ was a merely material romantic affair - in fact it is highly symbolic of this most intimate meditation of the *jivatma* that contemplates the *param atman* at the highest level of *yoga*.

VERSE 19

यथा दीपो निवातस्थो नेङ्गते सोपमा स्मृता ।

yathā dīpo nivāta-stho neṅgate sopamā smṛtā ।

योगिनो यतचित्तस्य युञ्जतो योगमात्मनः ॥ ६-१९ ॥

yogino yatacittasya yuñjato yogamātmanah ॥ 6-19 ॥

yatha: just like; *dipah*: a lamp; *nivata-sthah*: remaining/ in a place without wind; *na*: not; *ingate*: waver/ flicker; *sa*: that; *upama*: comparison; *smrita*: remembered/ considered; *yoginah*: a *yogi*; *yata-cittasya*: one who has controlled the mind/ whose mind is renounced; *yunjatah*: engaged; *yogam*: in *yoga*; *atmanah*: the Atman/ Self.

"Just like the flame of a lamp remains stable when there is no wind, the controlled mind of the *yogi* does not flicker - this is the comparison given for one who is engaged in the meditation on the Atman."

This verse contains the most famous definition of *nirvana*, the state of mind where all restlessness and fluctuations have been calmed down and the radiant light of the Atman can illuminate the consciousness without distraction or obstruction. *Nivata* is the attribute of the position, while *nirvana* is the position itself. In the absence of wind, the flame of the lamp does not stop burning, rather it burns better, in a steadier and more radiant way.

Another famous example is the crystal clear water of a small lake or pond, where there is no disturbance and therefore all the mud and sand has settled to the bottom, allowing a perfect purity and vision.

Patanjali's *Yoga sutras* also define this blissful and enlightened state in the first verses of the *samadhi pada* (1.2, 3): *yogah citta-vritti-nirodhah* ("Yoga is the cessation of the fluctuations in the mind") and *tada drastuh svarupe avasthanam* ("then the seer is established in his real form/nature").

Again, the purpose of *yoga* is highlighted here as the pure and firm contemplation of the Supreme Self as Transcendental Reality through a controlled mind. Without any doubt, *Bhagavad gita* is the most authoritative and specific text about *yoga*, also considering that this definition appears in the original verses a great number of times.

Some people believe that *nirvikalpa samadhi* means that one should meditate on a void. This is incorrect. There is no point in meditating on a void, especially considering that a void does not exist, by definition. There is not a single spot in the entire universe, or in the spiritual world, where we can find a "void". We can find ethereal space, we can find planetary space (*antariksha*), but there is no void. By definition, a void is something that does not exist, the absence of all existence. It is impossible to "meditate" on nothingness.

The misconception of "void meditation" derives from some half-baked and badly digested concept of Brahman that is described as devoid of material qualities.

Naturally a person who can only think in terms of material existence will conclude that something without material qualities simply does not exist, and therefore it is "a void".

But this is not confirmed in any scripture. Rather, Brahman is the supreme existence (18.54), the source of all existences and qualities, characterized by perfect *sat* (eternity), *cit* (consciousness) and *ananda* (happiness). How can something like that be "a void"? Nonsense.

Therefore the traditional scriptures state that only a *brahmana*, "one who actually knows Brahman" (*brahmana brahma janati*), is qualified and authorized to teach and guide others on the path of *yoga* and spiritual realization.

VERSE 20

यत्रोपरमते चित्तं निरुद्धं योगसेवया ।

yatroparamate cittam niruddham yogasevayā ।

यत्र चैवात्मनात्मानं पश्यन्नात्मनि तुष्यति ॥ ६-२० ॥

yatra caivātmanātmānaṁ paśyannātmani tuṣyati ॥ 6-20 ॥

yatra: there/ in that situation/ when; *uparamate*: becomes withdrawn; *cittam*: consciousness/ awareness; *niruddham*: restrained; *yoga-sevaya*: by engaging in the service of *yoga*; *yatra*: there; *ca*: and; *eva*: certainly; *atmana*: by oneself; *atmanam*: the Atman; *paśyan*: seeing; *atmani*: in the self; *tushyati*: becomes satisfied.

"When the consciousness becomes quiet because of the cessation (of the wavering) by engagement/ service in *yoga*, then one becomes satisfied in the Self by contemplating the Atman within the self."

Krishna continues to describe the stage of *samadhi*, or steady contemplation that becomes natural and spontaneous to the *yogi*. The expression *yatra eva* means "just then", and draws the line between the preparatory training and the actual constant position of *yoga*.

It is said that there are two types of *samadhi* - called *samprajnata* or "endowed with knowledge, reasoning, discrimination" and *asamprajnata*, where we find the cessation of all mental activities and the transcendental consciousness that is beyond the mental level. It is said that in this chapter, verses from 1 to 20 describe the *samprajnata samadhi*, while verses from 20 to 25 speak of the *asamprajnata samadhi*.

We must be very careful to understand this point properly. Many people mistakenly think that "cessation of all mental activities" implies the mindless behavior typical of the fools, by which one acts whimsically and stupidly, often under the manipulation of others. This is still the mental level, as all whims, even the unconscious ones, are created by the restlessness of the mind. There is still a lot of mental activity going on: simply, the consciousness remains unaware of it, because it is clouded by the darkness of ignorance.

The human beings that live on this planet, called *martyaloka*, are generally characterized by the influence of passion or *rajas*. They have strong desires and work to satisfy the impulses of their mind and senses, and as already described by Krishna (2.61-63, 3.36, 3.38, 5.23, 5.26) such lusty and greedy activities are also accompanied by the anger rising from personal frustration.

Especially in Kali yuga, the general tendency of the human beings is to slide down from *rajas* to *tamas*, when frustration and depression follow the discharge of selfish anger.

Tamas is characterized by a state of ignorance and oblivion, in which the mind is not functioning properly, and that is demonstrated in practice by the innumerable individuals that we call fools or idiots. In a sense, this is also a state of mindlessness, but the apparent bliss that results from such stillness of the mind is degrading the individual towards the lower species of life, such as animals, plants and even less intelligent creatures.

Through one's sincere efforts and under the expert guidance of a qualified teacher, an individual can rise from *rajas* to the platform of *sattva*, where the restlessness of the mind is pacified with a totally different type of happiness, enlightened by knowledge and understanding of the true nature of the world. On this platform of *sattva*, the mind works beautifully and for the benefit of the individual and the collectivity, producing beneficial and pleasing creations that inspire noble thoughts and emotions.

When this happy and luminous state of material *sattva* has purified the consciousness and is sustaining the individual's search for the transcendental knowledge, the actual realization of the transcendental nature of the Self raises the awareness beyond the mind, taking it to the level of direct perception of Reality that is described as *darshana*. This is the level suggested in this verse by the word *pasyan* - "seeing, having direct experience" as in *darshana*. The Rishis are those who "see" directly the *tattva*, through the transcendental spiritual intelligence, and therefore the knowledge they explain can correctly be described as "revealed".

Again, we should be very careful about cultural superimpositions. Abrahamic faiths claim to be "revealed religions" in the sense that their prophets say they have received their scriptures directly and

personally from God, who chose them specifically as his representatives and gave them the monopoly on religion.

The Revelation in the dharmic tradition is a totally different concept. Anyone can and should aspire to individual Revelation, through the purification of the consciousness from material identifications and attachments, and the contemplation of the inherent divine nature of the Self. The teacher is not a "savior", but only a guide, and each individual is responsible of his/ her own Self realization and enlightenment. This same concept is found also in the original Buddhism. Enlightenment or revelation is something that is completely natural and pre-existing in all human beings. We do not need to "be saved from our negative nature" by some exclusive divine intervention, and therefore there is no question of allegiance to a particular religious hierarchy or even to a particular form of God.

The expression *yoga sevaya* in this verse is interesting because it introduces the concept of transcendental service in the practice of *yoga*. One should become a worshiper and servant of *yoga* as the expression of the highest consciousness of Reality. Considering *yoga* as a method to be "utilized" like an instrument to attain some selfish material goal is therefore condemned.

VERSE 21

सुखमात्यन्तिकं यत्तद् बुद्धिग्राह्यमतीन्द्रियम् ।

sukhamātyantikam yattad buddhigrāhyamatīndriyam ।

वेत्ति यत्र न चैवायं स्थितश्चलति तत्त्वतः ॥ ६-२१ ॥

vetti yatra na caivāyam sthitaścalati tattvataḥ ॥ 6-21 ॥

sukham: happiness; *atyantikam*: endless/ unlimited; *yat*: which; *tat*: that; *buddhi-grahyam*: can be grasped by intelligence; *atindriyam*: beyond the senses; *vetti*: you should know; *yatra*: there/ at that time/ in that situation; *na*: not; *ca*: and; *eva*: certainly; *ayam*: that; *sthitah*: situated; *calati*: moves; *tattvatah*: truly.

"In this absolute state of happiness that can be grasped by the intellect but is beyond the reach of the senses, one certainly knows that he is firmly situated in the truth and does not move away."

This verse continues to elaborate on the need to rise above the mental platform, to the transcendental state of consciousness known as *nirvana*.

In this verse, one of the most important words is *calati*, that means "moves away, move astray"; the expression is *na eva calati*, "certainly does not move away". The soul's awareness does not move any more because it has finally found the perfection of happiness and engagement that everybody is seeking, a perfection that is not disturbed by external circumstances. Also, the genuine realization of Atman/ Brahman dissipates the illusory limitations of time and space, and therefore there is really no place or time to "go away" to, there is no other reality to observe, there is no other purpose to attain.

Another very important word is *atindriyam*, "beyond the senses". By definition, Transcendence is what is beyond the gross material existence, and therefore it cannot be perceived by the material senses, including the mind (usually considered the "sixth sense"). However, it is possible for us to perceive Transcendence or Tattva by using our intelligence. *Buddhi*, intelligence, is a bridge between the material world and the spiritual world, and from the very beginning Krishna has already amply recommended (2.39, 2.44, 2.49-53, 2.65-66, 3.1, 4.18, 5.20) that we should engage in *Buddhi*

Yoga, employing our intelligence to comprehend the spiritual nature of Transcendence. Again in the next chapters Krishna will reiterate the concept.

In verse 3.42 we learned that "the senses are superior (to this angry lust/ to dull matter), and the mind is superior to the senses. Intelligence is superior to the mind, and he (the soul) is superior to the intellect."

In our daily experience we see that what cannot be perceived by the senses can still be perceived by intelligence through the observation of its symptoms. For example we can perceive the existence of the air by watching the leaves of a tree move in the breeze, or the dust raised by a windstorm.

We do not see the air or the wind itself, but we can perceive its existence and movements by its results. Similarly, our senses cannot perceive the mind - even our own mind - but our intelligence can directly show us its existence and functions in the form of thoughts and emotions and impressions or feelings.

When it has been sufficiently purified, intelligence can even perceive the soul or Atman/ Brahman, and the functions of this Transcendental Existence, observed as *sat cit* and *ananda*, "eternal existence, awareness and happiness".

These three functions are ultimately the conscious or unconscious goal of all living beings: everyone wants to continue existing forever, everybody wants to know or to be aware, and everybody wants to be happy.

While our senses and mind may try to convince us to pursue these three supreme functions through the contact with material objects, intelligence can lead us beyond this delusional idea and enable us to perceive the true Reality, where the real happiness is found.

VERSE 22

यं लब्ध्वा चापरं लाभं मन्यते नाधिकं ततः ।

yam labdhvā cāparam lābham manyate nādhikam tataḥ ।

यस्मिन्स्थितो न दुःखेन गुरुणापि विचाल्यते ॥ ६-२२ ॥

yasminsthito na duḥkhena guruṇāpi vicālyate ॥ 6-22 ॥

yam: that which; *labdhva*: by obtaining; *ca*: and; *aparam*: something else; *labham*: attainment; *manyate*: thinks/ considers; *na*: not; *adhikam*: other; *tatah*: than that; *yasmin*: in which; *sthitah*: situated; *na*: not; *dukhena*: by sufferings; *guruna*: very heavy/ great; *api*: even; *vicalyate*: is moved/ disturbed.

"One who has obtained this (position) does not take into consideration/ feel the need for any further acquisition, and once established there, he does not become shaken even by severe sufferings."

As we were mentioning in the previous verse, the consciousness that has found the unlimited and inexhaustible happiness of the Atman/ Brahman does not move away or astray because intelligence shows that there is nothing that remains to be attained.

Krishna had already explained this perfect state of happiness and contentment in the Self while speaking of himself and of the elf-realized soul in general. The verses in this regard are the following:

na me parthasti kartavyam trishu lokeshu kiñcana, nanavapaam avaptavyam varta eva ca karmani, "O son of Pritha, in all the three worlds there is nothing that I need to do or that I want to obtain, yet I also engage in activities" (3.22) and

yas tv atma-ratir eva syad atma-triptas ca manavah, atmany eva ca santushtas tasya karyam na vidyate, "A human being who loves

the Self certainly becomes satisfied in the Self and peaceful within the Self: for such a person there is no need to perform any action"(3.17).

Krishna has also stated that Self realization gives the highest pleasure:

"In this world there is nothing as pure as knowledge. One who achieves perfection in *yoga* comes to find full happiness in the Self in the course of time" (4.38),

"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. 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" (5.21, 23).

For one who has attained this state of being, nothing else remains to be attained.

This verse repeats that a liberated soul that has obtained the awareness of Transcendence is not disturbed or shaken by external circumstances, even in case of extreme difficulties or sufferings.

Naturally, the body and the mind will perceive the suffering and may even become seriously impaired by it, but the pure consciousness always remains fixed on the contemplation of Reality, and does not move away from the perfection of realization.

In the next chapters Krishna will continue to explain that such transcendental position of consciousness is never lost, and the liberated soul will never return again to the material delusion.

VERSE 23

तं विद्याद् दुःखसंयोगवियोगं योगसंज्ञितम् ।

tam vidyād duḥkhasaṁyogaviyogaṁ yogasañjñitam ।

स निश्चयेन योक्तव्यो योगोऽनिर्विण्णचेतसा ॥ ६-२३ ॥

sa niścayena yuktavyo yogo'nirviṇṇacetasā ॥ 6-23 ॥

tam: that; *vidyat*: you should know; *duhkha*: suffering; *samyoga*: contact; *viyogam*: absence of contact; *yoga-samjñitam*: understanding of *yoga*; *sah*: he; *niscayena*: with perseverance; *yuktavyah*: should engage in; *yogah*: *yoga*; *anirvinna*: not depressed; *cetasa*: consciousness.

"This should be known as the absorption in *yoga* that liberates from all contacts with suffering; that is undoubtedly the *yoga* system that must be practiced without deviation/ without getting discouraged."

In verse 5.22 Krishna explained that the source of suffering is due to the contact with the material sense objects that are limited by time and transformation, and therefore can only give a temporary pleasure. The applied science of *yoga* enables us to become detached from such illusion, and to perceive the true satisfaction and happiness that derives from the Atman, or spiritual Self.

So, to continue the thread of discussion from the previous verse, a *yogi* that finds himself in the face of material difficulties is not confused, and by remaining detached he can quickly find relief and enjoy real freedom from all conditionings.

Physical diseases and difficulties can only affect the body and the mind, not the original consciousness of the soul. When the consciousness is correctly identified with the soul, it remains

constantly focused, beyond the states that appear in the ordinary mind: the state of wakefulness, the state of dreaming and the state of deep sleep. Beyond these, there is a "super-conscious" state called *turiya* that is our real nature.

Joys and sorrows come and go like the seasons (2.14) and the *yogi* learns to tolerate them, knowing that they will soon disappear. Therefore the *yogi* remains free from depression (*anirvinna*) even when attacked by sorrows and sadness and various kinds of problems. This is the true understanding (*samjnitam*) of *yoga*.

Some people interpret this verse to mean that the physical practice of *asana* and *pranayama*, and the relaxation of the mind they call "meditation", are meant to prevent and eliminate all the sufferings caused by diseases, old age and death in order to engage in sense gratification without interruption or obstacles, but this is not possible.

Of course it is possible to improve one's health and slow down the process of aging, but it is not possible to stop disease and death completely, and an increased attachment to the material body will create more sufferings in the next lifetime. The purpose of *yoga* is to detach ourselves from the body.

VERSE 24

सङ्कल्पप्रभवान्कामांस्त्यक्त्वा सर्वानशेषतः ।

saṅkalpaprabhavānkāmāṁstyaktvā sarvānaśeṣataḥ ।

मनसैवेन्द्रियग्रामं विनियम्य समन्ततः ॥ ६-२४ ॥

manasaivendriyagrāmaṁ viniyamya samantataḥ ॥ 6-24 ॥

sankalpa: imagination; *prabhavan*: generated by; *kaman*: desires; *tyaktva*: giving up; *sarvan*: all; *aseshatah*: completely; *manasa*: by the mind; *eva*: certainly; *indriya-gramam*: all the senses; *viniyama*: regulating; *samantatah*: from all sides.

"Completely abandoning all the desires/ plans arisen from the mental processes, (one should) control the mind and all the senses by regulating them from every side."

A very important word in this verse is *sankalpa*. In verses 4.19 and 6.4 we have already seen that the *yogi* needs to overcome and bandon all *sankalpa*, or intentions, plans and desires.

This does not mean that his professional duties, family duties or religious duties should be performed haphazardly or mindlessly, without the proper planning and organization. It means that the Self-realized *yogi* does not identify with the *ahankara* and *mamatva* any more, and therefore he is ready to follow God's plan and to accept whatever comes his way. He knows that the Supreme Purusha is the supreme consciousness and the supreme intelligence, and that everything that happens has a part in the greater plan.

A materialist is always full of selfish plans. He wants to expand his ego and achieve material happiness through the mirage of success in this world, and his mind is constantly elaborating and scheming, teeming with so many different purposes. On the other hand, a *yogi* simply performs his duties according to the capabilities - *guna* and *karma* - of his present body and mind, and follows the prescribed methods that have been explained in the scriptures and by the great *acharyas*.

Both the knowledge of the material world and the knowledge of the spiritual world have already been presented by the great *rishis*, and there is ample information and description that we can

effectively utilize for the benefit of the individual and society at large.

We do not need to reinvent the wheel every morning. This does not mean that we should not try to study and understand reality through a direct observation and research. It means that we should first study the information and explanations that have been compiled by the great personalities of the past, before venturing into unnecessary new mental speculations.

For example: everybody can understand that, in order to become a good mathematician, one needs to go to school, starting from the primary classes, and learn whatever knowledge has already been explained and collected by previous mathematicians. Only after having learned correctly all the existing material, we can start creating new equations and theorems, expand and elaborate on the previous ones, and so on.

Some people believe that spirituality or metaphysics are abstract and subjective ideas, and therefore all opinions are valid. This is really foolish. Metaphysics or spirituality is a precise science that can and should be verified objectively.

Some people interpret this verse to state the necessity of the passage from the *samprajnata samadhi* ("meditation with mental processes") also called *savichara* and *svatarka*, to the *asamprajnata samadhi* ("meditation without mental processes"), where *vichara* ("research") and *vitarka* ("discussion") are absent. However, we need to make a distinction between what is required for our own mind at an initial or intermediate stage of meditation, and what is required for our preaching mission.

Without this distinction, we would never have received any teachings from Krishna or the great *acharyas* or the Vedic scriptures (including Patanjali etc) - or we would be expected to

believe that Krishna, the great *acharyas* and the great Rishis were merely situated on the "inferior" level of *samprajnata samadhi*.

VERSE 25

शनैः शनैरुपरमेद् बुद्ध्या धृतिगृहीतया ।

śanaīḥ śanaīruparameḍḍ buddhyaḥ dhṛtiḡgṛhītayā ।

आत्मसंस्थं मनः कृत्वा न किञ्चिदपि चिन्तयेत् ॥ ६-२५ ॥

ātmasaṁsthaṁ manaḥ kṛtvā na kiñcidapi cintayet ॥ 6-25 ॥

sanaiḥ: gradually; *sanaiḥ*: gradually; *uparameḍḍ*: one should withdraw/ abstain; *buddhya*: by the intelligence; *dhṛiti*: with steadiness; *grihitaya*: accepting; *atma-samstham*: situated in the Atman; *manah*: the mind; *kṛtvā*: doing; *na*: not; *kiñcid*: anything; *api*: even; *cintayet*: should think/ worry about.

"Gradually withdrawing (from external things) by the use of intelligence, with a determined effort, one should fix the mind in the Self/ Atman and stop worrying/ thinking about everything else."

The use of intelligence is a key factor in the proper practice of *yoga*. Blind following of rules or methods, or even concepts, is not the proper way to proceed.

In all circumstances, we must allow ourselves to be guided in our choices and actions by the superior power of intelligence and good sense that comes directly from the soul and the Supreme Soul.

The first application of intelligence is to understand that we must proceed gradually. Gradually does not necessarily mean slow.

We can also proceed quickly, but things must be done gradually, as in all new exercises.

When we start some physical training, intelligence tells us that we must first attempt easy and brief exercises, then upgrade to some exercises that require a little more effort and strength, and so on.

If on the first day of our jogging training we attempt to run a marathon of many kilometers within a short span of time, we will unnecessarily face great difficulties and almost invariably we will fail. We may even suffer physical damage that will prevent us from actually engaging in a proper training for a long time.

Withdrawing from external things should be done gradually, in a natural and spontaneous way, without artificially forcing the mind, the senses and the body into premature renunciation. *Yoga* is not about following strict rules of abstinence or making efforts to practice difficult exercises, but about training the mind, the senses and the body to become regulated and controlled.

Dhriti, determination, should also be controlled and engaged by intelligence. Without intelligence, it becomes blind stubbornness, obstinate resistance to progress, and foolish prejudice.

The expression *atma samsthan manah krtva* indicates a conscious effort to keep the mind focused on the Atman. Of course intelligence will tell us that this Atman or self is not the material identification, the separatist selfishness and egotism that motivates the ignorant and foolish people.

Again, *na kincid api cintayet* ("never worry about anything") is a basic rule that must be applied with intelligence. A realized *yogi* is always aware that everything happens according to a divine plan, under the direction of the supreme intelligence, and that all opportunities can be utilized for progress.

This certainly does not mean that he will carelessly neglect the considerations about cause and effect - he will still look both sides when he is going to cross a road, and pick up the umbrella if the sky becomes cloudy. But this is not worrying, it is responsible thinking.

VERSE 26

यतो यतो निश्चरति मनश्चञ्चलमस्थिरम् ।

yato yato niścarati manaścañcalamasthiram ।

ततस्ततो नियम्यैतदात्मन्येव वशं नयेत् ॥ ६-२६ ॥

tatastato niyamyaitadātmanyeva vaśam nayet ॥ 6-26 ॥

yatah yatah: due to whatever/ wherever/ whenever; *niscalati*: it strays; *manah*: the mind; *cancalam*: restless; *asthiram*: unsteady; *tatah tatah*: there/ then; *niyamyā*: by regulating; *etat*: this; *atmani*: in the Atman; *eva*: certainly; *vasam*: under control; *nayet*: must bring.

"The mind is unsteady and impatient to wander around. Every time/ wherever it runs off, one should bring it back under control, and regulate it so that it remains controlled in/ by the Self/ Atman."

Controlling the senses might be relatively easy, but controlling the mind is much more difficult. The nature of the mind is very restless, as Arjuna will clearly say later in the chapter (6.34, *cancalam hi manah krsnah*).

This is why the process of *yoga* requires patience, enthusiasm and determination. Controlling one's mind is not much different from controlling one's small children: a young child is naturally restless

and curious about everything, often asking for things - even impossible or non-beneficial things - and jumping from one interest to another when it becomes bored.

We cannot fulfill all the requests of small children, yet we should not become angry or mistreat them. Every time they run off in a playful and curious spirit, we need to watch over them and go get them back when they start getting into trouble, before things become serious. Gently but firmly, we need to attract their attention again and again on the task they need to perform for their training, such as doing their homework, eating the proper food, taking bath, etc.

Similarly, we need to take care of our mind with the patient, tolerant but firm attitude of a good parent. Our "inner child" needs to play sometimes, but every time it engages in dangerous activities we need to bring it back to a safe place and offer a better engagement, that will give greater happiness (*param drstva nivartate*, 2.59).

Some believe that small children should be punished - beaten with a stick in the morning and with a shoe in the night - but this drastic action should be applied only when the mind has become spoiled and arrogant, especially the mind that has developed the false ego of being a great *guru*, a great devotee, a great scholar, a great brahmin, a great leader etc.

When the mind is sweet and humble, and innocently desires a little fun and pleasure, beating it with a stick and with a shoe will turn it into a repressed psychotic pervert, that distorts the healthy and natural attraction for happiness and love into a hunger for power and even into cruelty and callousness. Not much of a spiritual progress.

VERSE 27

प्रशान्तमनसं ह्येनं योगिनं सुखमुत्तमम् ।

praśāntamanasaṁ hyenaṁ yoginaṁ sukhamuttamam ।

उपैति शान्तरजसं ब्रह्मभूतमकल्मषम् ॥ ६-२७ ॥

upaiti śāntarajasam brahmabhūtamakalmaṣam ॥ 6-27 ॥

prasanta: peaceful; *manasam*: in the mind; *hi*: certainly; *enam*: this; *yoginam*: among the *yogis*; *sukham*: happiness; *uttamam*: supreme; *upaiti*: attains; *santa-rajasm*: having pacified the passion; *brahma-bhutam*: the existence of Brahman; *akalmasham*: free from all contamination.

"Certainly s/he among the *yogis* who has perfectly pacified the mind can attain the highest happiness. (Thus) having attained the pacification of passion, s/he becomes situated on the transcendental existence and becomes (totally) purified.

The expression *hi enam yoginam*, "only this (among) the *yogis*" suggests that many people practice *yoga* on various levels and with different degrees of success. Later on in *Gita* (7.3) Krishna will state, "Out of many thousands of human beings, only a few strive for perfection, and among all those who are engaged (on this path) and have achieved perfection, only a few know me in truth."

A peaceful mind, that finds satisfaction in the Atman/ Brahman, is the greatest wealth a human being can attain, and gives true happiness - that kind of happiness that is unlimited, inexhaustible and undisturbed by any circumstance.

What needs to be pacified within the mind? The restlessness of the mind is due to the *guna* or material mode of passion, called *rajas*. When this natural tendency of the mind has been pacified by the

predominance of the *guna* or material mode of goodness, called *sattva*, the mind becomes able to remain peaceful long enough to contemplate and realize the Transcendental Reality. At this point the material *guna* of *sattva* becomes purified and spiritualized, and is called *suddha sattva*.

How to bring the predominance of *sattva* over *rajas* in your mind? By following the *yama* and *niyama* prescriptions that constitute the preliminary foundations of *yoga* that refer to food consumption and other basic life habits.

In later chapters, especially in chapter 14, Krishna will speak more about the characteristics of the various *gunas* and how to utilize them.

The expression *brahma bhuta* means "the existence/ condition/ being of Brahman" and refers to the direct awareness of the transcendental nature of our existence that has already been called *brahma nirvanam* (2.72, 5.24-26).

This state of transcendental awareness will be presented again at the conclusion of Krishna's teachings in *Gita* (18.54, *brahma bhuta prasannatma*) to highlight, yet again, the fundamental importance of Brahman realization, on which true *bhakti* can be built.

Again, as we have already mentioned, we need to repeat that one cannot realize Bhagavan without having truly understood and realized Brahman.

The word *akalmasam* refers to the contamination consisting of material identifications, attachment and desires.

Life on the level of pure Brahman realization (*brahma bhuta*) is naturally free from all contaminations and material impurities.

VERSE 28

युञ्जन्नेवं सदात्मानं योगी विगतकल्मषः ।

yuñjannevaṁ sadātmanāṁ yogī vigatakalmaṣaḥ ।

सुखेन ब्रह्मसंस्पर्शमत्यन्तं सुखमश्नुते ॥ ६-२८ ॥

sukhena brahmasaṁsparaśamatyantam sukhamasṅnute ॥ 6-28 ॥

yunjan: engaging; *evam*: like this; *sada*: always; *atmanam*: in the Atman; *yogi*: the *yogi*; *vigata-kalmashah*: all contamination gone; *sukhena*: in happiness/ easily; *brahma-samsparsam*: in contact with Brahman; *atyantam*: unlimited; *sukham*: happiness; *asnute*: attains.

"Concentrating always on the Atman/ Self, the *yogi* who has become free from all contaminations attains the highest happiness because s/he easily remains in contact/ connected with the Brahman."

This verse repeats the message of the previous two verses. Krishna wants to make sure that the crucially important point is well understood: the true purpose of *yoga* is life on the level of pure transcendental awareness, free from all contaminations, characterized by the supreme happiness and satisfaction. The happiness of Brahman, also called *brahmananda*, is different from the pleasure or happiness on the material level that is based on the contact between the senses and the sense objects. *Brahmananda* is experienced in the contact with Brahman, and since Brahman is everywhere - we are Brahman, too - it cannot be interrupted at any time.

The word *samsparsam*, "in contact with", is used here as the alternative to the *sparsa*, or "contact" that according to materialists

is supposed to give happiness by touching the objects of the sense with the senses. Since Brahman is spiritual and transcendental, such contact belongs to a category that is completely different from gross sense gratification. Again, here the most important point is the consciousness. A Self-realized soul perceives the Brahman in himself and in all other things, without dualistic distinctions based on the body, on time and space, and therefore the happiness of contact is never interrupted.

VERSE 29

सर्वभूतस्थमात्मानं सर्वभूतानि चात्मनि ।

sarvabhūtaśthamātmānaṁ sarvabhūtāni cātmani ।

ईक्षते योगयुक्तात्मा सर्वत्र समदर्शनः ॥ ६-२९ ॥

īkṣate yogayuktātmā sarvatra samadarśanaḥ ॥ 6-29 ॥

sarva-bhuta-stham: that remains in all living beings/ in all existences; *atmanam*: the *atman*; *sarva-bhutani*: all living beings/ all existences; *ca*: and; *atmani*: in the *atman*; *ikshyate*: sees; *yoga-yukta-atma*: one who is engaged in *yoga*; *sarvatra*: everywhere; *sama-darsanah*: with equanimity.

"One who is connected through *yoga* contemplates the Atman that is situated in all living entities/ states of existence and all the living entities/ existences as situated in the Atman, therefore s/he is equally disposed towards everyone/ everything."

The Atman or Self engaged in *yoga* (*yoga-yukta-atma*) is connected to the entire Reality that is gradually realized as Brahman, Paramatma and Bhagavan.

When we speak of "engagement" or "connection", that is the basic meaning of the word *yoga*, this concept necessarily implies a greater Reality to which we are connected, and to whose service we are engaged.

The meaning of this verse is confirmed in other passages of *Gita*, for example in 5.18 (*vidya vinaya sampanne*), 15.15 (*sarvasya caham hridi sannivisto*) and 18.61 (*isvarah sarva bhutanam hrd dese 'rjuna tisthati*).

The expression *sarva bhuta* means "all the states of being", referring not only to "all the living entities" but also to all forms of existence, including the various types of situations that we can experience in our life. This confirms that genuine spiritual realization can never be hampered by any external circumstance.

We could say that this verse is rather esoteric, and not so easy to understand. Most of the verses of *Gita* are very direct and clear, and express logical, simple and fundamental truths that anybody can understand, especially if he has sufficient intelligence and common sense. Granted, a few of these truths are to be accepted with faith, as in the beginning the student does not have the instruments and the experience required to verify them, because they go beyond the perception of the material senses and the ordinary course of material life. Also, the simple and clear instructions given by Krishna may not be so easy to put into practice, but it is just a matter of making a personal effort into improving oneself and purifying one's consciousness. They are not vague or mysterious statements, and when sincerely studied in their original form, they do not leave much space for interpretation.

However, Krishna is gradually introducing very deep concepts that penetrate the core of Reality, into a dimension that is highly symbolic and relates to the activity of consciousness more than to the activities of the mind and senses - in other words, he talks of

transcendental Reality, that by definition is considered too great to be expressed by words or thoughts. This is the inherent challenge of all genuine paths of spirituality and religion: they need to use words to express what is said to be beyond the scope of words.

Therefore all genuine religions utilize the divine language of symbols that is embedded as a sort of "universal dictionary" into the subconscious of every human being, irrespective of the culture s/he was born and brought up in.

In the last century the study of archetypes has developed under the patronage of non-religious researchers in the field of psychology, and this path has led rigorously scientific psychologists to transpersonal psychology to the threshold of spirituality - from Carl Gustav Jung to Roberto Assagioli and beyond - just like the most advanced research in nuclear and particle physics has led scientists to a perspective that is strikingly similar to the vision of the *rishis* of the ancient Vedic tradition.

Usually religious scriptures contain a certain amount of good advice on ethics, moral life, duties, rituals, purification etc, and the recommendation that human beings should worship God and recognize the greatness of divine power, wisdom, compassion, and glory. *Bhagavad gita* contains all this and much more, because it also offers the opportunity of exploring the realm of transcendence to help the human being in his/ her natural and legitimate quest for Self realization, as a divine spark of that same supreme power and glory that is God.

Neither the Bible or the Koran, or other similar popularly known scripture offer this supreme knowledge, as they are destined for the masses of ordinary people that are unevolved and immature in their understanding and aspirations, not much different from animals, and therefore need to be controlled by a class of priests in some sort of theocracy.

But that is not the purpose of genuine spirituality or even of human life. *Vedanta sutras* clearly state, *athato brahma jijnasa*, "this (human lifetime) is the opportunity to learn about Transcendence", and Krishna is kindly, patiently and expertly guiding us, step after step, into that supreme Science.

In ancient times, this Science was known all over the planet, but it was considered a great secret (*raja vidya, raja guhyam*) as Krishna will also confirm in 9.2, and was passed down from master to disciple in a restricted circle of initiates "to the mysteries", to ensure that the proper understanding of the immense glory of this Science would not be lost.

Krishna will also recommend at the end of *Gita* (18.67) as a final instruction, that this Science should not be given indiscriminately to the ignorant masses, to those who are not austere, who do not have love for God, who are not interested to hear it or are envious or hateful.

Today, at the dawn of the Third Millennium, we find ourselves in a new situation. Humankind in general has come to the threshold of a major evolutionary step in consciousness, and each and every human being on the planet is faced with the choice of making the required effort to rise to the Transcendental consciousness, and offered the opportunity to understand the level of existence that s/he can attain in that way.

Today *Bhagavad gita* is amply available to almost everyone on the planet - except in those places where intolerant and ignorant so-called religions are afraid of its liberating science, and therefore they forbid its circulation. We should all take advantage of this extraordinary opportunity and make a sincere effort to study and understand it.

VERSE 30

यो मां पश्यति सर्वत्र सर्वं च मयि पश्यति ।

yo mām paśyati sarvatra sarvaṁ ca mayi paśyati ।

तस्याहं न प्रणश्यामि स च मे न प्रणश्यति ॥ ६-३० ॥

tasyāhaṁ na praṇaśyāmi sa ca me na praṇaśyati ।। 6-30 ।।

yah: one who; *mam*: me; *paśyati*: sees; *sarvatra*: everywhere/ in all things; *sarvam*: all; *ca*: and; *mayi*: in me; *paśyati*: sees; *tasya*: of him; *aham*: I; *na*: not; *pranasyami*: (I) become lost; *sah*: he; *ca*: and; *me*: to me; *na*: not; *pranasyati*: (he) becomes lost.

"One who sees me everywhere and sees everything in me never loses (sight of) me, and is never lost for me."

The word *pranasyati*, "becomes lost", refers to being "lost to the vision", or forgotten. Here we find the strong confirmation of a personal relationship between the Atman and the Brahman, that is based on the awareness of unity, on devotional service and on loving exchanges.

In this verse Krishna continues to offer himself as the perfect example of Brahman consciousness - this will become more and more prominent in the verses of *Gita*, as we proceed to study it. After the science of differentiation between physics and metaphysics, the science of proper action, the science of acquisition of knowledge, the science of renouncing delusional ideas, and the science of meditation to control one's own mind, we will proceed to the other aspects of the Transcendental Science, including *bhakti yoga* and *purushottama yoga*. These more personal aspects can be studied and understood properly only after we have genuinely studied and understood the previous

instructions, and assimilated the realizations that they offer. If we do not become free from the materialistic illusion of identification with the body, we will remain unable to appreciate the personal aspect of the transcendental science, and there will be the risk of becoming consciously or unconsciously envious of this personality that speaks of himself in such glorious terms.

Conscious envy is relatively easy to recognize, because it generally shows in the behavior of the envious person, mostly in the form of joy in front of the sufferings, defamation, losses and problems of others, and moroseness or anger in front of the happiness or glorification of those persons. An envious man/ woman cannot tolerate to see the happiness of others, especially of the person that is the object of his/ her envy.

Of course when the object of envy is a very powerful person, the envious must be very careful about showing their real feelings, and therefore they may make special effort to pretend they have favorable feelings towards the object of their envy - such as respect, appreciation, and even love or devotion. In the effort to be more credible, they may even go to the extreme and behave externally as they have become fanatical supporters or followers or devotees. There is a famous proverb saying, *ati bhakti chori lakshana*, "too much devotion is the symptom of a thief".

For a superficial observer it is not easy to distinguish a genuine devotee from one of such envious pretenders, and some ignorant people may even be led to believe that the envious pretender is actually a greater devotee than the real followers, who may be more dignified in their external behavior and prefer to serve humbly rather than making a big show of emotions in public.

Usually such envious pretenders are more easily found in the closest and most intimate circle around the great personality, because that is where their dramatic performance can have the

strongest effect, and where their actual aspirations can find a way to success. For example, from that position they can sabotage the relationship of the great personality with other, more sincere, people, and create a void around him so that nobody will be able to help him in the time of need. Also, a position in the "inner circle" or "core group of followers" can offer the opportunity to eliminate the great personality and take his place, or simply to enjoy his property and usurp his glory and authority.

When we apply these considerations to the greatest personality of all, Krishna, we can see that many of those who claim to be his greatest devotees are trying to direct the attention of the general people towards aspects of Krishna that appear to be more ordinary - for example, his being a pretty baby in the arms of his mother, a toddler fond of sweets, a simple-minded cowherd boy playing with his little friends, or a careless adolescent romantically involved with girls. In the name of the "most intimate *rasas*", these false devotees insist in focusing the attention of people on those activities of Krishna that most resemble the materialistic adventures of common people, and that are so often the object of foolish (and often envious) gossip among the ignorant masses.

These professional reciters encourage their audience to watch the most intimate dealings between Krishna and the *gopis*, for example, as a sort of peep show just like people go to the movies to watch some romantic comedy or tragedy or porn film, or like those old ladies whose greatest interest is to find out juicy details about the personal private lives of their neighbors. But genuine spiritual life is not that cheap.

We definitely can have a very personal relationship with God as Bhagavan, but such relationship should be based on a permanent, strong and genuine realization of God as Brahman and Paramatma.

VERSE 31

सर्वभूतस्थितं यो मां भजत्येकत्वमास्थितः ।

sarvabhūtasthitaṁ yo mām bhajatyekatvamāsthitaḥ ।

सर्वथा वर्तमानोऽपि स योगी मयि वर्तते ॥ ६-३१ ॥

sarvathā vartamāno'pi sa yogī mayi vartate ॥ 6-31 ॥

sarva-bhuta-sthitam: remaining in all beings/ existences; *yah*: he; *mam*: me; *bhajati*: worships/ serves; *ekatvam*: with concentrated consciousness; *asthitah*: situated; *sarvatha*: in every way; *vartamanah*: he may be; *api*: even; *sah*: he; *yogi*: a yogi; *mayi*: to me; *vartate*: exists.

"The yogi who worships me as the One who resides in all existences is situated (in me); wherever s/he may go, s/he always remains in me."

Krishna wants to clarify the concept that he is not an ordinary human being. Many people become devotees of great and powerful personalities, such as cricket or soccer players, pop singers, movie actors, famous politicians, social leaders, writers, philosophers or even religious teachers, because this is a natural tendency of human beings, especially of those who are still unevolved and immature, such as children and adolescents.

People who feel insecure about their own identity and purpose in life tend to vicariously identify with a model and shape their opinions, attitudes and behaviors in the imitation of such model - sometimes even replicating the accent, the gait, or some typical physical gestures. There is nothing intrinsically wrong in this, because each human being needs to develop gradually in order to grow naturally and evolve a balanced and self-sufficient

personality, and in healthy societies there are sufficient positive role models that growing people can look up to. As Krishna already said (3.21), the mass of people always look up at the great personalities and follow their example.

However, there is a difference between God and a great man. Many great men may consciously or unconsciously convince themselves they have become God, especially when their followers and fans become their devotees and literally worship them as God.

In Vedic tradition, formal worship is offered as an expression of respect and gratitude to all the great personalities and even to one's direct superiors and to nature's manifestations, but all these traditional rituals always require the very clear understanding that the Transcendental Supreme Reality is superior to all the secondary manifestations of power.

No man can ever become God. No matter how much power and glory seem to emanate from great men, such greatness is nothing but a pale reflection of the true glory of Bhagavan, as Krishna will clearly state in the next chapters (from 7.7 to 7.13, from 5.9 to 22.9, from 2.10 to 11.10, from 19.10 to 42.10).

As clearly stated in chapter 12 (verses 2 to 5), meditation on the personal form of Bhagavan is more congenial to the personal nature of the soul, but we should not forget that the personality that is worshiping God should also have the same transcendental and divine consciousness, otherwise the results will not be the same.

When a materially identified man worships the personal form of God within his limited materialistic perception, his devotion is not true *bhakti*: at best it can be some sentimentalistic attachment or attraction, or cheap bigotry, at worst it can be an offensive attitude of material familiarity that breeds contempt and may even slide into cynical exploitation.

Later in *Gita* (9.11) Krishna will explain that less intelligent people attribute material qualities and behaviors to the divine manifestations and their activities because they are unable to understand Transcendence: *avajananti mam mudha manusim tanum asritam, param bhavm ajananto mama bhuta-mahesvaram*

We should never think that the true worship of the personal form of God is something easy and cheap. *Gita* (7.3) confirms that the true understanding of this personal form is extremely difficult to achieve, and those who are true devotees of God are very rare: *manusyanam sahasresu kascid yatati siddhaye, yatatam api siddhanam kascid mam vetti tattvatah*. One who really knows the Lord and understands the transcendental nature of his form and activities can remember him at the moment of death and does not need to return to this world of birth and death: *janma karma ca me divyam evam yo vetti-tattvatah, tyaktva deham punar janma naiti mam eti so 'rjuna* (*Gita*, 4.9).

VERSE 32

आत्मौपम्येन सर्वत्र समं पश्यति योऽर्जुन ।

ātmaupamyena sarvatra samam paśyati yo'rjuna ।

सुखं वा यदि वा दुःखं स योगी परमो मतः ॥ ६-३२ ॥

sukham vā yadi vā duḥkham sa yogī paramo mataḥ ॥ 6-32 ॥

atma: with oneself/ the Atman; *aupamyena*: by comparison; *sarvatra*: everywhere; *samam*: equally; *paśyati*: sees; *yah*: s/he; *arjuna*: o Arjuna; *sukham*: joy; *va*: or; *yadi*: if; *va*: or; *duḥkham*: sorrow; *sah*: s/he; *yogi*: a *yogi*; *paramah*: the best; *mataḥ*: considered.

"O Arjuna, one who sees everything/ everyone as non-different from oneself, both in joy and in sorrow, is in my opinion the greatest *yogi*."

In the previous chapters Krishna has clearly stated that a true *yogi* and *sannyasi* is completely detached from all material association, from all identifications, sense of belonging and attachments. However, this does not mean that s/he has become insensitive to the happiness and distress of other living entities.

Just as the *yogi* and *sannyasi* continues to perform his/ her duties in the best possible way without expecting any personal advantage in return, in the same way s/he loves all living entities without selfish attachment and expectations.

Compassion is a characteristic symptom of a self-realized soul. As the perfect *yogi* is conscious of his/her nature as spirit soul and sees everyone around as a spirit soul, s/he does not make discriminations between him/ herself and others, and therefore deeply shares the joys and sorrows of everyone - especially the sorrows. S/he is therefore called *para-duhkha-duhkhi*, "one who shares the sufferings of others".

The expression *atman-aupamyena* indicates that one should see others according to the same standard one applies to oneself, treat others as he would like to be treated himself. This is precisely the contrary of envy and jealousy, and all the other similar sentiments that are characteristic of materialistic people, who see others as separated and different from himself. The Self-realized soul sees the divine *atman* in all beings, and therefore s/he makes no difference between *atman* and *atman*, as we have already seen in the previous verses.

This verse, however, add a new dimension of compassion, by specifying *sukham va yadi va duhkham*, "in joy and in sorrow".

Now, we know that the pure consciousness of the Atman only knows a transcendental happiness called *ananda* (as opposed to the material joy called *sukha*), in which there is no place for *duhkha* or distress.

Therefore, we must understand that this empathy also applies to the material joys and sorrows experienced by the bodies and minds of the living entities, and to the pressure these feelings create on the consciousness of the soul.

The compassionate sage thinks, "Seeking happiness is a natural tendency in everyone, and all beings experience joy and suffering. The joys and sorrows of others are the same joys and sorrows that I have experienced in my life, therefore I understand them and I will try to do my best to help others, just like in the past I have anxiously desired to be helped in my time of need."

However, the sage also knows that the greatest happiness lies not in the comforts of the body and mind, but in the attainment of the transcendental realization of the Self, so s/he will try to encourage the conditioned souls to pursue the highest purpose of human life.

This transcendental concern may seem similar to the mentality of some missionaries that conduct activities of social assistance and welfare with the overt or covert motivation of gaining new converts for their particular affiliation.

But in fact there is a huge difference between conversion into the sectarian allegiance to a particular faith and the genuine realization of the transcendental nature of the Atman, that is liberating the mind from all divisive identification, affiliation and bondage.

VERSE 33

अर्जुन उवाच ।

arjuna uvāca ।

योऽयं योगस्त्वया प्रोक्तः साम्येन मधुसूदन ।

yo'yaṁ yogastvayā proktaḥ sāmyena madhusūdana ।

एतस्याहं न पश्यामि चञ्चलत्वात्स्थितिं स्थिराम् ॥ ६-३३ ॥

etasyāhaṁ na paśyāmi cañcalatvātsthitim sthirām ॥ 6-33 ॥

arjunah: Arjuna; *uvaca:* said; *yah:* it; *ayam:* this; *yogah:* yoga; *tvaya:* by you; *proktaḥ:* explained; *sāmyena:* as sameness; *madhusudana:* o Madhusudana (Krishna); *etasya:* of this; *aham:* I; *na:* not; *paśyāmi:* (I) see; *cañcalatvat:* the quality of restlessness; *sthitim:* (permanent) situation; *sthiram:* firmly established.

Arjuna said:

"O Madhusudana, I do not see how it is possible to consistently perform this *yoga* that you have now described to me as equanimity, because (the mind) is restless."

Krishna has described the traditional system of *yoga* and *sannyasa* as it was practiced in the ancient times. It is said that in the beginning, in Satya yuga, the *yuga dharma* was precisely the practice of *yoga* and *sannyasa*, that transcendental meditation that purifies the intelligence from all material identification and attachment and carries it to the level of Brahman realization. This was possible because all human beings were capable of observing and following the basic principles of *dharma*: *tapas* (austerity), *sauca* (cleanliness), *daya* (compassion) and *satya* (truthfulness). People were able to retire alone in the forest and live in a totally detached way.

With the passing of time in the cycle of the *yugas*, mankind gradually became more degraded, because of the restlessness of the mind and its overwhelming desires. First austerity was lost, and people became lusty for the pleasures of the heavenly planets and the material advantages that one can obtain on this earth: a good birth, good descendants, a good wife or husband, fame, wealth and opulence, material power, beauty and physical vigor or fitness, mental strength, knowledge, and so on. Therefore in Treta yuga the ritual performance of sacrifices becomes the *yuga dharma*, that is faithfully executing the *nitya karmani*, the daily duties that include the *homa* or fire sacrifice. The main qualification and concern for this type of religious practice is cleanliness (*sauca*), therefore tradition puts a lot of emphasis on purification and cleanliness at every step - both externally and internally. Without the proper cleanliness and purification, a person has no *adhikara* (right) to perform the traditional rituals, while on the other side, anyone can become qualified through the proper purification and cleanliness system.

In the cycle of the universal seasons, Treta yuga is followed by Dvapara yuga, and the qualities of human beings diminish accordingly. Cleanliness becomes difficult to uphold, both internally and externally, and therefore the focus of religious activities is shifted towards the compassionate *yuga dharma* of Deity worship. Although cleanliness and austerity are always recommended, Deity worship in the temple can be open to those who do not possess very high qualifications in that field, as they can always attend the functions, offer their homage and receive the *prasadam*. The direct altar worship is delegated to priests that can maintain high standards of cleanliness and austerity because they are not required to do any other job, and who act as intermediaries in the relationship between the general people and the *vigrahas* installed in the temple. Therefore in Dvapara yuga, wealthy *kshatriyas* and *vaisyas* take up the responsibility of establishing

temples and providing for the regular maintenance of the *brahmanas* who perform the rituals in the name of the *karta* (the financier who dedicates the worship) and of the entire society. Of course cleanliness is always encouraged, especially for the officiating priests but also for the general people albeit in a lesser degree. For example, traditional temples always have sacred tanks or pools, called *kundas* or *sarovaras*, where the devotees and the pilgrims can bathe or at least clean up a bit before entering the temple. But the main activity of temples is the compassionate distribution of sanctified food (*prasadam*) and other consecrated items (such as holy water, flowers etc) and the public readings and discussions about the *shastra*, so that the general people can obtain benefit from the transcendental knowledge without having to strictly observe the rules of cleanliness or austerity.

At the time when Krishna is talking to Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra, the Dvapara yuga is coming to a close and Kali yuga is approaching, with the gradual degradation of the qualifications of human beings, who will lose compassion after having already lost cleanliness and austerity.

The only religious principle that will still remain to support spiritual life will be *satya*, truthfulness, and this is the quality that Arjuna is now demonstrating, by honestly and candidly objecting that the ancient system explained by Krishna (*ayam yah proktah*, "this that has been explained") is very difficult and impractical for this age.

Of course Arjuna is much more qualified than us, and he expresses this opinion for our benefit rather than considering his personal qualifications and capabilities, but what he says is the pure truth and we need to become truthful - i.e. humble and honest - enough to recognize it.

VERSE 34

चञ्चलं हि मनः कृष्ण प्रमाथि बलवद् दृढम् ।

cañcalaṁ hi manaḥ kṛṣṇa pramāthi balavad dṛḍham ।

तस्याहं निग्रहं मन्ये वायोरिव सुदुष्करम् ॥ ६-३४ ॥

tasyāhaṁ nigrahaṁ manye vāyoriva suduṣkaram ॥ 6-34 ॥

cancalam: restless; *hi*: indeed; *manah*: the mind; *krishna*: o Krishna; *pramathi*: turbulent; *balavat*: strong; *dridham*: obstinate; *tasya*: of it; *aham*: I; *nigraham*: conquering; *manye*: (I) consider; *vayoh*: than the wind; *eva*: certainly; *su-dushkaram*: extremely difficult.

"O Krishna, the mind is indeed restless, turbulent, powerful and stubborn. I think that controlling it would be more difficult than controlling the wind."

This is one of the most famous verses of *Gita*, and one of the most useful in the daily practice of *sadhana*. Arjuna is a very practical person, and he can understand the problems of people.

He is the perfect example of the *yogi* as described in verse 32, as one who can sympathize with the joys and sufferings of others, and looks compassionately upon them in their difficulties.

As we have already commented in the first chapter regarding Arjuna's sorrow, we should never fall into the mistake of considering him an ordinary person, a confused conditioned soul.

Arjuna is a very close and eternal associate of Krishna, and descended with him in this world for the purpose of manifesting the wonderful adventures of assisting the Lord's mission.

As stated by the Lord himself, Arjuna has been a close protagonist of the Lord's *lila* during many lifetimes (see *Gita* 4.4), acting under the superintendence of Yogamaya and apparently forgetting what he is not expected to know, so that he will be able to better play his role, like all the other divine manifestations that appeared with Krishna to assist his mission.

Arjuna's objections in this verse clearly demonstrate that the purpose of meditation is to control the mind and focus it on the contemplation of Transcendence.

Many uninformed people believe that *yoga* meditation consists in fantasizing or visualizing imaginary pictures, or simply to witness the constant whimsical flow of the thoughts, perceptions, desires and emotions that run through the mind.

This idea is created by the clever mind that naturally resists all forms of control just like a wild horse stubbornly rears and kicks in the attempt to overthrow his rider.

The mind is made of a subtle substance that is able to change appearance and movements, just like an ever-transforming monster that keeps sliding off our grasp, even taking up the appearance of Guru and God in order to deceive us into following its whims.

It is easy for the unbridled obstinate mind to twist things and ideas around and to rationalize and try to justify even the greatest nonsense.

We can overcome this problem by listening to our intelligence, that is superior to the mind, and to purify ourselves from all material identifications and attachments that constitute the roots of the selfish desires of the mind.

VERSE 35

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।

śrībhagavānuvāca ।

असंशयं महाबाहो मनो दुर्निग्रहं चलम् ।

asamśayaṁ mahābāho mano durnigrahaṁ calam ।

अभ्यासेन तु कौन्तेय वैराग्येण च गृह्यते ॥ ६-३५ ॥

abhyāsena tu kaunteya vairāgyeṇa ca gṛhyate ॥ 6-35 ॥

sri-bhagavan: the wonderful Lord; *uvaca*: said; *asamsayam*: without (any) doubts; *maha-baho*: o mighty armed (Arjuna); *manah*: the mind; *durnigraham*: difficult to catch; *calam*: moving; *abhyasena*: by practice; *tu*: but; *kaunteya*: o son of Kunti (Arjuna); *vairagyena*: by renunciation; *ca*: and; *grihyate*: is brought under control.

The Lord said:

"O mighty armed (Arjuna), certainly the mind is restless and very difficult to manage, but it can be controlled by practice and detachment, o son of Kunti."

One of the most frequent questions asked by beginners in *yoga* practice is, "how can I control the mind?"

Gita clearly recognizes the fact that controlling the mind is not an easy job, but it gives the perfect formula: *abhyasena* (by practice) and *vairagyena* (by detachment). The next verse also hints at some specific exercises that help in that regard. The *Yoga sutras* (1.12) by Patanjali also give the same instruction: *abhyasa-vairagyabhyam tan-nirodhah*, "The cessation (of the *cittavrittis*) is done by (persistent) practice (*abhyasa*) and detachment (*vairagya*)".

Practice and detachment can be exercised with the help of three virtues that are particularly important in the journey of spiritual realization: *utsaha* (enthusiasm), *dhairya* (patience) and *nischaya* (confidence). The last chapter of *Gita* (18.26) also lists *utsaha* (enthusiasm) together with *dhriti* (determination), that is a variation of *dhairya* (patience). Anyone who had the experience of taking care of children knows that it takes a lot of enthusiasm, patience and determination, as well as practice and detachment. Training one's mind is very much like educating a child. By nature, small children are restless, turbulent, energetic and stubborn, and they constantly come up with innumerable demands - desires, ideas and emotions. Some children are stronger and cleverer than others and they are therefore more difficult to manage, but when properly trained and educated, they become the best friends of the people who have taken care of them. Already in 6.5 Krishna has said that one's mind can be one's best friend or worst enemy.

Punishing or merely restraining the child are not effective systems, and allowing the child to do whatever he wants is generally dangerous; in both cases the child will behave like an enemy to us, and there will just be sufferings.

The best course of action consists in taking the guidance of intelligence and good sense, and following Krishna's instructions in *Gita*: we must become the best friends of our mind by treating it like a beloved child who needs the proper training. What does a child need? Some good, healthy and tasty food, sufficient rest, some fun, and training exercises suitable for his/ her stage of development. Under the guidance of an expert teacher, we can train our mind successfully if we give it the proper food, rest and fun, and engage it in suitable work, as also confirmed earlier in *Gita* (6.16, 17). Every time the restless childish mind wanders off, we must patiently bring it back, with tolerance, enthusiasm and gentle firmness.

It is also extremely important to offer the mind something better than what it already knows: *rasa-varjam raso 'py asya param drishtva nivartate*, "it can give up the taste (for such objects) when he sees/ finds the Supreme/ something that has a higher/ better taste" (2.59).

The superiority of the gentle, patient and positively enthusiastic method, as opposed to the "hard way" that some people believe is required to deal with small children, is highlighted by the humorous hint offered by Krishna in this verse when he calls Arjuna *maha-baho*, "mighty armed".

Can we control the wind with our mighty arms? Certainly not.

One may also try to use brute force to try to control the mind (or a small child) but the results will not be good. Just like the wind or the water find their way around obstacles, popping up again in unexpected (and often more violent and destructive) ways, a repressed mind will become distorted and create many problems that sometimes may seem totally unconnected to the original issue.

For example, a child that does not receive sufficient attentions may develop a physical disease, a neglected need of proper nourishment for the body may take the form of craving for junk food, a river in spate whose waters are not properly channeled will break the levies, and a repressed mind will create a series of unhealthy obsessions and phobias.

The gently firm method recommended by Krishna is certainly the best.

He stresses this important point by using the word *asamsayam*, "without (any) doubts".

VERSE 36

असंयतात्मना योगो दुष्प्राप इति मे मतिः ।

asamyatātmanā yogo duṣprāpa iti me matiḥ ।

वश्यात्मना तु यतता शक्योऽवाप्तुमुपायतः ॥ ६-३६ ॥

vaśyātmanā tu yatatā śakyo'vāptumupāyataḥ ॥ 6-36 ॥

asamyata: uncontrolled; *atmana*: self; *yogah*: yoga; *dushprapah*: difficult to obtain; *iti*: like this; *me*: my; *matih*: opinion; *vasya*: controlled; *atmana*: self; *tu*: but; *yatata*: making efforts; *sakyah*: possible; *avaptum*: to achieve; *upayatah*: by the means (I have) described.

"My opinion is that it is very difficult to attain yoga when the self/ mind is not engaged/ controlled, but there are (appropriate) means by which with a little effort one will be able to control the self/ mind."

Controlling one's mind is certainly the main issue in *yoga*. All the practice in *asana* and *pranayama* has the only purpose of helping us to control the mind, because without being able to direct the mind firmly towards the chosen object of meditation, there is no question of *yoga*.

The most famous authority on *yoga*, Patanjali, clearly states in the first chapter of his *Yogasutras* (1.2): *yogah citta-vritti-nirodhah*, "*Yoga* is the cessation of the fluctuations in the mind". This is possible only when we become able to control the activity of the mind and focus it firmly on one object only - what is called *dharana*, "holding the meditation firmly".

The first step in the process consists in deciding that we will not run after the myriad of desires, impulses, feelings, emotions,

thoughts, plans, ideas, fantasies, fears, and anxieties that the mind constantly proposes us. Therefore only a fool will think that he can practice *yoga* with the purpose of getting a trim and fit body that is able to run after the whims of the mind and the desires for sense gratification.

Some people even think that we should "get rid" of the mind, but this is simply stupid. The mind is an element of material nature, and we cannot "get rid" of the mind any more than we can get rid of the water that composes our bodies. Also, the idea of "cutting off the mind" because we have problems controlling it is something like deciding to cut off our head because we have a headache.

It is true that controlling the mind is difficult, but when we need to do something important, we should make an effort to overcome difficulties. We need commitment and determination in order to achieve any good result. Maybe we will not succeed 100% immediately, but even a small percentage of success is better than nothing, and without making any effort our life will not become any better. The word *yatata* means precisely "making efforts, striving".

Krishna reassures us: it is difficult, but it is possible. The word *sakya* ("possible") derives from the same root of *saktum* ("to be able to") and *sakti* ("power"). As individual souls, we have the power to control at least our own mind: this is the door that will take us beyond, towards the greatest possible power in this world.

The word *upayatah* suggests that there are means, rules, methods and exercises that we can use to achieve success in this enterprise, but the essential point is always about engagement. Control means engagement: positive engagement enables us to prevent the mind from negative engagement. Another very important point is that one's mind must be controlled by oneself, not controlled by others.

Having someone else control your mind is not the solution to your problems: it can help in the beginning, during a training period, because you need to learn good habits and practice the exercises that will enable you to control your mind movements, but after some time you need to stand on your own feet and take responsibility for your own progress.

VERSE 37

अर्जुन उवाच ।

arjuna uvāca ।

अयतिः श्रद्धयोपेतो योगाच्चलितमानसः ।

ayatiḥ śraddhayopeto yogācchalitamānaśaḥ ।

अप्राप्य योगसंसिद्धिं कां गतिं कृष्ण गच्छति ॥ ६-३७ ॥

aprāpya yogasamsiddhiṁ kām gatiṁ kṛṣṇa gacchati ॥ 6-37 ॥

arjuna: Arjuna; *uvaca*: said; *ayatiḥ*: one who fails (in the effort); *śraddhaya*: with faith; *upetaḥ*: having commenced; *yogāt*: from the yoga; *calita*: strayed; *manasah*: the mind; *aprapya*: has not attained; *yoga-samsiddhiṁ*: the perfection of yoga; *kām*: which; *gatiṁ*: destination; *kṛṣṇa*: o Krishna; *gacchati*: he goes to.

Arjuna said:

"O Krishna, (let's say that) someone has faithfully embraced yoga but due to insufficient renunciation/ efforts s/he is led astray by the mind and fails to attain the complete perfection of yoga. What destination will s/he achieve?"

Committing oneself fully to yoga, to the serious and dedicated practice of Self realization, is not an easy task, because it requires a

complete paradigm shift. It is not a mere hobby or leisure activity. It is a full time occupation.

We need to radically rearrange our priorities, starting with our own identification, and this important choice will inevitably change many things in our life - including our relationships, our lifestyle, our position in society. Material illusions can be very gratifying, and when we give them up we may get the feeling that we are losing something very important, that we will not get back so easily if we changed our mind and decided that the path of *yoga* is too difficult for us.

It will be difficult to leave an affectionate family, a good social position, a prestigious job, a comfortable house, and the little indulgences we call "creature comforts" (although we do not really need to lose them - we need to renounce our identification and attachments to them) but even the least successful person in this world has some attachments, some "comfort zone" he does not like to give up, at least in his consciousness.

In the 1960s and 1970s, many young people in the West left their homes and families, dropped out from school and refused to get stuck into conventional professional careers and to adapt themselves to conventional social expectations. They had the strong feeling that there must be something more in life, something that is worth pursuing beyond the illusory trappings of the materialistic dream and the illusory identifications and attachments that were obviously insufficient to explain life and make it really worthy of living. Most of those people were rather ignorant and confused, but they took inspiration from the early preachers of Sanatana Dharma that had ventured in the world to bring the transcendental message of *yoga* to the wealthiest countries of the world - some even traveled to India and lived together with *sadhus* to "experiment" on "how to expand the area of consciousness".

It took a lot of courage and dedication to just drop everything and just search for the meaning of life, to live with integrity and a higher purpose, and there was always a price to pay for burning the bridges behind oneself. Arjuna is thinking along the same lines: if one gives up all attachments and identifications to engage in *yoga*, it will not be possible to return to a life of ignorant bliss and attachments. And because it seems so difficult to achieve success in the higher dimension of life in *yoga*, what will happen to someone who fails because he is not strong and determined enough? What if he changes his mind and decides that he should have taken it a little easier? What if he "bit off more than he could chew"?

The word *ayati* refers to one who fails in the effort, that cannot strive enough, or is not diligent enough. In the previous verse the word *yatata*, "making efforts" clearly stated that it takes a lot of determination and work to achieve success on the path of *yoga*.

The expression *yogat calita manasah* translates as "the mind has gone away from the *yoga*", indicating a powerful urge to change the course of one's life, a total loss of interest, as when we say that our heart is "somewhere else". Because the mind is so powerful and difficult to control, when it leaves the path of *yoga* and simply refuses to engage any more into it, the situation becomes unbearable and it is just impossible to continue to work in that direction.

VERSE 38

कच्चिन्नोभयविभ्रष्टश्छिन्नाभ्रमिव नश्यति ।

kaccinnobhayavibhraṣṭaśchinnābhramiva naśyati ।

अप्रतिष्ठो महाबाहो विमूढो ब्रह्मणः पथि ॥ ६-३८ ॥

apraṭiṣṭho mahābāho vimūḍho brahmaṇaḥ pathi ॥ 6-38 ॥

kaccit: anything; *na*: not; *ubhaya*: of the two; *vibhrastah*: fallen; *chinna*: torn; *abhram*: cloud; *iva*: like; *nasyati*: is destroyed; *apratishthah*: without any position/ support; *maha-baho*: o mighty armed (Krishna); *vimudha*: confused; *brahmanah*: of Brahman; *pathi*: on the path.

"O mighty armed (Krishna), (I wonder) whether s/he will not perish like a scattered cloud, since s/he has abandoned both (pursuits, i.e. ritual activity and engagement in *sannyasa yoga*) and remains without a position/ stand, confused on the path of Transcendence."

In verse 2.41, Krishna explained the importance of seriously focusing on one thing only, which saves our intelligence from getting dispersed into many ineffective enterprises (*ekeha kuru nandana bahu sakha hy anantas ca buddhayo 'avyavasayinam*).

It is not possible to attain Self realization without giving up materialistic pursuits, identifications and attachments, because the path of *yoga* requires a totally different perspective on life. The path of *yoga* is the path of *moksha*, and one who is seeking *moksha* has already gone beyond *artha* and *kama*. The natural evolution of the civilized human being goes from the stage of learning and practicing about *dharma* to the stage when he engages in the dharmic pursuit of *artha* and *kama*. These two stages correspond to the *ashramas* called *brahmacharya* (celibate life) and *grihastha* (married life).

Every human being needs to receive the proper training from an early age, so that he will be able to learn good principles, habits and skills. This training is best received as a student in the Guru's house, starting from the age of 5, when a child has become physically and mentally self-sufficient enough to seriously engage in his studies. After completing his training, the young man can successfully engage in the pursuit of *artha* and *kama* without the

danger of falling into *vikarma*, or detrimental activities and choices that will obstruct his development and create a dark future for him. He marries and engages in a suitable professional occupation and his regular duties, reaping the fruits of his good *karma* in the form of wealth, knowledge, social position, respect from good people and so on. All this is perfectly legitimate, but as Krishna has explained in the previous chapters, such pleasures are temporary and do not constitute the real purpose of life. All scriptures clearly teach that *artha* and *kama* are just temporary stages in life, and that *moksha* is the highest and most important acquisition for a civilized human being.

Yoga is the path to *moksha*. But what if one was not ready? What if he still wanted to have some *artha* and *kama* from life? What if he felt that he still had something to do, some debts to repay, some work to complete? What if he wanted another chance at doing something good for his family, for his community, and for the world?

Of course we know that all this is still possible, and at a higher level, after attaining the liberated stage, so nothing is really ever lost. But what if one is still feeling childish, and small, and attached to the little things that make the life of an ordinary human being? There is nothing wrong in that. The Divine plan is built on the principles of *dharma*, so there must be compassion.

We do not get one chance only, like the abrahamics say, foolishly rejecting the real fact of reincarnation and imagining that a few years in disadvantaged circumstances are all we are offered to win an eternity of happiness in heaven or be sentenced to an eternity of sufferings in hell. God is much more compassionate than that.

Whatever good work, whatever progress we have made, we will be able to take it with us to the next lifetime, as Krishna will explain in the next verses.

While we cannot take material possessions with us when we leave our body, our spiritual realizations will remain to our credit, and in the next lifetime we will get better circumstances and opportunities to continue our progress and evolution.

In this verse Arjuna responds to Krishna's subtle humor by also addressing him as *maha baho*, "mighty armed", but in this context the name is appealing to Krishna's powerful protection, so that in his compassion he will support the confused souls.

In other words, Arjuna is replying, "My dear Krishna, there is nothing to laugh about here: the sufferings of people are real enough, even if they are due to illusion."

VERSE 39

एतन्मे संशयं कृष्ण छेत्तुमर्हस्यशेषतः ।

etanme saṁśayaṁ kṛṣṇa chettumarhasyaśeṣataḥ ।

त्वदन्यः संशयस्यास्य छेत्ता न ह्युपपद्यते ॥ ६-३९ ॥

tvadanyaḥ saṁśayasyāśya chettā na hyupapadyate ॥ 6-39 ॥

etat: this; *me*: my; *samsayam*: doubt; *krishna*: o Krishna; *chettum*: to cut off/ to eradicate/ remove; *arhasi*: you should; *aseshatah*: completely; *tvad-anyaḥ*: other than you; *samsayasyasya*: of the doubt; *chetta*: one who cuts off; *na*: not; *hi*: certainly; *upapadyate*: can be found.

"O Krishna, (please) you should dispel these doubts completely for me, because I cannot find anyone else but you who can remove uncertainty."

We are entitled to have doubts, because doubting is a faculty of intelligence, and blind following is always dangerous even when we are following a good person or a good path. However, we should not remain in doubt forever. The faculty of doubt is meant to encourage us to find the proper information and understanding, so that we will confidently engage in the best path we can find, supporting our choice with the faith we have developed from the experiences we have had. When we overcome our doubts after the proper deliberation, we can really progress in life. This crucial step, that consists in clarifying and overcoming doubts, has already been mentioned several times in *Gita*:

"I am asking you to clarify the confusion of my mind, to tell me without a doubt what is the best thing to do" (2.7), "get up, o son of Kunti, and abandoning all doubts, fix your mind on the battle" (2.37), "Please give me one instruction only, that will not create doubts, and by which I will obtain the best result" (3.2), "A person who is devoid of knowledge and faith and cannot overcome doubts will be lost. For one who is plagued by uncertainty there is no happiness in this world or in the next" (4.40), "One who has cut through all doubts by knowledge, finds his desires turning towards the self" (4.41), "Therefore o Bharata, get up and fight, establishing yourself in *yoga* and using the sword of knowledge to slash off all these doubts that were born from ignorance and are infesting the heart" (4.42), "O Krishna, please tell me what will be the best, without any doubt" (5.1), "The seers of Reality have been purified from all faults and have cut off all doubts..." (5.25), "This is undoubtedly the *yoga* system that must be practiced without getting discouraged." (6.23).

How is it possible to overcome doubt? We need someone we can trust, that has already experienced what we want to attain, and that is only interested to help us, without any strings attached. If one of these factors is missing, then the person we want to trust can be a

serious disappointment. Arjuna clearly states that Krishna is the best possible person to solve our doubts, as it will become even more apparent in the next chapters.

VERSE 40

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।

śrībhagavānuvāca ।

पार्थ नैवेह नामुत्र विनाशस्तस्य विद्यते ।

pārtha naiveha nāmutra vināśastasya vidyate ।

न हि कल्याणकृत्कश्चिद् दुर्गतिं तात गच्छति ॥ ६-४० ॥

na hi kalyāṇakṛtkāścid durgatim tāta gacchati ॥ 6-40 ॥

sri-bhagavan: the wonderful Lord; *uvaca*: said; *partha*: o son of Pritha (Arjuna); *na*: not; *eva*: certainly; *iha*: here (in this world/ life); *na*: not; *amutra*: in the next (world/ life); *vinasah*: destruction; *tasya*: of him; *vidyate*: is known; *na*: not; *hi*: certainly; *kalyana-krit*: one who performs good/ auspicious activities; *kascit*: any; *durgatim*: bad situation; *tata*: (my) dear (son); *gacchati*: goes to.

The Lord said:

"O Partha, s/he will never be lost, in this world or in the next life. One who is engaged in beneficial activities will never meet with a bad end."

The first point in Krishna's reply to Arjuna is reassurance. When we say that God is good, loving and compassionate, we cannot really believe that he will sentence a poor soul to eternal hell just

because of some mistake or weakness - also considering that it was God to create human beings in the first place, with their weakness and fallibility, and sanctioned the unfavorable circumstances in which human beings must live and make their choices.

The truth is that all living entities are created as parts of God's body, and their experience in the material universe is meant to be an evolutionary journey - its meaning is reflected in the various dimensions of the microcosm-macrocosm like a series of mirrors reflecting each other. Each living entity appears, grows and strives towards completion and perfection, and at the time of death it naturally moves to the next higher level of evolution; from the unicellular organisms to the human form of life, the laws of progress are naturally and automatically engraved in the heart of the *jiva*, and the process is instinctive. At the human level, these laws of progress are also given in the form of religious teachings, that must be in conformity to the natural law of progress eternally inscribed in the heart of the *jiva* - what we call "the voice of conscience" or the *sanatana dharma*.

The opportunity of human birth is extraordinarily important because it constitutes a sort of "graduation" or "coming of age", granting special freedom of choice and action and a greater power to participate more in God's work, just like a grown-up child will be given the keys of the house or the car, a more substantial allowance for his expenditures, his own TV set or computer, and so on.

However, with greater power comes greater responsibility: if the human being misuses the facilities he has been given, he will be held accountable and even deprived of some of the privileges he used against himself. This is why sometimes the natural evolution of the *jiva* is stopped and even appears to have been reversed, with a next incarnation that is lower than the previous one.

Such lower birth can be as a disadvantaged human being (handicapped, poor, unfortunate etc) or as an animal or a plant, but it is important to understand that the laws of *karma* are very complex and that in no instance our good actions and especially our spiritual evolution will be lost: they will simply remain dormant and will be revived at the proper time to help us continue our evolutionary journey. Many stories from *Puranas*, *Itihasas* and *Upanishads* confirm this fact.

As Krishna has explained in the last verses, everything is based on personal effort (*yataata, ayatih*). We only fail due to lack of personal effort - either in this present lifetime or in a previous lifetime... which created the karmic consequences of difficult circumstances in this present lifetime. Why someone fails and falls from the path of transcendence? It is only because of previous bad *karma*, therefore if someone performs good activities, the balance of *karma* will become favorable and after a short time all difficulties will be overcome.

In this verse, the word *tata* is particularly significant. It refers to a bodily relationship (*tanoti*) such as the one between father and son or between teacher and disciple (in Vedic tradition the disciple is considered exactly like a son). As a patient and benevolent parent that is teaching a baby how to walk his first steps, God watches over us and guides us in our efforts, step after step, and gradually letting us go more and more, so that we can learn to stand on our two feet and grow up, becoming stronger and more responsible, until we reach the level where we understand and appreciate God's nature and mission. At that point we attain our "final graduation" or the "full maturity", by which our consciousness becomes firmly established in God's consciousness. This level is called *brahma bhuta*, "the existence of Brahman", or *moksha*, "liberation", and generally takes several lifetimes to be attained, as Krishna will confirm in the next chapter: *bahunam janmanam ante* (7.19).

VERSE 41

प्राप्य पुण्यकृतां लोकानुषित्वा शाश्वतीः समाः ।

prāpya puṇyakṛtām lokānuṣitvā śāśvatīḥ samāḥ ।

शुचीनां श्रीमतां गेहे योगभ्रष्टोऽभिजायते ॥ ६-४१ ॥

śucinām śrīmatām gehe yogabhraṣṭo'bhijāyate ॥ 6-41 ॥

prāpya: after achieving; *puṇya-kṛitam*: one who has performed auspicious/ good activities; *lokan*: the planets; *uṣhitva*: after dwelling (there); *sasvatīḥ*: numerous; *samāḥ*: years; *sucinam*: of pure (people); *śrīmatam*: of wealthy (people); *gehe*: in the house; *yoga-bhrashtah*: one who has fallen from the path of *yoga*; *abhijāyate*: takes birth.

"After attaining the planets of those who are virtuous and residing there for many years, one who has fallen from *yoga* takes birth in the house of people who are pure and prosperous."

In this verse Krishna continues to reassure Arjuna, declaring that the *yogi* that renounces material identification and attachments will not lose the material facilitations and benefits pursued by the materialists engaged in their professional and religious duties. As he had already explained in 2.46: "Whatever value is found in a pond is also found, for all purposes, also in a large lake, and similarly whatever is contained in the all the *Vedas* can be found in a person who has realized the knowledge of Brahman".

As *yoga* is precisely the science of Brahman realization, it must naturally offer all the benefits that are contained in all the knowledge of the *Vedas*, what to speak of the ordinary and imperfect knowledge that is characteristic of non-civilized people.

Materialistic people worship God to obtain material blessings, such as elevation to the heavenly planets, a good birth, wealth and other similar facilities, therefore Krishna mentions such attainments as intrinsically available to the *yogi* in virtue of whatever effort s/he has done in the direction of personal evolution, even if such effort was not completely successful. One can fall from the path of *yoga* after a long progress or after a short progress, and the circumstances of the next opportunity will be directly related with the amount of work and therefore with the credit that the *yogi* had accumulated in his effort.

Elevation to the heavenly planets is not a bad thing, because the kingdoms of the *devas* are characterized by *sattva*, and life there offers ample opportunities for progress and engagement in the service to God's mission. However, because the residents of the heavenly planets enjoy much greater power and pleasures than the people of the Earth, it is more difficult for them to seriously concentrate on progress in *yoga* and to abandon such attractive and virtuous material identifications and attachments. This is why after a long and very pleasant vacation for rest and relaxation in the best possible resorts in the universe, the failed *yogi* is given another opportunity to engage in serious work in the human form of life, and in favorable circumstances. Taking birth in a good family means growing up in a favorable atmosphere that supports spiritual life and personal evolution through the example and precept of great cleanliness (*sucinam*) and other qualities that attract the blessings of Mother Lakshmi, the bestower of wealth and prosperity (*sri-matam*). These qualities are sense of responsibility, respect towards wealth resources, and proper engagement in hard work. Certainly taking birth in such a family provides a fundamental base of support for further training in *yoga*.

At lower levels, where the family may not be so good, there must still be some cleanliness or sense of order and discipline, in order

to maintain a sufficient amount of wealth that enables the children of the family to get a proper education and the opportunity to pursue *yoga* without being harassed by financial difficulties. However, wealth accumulated by illicit and unethical means is not considered to be *sri-mata* and is not accompanied by *suci* or cleanliness - a quality that applies both to the external cleanliness and to the internal or mental cleanliness. People born in families that are simply possessing a lot of money or property, but do not have the blessings of Lakshmi Devi, will lose their wealth and happiness in various ways; this may also be a blessing in disguise because the unfavorable situation will create a friction between the sincere nature of the fallen *yogi* and the unhealthy environment, pushing him to renounce all family ties, identifications and attachments. The Divine plan will provide for the most suitable arrangement according to each individual's particular needs.

VERSE 42

अथवा योगिनामेव कुले भवति धीमताम् ।

athavā yogināmeva kule bhavati dhīmatām ।

एतद्धि दुर्लभतरं लोके जन्म यदीदृशम् ॥ ६-४२ ॥

etaddhi durlabhataram loke janma yadīdṛśam ॥ 6-42 ॥

atha va: or; *yoginam:* of *yogis*; *eva:* certainly; *kule:* in the family; *bhavati:* becomes/ takes birth; *dhimatam:* of the wise; *etat:* this; *hi:* indeed; *durlabhataram:* extremely difficult to obtain; *loke:* in (this) world/ among people; *janma:* birth; *yat:* which; *idrisam:* of this type.

"S/he can even take birth in a family of wise *yogis* - certainly such a birth is extremely rare in this world."

Birth in a family of *sucinam* (clean people) and *srimatam* (wealthy people) is blessed with favorable circumstances for personal evolution, and it is not so difficult to attain. There are many families that offer such benefits, both in India and at global level all over the world.

Actually, at present it is even easier to find such families in western countries, where the level of prosperity is higher and people have proper bathrooms, cleaner houses and streets than what is generally seen in present India. Also, there are more opportunities for sattvic sense enjoyment, with a greater variety of fruits and vegetables, milk products, grains, and similar virtuous vegetarian ingredients and recipes than what we can find at present in India. And in all western cities there are dozens if not hundreds of *yoga* centers, and the ethics of work and individual responsibility are well developed.

Granted, in ancient times Indian civilization was much better, even compared to the highest level of progress, development, opulence and well-being attained in the western countries. In the ancient Vedic civilization, for example, each home had a bathroom and a functional system of water pipes for centralized sewage disposal, as we can still see in the archaeological sites of the Sarasvati valley.

In the description of the *Puranas*, we see that the cities were characterized by many amenities and beautiful buildings, gardens full of flowers, parks and *sarovaras*, or man-made lakes with *ghats* or steps made of stone that descended into the water just like in modern swimming pools.

From the descriptions of the *Kama sutras*, we learn that the quality of life in such ancient Indian civilization was extremely high and refined, and people had long hours to dedicate to pleasurable activities such as poetry, music, dance, calligraphy, making of

riddles, cooking delicious foods and preparing a variety of drinks. They were also making their own oil, sugar, clarified butter, floral bouquets, garlands and other types of decorations, perfumes and scented incense, spinning and weaving, beautiful clothing and ornaments, gardening, interior decoration, artificial flowers, hairdressing and hair dyeing, cosmetics, toys and ropes. They also learned many languages, used to go on picnics, and often engaged in various types of playful games such as chess etc.

Homes were carefully kept clean and pure, and had fine furniture and especially beautiful cots and sitting places, soft beds with white sheets, kitchen gardens, a rich flower garden with a swing and a small pond, ample storage rooms and so on. Such wonderful opulence made India famous all over the world in ancient times, with merchants traveling up and down from China, Indonesia, Egypt, Rome, and Ethiopia. There is ample archaeological evidence about all this, and in fact the climate and the natural resources of the Indian subcontinent are perfectly sufficient to ensure an extremely high quality of life. If this does not materialize today, it is due to poor management of the resources, ignorance, neglect and foolishness only.

At the time when Krishna spoke the *Gita* to Arjuna, Indian civilization was still extremely advanced, opulent and refined, so when he speaks of wealthy people, we should take his words seriously. Yet, in this verse Krishna says that even better than the birth in the house of the *sucinam* and *srimatam*, is taking birth in the family of wise spiritualists that are engaged in the practice of *yoga* as explained by *Gita*.

The expression *yoginam dhimatam kule*, "in the family of wise *yogis*", implies that the genuine practice of *yoga* does not require the acceptance of the order of *sannyasa*. One can effectively and successfully practice *yoga* even while living in ordinary family life, with wife and children, and engaging in a suitable professional

occupation, especially in the field of teaching, writing and conducting religious ceremonies and festivals. These families of *brahma rishis* and *raja rishis* were the illustrious origin of descendants that are still bearing the family names of Acharya, Gosvami, etc. Unfortunately, by the effect of Kali yuga the glorious tradition of such families has become lost, and their descendants are often more degraded than people who are of lesser ancestry. We sincerely wish that such descendants will understand the importance of reforming themselves and returning to the glorious qualifications of their ancestors, through a sincere effort guided by the original teachings. Of course any qualified person, from any family of origin, can become a genuine Acharya or Yogi, and start his own *kula* or family tradition, as many Rishis did in the past. Again, the required process consists simply in following the ancient original teachings.

Another meaning of *kula*, or "family", applies to the house of the Guru, of which a disciple becomes a member when he chooses to remain there even after completing his normal course of studies. In ancient times it was not uncommon for a brilliant disciple to be officially adopted by the Guru and become his son and successor under all aspects.

VERSE 43

तत्र तं बुद्धिसंयोगं लभते पौवदेहिकम् ।

tatra taṁ buddhisamyogaṁ labhate paurvadehikam ।

यतते च ततो भूयः संसिद्धौ कुरुनन्दन ॥ ६-४३ ॥

yatate ca tato bhūyaḥ saṁsiddhau kurunandana ॥ 6-43 ॥

tatra: there/ then; *tam*: that; *buddhi-samyogam*: intelligent engagement/ engagement in *buddhi yoga*; *labhate*: obtains; *paurva-dehikam*: from the previous body; *yatate*: he makes efforts; *ca*: and; *tatah*: then; *bhuyah*: again; *samsiddhau*: towards perfection; *kuru-nandana*: o beloved of Kuru.

"O son of Kuru, there (in such birth) s/he recovers the realizations from his/ her previous lifetime, and again resumes his/her efforts towards full perfection."

When the fallen *yogi* obtains a new favorable environment and circumstances presented by Krishna in the previous verses, he or she should be very careful not to waste that valuable opportunity. S/he should sincerely engage in hard work, making serious efforts in his/ her own individual progress, properly utilizing everything that has been supplied by the kindness of God, and feel encouraged and inspired to continue on the path towards success in *yoga*.

It is very important to understand that such effort is still required. We cannot afford to become complacent and neglectful, and delude ourselves into believing that simply by dint of our high birth, wealth, good position in society etc, we will automatically attain the goal of life. Sooner or later, the fallen *yogi* that has been supported by the favorable circumstances and has been thriving on the good results of his past good activities will find himself facing the very same obstacles that stopped his progress and evolution in the previous lifetime.

Advancement in *yoga* will be naturally smooth only up to the point where he had left his previous progress, just like a student that failed an exam after a full year of studies finds life very easy in the next year while repeating the same class, but only until he comes to the point where he had not learned the required lessons well enough to pass the exam in the first instance.

This is a serious moment of crisis, that can create a deep suffering and a lot of doubts, and even the danger of a worse downfall. If the fallen *yogi* makes the wrong choices in this favorable lifetime, allowing himself to be deluded by bodily identifications and attachments and does not make any effort in the proper direction, he will lose all his good qualities and slide into more troubles for his future lifetimes, until he has properly understood the lesson and reformed himself.

In that case, since in this lifetime he has not made any effort on the path of *yoga*, he will not get the same benefits that Krishna has promised to one who falls from the sincere practice because of insufficient strength and perseverance. Instead of obtaining a nice holiday on the higher planets and a great next birth, he will slide into the lower forms of life until he awakens from his delusion and becomes sincere again and ready to make the required efforts (*yatate*). This is not a punishment, but a necessary lesson.

In this verse, the expression *paurva dehikam* refers to the realizations (*buddhi-samyogam*) acquired in a previous body or lifetime. While we cannot take material possessions with us when we leave our body, our realizations come with us into the next lifetime. Perfection in *yoga* requires many lifetimes (*aneka-janma samsiddhah*). This is also confirmed in the next chapter (7.19) with the expression *bahunam janmanam ante*, "after many births".

Remembering previous lifetimes is a great blessing in this regard, because it will protect us precisely from the disastrous mistake we were mentioning above - coming to believe that we are special people just by dint of our birth, and that we do not need to make any effort to reform ourselves and to become perfect in the Self realization of *yoga*. A person who falls into this delusion may even become downright adharmic and indulge in the worst actions, lying and cheating, becoming offensive and arrogant, and exploiting any social or religious credit to perform illicit and unethical activities,

thus accumulating extremely bad *karma* because he will be misleading people by presenting a false and horrible farce of spirituality and religion as the actual, genuine and original process prescribed by Vedic knowledge. These people are not included in Krishna's reassurance in verse 6.40 ("he will never be lost, in this world or in the next life... will never meet with a bad end"), precisely because they are not "engaged in beneficial activities".

VERSE 44

पूर्वाभ्यासेन तेनैव हियते ह्यवशोऽपि सः ।

pūrvābhyāseṇa tenaiva hriyate hyavaśo'pi saḥ ।

जिज्ञासुरपि योगस्य शब्दब्रह्मातिवर्तते ॥ ६-४४ ॥

jijñāsuraṇi yogasya śabdabrahmātivartate ॥ 6-44 ॥

purva: previous; *abhyasena*: by the practice; *tena*: by that; *eva*: certainly; *hriyate*: is attracted to/ is carried forward; *hi*: certainly; *avaso*: spontaneously; *api*: even; *saḥ*: s/he; *jijnasuh*: inquisitive; *api*: even; *yogasya*: of the *yoga*; *śabda-brahma*: the (rules of the) scriptures; *ativartate*: transcends.

"Whatever s/he had attained in the previous life will certainly create a spontaneous attraction (towards perfection) - because the seeker of *yoga* even transcends the regulations of the scriptures."

As we have already seen in the previous verses, Krishna explains that the good realizations and merits of one's previous lifetimes are carried on to the next birth, where they create favorable circumstances to continue one's personal evolution.

This will be true even if the *yogi* had really degraded himself due to some serious mistake or bad choice; in that case he will have to go through some difficult times until the bad effects of the negative actions will not become exhausted, but then his mind will become purified and the good tendencies will rise again, because the results of the sincere effort on the path of *yoga* are not destroyed even if they are covered for a long time. Actual realizations will always accompany us lifetime after lifetime, even if we do not remember exactly when and where we attained them.

A powerful habit becomes second nature and will resurface easily whenever the circumstances allow it - this verse says *avasah api*, "without desiring so".

Just like a student moves with ease through the lessons that he had already learned in the previous years, even without studying too much, a person who sincerely practiced *yoga* in a previous lifetime finds himself spontaneously attracted by the practice and actually enjoys it. He easily understands the concepts and the methods, and does not need a lot of coaching and training - that is, until he reaches the point where he had stumbled in his previous lifetime.

As we explained in the previous verse, at that point he must make a choice to sincerely put sufficient effort to continue his progress. Without this hard work, he will not learn anything further.

The spontaneous attraction to the ideals and practices of *yoga* manifested by a fallen *yogi* who is resuming his transcendental journey is so strong that it does not need to follow the strict systems described in the scriptures and by the conventional traditions. This means that the *yogi* does not need the tedious exercises of *asanas* and *pranayama* and *dharana*, and is not even tied by the rules of *yama* and *niyama*, because the power of his previous realizations and practice is sustaining him easily.

Yet again, the *yogi* needs to remain firmly situated in sincerity and hard effort in his personal evolution towards the ultimate purpose of *yoga*, otherwise he will risk falling into the delusional traps of arrogance, neglect, material identification, callousness, cynicism, cheating propensities and unethical practices, which will cause an even greater downfall.

It is said that rules are made to help us, not to obstruct our development, and this is certainly true when we remain sincere and honest and hard working, and do not go astray from the proper path of *yoga* - *yogat chhalita* - which would be a downfall.

VERSE 45

प्रयत्नाद्यतमानस्तु योगी संशुद्धकिल्बिषः ।

prayatnādyatamānastu yogī saṁśuddhakilbiṣaḥ ।

अनेकजन्मसंसिद्धस्ततो याति परां गतिम् ॥ ६-४५ ॥

anekajanmasamsiddhastato yāti parāṁ gatim ॥ 6-45 ॥

prayatnat: by serious practice; *yatamanah*: making efforts; *tu*: but; *yogi*: the *yogi*; *samsuddha*: purified; *kilbishah*: from contaminations; *aneka-janma*: many lifetimes; *samsiddhah*: having achieved perfection; *tato*: then/ there; *yati*: attains; *param gatim*: the supreme position/ goal.

"Engaging in a serious practice, such a *yogi* becomes purified from all contaminations and attains the supreme goal, a perfection that requires many lifetimes."

The need for sincerity and a serious effort is repeated here by Krishna, and this definitely clarifies the huge importance of these

two factors. It is only by sincerity and hard work that one can become purified from all contaminations, reform all imperfections, and progress in his personal development and evolution, towards the supreme goal.

This hard work is not necessarily cause for suffering or anxiety. Especially when done in favorable circumstances, in a good environment and with proper instruments, hard work can be extremely pleasurable and satisfying, just like a person with a healthy and strong body will enjoy regulated physical exercise even if done strenuously. There is a cumulative effect in the totality of the work and realizations accumulated in many lifetimes, just like many small streams converge to create a large river with a powerful current that sweeps away all obstacles. Every river starts with a small seasonal stream springing from some unassuming source, and only becomes a huge reservoir towards the end of its journey, enriched by all the small and not so small affluents that it will meet on its way.

So when we see someone who seems to be a natural in *yoga* or spirituality, we must understand that this person has done a lot of sincere work in previous lifetimes and had a lot of experiences - some good, some bad, but all of them required a lot of effort to be faced and utilized in the proper way.

Nothing comes automatically on this path, and there is no need of being envious or to think that such person is intrinsically special. Anyone can attain the same level, with the proper amount of work and effort, over the necessary length of time.

Krishna will confirm that in the next chapter, especially in 7.19 and 28: "After many lifetimes, one who has knowledge attains me, realizing that Vasudeva is everything. Such a great soul is very rare" (*bahunam janmanam ante jnanavan mam prapadyate vasudevah sarvam iti sah mahatma sudurlabhah*) and "Those who

have put an end to all bad activities, have accumulated virtuous activities, and are completely liberated from the delusion of duality and firm in their determination, worship me" (*yesam tv anta-gatam papam jananam punya karmanam, te dvandva moha nirmukta bhajante mam drdha vratah*).

VERSE 46

तपस्विभ्योऽधिको योगी ज्ञानिभ्योऽपि मतोऽधिकः ।

tapasvibhyo'dhiko yogī jñānibhyo'pi mato'dhikaḥ ।

कर्मिभ्यश्चाधिको योगी तस्माद्योगी भवार्जुन ॥ ६-४६ ॥

karmibhyaścādhiko yogī tasmādyogī bhavārjuna ॥ 6-46 ॥

tapasvibhyah: than the ascetics; adhikah: greater/ superior; yogi: the yogi; jnanibhyah: than the scholars; api: also; matah: considered; adhikah: greater; karmibhyah: of those who engage in ritualistic duties; ca: and; dhiko: greater; yogi: a yogi; tasmat: therefore; yogi: a yogi; bhava: become; arjuna: o Arjuna.

"The *yogi* is superior to the ascetic and is considered also greater than a scholar and greater than those who perform (ritualistic) activities. Therefore, o Arjuna, you should be a *yogi*."

The entire *Bhagavad gita* teaches about *yoga*, a very complex and deep science that can take us to the highest perfection and fulfill the purpose of life. Therefore it is not a cheap subject, certainly not just about bodily positions and breathing exercises as many cheaters would have us believe.

There are six opulences that a human being can obtain, and three of them are considered more important than others - detachment,

knowledge and prosperity. These can be attained by one's determined effort during one's lifetime even from a disadvantaged position, while the other three opulences - physical beauty and strength, and fame - largely depend on the good merits from one's previous lifetime, and are not really very useful to achieve the perfection of life.

Moksha, liberation, is certainly not attained by physical efforts or through one's name and fame, or thanks to one's good looks.

Prosperity can therefore be attained through good *karma* that includes the daily worship of the *devas*, knowledge can be attained through the cultivation of *jnana* or the study of scriptures, and detachment can be attained through the practice of *sannyasa*.

In the previous chapters, Krishna has already described the importance and benefits of *karma* (chapter 3), *jnana* (chapter 4) and *sannyasa* (chapter 5), and how to bring these practices to perfection through the application of *yoga*, that transforms them into *karma yoga*, *jnana yoga* and *sannyasa yoga*.

He has also explained that this essence of *yoga* is called *buddhi yoga*, or the engagement of intelligence into the transcendental meaning and purpose of all actions, and that it is superior to all these practices. Similarly, it is called *bhakti yoga*, because it engages emotions and sentiments in the favorable service to the Transcendental Reality.

The next chapter will explain that this essence of *yoga* is also called *vijnana*, because it focuses on the practical application of knowledge to the perception of Reality and one's choices in the service to the Divine. Being a *yogi*, as opposed to being an ascetic, a scholar or a performer of rituals, does not mean that a *yogi* can not or should not be detached and renounced, or underestimate knowledge, or to despise the proper performance of the duties

required for the progress of the individual, the family and society. Rather, it means that a *yogi* knows that all these are means, and not the end.

Asceticism is an instrument to train one's mind and control it, so that it will become able to concentrate easily on the contemplation of Transcendence. The cultivation of knowledge must be oriented towards the highest and most important knowledge, *brahma jnana*, and all other forms of knowledge should support this supreme purpose of life. And the performance of the *karmas*, or duties, should be dedicated to the Supreme in full transcendental renunciation and knowledge of the actual purpose of all *yajnas*: the Supreme Reality or Tattva, that is called Brahman, Paramatma and Bhagavan. In other words, by applying one's intelligence and devotion, a *yogi* can utilize everything else to attain perfection.

Last but not least, Krishna clearly gives his direct instruction: become a *yogi*. Arjuna has asked him to clarify his doubts once and for all, and this is exactly what Krishna is doing, not only for him, but for all of us.

VERSE 47

योगिनामपि सर्वेषां मद्गतेनान्तरात्मना ।

yogināmapi sarveṣāṁ madgatenāntarātmanā ।

श्रद्धावान्भजते यो मां स मे युक्ततमो मतः ॥ ६-४७ ॥

śraddhāvānbhajate yo mām sa me yuktatamo mataḥ ॥ 6-47 ॥

yoginam: of the *yogis*; *api*: even; *sarvesham*: all; *mad-gatena*: fixed on me; *antar-atmana*: within his self; *sraddhavan*: who has faith; *bhajate*: who worships/ serves; *yah*: s/he; *mam*: me; *sah*:

s/he; *me*: by me; *yukta-tamah*: the best of the *yogis*; *matah*: is considered.

"And among all *yogis*, one who worships/ serves me with faith and full concentration/ dedication, is considered by me as the greatest *yogi*."

In the previous verse, Krishna established that *yoga* is the spirit that can give life to asceticism, knowledge and the performance of ritualistic duties. We mentioned that such essence of *yoga* is also called *buddhi yoga* or *bhakti yoga*.

In this verse, Krishna confirms that even more powerful than intelligence, is the loving devotion that fixes the meditation to the Transcendental Reality in a dynamic contemplation. Again, the example of the *lilas* of Krishna in Vrindavana can help us understand how love and devotion can overpower any other consideration. The transcendental appearance and adventures of Krishna (*janma karma ca me divyam*, 4.9) are not comparable to the ordinary birth and activities of conditioned human beings: they are specifically planned to attract the attention of devotees and engage them in a blissful meditation, and at the same time to offer a wealth of wonderful symbolic teachings. This is the reason why the great Rishis composed the *Puranas* and *Itihasas*, the sacred scriptures that are most suitable for the simple-minded people of Kali yuga.

All Vedic scriptures contain many layers of meanings, and the adventures or *lilas* of the Lord and his eternal companions also participate to the same transcendental and multi-layered nature. Besides, Krishna will later declare (9.11) that only foolish people mistake his adventures for the ordinary activities of a normal human being (*avajananti mam mudha manusim tanum asritam, param bhavam ajananto mama bhuta-mahesvaram*) because they do not know that he is the Lord of all beings/ existences, and his

nature is transcendental and supreme. This means that Krishna is always in control of everything that happens.

Therefore, whatever events appear and develop in his adventures, they are precisely what he wanted them to be, just like a good theater director allows the play to develop seamlessly and naturally, but always remains in full control of the action, and uses it to convey symbolic meanings and his particular message.

It is in this light that we must understand the adventures of Krishna and especially his most intimate relationships in Vrindavana - how the intense feelings of the *gopis*, both younger and older, and the other women there, including the wives of the *brahmanas* that were performing the sacrificial rituals when Krishna and Balarama sent their friends to ask for food. The *bhakti* sentiments or *rasas* of these apparently simple-minded women have *madhurya*, *vatsalya* or *dasya* characteristics, but they are always stronger than mere passive contemplation or *santa*, as usually manifested by the Vedic scholars, the *sannyasi* renunciates, and the ritualistic performers of the *karma kanda*.

The word *bhajate* is particularly important and interesting here. It comes from the root *bhaj*, that means "serving, worshiping, adoring, engaging the consciousness". From the same root we have the word *bhajan*, meaning "devotional songs".

This same word was used in 6.31: *yo mam bhajaty ekatvam asthitah*, "one who worships me as the One who resides in all". We will also find it in the next chapters: *catur vidha bhajante mam* (7.16), *te dvandva moha nirmukta bhajante mam* (7.28), *bhajanty ananya manaso* (9.13), *ye bhajanti tu mam bhaktya* (9.29), *api cet suduracaro bhajate mam ananya bhak* (9.30), *imam prapya bhajasva mam* (9.33), *iti matva bhajante mam budha* (10.8), *tesam satata yuktanam bhajatam priti purvakam* (10.10), *sa sarva vid bhajati mam* (15.19).

From the same root we have the word *bhakti*, that will also appear many times in the text of *Gita*.

This supremacy of devotion to God in the practice of *yoga* is confirmed by Patanjali in his *Yoga sutras*, especially in 1.23: *ishvara pranidhanad va*, "(*samadhi*) can also be attained by dedicating oneself to Isvara (God)". Who is Isvara? The *Yoga sutras* immediately answer the question (1.24): *klesha karman vipakashayair a-para-mrishtah purusha-vishesha ishvarah*, "Ishvara is that special Purusha who is Transcendent, and is never touched by sufferings or obstacles, by the actions and their consequences".