

BHAGAVAD GITA

**The Global Dharma
for the Third Millennium**

Chapter Seven

Translations and commentaries
compiled by Parama Karuna Devi

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Chapter 7: Vijnana yoga

The Yoga of wisdom

In the first 3 chapters, Krishna has been instructing Arjuna about the performance of one's duty, the distinction between the temporary body and the eternal Atman, the purpose of Yoga as the science of conscious action, the need to control one's mind, the meaning of detachment as selflessness, and the concept of duty as sacred action.

Then Krishna starts to speak about the transcendental level that is above duty and action, and the realization of Atman (3.17-18). However, even those who are already above action and duty should continue to act dutifully, because by their good example they can inspire and support society. Here, for the first time, Krishna speaks about himself and his own transcendental nature (3.22-24), to say that although he is certainly above all duties and actions, and yet he continues to perform those actions that are required for the protection and maintenance of the universe. After this brief comment, Krishna goes back to the subject of dutiful action according to one's position within the order of things in the universe, based on one's qualities and abilities. Again, he briefly mentions his divine nature in 3.30, saying that a *yogi* offers all his/her activities to him. However, by the end of 3rd chapter, Krishna still presents himself as the equivalent of Atman/ Brahman, in a general transcendental way rather than a very personal way.

The 4th chapter becomes more specific, and Krishna begins to make a clear distinction between himself as a divine Personality, that is immensely different from all other personalities: he is the Supreme Lord of all creatures and states of being (4.6). Unlike the

other individual manifestations of Brahman (the Jiva Atmans), Krishna is the supreme individual (Param Atman).

Thus from the realization of Brahman, we move to the realization of Paramatma and Isvara. Krishna continues to speak about his own divine nature from 4.1 to 4.14, also revealing that the realization of his transcendental position is the secret to liberation.

Again from 4.15 to 4.43 and from 5.2 to 5.28, Krishna speaks about the sacred nature of dutiful selfless action, talking about Brahman and Nirvana, with only a brief mention about his own divine position (4.35). In 5.29 again Krishna states that one who knows him as the Supreme Lord of all planets, the purpose of sacrifices and the friend of all beings, attains peace.

The 6th chapters shifts the focus again on duty, *yoga* and the realization of the Paramatma, with 2 verses (6.14-15) and then again 2 more verses (6.30-31) stating that Krishna himself is personally the purpose of *yoga* and meditation. This concept is repeated in the last verse of the chapter (6.47).

In the 7th chapter, Krishna will speak much more about himself and his supreme nature, with only one exceptions when he does not mention himself (7.5)

This focus on Krishna bhakti becomes so important that, while previously he spoke about detachment as the key to success, now he is speaking about attachment to him as the key to success on a higher level.

From 7.8 to the end of the chapter, we clearly see that Krishna is not an ordinary material personality, but an extraordinarily deep level of consciousness - that can be found in this world as the essence and support of everything that exists. However, not everybody is able to perceive Krishna because one needs to turn to him with an open mind. It becomes clear, therefore, that *vijnana* is

equivalent to the supreme level of transcendental consciousness that we call Krishna consciousness - the complete and constant awareness that encompasses Brahman, Paramatma and Bhagavan, and includes all realities, material and spiritual. By directly connecting to this supreme consciousness, the *yogi* attains the highest position and the perfection of life.

VERSE 1

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।

śrībhagavānuvāca ।

मय्यासक्तमनाः पार्थ योगं युञ्जन्मदाश्रयः ।

mayyāsaktamanāḥ pārtha yogam yuñjanmadāśrayaḥ ।

असंशयं समग्रं मां यथा ज्ञास्यसि तच्छृणु ॥ ७-१ ॥

asamśayaṁ samagraṁ mām yathā jñāsyasi tacchṛṇu ॥ 7-1 ॥

sri-bhagavan: the Lord; *uvaca*: said; *mayi*: to me; *asakta*: attached; *manah*: mind; *partha*: o son of Pritha; *yogam*: in *yoga*; *yunjan*: uniting; *mat-asrayah*: taking shelter in me; *asamsayam*: without a doubt; *samagram*: completely; *mam*: me; *yatha*: thus; *jnasyasi*: you will know; *tat*: that; *srinu*: listen.

The Lord said:

"Now listen, O Partha (son of Pritha), how by getting the mind to develop attachment for me through the practice of *yoga* and taking shelter in me, you will be able to know me completely and without any doubt."

The expressions *mad-asrayah* and *mayy asakta* indicate that *yoga* requires the practice called *isvara-pranidhana*, or surrendering to

God in his personal form, and developing a genuine personal relationship of devotion.

The word *samagram*, "completely", does not refer to the idea of completely knowing God: that would be impossible because God is infinite and ever expanding.

It refers to the fullness of the consciousness of the devotee, that is completely absorbed in Krishna consciousness, in the awareness of his complete perfections (*bhagas*) for which he is known as Bhagavan: power, beauty, knowledge, wealth, fame and detachment. The word *asamsayam* expresses complete certainty.

Meditation on the Atman, described in the earlier chapters, must be supported by knowledge and renunciation to material identification and attachments, in order to realize its transcendental nature. However, it is a long and difficult method, and there is the danger of falling from the path.

In alternative, such awareness can also be attained simply through devotional dedication to Bhagavan: *isvara pranidhanat va* (1.23), Isvara being the special being (*purusha*) that is not touched by sufferings and by the consequences of past actions that create attachments: *klesha karman vipaka asayaih अपरा म्रिस्ता पुरुषा विश्वा इवाराह* (1.24).

So *vijnana yoga* is equated with *bhakti yoga*.

Of course, this path of *bhakti yoga* must also be supported by knowledge and renunciation, and this is why it is presented after the previous teachings about the disillusionment about material life, the difference between the body and the Self, the importance of performing one's duty with a pure and sincere consciousness, the knowledge of *yoga*, the renunciation to all forms of selfishness, and the science of meditation on Transcendental Reality.

We should never take *bhakti* cheaply. It true that *bhakti*, devotion to the Personality of Godhead, is the fastest and surest path to perfection, and it is independent from the separate pursuit of learning and renunciation, but genuine *bhakti* includes knowledge and detachment from selfishness, for the simple fact that love for the Personality of Godhead is so pure and powerful that makes us forget all other concerns, desires, fears, and delusions.

So when we find a person who claims to be situated in Krishna bhakti, but refuses to follow the instructions of Krishna as expressed in *Bhagavad gita*, we should immediately understand that s/he is a cheater - an ignorant pretender, or worse.

The word *srinu*, "listen", is the first step in the development of *bhakti*. The nine paths of the devotional practice are listed as *sravana* ("listening"), *kirtana* ("speaking"), *smarana* ("remembering"), *vandana* ("offering homage" or "glorifying with prayers"), *pada sevana* ("following the instructions"), *dasya* ("working in service"), *pujana* ("worshiping"), *sakhya* ("behaving as a friend"), *atma-nivedanam* ("fully dedicating oneself").

There are also nine steps in *bhakti*, known as *sraddha* ("faith"), *sadhu sanga* ("association with good people"), *bhajana kriya* ("engaging in *sadhana* - regulated devotional activities"), *anartha nivritti* ("abandoning one's bad habits and correcting one's defects"), *nistha* ("stability of consciousness"), *ruci* ("actual taste for spiritual life"), *asakti* ("attachment" for spiritual life), *bhava* ("spontaneous devotional emotions"), and *prema* ("pure love for God").

VERSE 2

ज्ञानं तेऽहं सविज्ञानमिदं वक्ष्याम्यशेषतः ।

jñānaṁ te'haṁ savijñānamidaṁ vakṣyāmyaśeṣataḥ ।

यज्ज्ञात्वा नेह भूयोऽन्यज्ज्ञातव्यमवशिष्यते ॥ ७-२ ॥

yajñātvā neha bhūyo'nyajñātavyamavaśiṣyate ॥ 7-2 ॥

jnanam: knowledge; *te*: to you; *aham*: I; *sa*: together with; *vijnanam*: applied knowledge/ wisdom; *idam*: this; *vakshyami*: I will tell; *aseshatah*: in details/ unlimited forms/ complete; *yat*: which; *jnatva*: by knowing *na*: not; *iha*: here; *bhuyah*: further/ again; *anyat*: anything else/ more; *jnatavyam*: to be known; *avasishyate*: remains.

"I will tell you in detail that *jnana* and *vijnana*, knowing which nothing remains still to be known."

This chapter is dedicated to the *vijnana yoga*, or the "yoga of applied knowledge". The word *jnana* refers to theoretical knowledge, while *vijnana* refers to applied knowledge or wisdom. In the previous chapters Krishna spoke of detachment from material identification and belonging, and now he has started to speak about spiritual identification and attachment. Before building or cultivating spiritual knowledge, we need to make sure that our ground has been cleared from all material garbage, otherwise there will always be dangers in the future, and the plant of *bhakti* will be suffocated by the outgrowth of weeds.

Patanjali's *Yoga sutras* explain that "Yoga means cessation of the fluctuations of the awareness": *yogah citta vritti nirodhah* (*Yoga*

sutras 1.2). The purpose of such cessation is to attain the clear realization of the Self, the Atman, expressed in verse 1.3 as *tada drastuh sva-rupe avasthanam*: "then (when the consciousness is stable), the witness (*drasta*) becomes firmly situated in one's true identification (the *sva-rupa*, that is actually true because it can never be lost)".

Verse 1.4 of *Yoga sutras* further clarifies, *vritti sarupyam itiratra* (1.4): "that (awareness) is opposite to the material identification with the mind and body (that is constantly changing)". These verses clearly state that the practice of *yoga* is meant to develop knowledge and wisdom, therefore we must expect anyone who practices *yoga* to be more than happy and competent to discuss such topics - not about health and fitness, rajasic or tamasic sense gratification, or other similar grossly materialistic pursuits.

Later on (*Gita* 13.8-12) Krishna will define what is knowledge, clearly mentioning the freedom from material identification (*anahankara*) and attachments (*asakti*), and the study of spiritual texts (*adhyatma jnana*) and understanding of the categories of reality (*tattva-jnana*). Not even once, in the vast expanse of the *yoga shastra*, we find a statement to suggest that the purpose of *yoga* is to get good health or a good-looking slim and trim body.

Such material delusion has originated quite recently, when the Indian Yoga teachers came in contact with the Western mentality - characterized by the obsession with sexual attractiveness as a parameter of social acceptability - and should be considered one of the greatest disasters in Indian culture, comparable to the formulation of the notorious Aryan invasion theory.

As stated in *Bhagavata Purana* (1.1.10), in Kali yuga people become *manda, sumanda matayoh manda bhagya hi upadrutah*: unfortunate, foolish and lazy, and misguided by bad teachings.

Another interpretation of *jnana* and *vijnana* is given as material and spiritual respectively, or phenomenal ("pertaining to the effects") and numinous ("pertaining to the cause"). The words *phenomenon* and *noumenon* derive from the Greek language and were used by the ancient Greek philosophers.

The knowledge of Krishna includes both the material and spiritual manifestations, and in fact we see that the *Bhagavata Purana*, that is specifically dedicated to the knowledge of Bhagavan Sri Krishna, begins very much like *Bhagavad gita* - with the questions about duty and proper action, then explains "the first step in God realization" as Brahman and Paramatma, and then speaks about the creation of the material universe, the divisions of the cosmic manifestation, the calculation of time, the appearance of the various *avataras*, the principles of material nature, the cycle of material activities, the story of the descendants of Manu, the Surya dynasty and the Chandra dynasty, the geographical description of the universe, the prescribed duties for mankind, the *varnashrama dharma*, and the wars between the Suras and the Asuras.

Of course all these stories and descriptions carry an immense wealth of spiritual information and instructions, especially in the form of dialog between the protagonists of the stories.

Similarly, the entire vast ocean of Vedic knowledge can be considered "the science of Krishna", as by Krishna we intend the highest possible level of consciousness - eternity, knowledge and happiness - that is the complete Reality.

VERSE 3

मनुष्याणां सहस्रेषु कश्चिद्यतति सिद्धये ।

manuṣyāṅāṁ sahasreṣu kaścidyatati siddhaye ।

यततामपि सिद्धानां कश्चिन्मां वेत्ति तत्त्वतः ॥ ७-३ ॥

yatatāmapī siddhānāṁ kaścīnmāṁ veti tattvataḥ ॥ 7-3 ॥

manuṣyanam: among the human beings; *sahasreshu*: (counted in the) thousands; *kascit*: (maybe) someone; *yatati*: makes efforts; *siddhaye*: towards perfection; *yatatam*: among those who strive for perfection; *api*: even; *siddhanam*: among those who have achieved perfection; *kascit*: (maybe) someone; *ma*: me; *veti*: knows; *tattvataḥ*: in truth.

"Among thousands of human beings, one may strive for perfection. And among all those who have achieved such perfection, one may actually come to know me."

Krishna wants to dissipate any illusion for those who might have thought that knowing him was something cheap and easy, that can give perfection without the need of too much effort (*karma yoga*), study (*jnana*) or renunciation (*vairagya*). Some foolish people delude themselves and others into thinking that, in order to be situated on the highest platform of spiritual realization, it is sufficient to make a show of some chanting, singing, dancing and eating good food, and fantasizing about romantic or erotic meetings between young Syamasundara and the cowherd girls. Others, equally foolish, believe that sectarian affiliation to some politicized materialistic religious organization is the only requisite to become "properly situated" on such highest platform of *bhakti*.

But reality is quite different, as Krishna explicitly states here.

First of all, one must sincerely and seriously strive to become perfect in the performance of one's prescribed duties and in the understanding of *yoga* and *knowledge*, as illustrated in the previous 6 chapters of *Bhagavad gita*. Then, after the *sadhaka* has attained such perfection, s/he can hope to actually approach the Lord - the actual Supreme Personality of Godhead, rather than a first-hand or second-hand mental projection of a fantasy character one may choose to call "Krishna".

The path of perfection is explained in *Bhagavata Purana* (1.2.17-21) as *srinvatam sva-kathah krishnah* ("listening to Krishna's discourses", which of course includes Krishna's instructions), *punya sravana kirtanah* ("a subject of discussion that brings good merits", because it inspires devotees to act dutifully), *hridi antah-sthah hi abhadrani vidhunoti suhrit satam* ("by which the presence of the Lord becomes fixed in the heart and purifies the heart from all inauspicious things"), *nashta prayesu abhadresu* ("all bad things are destroyed), *nityam bhagavata sevaya* ("by the constant service to Bhagavan/ to the Bhagavata"), *bhagavati uttama-sloke bhaktih bhavati naistiki* ("devotion to the Divine, glorified by sublime verses, becomes firmly and permanently established"), *tada rajas tamo bhavah kama-lobhadayah ca ye ceta etair anavidham sthitam sattve prasidati* ("thus the *sadhaka* becomes firmly situated in *sattva*, goodness, without being influenced by the various forms of lust and greed and other material defects born from passion and ignorance").

Then, when the mind is perfectly satisfied on the spiritual level (*evam prasanna manaso*) one becomes united with Bhagavan in the Bhakti Yoga (*bhagavad bhakti-yogatah*) and at that time the applied knowledge of the reality of Bhagavan (*bhagavat tattva vijnanam jayate*) through the contact with the liberated level (*mukta sangasya*). All the knots of the heart are slashed (*bhidyate hridaya granthih*) and all doubts find their answer (*sarva*

samsayah kshiyante), because one can directly see (*dristhe*) that the soul and Lord (*atmani isvare*) are the purpose of one's activities (*asya karmani*).

A sincere devotee should not underestimate the dangers of inconsistency, neglect towards the basic instructions and requirements, superficiality and artificiality.

VERSE 4

भूमिरापोऽनलो वायुः खं मनो बुद्धिरेव च ।

bhūmirāpo'nalo vāyuḥ khaṁ mano buddhireva ca ।

अहंकार इतीयं मे भिन्ना प्रकृतिरष्टधा ॥ ७-४ ॥

ahaṅkāra itīyaṁ me bhinnā prakṛtirasṭadhā ॥ 7-4 ॥

bhumih: earth; *apah*: water; *analo*: fire; *vayuh*: air; *kham*: space/ ether; *manah*: mind; *buddhih*: intelligence; *eva*: as well as; *ca*: and; *ahankara*: material identification; *iti*: like this; *iyam*: all these; *me*: my; *bhinna*: separate/ distinct; *prakritih*: nature; *ashtadha*: eight fold.

"Earth, water, fire, air, ether, mind, intelligence and material identification: all these are the eight different forms of my prakriti."

Prakriti means "nature", and refers to the inherent power of God, the Supreme Reality. It is not possible to separate Reality from Power - there is no reality without power, and no power without reality.

In the previous verse Krishna has stated that one should not take him cheaply, because it is not easy to obtain the true knowledge of

his nature, and we should remember this warning while reading this verse, so that we do not take cheaply God's energies, too. Material nature - composed by the 8 elements - is not simply a creation of God: it is his actual nature, albeit "separated" (*bhinna*). What is the meaning of "separated"? It means that the elements composing the material bodies in this world are distinct from the principle of consciousness, called the Purusha or Atman.

Why? Because the 8 elements of material nature are constantly transforming and they are subject to the action of time and space, they are meant to be the "field" in which the Purusha is working. Later (*Gita* 13.2-4) Krishna will speak about the *kshetra* ("field") and the *kshetra-jna* ("one who knows the field"). The Purusha or Atman is not transforming and is not subject to time and space: he is the active principle, that animates the inert matter. There are two Purushas (*kshetra jnas*): the individual *jivatma* (irrespective of the gender of the body it is wearing) and the Supreme Lord, called *param atma*.

Another meaning of *bhinna* refers to the fact that in the primary creation of the universe, the original *pradhana* - that is described as Brahman itself - *separates* into the various categories of energy, thus manifesting the 8 material elements, the *gunas*, etc.

Material science is meant to study the manifestations and the elements of nature, and many famous scientists have expressed their gratitude for the special insights they obtained from Vedic literature. Starting with the decimal system to the most advanced particle physics, one who reads Vedic literature with an open mind and a solid culture will be blessed with extraordinary realizations. Many people do not know that the so-called Arabic numbers were introduced in Europe by Arabs, who took them from India, as confirmed by many historians and scholars, including famous physicist Albert Einstein, author of the revolutionary relativity theory and the law of the photoelectrical effect (the basis of quanta

theory) and Nobel Prize for Physics 1921. He declared, "We owe a lot to Indians who taught us how to count, without which no worthwhile scientific discovery could have been made."

Hans Torwesten (born in Germany in 1944), author of *Vedanta - Heart of Hinduism*, wrote, "A fair number of leading physicists and biologists have found parallels between modern science and Hindu ideas". Brian David Josephson (born in Wales, 1940), pioneer of superconductivity and magnetic fields, director of the project of Unification Mind-Matter, and Nobel Prize 1973 for physics, wrote, "The *Vedanta* and the Sankhya hold the key to the laws of mind and thought process which are co-related to the Quantum Field, i.e. the operation and distribution of particles at atomic and molecular levels."

Werner Heisenberg wrote, "After the conversations about Indian philosophy, some of the ideas of Quantum Physics that had seemed so crazy suddenly made much more sense." He was the pioneer of quanta mechanics, the father of the "uncertainty principle of quantum theory" that carries his name, and Nobel Prize 1932 for the work that set the foundations for the discovery of the allotropic forms of hydrogen. At the end of the war he was appointed director of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Physics and he reorganized it until the transfer to Munich in 1958, when it was renamed Max Planck Institute for Physics and Astrophysics. He was also president for the German Research Council, chairman of the Commission for Atomic Physics, chairman of the Nuclear Physics Working Group, and president of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation.

Other prominent scientific thinkers who shared the same opinion were Fritjof Capra (American of Austrian origin, founder of the *Center for Ecoliteracy* and author of *The Tao of Physics: An Exploration of the Parallels Between Modern Physics and Eastern Mysticism*), Erwin Schroedinger (Austrian physicist and political

refugee, Nobel Prize 1933 for quantum mechanics, the author of *What is Life? The Physical Aspect of the Living Cell*, and *Mind and Matter*), David Bohm (one of the greatest physicists of quanta mechanics), John Archibald Wheeler (American theoretical physicist, who worked with Niels Bohr on the foundations of nuclear fission, introduced the S-matrix and created the expressions *black hole*, *quantum foam* and *wormhole*), Carl Sagan (astrophysicist and author of *Cosmos*), and Julius Robert Oppenheimer (known as the "father of the atomic bomb", author of the Born-Oppenheimer approximation, the electron-positron theory, the Oppenheimer-Phillips process and the first foundations of the quantum tunneling, of the modern theory of neutrino stars and black holes, quanta mechanics, the theory of the quantum field, and the interaction of the cosmic rays).

Those who say that Vedic knowledge is incompatible with modern science are just plain ignorant.

VERSE 5

अपरेयमितस्त्वन्यां प्रकृतिं विद्धि मे पराम् ।

apareyamitastvanyāṁ prakṛtiṁ viddhi me parām ।

जीवभूतां महाबाहो ययेदं धार्यते जगत् ॥ ७-५ ॥

jīvabhūtāṁ mahābāho yayedaṁ dhāryate jagat ॥ 7-5 ॥

apara: lower/ not higher; *ayam*: this; *itah*: besides; *tu*: but; *anyam*: another; *prakritim*: nature; *viddhi*: you should know; *me*: mine; *param*: higher; *jiva-bhutam*: the living beings; *maha-baho*: o mighty armed; *yaya*: by whom; *idam*: this; *dharyate*: is sustained; *jagat*: the universe.

"O mighty-armed (Arjuna), know that besides this lower prakriti there is also another - the living beings by which the universe is upheld."

The two *prakritis* (natures) mentioned in this verse are the two "energies" of God: the material elements of creation and the spiritual spark.

Later in verses 13.2-4, Krishna himself gives another definition of the difference between the two when he speaks of the *kshetra* ("the field") and the *kshetra-jna* ("the knower of the field"), implying that everything is based on consciousness or knowledge.

The spiritual spark is called "superior" because it is the direct manifestation of Shakti, while the material elements are called "inferior" because they are a secondary manifestation of the same Shakti. Just like the senses are more powerful than the sense objects, and the mind is more powerful than the senses, so the *jivatman* is more powerful than the mind.

Some people believe that there are two separate divine Shaktis, of which one is inferior to the other, but this is not a fact. Shakti is one, but manifests in many forms, just like electricity is perceived differently as light, heat, magnetic field, sound, motion, waves, and even as coldness (as in a freezer), logical processing (as in computers), and so on.

Thus we find several different definitions of Shakti, such as *bahiranga shakti* ("external potency"), *tathasta shakti* ("marginal potency"), *antaranga shakti* ("internal potency"), *hladini shakti* ("pleasure potency"), *cit shakti* ("consciousness potency"), *avaranatmika shakti* ("covering potency"), *prakshepatmika shakti* ("attracting potency") and so on. The two *prakritis* mentioned by Krishna in this verse are respectively the *bahiranga shakti* ("external potency") and the *tathasta shakti* ("marginal potency");

we should note that Krishna says "there are two energies" and not "there are only two energies". This is a very important distinction, that we need to understand clearly.

Svetasvatara Upanishad (6.8) states, *parasya shaktir vividhaiva srutyate svabhaviki jnana-bala-kriya ca*, "The Supreme is known to have many Shaktis, that by their own nature manifest as knowledge, strength and activity."

The word *dharyate* means "supporting"; it derives from the same root of the word *dharma*. The living entities participate to the divine play of creation, maintenance and dissolution by performing their specific dharmic duties as per their *guna* and *karma*. The idea that the living entities are in this world to "exploit" and "enjoy" it, as suggested by some commentators, is the very basis of our delusion that keeps us imprisoned in material identification and attachment. People may be deluded into thinking they are the owners and enjoyers of material nature, but it is just an illusion, a faulty concept that is projected by the elements of material nature itself - *ahankara*, *buddhi* and *manas*..

When a person is less evolved, s/he is conditioned by ignorance, manifesting as material identification and attachments, compared to bondages: therefore the Atman is called *baddha jiva* ("bonded soul") as opposed to *mukta jiva* ("liberated soul"). Some commentators believe that these two categories of conditioned souls and liberated souls are intrinsically different, and therefore they call them *nitya baddha* ("eternally conditioned") and *nitya mukta* or *nitya siddha* ("eternally liberated" or "eternally perfect").

While we can accept the idea that there are indeed *nitya siddha* personalities, that have always been situated at the highest level of consciousness because they are direct emanations of the Divine on a higher platform, the idea of *nitya baddha* souls (as intrinsically conditioned souls that can never attain the level of liberation) is

totally unfounded, as it is not confirmed in any genuine *shastra* that we know of. Of course, we have seen that sometimes words are used in a relative sense - for example, *amara* ("immortal") as applied to the Devas living on the higher planets is not exactly correct because the Devas, too, come to the end of their lives when the universe is withdrawn... the definition applies more to the "eternal position" in the universal administration that will be filled by different personalities from time to time.

Similarly, the "eternity" of the *samsara* or cycle of births and death should be interpreted as the eternal law of cyclic manifestation in the material universe, that comes into being at each new creation. Thus, when we speak of *nitya baddha* souls, it means that the *jivatman* has the free will to choose to remain in the material universe indefinitely, disappearing and reappearing at each dissolution and manifestation of the universe, until s/he chooses otherwise. Conditioning, as a manifestation of ignorance, is called *asat* precisely because it is temporary and illusory. As Krishna has already explained very clearly in 2.16, *sat* can never become *asat*, and *asat* can never become *sat*. What is illusory, temporary and bad does not really exist. Claiming that the *nitya baddha jivas* are *eternally* or *ontologically* conditioned by ignorance and impermanence because of their permanent nature is a serious contradiction in terms - it amounts to saying that *asat* is *sat*.

VERSE 6

एतद्योनीनि भूतानि सर्वाणीत्युपधारय ।

etadyonīni bhūtāni sarvāṇītyupadhāraya ।

अहं कृत्स्नस्य जगतः प्रभवः प्रलयस्तथा ॥ ७-६ ॥

ahaṁ kṛtsnasya jagataḥ prabhavaḥ pralayastathā ॥ 7-6 ॥

etat: these; *yonini*: from the sources; *bhutani*: living beings/ states of existence; *sarvan*: all; *iti*: thus; *upadharaya*: (you should) understand; *aham*: I; *kritsnasya*: of everything; *jagatah*: the universe; *prabhavah*: the source of creation; *pralayas*: the cause of dissolution; *tatha*: also.

"Know that all the things/ beings come from these two matrixes. (Thus) I am the origin of the creation and the destruction of the entire universe."

Everything that exists in the universe is composed by the interaction of matter and spirit. Even what appears to be dull and inert matter is actually permeated by consciousness, albeit in a low and faint degree.

According to the Vedic vision, even mountains and hills, rivers and oceans are living beings, although they do not appear to be characterized by the usual symptoms of life - birth, growth, reproduction, dwindling and death. The fact of the matter is that they simply have life cycles that are too long and their changes are too imperceptible for us to notice, just like our life as human beings would appear eternal and unchanging to those small insects who live only for the short period of one of our days. And we can see that even minerals can transform with time and the change of circumstantial conditions - compressed coal turns into diamonds, rocks turn into sand and dust, and so on. Any corpse, any dead body - human, animal or vegetal - is still teeming with life in the form of microbes, bacteria, molds, spores and worms. Similarly there are many disembodied entities, such as ghosts and spirits, that are still considered living beings because they have a body made of subtle, but still material, elements - mind, intelligence and ego (*manasa, buddhi, ahankara*).

We need to keep our minds open and allow the possibility that actually conventional knowledge, modern mainstream science and

popular wisdom may not be perfect or right, and that there are still many things to be known and understood in our universe. What would be the harm in hypothetically accepting the idea that Vedic knowledge can still teach us something, if we sincerely make an effort to study and understand the peculiar language it uses? Why shouldn't we put aside the so-called "modern scientific" prejudices and make a fully hearted attempt at experimenting the teachings of the *Vedas* exactly according to the method given in the *Vedas* themselves, and see what comes out of it?

The so-called modern science of mainstream conventional western academia has developed empirically in the last 300 years, and in spite of having full credence and support from government, media, schools and general people, it has created more problems than solutions, still leaving a lot of gaps and unanswered questions, and often undergoing dramatic changes of scenario because of new "revolutionary" discoveries, especially at its top levels as we have seen in the commentary of a previous verse. If the "scientific system" was really objective and unbiased, school books should be re-written every 10 years or even more often, and the "uncomfortable evidence" should not be swept under the rug and kept from the public knowledge.

Krishna states in this verse that he is the origin of both matrixes - the material and the spiritual - and therefore he knows how they work. An intelligent reader, with an open scientifically inclined mind, will be happy to listen to Krishna's explanations and put such knowledge to the test in the laboratory of practical life, without prejudice or bias, and incorporate the results without being obstructed by false egotism and envy. There is nothing to lose in the process.

The word *yonī* ("matrix") used in this context is particularly interesting, because it clearly defines Shakti as the Feminine principle, the Mother Goddess that is at the root of the

manifestation of the cosmos. This means that both material nature and the *jivatman* are feminine in nature, and parts and parcels of the Mother Goddess; also feminine is the illusory energy *maya*, that acts in the material mode as Mahamaya or in the spiritual mode as Yogamaya.

VERSE 7

मत्तः परतरं नान्यत्किञ्चिदस्ति धनञ्जय ।

mattaḥ parataram nānyatkiñcidasti dhanañjaya ।

मयि सर्वमिदं प्रोतं सूत्रे मणिगणा इव ॥ ७-७ ॥

mayi sarvamideṁ protaṁ sūtre maṇigaṇā iva ॥ 7-7 ॥

mattaḥ: than me; *parataram*: higher; *na*: not; *anyat*: other; *kincit*: there is; *asti*: there is; *dhanañjaya*: o conqueror of wealth (Arjuna); *mayi*: in me; *sarvam*: all; *idam*: this; *protam*: strung/ woven/ connected; *sutre*: thread; *mani-gana*: a series of pearls; *iva*: like.

"O Dhananjaya (Arjuna), there is absolutely nothing superior to me. Everything rests on me, like pearls are strung on a thread."

All creations are formed by the interaction between the spiritual spark and the material elements, but still both these natures rest on the transcendental existence of Brahman, Paramatma and Bhagavan.

Before the manifestation of the universe, only the Transcendental Reality existed, one and undivided. Then *pradhana* manifested as the total aggregate of existence, and the *jivatmans*, sparks of the

Transcendental Reality, entered into the *pradhana*, like the seed enters the field and takes birth by developing a body.

Actually we could say that the Supreme One entered the *pradhana* in the form of innumerable sparks known as the *jivatma: eko 'ham bahu syam prajayeyeti*, "I am one, but I manifest myself into many" (*Chandogya Upanishad* 6.2.3). This is not easy to understand, because of the eternal and unchangeable nature of the Transcendental Reality; we could compare the process with the generation of an offspring, by which the parent does not become diminished at all.

In fact later (14.4) Krishna will clearly say that he is the father of all living beings (*aham bija pradah pitah*). Each and every emanation is complete and perfect in itself, yet the Supreme remains complete and perfect: *purnam adah purnam idam, purnat purnam udacyate, purnasya purnam adayah, purnam eva avasishyate* (Invocation at the beginning of the *Upanishads* of the *Sukla Yajur Veda*. including the *Isha Upanishad*).

Katha Upanishad (2.2.13) states, *nityo nityam cetanas cetananam, eko bahunam yo vidadhati kaman*, "God is the eternal reality from whom all eternal realities emanate, the conscious soul among all the conscious souls, but alone he is providing for the necessities of all".

The Supreme also manifests as the *pradhana: eka-desasthitasyagner jyotsna vistarini yatha parasya brahmanah saktis tathedam akhilam jagat*, "From one single place (existence), Brahman expands everywhere in the form of its energies, just like the radiance of a fire that pervades the entire universe. (*Vishnu Purana*, 1.22.53).

Svetasvatara Upanisad (6.16) states, *sa visva krd visva vid atma-yonir jnah kalakalo guni sarva vid yah, pradhana-kshetra jna-*

patir gunesah samsara-moksha-sthiti-bandhahetuh, "God has created the world and knows the entire universe. He has no other origin or matrix than himself, he is the beginningless origin of time, the origin of the *gunas* and possesses all knowledge and all qualities, and he is the Lord of the *gunas*, of knowledge and *pradhana*. He binds the *jivas* in the *samsara*, keeps them there and guides them to liberation, too."

Svetasvatara Upanishad (3.8-9) says, *vedaham etam purusham mahantam, aditya-varnam tamasah parastat, tam eva veditvati mrityum eti nanyah pantha vidyate ayanaya, yasmat param naparam asti kincid yasman naniyo no jyayo asti kincit, vriksha iva stabdho divi tishtati ekas tenedam purnam purushena sarvam*, "I know this Supreme Purusha, whose color is like the sun dissipating the darkness. One who knows him can conquer death: this is the only path. Nothing is superior to him, either in greatness or in subtle pervasiveness. Like a tree, he remains in the spiritual sky, and yet pervades the entire universe."

VERSE 8

रसोऽहमप्सु कौन्तेय प्रभास्मि शशिसूर्ययोः ।

raso'hamapsu kaunteya prabhāsmi śaśisūryayoh |

प्रणवः सर्ववेदेषु शब्दः खे पौरुषं नृषु ॥ ७-८ ॥

praṇavaḥ sarvavedeṣu śabdaḥ khe pauruṣam nṛṣu || 7-8 ||

rasah: taste; *aham*: I (am); *apsu*: in water; *kaunteya*: o son of Kunti (Arjuna); *prabha*: the radiance/ light/ power; *asmi*: I am; *sasi-suryayoh*: of the moon and the sun; *pranavaḥ*: the *pranava*; *sarva-vedeshu*: in all the *Vedas*; *śabdah*: the sound; *khe*: in space; *paurusam*: capability; *nrisu*: in human beings.

"O son of Kunti, I am the taste of water, the radiance of the moon and of the sun. I am the *pranava omkara* in all the *Vedas*, I am sound in space, and capability in human beings."

In the previous verses, Krishna has clearly stated his divine nature, saying that he is the origin of both the material and spiritual existence, the father of all the living entities and the foundation of the universe. Now, he is elaborating on the meaning of "divine nature". Some people imagine God simply as a powerful person, some kind of king, who lives in a nice place somewhere in the sky, knows everything, sees everything, and constructed the world and created people because he was bored, then gave those creatures a number of laws - those who obey his laws will go to heaven and those who disobey will go to hell.

Things become more complicated because of a number of delusional people claiming to know "something new" about God - new messages, new laws and orders, new stories - which is of course impossible to verify and sometimes even to question, but usually have no deeper symbolic meaning attached and often are contrary to the fundamental principles of ethics, logic and common sense. In this deviant ideologies, people are discouraged to ask questions or even to try to understand things - because it's all "a mystery".

Bhagavad gita offers a very different scenario, and it certainly does not ask us to believe simply out of loyalty. Rather, it goes a great length to explain things under different perspectives so that we might understand its science, verify it for ourselves and become Self-realized. The big difference is that in Vedic knowledge, God realization is Self realization. The concept of God is much deeper and vaster than what most people think and expect. The transcendental presence of God can be perceived everywhere in this world by a sensitive and pure soul as the intrinsic and pure source of happiness (*rama* means "happiness") - the fresh and

sweet taste of water, the smell of clean earth, the light of sun and moon, the warmth of fire, and the feeling of life itself. Subtler energies are also divine, such as the primordial sound vibration from which everything comes to being, and the ability/ capability of action in human beings.

The word *rasa* means "taste" and can be applied at many levels. *Taittiriya Upanishad* (2.7) states, *raso vai sah, rasam hy evayam labdhvanandibhavati*, "God is the taste, and everybody finds happiness by tasting a drop of it." This taste is obviously not limited to the sensory experience of the material tongue, but it can also include it, as we see in the concept of the sacredness of *prasadam*, the food offered to God and then shared by devotees and public. A person who is spiritually active or at least firmly situated in *sattva* can easily taste the difference between the food that has been offered to God and the exact same recipe but cooked with a selfish materialistic mentality. The connection between water and taste is significant.

Contemporary conventional academic knowledge says that pure water is colorless, odorless and tasteless because it contains nothing that triggers taste receptors, but the people who have written these definitions had their sensitivity damaged by bad habits such as smoking, drinking alcoholic beverages, and even consuming industrial food "enhanced" with artificial flavorings, spoiled foods and foods that are hot, spicy, pungent, or downright disgusting - what is diplomatically called today "an acquired taste" - such as fermented fish sauce, some types of fermented cheese, etc. Besides, the water they may have tasted is usually dead water, distilled or processed industrially to make it "safe to drink" and stored in containers for quite some time, generally both before and after the treatments.

Krishna's presence in this world is subtler than that, and can only be perceived by those who have purified their tongue by observing

a proper *sattvic*/ spiritual diet and life habits. Any evolved human being who is situated on the platform of *sattva* can experience the true taste of fresh clean and lively water as sweet as nectar (*amrita*), the best drink that one can possibly have. Unfortunately, the number of people who can afford to even taste such water - if only once in their lifetime - is rapidly decreasing, and may become practically zero in a few short years, due to the spreading of pollution and industrial consumerism at global level.

Another important point is that water as mentioned in this verse applies to the essence of liquidity that is present in all liquids. Nobody, even the cleverest scientist, can actually feel any taste when they are really thirsty, the food is dry and their mouth is dry. To get any taste from what they are eating, they need some moisture. Do the experiment and verify for yourself: this is much more scientific than playing parrots and blindly repeating the words of the "academic authorities" when they dish out their pontificating nonsense.

On a different level of meaning, *rasa* indicates the taste of the sentiment of devotion that the *bhakta* experiences towards God. There are several varieties of such sentiments or feelings, some primary and some secondary, and all are considered perfectly legitimate and virtuous. The most intimate and intense *rasa* - called *parakiya sringara rasa* - is the sentiment of a secret lover, exemplified by the love of the *gopis* of Vrindavana towards Krishna. Their feelings were so overwhelming that they completely forgot everything else, and even appeared to have lost their mental sanity.

Slightly less intimate and intense is the *svakiya sringara rasa* - the sentiment of a legitimate spouse - exemplified by the queens of Krishna in Dvaraka; such feelings are also so strong that the devotee forgets the divine position of the Lord in the desire to please him and serve him.

Next is the *vatsalya rasa*, that we can define as motherly and fatherly affection, exemplified in Krishna's *lila* not only by Yasoda and Nanda and Devaki and Vasudeva, but also by all the elder *gopis* and *gopas*, the elder inhabitants of Vrindavana, Mathura, Dvaraka, all the elder relatives of Krishna, Krishna's *gurus* Garga Muni and Sandipani Muni, and even the cows who were overwhelmed by ecstasy at the thought that Krishna would drink their milk. This *vatsalya rasa* can become mixed with *sakhya rasa*, as in those friends and relatives of Krishna who appeared to be only slighter older than Krishna, such as Balarama the elder brother of Krishna, and the two eldest Pandavas Yudhisthira and Bhimasena.

Sakhya rasa is the sentiment of friendship among peers, exemplified by the young cowherd boys in Vrindavana, by Arjuna (4.3, 11.41-42) and by all those who appeared in Krishna's *lila* to be of the same age of Krishna. This sentiment can also become mixed with the *dasya rasa* - relationship of service towards a superior - when appears in those who appeared in Krishna's *lila* to be younger than Krishna - such as the smallest *gopas* and *gopis*, and Arjuna's younger brothers Nakula and Sahadeva.

By itself, *dasya rasa* is very respectful and submissive, and it is exemplified by the sons of Krishna at Dvaraka, by his house servants both in Vrindavana and Dvaraka, his soldiers, and his devotees in general. Uddhava as a young relative of Krishna also accepted him as his master and teacher, and received his instructions in the *Bhagavata Purana*. The same sentiment can also be observed in the environment of Krishna, including the calves and cows that Krishna takes to the pastures, the animals of the forest, the tree, the grass, and even the water of the rivers. We must not make the serious mistake of evaluating *bhakti* according to the material criteria, and seeing Krishna's personal companions as "just animals" or "just uneducated girls".

The main *rasas* can also become tinged by secondary *rasas* such as *virya* (heroism in battle), *bhayanaka* (fear), *hasya* (humor), *karuna* (compassion) and *adbhuta* or *vismaya* (amazement), manifested in observing Krishna's activities, including some extraordinary roles that Krishna played in his *lila*. In observing the activities of other persons directed towards Krishna, such as devotees offering prayers or enemies attacking him, other secondary *rasas* can appear such as *raudra* (anger) and *bibhatsa* (disgust).

The most elementary of the main *rasas* is *santa* ("peacefulness"), that consists in the realization and appreciation of Krishna's exceptional qualities and transcendental position; this sentiment is expressed in all the prayers we find in the *Puranas* and *Itihasas*.

The light of the moon and the sun is actually the *brahmajyoti*, the light of the Brahman, that reaches us filtered through the various layers of material elements. Krishna is also the origin and the basis of the Brahman (14.27, *brahmano hi pratistha aham*) and so we can just imagine what Krishna is talking about when he speaks about himself. The word *prabha* does not mean simply "light", because both the moon and the sun have other powers besides supplying illumination.

The sun's energy includes UV rays, which disinfect liquids and solids and stimulate the growth of plants, and infrared rays, which produce heat. Between the ultraviolet and the infrared frequencies there is a series of "nice colored rays" that have a variety of properties not yet fully explored by conventional mainstream science - such as the healing power of green light, the relaxing power of the blue light, the metabolism-stimulating power of the yellow light and so on.

These specific properties may not have been recognized by academic physicists, but they have been empirically verified and effectively utilized for several years already by market strategists

in the choice of colors for interior decoration or various equipments.

A suitable elaboration on the *pranava omkara* in Vedic literature and tradition is too bulky to be presented here, therefore we will refer to later verses on this subject (9.17, 17.23-24). *Pranava* means "of the *prana*", and refers to the fact that the *omkara* (the sound AUM) is the fundamental sound of the energy, the subtle life air that constitutes the magnetic field of the living organism and is created by the Atman in the body. All sounds are created from the basic sound AUM, which makes speech and communication and knowledge possible.

The expression *paurusam* translates ability or potency and sometimes even manliness, but it does not refer to the biological function that modern society tries to enhance through medications such as Viagra. It has a much deeper meaning, connected with the other concepts expressed in these verses in regard to the important supportive role (*dharma*) of human beings in the universe.

VERSE 9

पुण्यो गन्धः पृथिव्यां च तेजश्चास्मि विभावसौ ।

punyaṅ gandhaḥ pṛthivyāṁ ca tejaścāsmi vibhāvasau ।

जीवनं सर्वभूतेषु तपश्चास्मि तपस्विषु ॥ ७-९ ॥

jīvanam sarvabhūteṣu tapaścāsmi tapasviṣu ।। 7-9।।

punyaḥ: original/ attractive/ pure/ good/ auspicious; *gandhaḥ*: fragrance/ smell; *pṛthivyam*: in earth; *ca*: and; *tejah*: heat/ power; *ca*: and; *asmi*: I am; *vibhavasau*: in fire; *jivanam*: life; *sarva-*

bhutesu: in all living beings; *tapah*: austerity; *ca*: and; *asmi*: I am; *tapasvisu*: in those who practice austerity.

"I am the good/ pure smell in earth, I am the heat in fire, I am life in all beings, and I am austerity in ascetics."

What taste is to water, scent is earth.

The word *punya* is generally referred to saintly activities, such as hearing and talking about the Transcendental Reality (*punya sravana kirtanah*, *Bhagavata Purana* 1.2.17, 10.41.16). In *Bhagavad gita* it is referred to the activities that must be performed in order to accrue merits (6.41, 7.28, 8.28, 9.20, 9.33, 18.71, 18.75). So we should not think that *punya gandham* just means "good smell". Literally, *punya* means "pure and pristine, not decayed, not decomposed", and therefore it can also be translated as "pure, clean, healthy, original, attractive, good, auspicious". We understand that the bad smell comes from decomposition and impurity, that are manifestations of *tamas* or ignorance.

Just like the pure original water that we can find in uncontaminated nature, pure original earth or clay is actually a very purifying substance - whatever the conventional contemporary knowledge may say, and as proven practically by many individuals and groups that work in the field of natural medicine. Applications of pure original clay (mud) packs on wounds actually clean them, spontaneously extracting any impurities and splinters, and can even remove pus from a closed wound that has become infected, or from otherwise contaminated body parts, including tumors. On a more daily basis, clay "masks" are used in natural beauty practice to heal and remove pimples and skin impurities of all kinds, and many commercial companies have been producing clay-based cosmetics for many years, with increasing success. And just as with water, the purity of earth has become increasingly jeopardized and destroyed by the advancing pollution and non-sustainable

development, so that in the future it will be more and more difficult to actually find clean earth in the natural state in the environment... in subservience of the "self-fulfilling prophecy" that "mud is dirt", and therefore we can and should throw all kinds of contaminating things into the soil, "where they belong".

In the proper order of things, the purity of water and earth is ensured by the powerful rays of the sun, that disinfects and energizes, burns and regenerates the material elements. This purifying effect of the sun, too, is being threatened by the increasing air and space pollution, from industrial fumes (causing acid rains), nuclear radiation fallout, smog from the burning of fossil fuels, excess carbon dioxide and monoxide, ozone depletion, to the notorious chemtrails.

Tejas is the powerful destructive energy that purifies everything by burning, the remedy that is applied by the laws of nature to bring back the balance in the universe. This power manifests primarily as fire and sun, but also in the microcosm of the human body as the *jataragni*, the "fire in the belly" that digests foods, and the solar plexus that irradiates the energy of determination and will power. It is important to notice here that in Vedic language, fire also includes everything that "burns", including chemicals acids, such as the hydrochloric acid produced by our stomach.

The primary elemental nature of the radiance of sun/ fire called *tejas* (also mentioned in the next verse) is highlighted here by the name Vibhavasū referred to the Deity of fire, where *vibha* means "shining with great brilliance" and *vasu* means foundations", "that which resides". The Vasus are the eight principles of the cosmic manifestation, sometimes referred as the "material elements", but that definition creates confusion because they can be mistaken for the 8 elements previously mentioned by Krishna (7.4) as *bhumih apah analah vayuh kham manah buddhah ahankara*. The personifications of these Vasus are called fire as Agni ("burning")

or Anala ("lively"), earth as Prithivi ("wide") or Dhara ("that which supports"), wind as Vayu ("wind of life") or Anila ("breath of life"), space as Antariksha ("what is seen in the middle") or Aha ("pervading"), the sun as Aditya ("eternal") or Pratyusha ("he who follows dawn"), the sky as Dyaus ("luminous") or Prabhasa ("radiant") also connected to sunset, the moon as Chandra ("illustrious") and Chandramasa (the lunar month) or Soma (the rejuvenating plant). Nakshatra (the aggregate of constellations) is also strictly connected to Dhruva (the pole star) and with the Sapta Rishis (the Seven Sages) that compose the most famous constellation in the sky: the Great Dipper or Ursa Maior.

Dhruva is also known as Svetadvipa, the *prapancika vaikuntha* planet in each universe. The primary principles of the universe are also categorized in a slightly different way as the Adityas, that are 12 aspects of the sun: Mitra, Aryaman, Bhaga, Varuna, Daksha, Amsa, Tvastri, Pushan, Vivasvat, Savitri, Sakra and Vishnu.

The other group of categories, called the 11 Rudras, are the aspects of Shiva or the Purusha principle: Atma (the individual soul), Ananda (happiness), Vijnana (knowledge), Manas (the mind), Prana (the vital energy), Vac (the faculty of speech), Isana (the dominating principle), Tatpurusha (that activating principle), Aghora (nothing is horrible), Vamadeva (pleasant Lord) and Sadyojata (appearing quickly).

Life in all living beings is again, the Atman/ Brahman, that is the main subject of all Vedic scriptures.

Tapasya is the deliberate practice of tolerating difficulties for a higher purpose; it is another form of *tejas* because it creates power, especially for the creation, the preservation and the dissolution of the universe. In a sense, it is one of the primary principles of the cosmos, too.

VERSE 10

बीजं मां सर्वभूतानां विद्धि पार्थ सनातनम् ।

bījam mām sarvabhūtānām viddhi pārtha sanātanam ।

बुद्धिर्बुद्धिमतामस्मि तेजस्तेजस्विनामहम् ॥ ७-१० ॥

buddhirbuddhimatāmasmi tejastejasvināmaham ।। 7-10 ।।

bijam: the seed; *mam*: me; *sarva-bhutanam*: of all beings; *viddhi*: (you should) know; *partha*: o son of Pritha; *sanatanam*: eternal; *buddhih*: the intelligence; *buddhimatam*: in those who are intelligent; *asmi*: I am; *tejah*: the radiance; *tejasvinam*: in all the things that resplend; *aham*: I (am).

"O Partha, know that I am the eternal seed of all existences/ all beings, I am intelligence in the intelligent, and I am the powerful radiance in the powerful."

Krishna is the seed, or principle, or essence, of everything - all beings, all species of life and all existences. The seed of material existences is eternal, albeit its manifestations appear and disappear in cycles, and keep changing. The word *bija* is also used for the technical proceedings of worship and rituals, as the "seed sound" from which the *mantras* and the personal presence of the Deity are manifested. So we can understand that here the definition does not simply apply to the sperm that fertilizes the egg in the animal forms of life, or the grain from which the plant sprouts. It is rather the power of life, the knowledge or consciousness contained in the blueprint of existence, that blossoms into full bloom in the cycle of creation.

The attribute *sanatana*, "eternal", adds a new layer of meaning, indicating that at the time of the dissolution of the universe all existences and all living beings are withdrawn and absorbed again

into the timeless Brahman, the Maha Vishnu Narayana, "the shelter of all", to be manifested again at the beginning of a new cycle of creation. This is another reminder of how the Divine presence or existence should not be taken cheaply.

Sometimes this *sanatana sarva-bhutanam bija* is interpreted as the *pradhana*, the primary non-manifested aggregate of existence that remains eternally even after the dissolution of the universe, the Shakti that develops the divine seed into the various forms and that is also eternal - the *pradhana* - albeit the forms that she creates are appearing and disappearing in cycles. Again, this is non-different from Brahman.

The intelligence in those who are intelligent is a very interesting principle. It can be defined as a sharper awareness or consciousness, and this brings us back to the intimate nature of the Atman/ Brahman, that is fundamentally consciousness. We have already seen how in *Bhagavad gita* Krishna keeps presenting intelligence as the most important factor in progress, both in material and spiritual life. Such intelligence is created by the accumulation of *punya* or results of virtuous activities, especially the sincere performance of one's duties, and by the effort and desire one invests in obtaining one's purpose.

The expression *tejas* (on which we already elaborated in the previous verse commentary) translates "power" but in its natural form, that radiance of energy/ vibrations/ aura that characterizes truly powerful personalities (7.10, 10.41, 11.17, 11.30, 11.47), just like heat and light immediately reveal the presence of fire.

In human society, it is generally applied to *kshatriyas* and *brahmanas* (16.3, 18.43) especially in the meaning of "courage", but in 11.19 and 11.30 the word *tejas* is specifically applied to the form of Time, that devours and burns everything, covering the universe with its radiance and power. In 15.12 it is applied to the

sun and the fire. This same meaning is also expressed in *Bhagavata Purana* (1.1.1) *tejo vari mridam*, "sun/ fire, water and earth", which also connects the idea of fiery power together with water and earth like in the two previous verses of *Bhagavad gita* (7.8-9). After all, earth is produced by the union of fire and water - the first elemental components of the universe, that create the stars and the planets.

VERSE 11

बलं बलवतां चाहं कामरागविवर्जितम् ।

balam balavatām cāham kāmārāgavivarjitam ।

धर्माविरुद्धो भूतेषु कामोऽस्मि भरतर्षभ ॥ ७-११ ॥

dharmāviruddho bhūteṣu kāmo'smi bharatarṣabha ॥ 7-11 ॥

balam: strength; *balavatam*: of those who are strong; *ca*: and; *aham*: I (am); *kama-raga-vivarjitam*: free from lust and attachment; *dharma aviruddhah*: not against the *dharma*; *bhuteshu*: in the living beings; *kama*: desire/ pleasure; *asmi*: I am; *bharatarshabha*: o best among the descendants of Bharata.

"O best of the Bharata dynasty (Arjuna), I am the strength of the strong who is free from lust/ selfishness and attachment. In all beings, I am the (sexual) desire that is not contrary to *dharma*."

The strength (*balam*) mentioned in this verse is connected with the *tejas* of the two previous verses, and with the intelligence (*buddhih*) of the intelligent mentioned in verse 7.10. Like splendor and intelligence, strength is a *shakti* attribute of the Supreme Lord, but just like in the feminine/ masculine couple of *pradhana* and *brahman*, the "genders" are switched.

This is an important point that we should remember every time we contemplate the Supreme Deity pictured in an apparently male or female form: the Divine is not limited like the embodied conditioned souls, and it would be a mistake to project human social conventions on God, even if God plays some roles in the performance of the *avatara lilas*.

Here *balam* is further defined by the expression *kama-raga-ivivarjitam*: free from lust and attachment. This is particularly important because *tejas*, *balam* and *buddhi* are required for the protection of the individual and society, but can be very badly misused and therefore become a great danger for everyone.

A person that is controlled by lust, selfishness and attachment but has no strength, power or intelligence can do very little harm, so before training people to help them develop greater power or strength, we should make sure that they are fit candidates. This is the logic of the *gurukula* system, where all children are first examined and tested by the *guru* to ascertain which position they should occupy in society and what kind of training they should receive in that capacity. Re-establishing this educational system is one of the most important priorities in rebuilding a functional society.

In contemporary conventional education (usually called "western") teachers do not have any responsibility towards the proper development of the children, either on the level of the knowledge of the subjects or on the level of ethical principles. Like the members of governments, teachers are appointed by an impersonal "authority" that calculates merits on the basis of academic certificates and other similar criteria, with a great emphasis on the ideological conformity and allegiance to the "official version". So when the students fail in learning their curriculum or in developing the proper qualities and skills, or in becoming useful members of society, the teachers are not held responsible. Their job is just to

tell the students to read the text books approved by the school management or the government education board, and if some teachers have a passion for their subject and go the extra mile to inspire students to understand and appreciate it, they are scarcely recognized or supported.

The worst situation seems to be in India, where even the students from the lowest grades of elementary schools need to get regular tuition from private teachers or institutions besides the normal school attendance, if they want to have any chance to passing the test. The reason for this disaster is mainly the casteist discrimination enforced by the government system that rewards backwardness, irresponsibility, and a heavily politicized approach, totally disregarding intelligent, ethical values, merit and actual need - both for the appointment of teachers and for the enrollment of students. Since priority is given to non-brahmins, people learn that the brahminical qualifications are to be considered an obstacle to education, so the general population becomes more and more alienated from the Vedic heritage, values and knowledge.

The ideal education is the *gurukula*-based system, in the hands of genuine *brahmanas* that are qualified both in regards to the knowledge of the subject they are teaching, and in training their students in ethical values (*dharma*) and self-discipline (*tapasya*), as well as in directly developing the skills that are required to perform the job. This can be re-established by promoting home schooling and distance education, that take advantage of present legal provisions created by various ideological groups.

Another important point is that contemporary conventional education does not give the students sufficient practical skills and useful knowledge to become good members of society, because it does not want to recognize the natural diversity of talents and abilities of the individuals. Obsessed by the fear of "diversity", mainstream society (especially in western countries) expects all

individuals to be equally capable of learning a common basic education curriculum and getting the same results - so when unqualified students fail in the attempt, the entire class is set a lower standard so that "nobody is left back", and the most intelligent students lose interest in the proceedings.

The *gurukula* system, on the other hand, gives a personalized evaluation and training of each individual student's potential in qualities and tendencies, and gives a different curriculum and training to intellectuals, warriors, business persons, and artisans.

The only minimum common education everybody gets is about the basic ethical principles - truthfulness/ honesty, compassion/ selflessness, cleanliness/ purity and self control/ discipline. Even animals can be trained in these basic rules, so there is no question that some human beings are unable to be educated at this level. Of course, there will be human beings who choose not to live according to these basic rules of *dharma*, but they should be kept outside the boundaries of a civilized society, as *anaryas*.

The expression *kama* translates "desire", and is often referred to sexual desire. The topic is tricky because of the artificial superimpositions of the dominant Abrahamic cultures at subtler levels, that often create a tangled mess of emotions around sexual energy and urges, with the development of unnecessary guilt and fears ultimately leading to perversions and damages.

First of all, we need to make the very important distinction between natural sex urge and artificial sex urge, that are respectively on the physical and on the mental level.

The human body naturally produces hormones and sexual fluids, especially during the "fertile" period, that is from adolescence to the beginning of old age. In the *gurukula* system, the students are trained in the basic ethical principles and learn to control their

minds and senses by engaging them in appropriate and beneficial ways under the constant surveillance and responsibility of a qualified teacher. If a boy is trained properly before puberty, adolescence will be much easier and happier both for the individual and for society: practically all the problems that people have on the sexual level are created by social pressure, cultural myths and stereotyped roles they are unable to cope with.

All forms of desire, including the natural sex urge, are not only admissible but sacred and divine as well, as long as they do not violate the principles of *dharma* - truthfulness, compassion, cleanliness, and self-control. So, as long as a relationship is not based on physical or psychological violence, on betrayal or hypocrisy, on some type of psychological or physical perversion, or on mere animal lust, it is considered legitimate from the moral point of view. It is important to understand that Vedic culture does not consider sexual acts (as long as they are free and based on mutual consent) as illegal or immoral - on the contrary, *kama* is one of the four main purposes of human life (*dharma, artha, kama, moksha*).

The two important concepts expressed in this verse are connected in the definition of strength (*bala*) as divine when it is free from lust, selfishness and attachment, as *kama* and *bala* never go well together. There is no need for "force" in civilized and healthy sexual matters. If someone is attracted by the idea of violence in sexual relationships, they should get their mind examined by a qualified expert, because there must be some psychological issue that is poisoning their system.

Kama or desire is a powerful divine principle in itself, but the activities prompted by it could become disastrous (both for the individual and for the collectivity) unless they are consistently channeled through the principles of *dharma*.

Some people believe *dharma* to be merely a collection of traditional social rules and norms such as marriage rituals and reciprocal duties of family members, or even a net of social prejudices that systematically stifle progress and proper engagement of resources. This misconception is the root of the degradation of society.

VERSE 12

ये चैव सात्त्विका भावा राजसास्तामसाश्च ये ।

ye caiva sāttvikā bhāvā rājasāstāmasāśca ye ।

मत्त एवेति तान्विद्धि न त्वहं तेषु ते मयि ॥ ७-१२ ॥

matta eveti tānviddhi na tvahaṁ teṣu te mayi ॥ 7-12 ॥

ye: they; *ca*: and; *iva*: certainly; *sattvika*: according to *sattva*, goodness; *bhava*: state of being; *rajasah*: according to *rajas*, passion; *tamasah*: according to *tamas*, ignorance; *ca*: and; *ye*: they; *mattah*: from me; *eva*: certainly; *iti*: thus; *tan*: them; *viddhi*: you (should) know; *na*: not; *tu*: but; *aham*: I (am); *tesu*: in them; *te*: they; *mayi*: in me.

"You should know that certainly all (those forms of) existence (created) by *sattva*, *rajas* and also *tamas* come from me, but I am not in them: rather, they are in me."

With a long first *a*, the word *bhava* means "emotion, feeling".

The word *bhava* (with a short first *a*) means "existence, birth, becoming, manifestation". *Bhava* is also a name of Shiva.

In this verse Krishna is elaborating about the nature of existence. In 7.9, he has said he is the seed of all beings (*bijam mam sarva-*

bhutanam sanatanam). The difference of meaning between *bhava* and *bhuta* is that *bhava* is something that is manifesting, while *bhuta* is something that has already come into existence. To continue with the logical thread of Krishna's discussion, we could say that *bhava* is the seed or the preliminary stage of *bhuta*.

The variety of states of being in the material world are produced by the union of the two basic energies - the *apara prakriti* constituted by the 8 material elements, and the *para prakriti* constituted by the living beings, of which Krishna has already said he is the origin (7.4-6).

As we will see in detail later in the text, the *apara prakriti* has three *gunas* (modalities or qualities), namely *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*, that regulate all material existences and all living beings. The science of the *gunas* is so important that *Bhagavad gita* dedicates the entire chapter 14 to elaborating on it, and it is also mentioned in many other parts of the text.

All the various forms of material existence emanate from God but they are not divine in themselves (and therefore should not be considered as absolute) because they are intermediate positions meant for the development of the *jivatma* towards the realization of the eternal existence of awareness and bliss, that is the Atman/ Brahman.

Krishna, the Transcendental Reality, is like a canvas template on which the three colors of the *gunas* (white, red and black) are painted: the colors are in the canvas, but the canvas is not in the colors. The canvas template is the support for the ever-changing play of the colors, but it is not really pervaded by them at any stage, even if superficially people may think so: the proof is that when the individual or mixed colors are washed away, the canvas template returns to shine with the original clarity.

Similarly, God (*brahman, paramatma, bhagavan*) remains always unchanged before and after the creation of the universe, and before and after the dissolution of the universe. At the same time, God contains eternally the "blueprint" for existence, in the form of the spiritual seed - the spiritual qualities. The temporary and changing existences are originated and supported by the eternal existence. Here is the key to reconcile the apparent contradiction between *nirguna* ("without qualities") and *saguna* ("with qualities"). Everything we see in the material world has an original counterpart in the spiritual existence, in the "world of ideals" that transcends manifestation and dissolution, and is eternally perfect.

The material copy of the original blueprint is purposefully distorted with defects (impermanence, ignorance and suffering) because the purpose of the material universe is to train the individual soul towards progress. What is training without the purposeful application of difficulties? There would be no effort, no exercise of will power, no improvement. So the proper way to utilize the material manifestation is to engage it in our journey of progress in consciousness, and let it go when it is not useful any more.

VERSE 13

त्रिभिर्गुणमयैर्भावैरेभिः सर्वमिदं जगत् ।

tribhirguṇamayairbhāvairēbhiḥ sarvamidaṁ jagat ।

मोहितं नाभिजानाति मामेभ्यः परमव्ययम् ॥ ७-१३ ॥

mohitaṁ nābhijānāti māmebhyaḥ paramavyayam ॥ 7-13 ॥

tribhiḥ: by the three; *guṇa-mayaiḥ*: composed by the *gunas*; *bhavaiḥ*: by the existences; *ebhiḥ*: (all) these; *sarvam*: all; *idaṁ*: this; *jagat*: universe/ people; *mohitam*: confused; *na*: not;

abhijanati: does understand; *mam*: me; *ebhyah*: compared to these; *param*: higher/ supreme; *avyayam*: imperishable.

"Under the conditions of existence created by the three *gunas*, this world does not understand me, as I am inexhaustible and transcendental."

The subject of this verse is *jagat*, "the world", intended as "all the people in general according to the material concept". The embodied conditioned beings cannot understand Krishna, the Transcendental Reality, because of the limitations of their material sense of identification (*ahankara*), that manifests in the *bhavas*, or conditions of existence, constituted by the three *gunas*, or qualities of material nature.

Krishna is beyond and above this level of material identification, beyond and above the *gunas*, in the eternal transcendental reality: we can move to this higher level and ultimately understand him, but first we need to leave our limitations behind.

How can we see reality, if we insist in wearing heavily colored eyeglasses? The colors of the *gunas* confuse our vision and project shadows of forms that do not really exist, because they are only temporary. The actual reality is beyond the eyeglasses and does not depend on them, while the colorful projections of the lenses are precisely what constitutes the eyeglasses and depends on the greater reality for their existence. Nobody is forcing us to keep our eyeglasses on, but because of a strange sense of fun and entertainment, we have taken up the habit of wearing them and after some time we have become convinced that they are an integral part of our vision, and that without these eyeglasses we would not be able to see anything.

To solve the problem, it takes an act of surrender, of faith, that pushes the will power to actually choose to remove the eyeglasses

and to look at the real world. The issue of faith and surrender in *Bhagavad gita* is radically different from the concept of faith and surrender we find in abrahamic ideologies, because surrendering to Krishna is only the first step that will enable us to actually experiment and verify the value of his teachings by our direct perception.

Krishna answers all questions and does not speak of mysteries that nobody will ever know, he never asks for blind allegiance and obedience, and does not threaten punishments or promises rewards. On the contrary, he will tell Arjuna, "I have given you this knowledge, now think about it and then choose what you want to do" (18.63-64).

The word *maya* without long *a* means "composed by" or "consisting of", while *maya* with long *a* means "illusion".

Another meaning of *guna* is "rope". We can visualize the *gunas* as three different threads that are woven together to form the beautiful cloth or network of the universal manifestation, that is three-dimensional in nature, that we can use as a ladder to move around and upwards.

The combination of the three *gunas* produces bodies/ conditions of existence/ manifestations such as *devas*, *asuras*, human beings and animals and plants. Among the human beings, *brahmanas*, *kshatriyas*, *vaisyas* and *sudras* are also characterized by particular mixtures of the *gunas*, and so are the *anaryas* or uncivilized people.

All such conditions of life are temporary, and the living being is supposed to progress through them towards the ultimate purpose of liberation or Self realization.

VERSE 14

दैवी ह्येषा गुणमयी मम माया दुरत्यया ।

daivī hyeṣā guṇamayī mama māyā duratyayā ।

मामेव ये प्रपद्यन्ते मायामेतां तरन्ति ते ॥ ७-१४ ॥

māmeva ye prapadyante māyāmetāṁ taranti te ॥ 7-14 ॥

daivi: divine; *hi*: certainly; *esa*: this; *guna-mayi*: consisting of qualities; *mama*: my; *maya*: illusion; *duratyaya*: very difficult to overcome; *mam*: me; *eva*: certainly; *ye*: those (who); *prapadyante*: approach; *mayam*: illusion; *etam*: this; *taranti*: can go beyond; *te*: they.

"This divine energy of mine, manifesting as the three *gunas*, is very difficult to overcome but those who take shelter in me (can) cross over this illusion."

The *apara prakriti* mentioned by Krishna in the previous verses (7.4-6) is still divine and unconquerable even by the living beings that are known as *para prakriti*, so she deserves all our respect and worship.

Some foolish people think they can "declare war to Maya" or material nature, but they will be invariably beaten down... the greatest defeat for them is to develop the strong ego of being "a stalwart *sannyasi*" - or *brahmachari*, or *brahmana*, or *yogi*, or *jnani*, or *vaishnava*, or whatever identification their minds dictates to them to make them feel superior - important and great.

Indeed, such deluded people have already been humiliated by their arrogance and they remain even more strongly and permanently under the grip of illusion. Krishna's instructions are the only safe path to become free from ignorance and illusion: we need to

recognize the divine nature of Maya and bow to the Transcendental Reality that manifests such wonders.

Goddess Mahamaya is like a mother tiger: her jaws are inescapable death for all animals, but they are a place of comfort, safety and love for her kittens, who have affection and respect for her, and depend on her for everything. This is the sentiment of surrender (*prapadyante*) expressed by Krishna in this verse.

The word *prapada* refers to the front part of the feet, and it especially relates to the traditional gesture of touching the feet of a superior as a mark of respect and submission; it expresses the meek and humble attitude that a devotee needs to cultivate towards the Lord and his divine energies. Such meekness and humility, however, should be directed towards God, and not towards adharmic and foolish people who are trying to create obstacles on the path of progress for individuals and for society. We must remember that Krishna speaks the instructions of *Bhagavad gita* to Arjuna precisely to encourage him to engage in a terrible fight where he will contribute directly or indirectly to the killing of several thousands of people, including his own relatives and elders and other great personalities, such as kings and *gurus*. Obviously Krishna does not want Arjuna to surrender, or to be meek and humble towards the evil Duryodhana and his supporters - and neither should we.

Sometimes ignorant people criticize dharmic activists for their outspoken awareness campaigns. Many believe that self-realized souls should always be silent and wearing a beatific vacant smile on their faces, "transcendentally" callous to the events of this world, and if they speak at all, they should only utter incomprehensible and philosophical speculations, vague blessings, sentimentalistic platitudes generally based on "love", totally impractical instructions or complicated technical details about religious rituals.

Unfortunately, the general public is so misguided and so ignorant about the actual contents of the *shastra* that they routinely fall victims to such dangerous cheaters and their followers, because they are told that by simply making a public show of submission to such so-called *gurus* one is automatically "saved" as taught in the abrahamic ideologies.

The expression *guna-mayi*, "made of *gunas*", does not refer to the origin of *maya* but to her production. As we have seen already, and will see again later in the text, the three *gunas* - *sattva*, *rajas*, *tamas* - are the expression of the bondage of the conditioned soul, that is originated and perpetuated by the choices of the individual soul through the exercise of free will.

The Lord is not responsible for such choices and neither is the Mother Goddess Mahamaya: the only cause of the bondage of the conditioned soul is the material identification that covers possession, belonging and gratification. Therefore it is only logical that the only way to get out of the mesh of delusion consists in giving up *ahankara* and *mamatva*, and approaching the Divine - the Lord and his Shakti - in a very humble and submissive attitude, actually following God's teachings. In this regard, it is important to note that in spiritual symbolism, the idea of *pada*, indicating the feet of a divine personality, includes his/ her teachings and instructions, position on the level of consciousness, and service to his/ her mission.

Another meaning of *guna* is "rope", that we can easily connect with the idea of bondage and net, but also with rope walking and rope ladders. The rope is not responsible for our bondage: it all depends on how we use it. By following carefully and sincerely Krishna's detailed instructions in *Bhagavad gita*, we will be able to climb the net by using the higher ropes of *rajas* and *sattva* to lift ourselves out of the most tangled mess of *tamas*, then moving up from *rajas* to *sattva* and finally out of the entire net altogether,

attaining the level of *suddha sattva* or spiritual goodness. In the earliest stages of the process, it is very important to get help from an expert person, because when one is bound hands and feet, it is very difficult to do anything, and one's efforts may even cause a further tightening of the ropes.

Have you ever disentangled a mass of yarn? It is a very useful exercise for the mind, because it teaches patience, carefulness, gentleness, and the logical process of tracking the extremities of the yarn and liberating them from the mess, keeping all threads clearly visible at all times.

VERSE 15

न मां दुष्कृतिनो मूढाः प्रपद्यन्ते नराधमाः ।

na mām duṣkṛtino mūḍhāḥ prapadyante narādhamāḥ ।

माययापहृतज्ञाना आसुरं भावमाश्रिताः ॥ ७-१५ ॥

māyayāpahṛtajñānā āsuram bhāvamāśritāḥ ॥ 7-15 ॥

na: not; *mam*: me; *duskritinah*: evil doers; *mudhah*: stupid; *prapadyante*: approach in a respectful mood; *nara-adhamah*: the lowest of the human beings; *mayaya*: by illusion; *apahrita*: stolen; *jnana*: knowledge; *asuram*: demoniac mentality; *bhavam*: nature; *asritah*: those who have taken shelter of.

"The evil doers, the foolish, the most degraded, those whose knowledge has been covered by delusion, and those who have chosen an asuric existence do not approach me."

In the previous verses, Krishna has declared that he is the origin of the universe and the father of all living beings (7.4-7). He is the

Transcendental eternal Reality that supports the existence of all things, and knowing him constitutes the highest perfection. Why then it is so difficult to know him? Krishna explains that the consciousness of the conditioned souls is covered and tied by the three *gunas* (7.13) or modalities of material existence, and that only those who approach the Divine in a respectful, humble and sincere manner will be able to overcome (*taranti*) the net woven by such ropes. How to do this practically? Krishna now explains what are the main obstacles to this process.

Duskritina means "evil doers": *duh* means "bad", *krit* means "one who does". Thus, the first negative factor that prevents us from approaching Krishna is the deliberate choice of committing bad actions. What are "bad actions"? Those activities (committed physically, mentally or by abstention) that are contrary to *dharma*, that are contrary to truthfulness and honesty, compassion and benevolence to all, cleanliness and purity of mind, and self-control.

Those who choose to engage in wrongful and damaging activities get caught in a net of negative reactions and lower modes of material identification, and become bound more and more tightly by the *gunas*. Earlier (4.36) and later (9.30) Krishna will say that sincere engagement in devotional service can purify even the greatest criminal actions, but we should never forget that in many more verses he reiterates that it is necessary to give up all bad activities before one can come to know him.

This obviously means that the purification from the sins or wrongful activities starts only when one sincerely makes deliberate efforts to give them up, and applies to the karmic residues left by the previous negative activities.

Krishna certainly does not condone the cynical behavior of a false devotee who deliberately continues to engage in wrongful acts, counting on his fake devotion to neutralize their effects: this is

clearly an offensive attitude, and listed among the 10 main offenses to be carefully avoided in devotional service.

A *duskritina* has set the course of his boat in the wrong direction, so he will not be able to reach the proper destination. It is up to us, individually: at every step in our lives we are offered the choice between the right thing and the wrong thing, and our conscience is always there to tell us which is which. As a counterpart, the next verse will speak of *sukritinah*, "good-doers", if we may say. From the same root, *kirti* means "good fame" and refers to the glory that is accrued by making the right choices even when it would be easier to make the wrong one.

The expression *duskritina* is sometimes translated as "miscreant", but we should be very careful as this English word carries a profound abrahamic bias that is alien to the Vedic concept. In abrahamic societies apostasy or heresy are punishable crimes. While for abrahamics a "miscreant" is someone who does not blindly accept to believe in the dogmas established by their priests, a *duskritina* is simply one who performs bad and unethical activities, callous to the damage that he causes to others: the definition has nothing to do with one's religious faith or lack thereof.

The second category of hopeless people are the *mudha*, the "fools". Here and in several other passages, we see that Krishna is not trimming words too much when it comes to lack of intelligence or good qualities.

Sometimes "politically correct" people object to the use of "strong words", protesting that *satyam bruyat priyam bruyat*, "truth should only be told in a pleasing manner", but how can you describe a fool without risking him to feel offended at all? If you are not clear enough, there will be no point in speaking, because your warnings will be lost. Calling spade a spade cannot be considered offensive:

it just plain truth. Truth has no fault in itself. Those who feel offended by truth should verify their priorities. So, the famous quote (*satyam bruyat priyam bruyat*) actually means that we should try to tell the truth in a friendly manner, so that we avoid unnecessarily hurting people. Of course, it should be the truth: we need to stick to the actual point - we cannot say that someone is a fool because of race, gender, or other factors that are irrelevant to the degree of intelligence and ability to understand.

The word *mudha* has been also translated as "devoid of discrimination" and "beast of burden", as exemplified by the behavior of the donkey, that can be made to carry very heavy burdens simply by dangling a carrot tied to a stick in front of him. Of course the donkey can never get the carrot because the stick with the carrot also moves with him, but in the meantime he is laboring all day, and in the end he must content himself of a bunch of dry grass he could have had simply by stopping on the way to graze from the roadside. Another characteristic of donkeys is that they like to kick, especially with their rear legs; a male donkey always risks to be hurt when he approaches a female for sex, but still he cannot restrain himself.

Nonetheless, the donkey likes to brag and often even sings, very pleased with what he considers his beautiful voice and profound poetry. In human society, these characteristics apply to the gross materialist, only interested in the philosophy of "work hard, play hard", always pursuing a dream of happiness that he can never obtain because of the very nature of the material world, and carrying a burden that give him no benefit. These people may aspire to "cultural programs" such as music, dance and similar entertainment, but because these have no spiritual or educational contents, they remain empty and vain. When they are offered the opportunity for spiritual research, and asked if they ever wonder about the meaning of life and the purpose of the universe, they

become spiteful and offensive because they cannot even understand the point of such "waste of time", as they say. "Get a job," is their most likely response.

Naradhamah are the lowest among the human beings, the degraded uncivilized people that prefer to live "freely" like animals, without following any rule or ethical principle, without striving to improve themselves. Or worse, they have concocted cruel and degrading rules for their community, and they stick to them. These fallen people see no harm in killing innocent and friendly creatures to eat them, to violate women or children for their own sense gratification, to cheat and steal property to which they have no rights, to befoul nature, to destroy or waste resources and the property of others, and in general to behave in a very irresponsible way.

The *maya-apahrita-jnana* people are those who know things "theoretically" but remain unable to put them in practice because of some material attachment or delusion. Many people like to talk about philosophy and spirituality, but when it is time to walk their talk, they do not make any effort to become consistent, and sometimes they are even surprised to hear that we expect them to do what they have been preaching. "But that was just philosophy", they say. Or sometimes, when they have pledged to give or to invest something, they conveniently forget their promise or pretend they did not realize what was expected from them. Many people like to make grandiose statements, such as affirming they are ready to give everything to the cause, even their lives, and fight to the last, and then they refuse to donate even a small amount of money or a few hours of their leisure time. Many people preach about not smoking and yet they keep smoking, talk about environment protection and don't care how much garbage they are producing or how many resources they are consuming unnecessarily. Some say, "*dharma rakshati rakshitah*" ("ethic principles defend those who

defend them") and then keep merrily trampling *dharma* in many ways, or say "*satyam eva jayate*" ("truth will prevail") and keep telling lies privately and publicly without any shame, and so on.

The fourth category of people who remain unable to approach Krishna are the *asuram bhavam asritah*, those who have deliberately chosen an asuric life. The word *asura* is generally translated as "demoniac", but we should not confuse this concept with the abrahamic meaning based on the idea of mythical creatures also called "fallen angels", who have powers practically identical to "the good God" (and sometimes even greater) and are always trying to push human beings "to sin". This concept of a "bad god" that keeps fighting against the "good God" in the minds and hearts of human beings is a convenient delusion normally used by abrahamics to justify their own bad choices and even the persecution of innocents. Also, the translation "atheists" is not applicable here, because some people may believe in the existence of God, but project their asuric tendencies on him, or even worship some Asura believing him to be God - so they should be counted in this category, too.

The population of the universe is divided into two broad categories: the *suras* and the *asuras* - those who support the divine plan for the benefit and progress of all beings, and those who oppose such plan for their own misguided and deluded selfishness (individual or collective). More about the asuric nature as opposed to the daivic nature (often translated as "demoniac nature" and "divine nature") is in chapter 16, entirely dedicated to the subject.

The expression *asuram bhavam asritah* shows that the demoniac nature is something that one chooses by one's free will, not a genetic inheritance of a particular species or race. Some commentators aggregate the various categories listed in this verse, signifying that the "bad guys" are expected to have all the four bad qualities at the same time, but this is not the case.

VERSE 16

चतुर्विधा भजन्ते मां जनाः सुकृतिनोऽर्जुन ।

caturvidhā bhajante mām janāḥ sukṛtino'rjuna ।

आर्तो जिज्ञासुरर्थार्थी ज्ञानी च भरतर्षभ ॥ ७-१६ ॥

ārto jijñāsurarthārthī jñānī ca bharatarṣabha ॥ 7-16 ॥

catuh: four; *vidhah*: types; *bhajante*: they worship/ serve/ pray; *mam*: me; *janah*: people; *sukritinah*: those who do good deeds; *arjuna*: o Arjuna; *artah*: one who suffers; *jinasuh*: one who is seeking knowledge; *artha-arthi*: one desires wealth and prosperity; *jnani*: a learned person; *ca*: and; *bharata-rshabha*: o best among the descendants of Bharata.

"O Arjuna, best of the descendants of Bharata, four types of good persons worship me: one who is suffering, one who is inquisitive, one who wants some favor or benefit, and one who has knowledge."

Just like there are four types of people who remain unable to approach Krishna, there are four types of devotees, who are willing to make the right choices in their life (*sukritinah*). *Sukritinah* are also those who have already performed a sufficient amount of good actions and have therefore accumulated karmic merits (*sukriti* or *punya*), even unconsciously (*ajnata sukriti*) as for example in the case of someone who offers a gift to a devotee who in turn will offer it to the Deity, or someone who transcribes or prints or distributes a spiritual book without knowing its contents.

The word *bhajante* is very interesting and expresses a higher level of religious sentiments and behavior. Rather than running around trying to enroll more people into their religious camp by hook or

by crook, the genuine devotees of Krishna worship and serve him through the process of *bhakti yoga* by applying Krishna's teachings to their own lives and by elevating their consciousness to a transcendental level. The word *bhajan* derives from the same root of the word *bhakti*, and it can be translated as "devotional service in transcendental consciousness".

The word "religion" derives from the Latin *religare*, "connecting", as referred to the relationship connecting the individual with God. This means that religion should be a private concern, based on personal beliefs and worship practices, in which neither the government nor society or other people should have any saying.

Of course, there are limits to the personal beliefs and worship practices: if some people believe that killing, or raping, or stealing etc is a legitimate worship practice, they should be closely monitored and prevented from committing any unethical/ violent action.

Expert preachers should inspire them to raise their level of consciousness and engage their destructive tendencies in a non-damaging manner, by directing them against their own negative tendencies. So the "killing" should be turned into the destruction of one's own defects, or as an intermediate stage there will be a temporary allowance for animal sacrifice (duly restricted and monitored, especially to sensitize people towards the sufferings of the animals). The lusty tendencies can be sublimated into the higher emotions towards God by the process of *sravanam kirtanam*, also helped by practices such as dancing, dramatic performance, Deity worship, etc - and at an intermediate and temporary (lower) level through consumption of psychotropic substances and other similar methods. Stealing will be sublimated through the regulated collection of donations and alms from the general public, that will be directly engaged in the service of the Deity, especially used for preparing and distributing consecrated

foods. Such fund raising must be done strictly according ethical principles and behaviors, otherwise it will be detrimental to the progress of everyone.

What are the main motivations that inspire a decent person (*sukritina*) to approach God?

The most popular reason is suffering. When one is in very serious danger, or experiences a very great pain, it is natural to think of God: even a professed atheist or agnostic will then resort to fervently praying God. The effect may not be very long lasting - generally people forget God as soon as the danger has passed - but at least for some time the sentiment is very strong.

A *jijnasu* is "one who seeks knowledge". As stated in *Vedanta sutras (athato brahma jinasa)* and in other Vedic texts, human life finds its real purpose when the individual starts asking questions about existence, the purpose of life, and so on: this is called "search for knowledge".

In different times and different places, such quest has taken various forms, but the common denominator is the aspiration towards a higher level of consciousness. In Vedic tradition, God/ Krishna is consciousness, the essence and origin of all existence, so by approaching Krishna we will obtain the knowledge we are seeking.

Another reason why people approach God is to ask for favors. For most people, "prayer" is the only means by which they approach God, and "praying" simply means asking for something. They say, "give us our daily bread, give us this blessing or that blessing, make me pass this school exam, make me win the lottery, give me a good job, give me a good husband/ wife, remove my disease, give me wealth, give me health, give me position, give me protection, give me intelligence, give me devotion, give me liberation".

There is nothing intrinsically wrong in asking God for something valuable (*artha*), and in fact *artha* is one of the four main purposes of life according to the Vedic system. Of course, God helps those who help themselves: praying God for his blessings does not mean that we can just sit back and relax and let him do all the work for us. So if we want to get our daily bread, we need to work for it, and if we want to pass a school exam we need to study.

If we want to win the lottery we should remember that there are lots of people who are praying for the same result and only one can possibly win (so we had better accumulate some good *karma* credit by performing sufficient good deeds first). If we want a good job we must make sufficient efforts to qualify ourselves and to go looking for one, and so on.

A *jnani* is a person who lives by knowledge. Having already attained the level of knowledge, he becomes truly qualified to understand and worship Krishna, as we will see in the next verses. The wise person has overcome the fear of duality and loss, so he is ready to accept whatever comes to him according to the results of his past deeds: the bad things - including death, disease, misfortunes of various types, pain and disappointments - as well as the good things, that already come by themselves.

Such a *jnani* could be in any *varna* or *ashrama*, because intelligence and wisdom are inherently human characteristics and can be found even in illiterate people or in those who are engaged in menial work, or are faithful to family responsibilities.

In this chapter, Krishna has only started to discuss about the science of *bhakti* (loving devotion to God), and at this stage *bhakti* is still presented as the means to approach God, and not the end (*kevala bhakti*).

VERSE 17

तेषां ज्ञानी नित्ययुक्त एकभक्तिर्विशिष्यते ।

teṣāṁ jñānī nityayukta ekabhaktirviśiṣyate ।

प्रियो हि ज्ञानिनोऽत्यर्थमहं स च मम प्रियः ॥ ७-१७ ॥

priyo hi jñānino'tyarthamaḥaṁ sa ca mama priyaḥ ।। 7-17।।

tesam : of them; *jnani*: one who has knowledge; *nitya-yuktah*: constantly engaged; *eka-bhaktih*: only in devotional service; *visisyate*: excels over others/ in various special ways; *priyah*: the dearest; *hi*: indeed; *janinah*: to the *jnani*; *ati*: very much; *artham*: value; *aham*: I; *sah*: for this person; *ca*: and; *mama*: my; *priyah*: dearest.

"Of them, the person of knowledge who is constantly engaged (in *yoga*) and focused in devotion is the best; I am very dear to the *jnani*, and s/he is very dear to me."

This verse strictly connects *yoga* and *bhakti*, as one and the same. In fact, *yoga* and *bhakti* are one and the same: *yoga* means "uniting/ connecting with God" and *bhakti* means "loving God". How can one unite with God without love? It is not possible, just like it is not possible to love and serve God without having established a connection with God.

However, this *yoga* is not the fancy gymnastic set of exercises that are presented as meant to lose weight or relieve back pain. To really achieve the purpose, the goal shown by Krishna in *Bhagavad gita*, one must be *nitya-yukta*, "constantly engaged", 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and the engagement must be focused on perfect devotion, *eka-bhakti*.

What is perfect devotion? It is perfect concentration on Krishna consciousness only - also called *kevala bhakti* ("only devotion"), *suddha bhakti* ("pure devotion"), *ananya bhakti* ("exclusive devotion"), *akinchana bhakti* ("devotion without anything else"), and *uttama bhakti* ("the highest devotion").

Bhakti rasamrita sindhu, one of the most famous texts in *bhakti* literature, states: *anyabhilashita sunyam jnana karmady anavritam anukulyena krishnanusilanam bhaktir uttama*, "The highest level of *bhakti* is free from all reservation, completely dedicated to please God in a favorable way, and independent from any desire for scholarship or material merit. It is simply about behaving always in accordance with Krishna's instructions and desires." (1.1.11)

So, the highest form of *bhakti* is not conditioned by *jnana* or *karma*. More ordinary forms of *bhakti* are called *jnana mishra bhakti* ("devotion mixed with the pride of learning") and *karma mishra bhakti* ("devotion mixed with sense of duty"), which tend to dilute the sentiment of dedication to Krishna, and therefore must ultimately be moved to the back seat.

However, we need to watch out for *tamas* and *rajas* creeping and sneaking back from the rear door, and suggesting that *bhakti* can be a cheap and quick shortcut that does not require study and work, but will simply develop with some sentimentalistic emotions and a bigot sectarian allegiance.

Bhakti rasamrita sindhu (1.2.101) explicitly warns us against this dangerous foolishness: *sruti smriti puranadi pancaratra vidhim vina, aikantiki harer bhakti utpatayaiva kalpate*, "Exclusive devotion to Lord Hari (Krishna) that ignores the teachings of *Sruti*, *Smriti*, *Puranas* and other Vedic texts, including the *Pancharatra*, is simply a fantasy and an unnecessary disturbance in society."

Eka bhakti corresponds to *aikantiki bhakti*.

The word *visisyate* derives from *visista*, a definition that carries various levels of meanings. For example, we can find it in the expression *visista-advaita*, or "special non-duality that carries diversity". Thus *visisyate* also means "excellent, special" and also "in various ways" - a meaning that opens the doors to a wide horizon of engagements in devotional service. One should not think that *bhajan*, service to God, is limited to singing or reciting the names, qualities and activities of God, or worshiping the Deity in the temple. Anything, any activity, can be transformed in the highest form of devotional service simply by an act of consciousness.

Later Krishna will say that a simple offering of a leaf, a small fruit or a little water (9.26) is sufficient, or even the daily acts that everybody performs such as eating, performing one's daily duties, distributing charity, or tolerating difficult situations (9.27) can all be transformed in perfectly bona fide devotional service to Krishna.

The purpose of such pure *bhakti* is simply to develop a strong loving relationship with Krishna, a personal relationship of affection and care that Krishna will personally reciprocate. Already (4.11, 5.15) Krishna had stated that God is equally disposed towards everybody, and in 9.28 he will repeat that his equanimity towards all living entities is not diminished by the personal loving relationship with his intimate devotees. It is not easy to understand the sublime love relationship between God and his devotee, especially when one is still plagued by the materialistic lust, material identification and attachments, and material concepts. God is not jealous (contrarily to what some deluded people think) and therefore does not become angry if we neglect or forget him or fail in our duties, and he does not punish anyone.

Each individual simply receives the result of his/ her own actions, that s/he sowed in the past and have gradually fructified: it is a natural impartial law, like all natural laws. Gravity works exactly in the same way for everyone, irrespective of their sectarian allegiances, and so do hurricanes, floods, tsunamis, earthquakes, and all natural laws. The laws of probability only create some differences when the actions of a person are different from the actions of another person (for whatever reason, including religious beliefs) - not on the basis of religious beliefs or allegiance themselves.

A pure devotee of Krishna acts in perfect harmony with the universal laws and with the Divine plan, and thus sees opportunities of service in each situation - difficult, favorable and unfavorable.

This is why *Bhagavata Purana* (1.2.6) says that *bhakti* is not hampered by any circumstance. *Sai vai pumsam paro dharmo yato bhaktir adhokshaje ahaituky apratihata yayatma suprasidati*, "The supreme *dharmā* (duty) for human beings is whatever activity carries selfless and constant love and devotion to the Transcendental Lord: this is the way to achieve complete satisfaction."

Whether it is *nitya karma* ("regular duties"), *naimittika karma* ("accessory duties"), *tapasya* (simply tolerating difficulties with patience), any type of work in all the *varnas* and *ashramas* can be transformed into pure blissful *bhakti seva*: it is all in the consciousness - Krishna consciousness.

Therefore the pure devotee does not lament or blame or hates anything, and is always sober in all circumstances (12.17, 18.50).

This makes the pure devotee "dear to Krishna" because Krishna is the supreme level in pure consciousness. *Bhagavata Purana*

(9.4.68) states, *sadhavo hridayam mahyam sadhunam hridayam tv aham mad-anyat te na jananti naham tebhyo manag api*, "I am always in the heart of the *sadhus*, and they are always in my heart, because they are not interested in anything but me."

VERSE 18

उदाराः सर्व एवैते ज्ञानी त्वात्मैव मे मतम् ।

udārāḥ sarva evaite jñānī tvātmaiva me matam ।

आस्थितः स हि युक्तात्मा मामेवानुत्तमां गतिम् ॥ ७-१८ ॥

āsthitaḥ sa hi yuktātmā māmevānuttamāṁ gatim ॥ 7-18 ॥

udarah: great personalities; *sarva*: all; *eva*: certainly; *ete*: these; *jnani*: the person who has knowledge; *tu*: but; *atma*: the Self; *iva*: like; *me*: my; *matam*: opinion; *asthitah*: situated; *sah*: s/he; *hi*: indeed; *yukta*: united; *atma*: the Self; *mam*: me; *eva*: certainly; *anuttamam*: the highest; *gatim*: destination.

"All (these) are great souls, but the person of knowledge is verily the Self. This is my opinion. S/he is firmly situated and connected with the (consciousness of the) Atman, therefore s/he certainly attains me, the highest goal."

The various types of devotees described previously (7.16) are all good people and will ultimately attain perfection. *Bhagavata Purana* (2.3.10) states, *akama sarva-kamo va moksha-kama udara-dhih tivrena bhakti-yogena yajeta purusham param*, "Those who have superior intelligence will worship the Supreme Lord with an intense devotional service, whether they are free from all personal desires, they are full of desires, or they only desire liberation."

The word *udarah* is used in both verses to indicate a higher level of intelligence or wisdom, that is required to connect with the Supreme. Sentimentalistic fools are thus excluded from the picture.

However, the *arta*, the *jijnasu* and the *artha-arthi* are still distracted by a sense of duality, a sort of separatist selfishness that prevents them from actually experiencing the Transcendental Reality in full consciousness of Krishna. Their approach is *pradhani bhakti* ("mostly devotion") or *guni-bhuta bhakti* ("devotion conditioned by the modes of material nature").

In chapter 17, entitled *sraddha traya vibhaga yoga*, "the yoga of differentiating between the three forms of beliefs", Krishna will further explain this *guni-bhuta bhakti*, detailing the types of *sraddha* (faith), *yajna* (sacrifice in worship), *achara* (behavior), *ahara* (dietary choices), *tapasya* (austerity), and *dana* (charity) - all essential components of spiritual or religious life - under the influence of the three *gunas*. This means that merely "religious" people still have some material identification or attachment.

On the other hand, the *jnani* has acquired the proper knowledge and realized his/ her transcendental nature (*atma*), which enables him/ her to actually develop a spiritual relationship with the Lord as his/ her own Supreme Soul (*param atma*).

This concept is quite tricky and almost impossible to understand for those who are still immersed in a material concept of life, because they cannot see how Transcendence is omnipresent and indivisible, therefore they imagine that the individual soul and God cannot be in the same place at the same time.

The way prescribed by Vedic knowledge must then include the Brahman realization and the Paramatma realization before one can safely say s/he has actually realized Bhagavan. Of course, the realization of Bhagavan includes the Paramatma and Brahman, but

such preliminary stages must have been assimilated - if not in this lifetime, in a previous lifetime.

One does not simply jump from the darkness of ignorant gross material identification to pure transcendental *bhakti*: if someone claims to have performed such a feat, we need to verify whether s/he is actually deluded by some form of *prakrita sahajyism*, or "materialistic superficiality", because following such people is extremely dangerous.

This same concept will be repeated by Krishna at the conclusion of the *Bhagavad gita* (18.54): only one who is firmly situated on the transcendental level of Brahman (*brahma-bhuta*) and is favorably disposed towards all beings and situations (*samah sarvesu bhutesu*), which is a characteristic of the Paramatma realization, can really achieve the highest devotion (*mad bhaktim param*).

By realizing this transcendental and inconceivable oneness and diversity, we will be able to understand how the devotee can be the *atma* of Krishna, and Krishna the *atma* of the devotee, on a level of consciousness so sublime, vast and deep that everything else becomes completely irrelevant.

This is the *anuttama gatih*, the supreme destination, or *paramam dhama*, the supreme position, also described in 8.13, 8.20, 8.21, and then in 15.6.

It is also the *param bhava* described in 7.24, the *brahma bhuta* of 6.27 and 18.54, the *mat samstham* of 6.15 and the *mam* ("me") mentioned frequently as the supreme destination (4.9, 6.13, 6.47, 6.48, 8.5, 8.15, 8.16, 9.25, 10.10, 18.55, 18.65) and the *tat* ("that:") referred to the Supreme abode (18.55).

VERSE 19

बहूनां जन्मनामन्ते ज्ञानवान्मां प्रपद्यते ।

bahūnām janmanāmante jñānavānmām prapadyate ।

वासुदेवः सर्वमिति स महात्मा सुदुर्लभः ॥ ७-१९ ॥

vāsudevaḥ sarvamiti sa mahātmā sudurlabhaḥ ।। 7-19 ।।

bahunam: of many; *janmanam*: births; *ante*: at the end; *jnanavan*: one who has knowledge; *mam*: me; *prapadyate*: approaches respectfully; *vasudevah*: Vasudeva, the omnipresent Transcendental Reality; *sarvam*: everything; *iti*: thus; *sah*: s/he; *mahatma*: great soul; *su-durlabhah*: very rare.

"After many lifetimes, one who has knowledge attains me, (realizing that) Vasudeva is everything. Such a great soul is very rare."

The name Vasudeva (with a long first *a*) means "omnipresent", and it is also referred to Krishna as the son of Vasudeva (with a short first *a*), a name that means "the substance for the universe". When we mentioned the Vasus in the commentary to verse 7.9, we said that the Vasus are the basic components from which the universe is made: fire, earth, wind, space, sky, sun, moon and stars. In the previous verses Krishna has stated that he is the essence and foundation of the universal existence, therefore he is called Vasudeva (omnipresent).

In this verse Krishna clearly expresses that the genuine realization of Bhagavan can be attained only after a long journey of Self realization based on knowledge (*jnana*). This means that actually getting in contact with Bhagavan is no cheap thing. It is not likely that a conditioned soul, immersed in the lower *gunas* and engaged

in negative activities, devoid of knowledge, not particularly inclined to do good deeds, identified with the material body and attached to the sense of possession and duality, will quickly become able to realize Krishna consciousness.

What could happen is a *chaya* ("shadow"), *pratibimba* ("reflection") or *abhasa* ("semblance") of devotion that inexperienced people can mistake for the real thing, but it will inevitably disappear, destroyed by the *anarthas* ("bad things") that have not been eliminated from the heart. This "free taste" of devotion is meant to kindle the faith of a beginner, or to reawaken a person to a forgotten progress that was practiced in a previous lifetime, but it does not last long.

If the *anarthas* are not eliminated, if there is no sufficient effort on the devotee's part and the guidance of an expert self-realized soul, the seed of the *bhakti lata* will be suffocated by the weeds growing from the watering of the garden - in the form of the practices of *sadhana bhakti*, including the chanting of the holy names of God. Such weeds are the desire to obtain fame, honor, worship and profit for oneself, the desire to engage in politics and meddling about the private lives of other people, the desire to live an easy comfortable life without working or caring for anybody, a sense of irresponsibility and complacency, a sense of self-righteousness that can grow up into arrogance, exponential growth of *ahankara* and *mamatva* (that are detrimental even when they are just applied to the religious field), and sometimes plain madness and perversion.

The blessings of a genuine *guru*, the company of true devotees, the sincere and practical engagement in favorable service, the discussion of the glories of the Lord, the contact with the holy names of God and with the *prasada* - the consecrated food and other articles offered to God - are all very powerful and can be contagious in spreading the faith and attraction towards the sentiments of devotion.

This benign *bhakti* “virus” brings a sort of "mutation", spiritualizing the entire body and mind, deeply transforming the consciousness by making it so clear and transparent that the light of the spiritual Self can shine through all the time, with its happiness, wisdom, peace, harmony, love, and a healthy disposition towards life. It is so beneficial that it can heal all wounds and damage, and protect the entire system from any harm.

However, a grossly conditioned soul is "guarded" against the beneficial and purifying contagion of spiritual consciousness, by a strong negative "immune system" made of doubts and desires that fight back fiercely, by a thick layer of ignorance that is difficult to penetrate, and a constant flow of mental fantasies and impressions and memories that instantly washes away the spiritual feelings as soon as they appear. Sometimes, a deeply ingrained tumor of *anartha* (bad habits, cruelty or cynicism) may remain hidden even in later stages of the process of re-spiritualization of the consciousness, and proliferate out of sight until it surfaces with a profusion of contamination and suffering. This is why it is important to constantly work at removing any bad habit and defect that may jeopardize the development of genuine *bhakti*. The process may take several lifetimes.

As we have already mentioned in the commentary to verse 7.1, the stages of the development of the *bhakti lata* (the tender creeper plant of devotion) are *sraddha*, *sadhu sanga*, *bhajana kriya*, *anartha nivritti*, *nistha*, *ruci*, *asakti*, *bhava* and *prema*. It is a long process that requires patience, enthusiasm and determination.

According to the level of his/ her realization, a devotee is described as *kanistha* (neophyte), *madhyama* (established on an intermediate level) and *uttama* (advanced).

The *kanistha adbhikari* is attracted to Krishna in the form of the Deity in the temple, the *lilas* narrated in the scriptures and the

recitation of the holy names; he has sufficient faith to remain on the spiritual path and humility to serve those who are universally recognized as elders and make friends with those who are normally recognized as devotees.

The *madhyama adhikari* has developed more knowledge and realization, so he is able to inspire faith in others and teach and guide them; he has realized the Transcendental existence and the presence of the Lord in the hearts of all living beings (as Brahman and Paramatma respectively), so he sees God everywhere and is friendly with all the good living entities.

He can recognize the difference between *sura* and *asura*, *vidya* and *avidya*, *dharma* and *adharmā*, and has established himself strongly and consistently on the level of spontaneous attraction toward God in all his forms. He can recognize an elder and a devotee even when they are not manifesting their position openly, and similarly he can also recognize a cheater who is wearing the dress of a religious person or an elder or a devotee, and avoids such company. He is very serious in the practice of *sadhana bhakti* (regulated devotional service) and compassionate towards the innocent people, including those who are afflicted by ignorance and other defects. His attachment for the Deity in the temple is selfless, and he prefers to engage directly in service (whatever form it may take) rather than attending a gorgeous ceremony as a spectator that enjoys a good show.

The *uttama adhikari* is on the highest level of *raganuga bhakti* (spontaneous loving devotion to God) and has dropped any material concern, identification and attachment; he has become free from all defects and bad habits, and only has good qualities and behaviors. He is compassionate towards all living entities, including the *asuras* or evil-minded people, and he is not touched by what happens to his material body or by the circumstances in which he may find himself.

He sees everything in the spiritual dimension, even ignorance and bad behaviors, considering them as simply different lessons in the great school of life, and different manifestations of the Divine plan - as Krishna will explain in the next verse. Attaining this level usually takes many, many lifetimes.

VERSE 20

कामैस्तैस्तैर्हृतज्ञानाः प्रपद्यन्तेऽन्यदेवताः ।

kāmaistaistairhṛtajñānāḥ prapadyante'nyadevatāḥ ।

तं तं नियममास्थाय प्रकृत्या नियताः स्वया ॥ ७-२० ॥

taṁ taṁ niyamamāsthāya prakṛtyā niyatāḥ svayā ॥ 7-20 ॥

kamaih: by the desires (for pleasure); *taih taih:* these and those; *hrita-jnanah:* devoid of knowledge; *prapadyante:* respectfully approach; *anya-devatah:* other Divine Personalities; *tam tam:* these and those (respectively); *niyamam:* methods; *asthaya:* following; *prakritya:* according to their own nature; *niyatah:* guided; *svaya:* by themselves.

"Those whose knowledge is confused by a variety of desires approach other *devas*, and according to their nature they follow the (specific) regulations."

In verse 7.16, Krishna explained that good-natured people (*sukritinah*) approach him respectfully to obtain knowledge and prosperity, and relief from their sufferings and dangers. Such people have a concept of God as the Transcendental Reality, the supreme collective intelligence, the origin and foundation of all existence, and they are able to perceive his presence as Brahman and Paramatman. However, there are many people who are unable to understand what Brahman or Paramatman means, because of their own lack of knowledge about the difference between the

material and the spiritual levels. Therefore they project on God the same concepts and dynamics they have observed in material life: when they want to obtain something that is not within their own reach, they ask help from a taller or older person - a more powerful, wealthier, wiser, and more important person.

Because in the material world everything is based on duality and differentiation, different powerful personalities are competent to give help in different fields. If you are unable to make your own iron tools, you go to the blacksmith and ask what you want, pay some money and get your article. Similarly, if you cannot grow your own vegetables or fruits, you go to those who sell vegetables and fruits, and so on. If you are unable to overcome a disease you go to the doctor, if you are illiterate and want to read a letter from a relative you go to the school teacher, if you want an electrical connection you go to the officer in charge, and so on. These are all different persons, each endowed with the specific power that can fulfill one of your wishes, and you approach them one by one according to the circumstances. When you have obtained what you wanted, you may be somehow grateful, but generally the relationship remains superficial.

Materialistic people project the same scenario on the religious level. It is true that the scriptures recommend to meditate on the various aspects of the Personalities of Godhead that are subtly connected to the principle one wants to develop - for example Surya when one feels the need for health or strength - but this meditation is meant to awaken those qualities and powers within ourselves, because as Paramatman lives in our soul, so do all his limbs and parts, symbolized by the various aspects of the Personality of Godhead that control the principles of the entire creation.

The confusion (*hrita-jnana*) mentioned in this verse consists in approaching a variety of personalities of Godhead as if they were

somehow separated or even in competition with each other, and trying to "bribe" them individually in order to obtain some material benefit.

Deluded people sometimes think they are "using" such divine Personalities (and their *mantras*, *yantras*, etc) as if the Devas were order suppliers of the commodities they want to "purchase". However, even this low-mentality tendency should not be stopped as it will ultimately lead to spiritual progress. This is the reason why in the next verse Krishna clearly says that he personally strengthens the faith of such worshipers. A so-called devotee of Krishna who tries to forcibly stop others from performing such worship according to their faith is therefore acting against the Lord's plan and is simply creating an unnecessary disturbance in society.

If this method of separate worship is followed sincerely and carefully, and the form worshiped is genuine, ideally under the guidance and the tuition of expert persons who have realized Brahman (the *brahmanas*), the worshipers will gradually develop the same qualities of the Devas they honor and serve, and they will become situated on a sattvic level. Some foolish people say that some Personalities of Godhead such as Vishnu etc are manifestations of *sattva*, other Personalities of Godhead such as Brahma etc are manifestations of *rajas* and other Personalities of Godhead such as Shiva Mahadeva etc are manifestations of *tamas*. This idea is preposterous and totally contrary to Krishna's teachings. All the Personalities of Godhead are transcendental, even when they appear in this universe playing an apparently material role.

It is true that Vishnu, Brahma and Shiva are *in charge* of each of these three *gunas* respectively, but there is not one single passage in all scriptures that says that God is subject to the power of the *gunas* - like a conditioned soul. Such an idea is deeply offensive. It

amounts to saying that a judge of a criminal court is nothing but a criminal, a manifestation of the criminal tendencies of people.

Unfortunately some foolish and immature people utilize this verse of *Bhagavad gita* to justify and encourage an offensive attitude towards those they call "paltry/ unimportant demigods", because they consider the various Personalities of Godhead as different and separate from each other, or even in competition with each other. It amounts to trying to hurt the feet of our friend to show that we prefer his face, because our friend told us that when addressing him we should talk to his face and not to his feet. Such lack of intelligence is certainly the effect of previous offenses committed by the so-called devotee, and leads to complete disaster in spiritual life - as in the case of the square-headed idiot who spit out Mahadeva's *prasada* and rushed to drink the footwash water of some confirmed criminal.

Here the point presented by Krishna is that we should not make the mistake of considering the Devas as *ananya*, "different" from Krishna, from the Unified Transcendental Reality. Such mistake has two sides: 1. approaching "other Devas" as competitors and separate limited powers that are more likely to grant a wish, 2. approaching Krishna as a competitor and separate different but still limited power that is more likely to grant a wish than the "other Gods".

The first two of the 10 offenses that can damage the development of *bhakti* (as listed in the *Padma Purana*) are: 1. insulting a genuine devotee, 2. separating Vishnu from Shiva and the other Personalities of Godhead by considering them as different and independently existing. This means that those so-called *vaishnavas* who insult the Devas (who are much more elevated spiritually and closer to God than any foolish human being on this planet) considering them as independently existing from Krishna are in a very bad position indeed.

Much worse, in fact, than the sincere and humble devotees who offer their devotions to the Personalities of Godhead they feel spontaneously attracted to, such as Shiva, Surya, etc.

Even those who can stretch their brain only to accepting the idea that Shiva is the greatest *vaishnava* (*vaishnavanam yatha sambhu*, as stated in *Bhagavata Purana*, 12.13.16) should stop just one moment and ask themselves whether it is healthy to callously commit offenses against the greatest *vaishnava*, and dare to call him "a paltry demigod on the inferior *jnana mishra bhakti* level" - and this in the name of exclusive pure devotion to Krishna, too!

VERSE 21

यो यो यां यां तनुं भक्तः श्रद्धयार्चितुमिच्छति ।

yo yo yām yām tanuṁ bhaktaḥ śraddhayārcitumicchati ।

तस्य तस्याचलां श्रद्धां तामेव विदधाम्यहम् ॥ ७-२१ ॥

tasya tasyācalām śraddhām tāmeva vidadhāmyaham ।। 7-21।।

yah yah: which (whatever); *yam yam*: that (same); *tanum*: body/form; *bhaktah*: a devotee; *sraddhaya*: with faith; *arcitum*: to worship; *icchati*: wishes; *tasya tasya*: to him (individually and respectively); *acalam*: firm; *sraddham*: faith; *tam*: that; *eva*: certainly; *vidadhami*: I give/ strengthen; *aham*: personally.

"Whatever form the devotee wishes to worship with faith, I strengthen the determination by which s/he will become established (in that method and *ista devata*)."

The variety of forms in which people worship God is not a bad thing at all: in fact God has unlimited forms, unlimited names, unlimited qualities, activities, and variety of approaches - to attract

the minds of so many different people. The concept of the "preferred form of God" that one likes to meditate on and worship is called *ista devata* (one's "desired form of God"). One can choose the *ista devata* s/he prefers, and even change his/ her choice in the course of time, when the progress in devotional service or a change of circumstances inspire him/ her to focus in a different aspect of Godhead. Some people choose their *ista devata* according to the suggestions of astrologers, or to please their parents and family, or to gain acceptance into a community; however, the best reason is because of the development of his/ her own personal devotional sentiments.

The important thing is that we should always remember that God is one, and that by worshipping or meditating on one form of God rather than another, we are not offending or betraying the other forms of God. All the forms of the Mother Goddess are aspects of the same Shakti, and similarly, all the forms of the Lord are expansions and emanations of expansions of Vishnu: we should not make the mistake of applying material limitations to the Godhead. All the various forms of the Godhead are limbs of his/ her transcendental body, and there is no real difference among them.

In the Vedic system, the genuine scriptures present a variety of Personalities of Godhead, sometimes focusing on one, sometimes on more, and even each Personality is shown in different *avatars* or forms in which s/he descends into this world for a divine mission.

Skanda Purana teaches, "One should worship Lord Krishna, the cause of all causes, and then worship the best of the *devatas*, Lord Shiva. Then one should worship all the other *devatas* with great faith and devotion." And again, *sivasya hridayam vishnur, vishnos ca hridayam siva*, "Shiva is the heart of Vishnu, and Vishnu is the heart of Shiva."

The *Gautamiya tantra* (one of the most important texts for *vaishnavas*) says: *gopalam pujayed yas tu nindayed anya devatam astu tavam paro dharmah purva-dharmo 'pi nasyati*, "If one worships Gopala but disrespects other *devas/ devis*, his *bhakti* will be lost. Not only he will not be able to get *bhakti*, but even whatever *dharma* he had acquired previously will be lost."

In the *Kurma Purana* (12.20), Vasistha (the *guru* of Ramachandra) answers the questions of the sons of Kartavirya Arjuna saying, "the best thing for human beings is to understand that Shiva is non-different from Visnu, therefore Shiva and Vishnu must be worshiped simultaneously".

Brihad Bhagavatamrita (1.2.86) says: *krsnac chivasya bhedeksa maha-dosa-kari mata ago bhagavata svasmin ksamyate na sive krtam*, "One who sees some difference between Krishna and Shiva is committing a great offense. Krishna may excuse someone who commits offenses to his own lotus feet, but will never forgive one who commits *aparadha* at the lotus feet of Shiva".

Krishna himself, in the *Mahabharata*, presents the *Siva sahasra nama stotra*, to which Bhishma follows with the *Vishnu sahasra nama stotra* (which also contains many names such as Shiva - twice - and Sambhu, Isana, Rudra, Mahadeva and others). Krishna also instructs Arjuna to recite the hymn to Durga before the battle of Kurukshetra, following the example of Ramachandra who worshiped Durga before the battle against Ravana.

Again, in *Bhagavata Purana* (10.88.38-39) Krishna addresses Shiva as *visva-isa* (Lord of the Universe) and *jagat guru* (the *guru* of all), and says, "If someone commits offenses *against* you, s/he will never get any good fortune". Again *Bhagavata Purana* (4.4.14) says, *yad dvy-aksharam nama gireritam nrinam sakrit prasangad agham asu hanti tat, pavitra-kirtim tam alanghyasasanam*, "If someone pronounces the name of Shiva, composed

by two syllables, all impurities and faults will disappear from his heart immediately. Shiva's fame is spotless, and nobody dares to disobey him."

Narada Purana (63.121, 65.58) says: *diksaya guru-murti-sthah sarvanugrahaah sivah*, "In the process of *diksha*, Shiva, the universal *guru*, manifests in the form of the *diksha guru* to bless the disciple" and *om namas te natha bhagavan sivaya guru-rupine*, "I offer my homage to Bhagavan Shiva, who manifests in the form of the *guru*". On a side note, this would explain why some so-called devotees who enjoy offending "the demigod Shiva" have so much troubles with finding a genuine *guru*.

In several scriptural texts we find direct personal disciples of Shiva who were also exalted *vaishnavas* - starting from Narada himself (*Narada Pancharatra*, *ratra* 1, chapters 8-9), to Garga Muni (*Brahma vaivarta purana* 4.13.72), Markandeya Rishi (*Bhagavata Purana*, canto 12, chapter 10) and the Pracetas (*Bhagavata Purana*, canto 4, chapter 24) who specifically became able to approach Vishnu only after being tutored by Shiva. The *Narada Pancharatra* also states: *sivo harir hara iha sakshat siva eva nirupitah, siva-dveshi hari-drohi vishnum nityam bhajan api*, "Shiva is Hari and Hari is none other than Shiva. One who is hostile to Shiva is hostile to Vishnu, even though he may daily worship Vishnu." In the line of the followers of Chaitanya, we find the *Shivastakam* prayers (text 7), quoted by Murari Gupta in his *Sri Caitanya Carita Mahakavya*. There Chaitanya describes Shiva's position as the universal spiritual master: *sivaya sarva-gurave namo namah*, "I repeatedly offer my obeisances to Lord Shiva, who is the *guru* of everyone."

Krishnadasa Kaviraja, in his *Sri Vraja dhama mahimamrita*, glorifies Shiva as Gopisvara - still today, genuine pilgrims humbly offer their obeisances to Gopisvara Mahadeva in his temple before starting their Vrindavana parikrama.

It would also be wise, for the *prakrita sahajya* fans of Vrindavana Krishna, to remember that Shiva is the *kshetrapala* (guardian) in Vrindavana (as in all the other holy places) and specifically watches the *rasa mandala* area, so that unqualified people will not be able to enter it. Through his *mahamaya*, Shiva deludes the foolish fake devotees into thinking they are actually standing in the *rasa mandala* or in the *vraja mandala*, while they are simply remaining on the external material and geographical surface - where the Seva kunj is not much different from the Radha Golf Club.

VERSE 22

स तया श्रद्धया युक्तस्तस्याराधनमीहते ।

sa tayā śraddhayā yuktastasyārāḍhanamīhate ।

लभते च ततः कामान्मयैवविहितान्हि तान् ॥ ७-२२ ॥

labhate ca tataḥ kāmānmayai vavihitānhi tān ।। 7-22 ।।

sah: s/he; *taya:* with that; *sraddhaya:* faith; *yuktah:* together with; *tasya:* of that (Personality of Godhead); *aradhanam:* for the worship; *ihate:* engages in; *labhate:* s/he obtains; *ca:* and; *tatah:* from that (Personality of Godhead); *kaman:* the objects of his desires; *maya:* by me; *iva:* certainly; *vihitan:* (according to) the wishes; *hi:* certainly; *tan:* those.

"Engaged in that faithful dedication, s/he worships that form s/he desires, and obtains those blessings/ favors. But all this is arranged by me."

The fact that a worshiper with material desires decides to approach a particular Personality of Godhead does not mean that such

Personality of Godhead is "material". This applies not only to Shiva and the "other *devas*", but to Krishna as well, since there are lots of materialists who worship Krishna with the purpose of getting material benefits: this does not make Krishna a material personality and certainly does not make such materialists any more "spiritual".

Another reading of the last two words is *ihitan*, meaning "beneficial", referred to the things received by the worshiper. This would indicate that the Godhead is very intelligent and gives to their worshipers only those things that will be beneficial for their progress - whether such things will be pleasurable or unpleasurable.

Also, Krishna has already given very clear instructions in 3.9-16 about the need of offering grateful worship to the Devas, to reciprocate their gifts and support in life. As long as we have a material body, we need material resources for our basic maintenance (food, clothes etc) and even to engage in a practical worship to the Supreme Lord. Leaves, flowers, fruits and water (9.26), as well as the tasty sattvic food that is offered to Krishna, and all the other practical paraphernalia for devotional service, are produced only thanks to the blessings of the Devas.

What's wrong in asking help from the Devas for one's devotional service to Krishna, and showing them recognition and gratitude according to the explicit orders of Krishna himself in *Bhagavad gita*, when we do not hesitate to beg and grovel in front of materially wealthy and powerful materialistic people, to flatter them and sycophantically try to get into the picture with them for a nice photo opportunity? Are those arrogant politicians, business people and industrialists, and similar people, more respectable and more worthy of being approached than the sattvic Devas? I think not.

Some say that a pure devotee does not ask any material favor, and therefore s/he does not need to approach the *devas* or even show them a modicum of respect, but this is fundamentally wrong, and inspired by impersonalist and nihilistic ideas. Devotional service does not require the elimination of all desires, but transforms them into spiritual desires by connecting them to a higher purpose, precisely engaging them in the service of God.

Narada Pancharatra is quoted to say: *sarvopadhi vinirmuktam tat-paratvena nirmalam, hrisikena hrisikesa sevanam bhaktir ucyate*, "Bhakti means serving the Lord of the senses by engaging one's senses, and it is pure when it is free from all material designations/identifications, and completely focused on God."

What's wrong in having desires? Krishna has already said (7.11) that *kama* is even divine when it is in accordance with *dharma*. What we need to give up is not desire, but attachment to the material identification that makes us believe that we are the author of the action and its beneficiary.

The best example that illustrates the real meaning of this verse is the fact that the *gopis* of Vrindavana worshiped Durga by the observance of the long Katyayani vrata to obtain the blessing of having Krishna as their lover. The "exclusive devotees" of Krishna who refuse to honor Mother Durga, Shiva and the other Personalities of Godhead should stop one moment and think whether they are considering themselves more advanced in *bhakti* than the *gopis* of Vrindavana.

Another example is Chaitanya himself, who on several occasions instructed his followers and gave his personal example by offering worship and glorification to Durga and Shiva. For example, at Mayapur, during the dancing drama performance at the house of Chandrasekhara, Chaitanya (then known as Nimai) entered into the royal mood of the Mother Goddess while his follower Gopinatha

played Vishnu - in the genuine couple of Durga-Madhava, hugely popular in the Bengali and Oriya cultural areas - and the devotees started offering many prayers to Lakshmi and Chandi Durga. Then Chaitanya explicitly instructed his followers never to disrespect or belittle the Devas.

Vrindavan Dasa quotes him in the *Chaitanya Bhagavata*: "All glories to the universal Mother, Mahamaya Devi. Kindly give the shelter of your lotus feet to the wretched conditioned souls who suffer in this material world. You are the controlling power of the entire material universe and you appear in every *yuga* to uphold the principles of religion. Even Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva are unable to fully describe your unlimited powers, what to speak of ordinary people. You are faith, compassion, modesty, and the personification of pure devotion to Lord Vishnu, Krishna, so all branches of knowledge are your manifestations. The *Vedas* describe you as the original energy, and you appear to be within this material nature consisting of the three *gunas* but you are actually their cause, and you are always situated in a transcendental position. You are the eternal, unchanging, supreme energy, the shelter and resting place of all living entities, the universal Mother who sustains everyone, matchless and unrivalled. You are the life-giving water, and by remembering you one can easily cut the bonds of material illusion. You appear also as Mother Lakshmi, the eternal consort of Lord Narayana, in the homes of the dharmic people, but to the sinful offender you manifest as the all-devouring death. You are the creator of the universe and those who ignore you, not offering you worship, are punished by the threefold miseries. To the devotees you inspire pure faith, and therefore we pray you to please give us shelter in the shade of your lotus feet. Your illusory potency keeps the entire creation enthralled, so if you do not protect me, who will? Your appearance in the material world is to deliver the conditioned souls, and by remembering you one attains all perfection. O

Mother, we are all surrendered to you: kindly look upon us with benevolence, so that we may remain with a fixed mind at your lotus feet.”

Also, when Chaitanya set on his journey to Jagannatha Puri, he first visited Chatrabhoga on Ganges at Mathurapura (now called Diamond Harbor), a famous *tirtha* dedicated to Shiva, where Shiva manifests as the water *linga* at Ambulinga ghat, in the form of a great number of streams formed by Ganga. All the followers of Chaitanya took bath there, and Chaitanya himself immediately manifested a strong ecstasy with uncontrollable spiritual emotions and lost external consciousness.

At Prayaga ghata in the Midnapura district of Orissa, Chaitanya guided his followers to pay respects to the temple of Shiva Mahesha, a *lingam* installed at a temple near a bathing *ghat* established by Yudhisthira during the journey of the Pandavas. There Chaitanya ecstatically participated to the *kirtana* of the devotees of Shiva, and in the end he was so happy that he went around to collect food to feed everyone. Walking on, after the incident when Chaitanya's *sannyasa* staff was broken, he left his companions; he arrived alone in Jalesvara and went directly to the local Shiva temple, where his anger subsided and he started to dance happily. Vrindavana Das writes in his *Chaitanya Mangala*, commenting the fact: "If anyone disrespects Lord Shiva, not following the example of Lord Chaitanya, then he cannot be considered a Vaishnava, and all his spiritual advancement will be annulled."

After reaching Bhubaneswar (anciently called Ekamra kanana and Koti lingesvara) Chaitanya took bath in the Bindu sarovara, the holy *tirtha* filled with all the waters collected by Shiva from the various places of pilgrimage. He immediately went to take *darshana* of Tribhuvaneshvara svayambhu lingam (also known as Lingaraja - still the most important temple in Bhubaneswar) and by

seeing that it was beautifully surrounded by innumerable *ghi* lamps offered by the devotees, Chaitanya felt very pleased and started to dance ecstatically, singing "Shiva, Rama, Govinda". Then he instructed his followers by quoting Krishna's words: "One who claims to be My devotee but disregards Shiva is only trying to pretend devotion to Me" and he offered worship to Shiva, followed by all the devotees.

Vrindavana Das comments: "The Supreme Lord is the supreme *guru*, one who does not follow his instructions suffers because of such grievous mistake."

Chaitanya also visited many other Shiva temples in Bhubaneswar before resuming his journey to Puri. He also stopped on the way outside Bhubaneswar at the Shiva temples called Jalesvara and Kapotesvara near the Bhargavi river. Similarly, Chaitanya devotedly visited many Shiva temples while traveling around south India.

VERSE 23

अन्तवत्तु फलं तेषां तद्भवत्यल्पमेधसाम् ।

antavattu phalaṁ teṣāṁ tadbhavatyalpamedhasām ।

देवान्देवयजो यान्ति मद्भक्ता यान्ति मामपि ॥ ७-२३ ॥

devāndevayajo yānti madbhaktā yānti māmapi ॥ 7-23 ॥

anta-vat: that has an end; *tu*: but; *phalam*: result; *tesam*: to them; *tat*: that; *bhavati*: becomes; *alpa-medhasam*: less intelligent; *devan*: the *devas*; *deva-yajah*: those who become devotees of the *devas*; *yanti*: go; *mad-bhaktah*: my devotees; *yanti*: go; *mam*: to me; *api*: also.

"Persons of lesser intelligence seek temporary benefits. Those who worship the Devas go to them, but my devotees come to me."

This concept is further clarified as Krishna specifically states that confused and less intelligent people seek temporary material benefits only. On the other hand, offering one's unmotivated and selfless respect and adoration to the Devas as limbs of the Supreme Personality of Godhead is a symptom of a true devotee of the Lord, a genuine follower in the footsteps of Chaitanya and the *gopis* of Vrindavana.

Those same people who approach the Devas with selfish purposes, to try to bribe them for some special favor or *karma* discount, inevitably also aspire to attain the higher planetary systems, the realms of pleasure, beauty, power and longevity that are generally known as "paradise".

Because materialists are merely interested in their own sense gratification, their ideal of perfection in life is to obtain greater and greater pleasures, at a higher level and for a much longer time. They cannot even imagine a higher purpose, but of course, we know that this is not the best possible things we can do with the valuable opportunity of our human life.

However, there is nothing intrinsically wrong or offensive in that limited understanding and aspirations. It is rather a temporary choice, and those who consider it permanent and sufficient for their full satisfaction are actually less intelligent and knowledgeable. These "demigod worshipers" are not the ones who should be worrying about committing offenses. On the contrary, if they are intelligent enough to properly utilize the opportunities that their receive from the Devas, and to keep their minds and hearts pure, they can further their understanding of devotional service and better serve the Divine mission.

Later in the text (8.15, 16), Krishna will state that in the entire material manifestation, even up to the highest planetary systems, all positions are *asasvatam* (temporary) and *duhkhalayam* (fraught with sufferings). So those who aspire to *svarga*, the heavenly planets, when they can actually attain *moksha*, liberation, and *prema*, love for Godhead, can easily be described as less intelligent people. They are not exactly *mudhah* (7.15, 9.11, 3.6) but they do not exactly shine out of their brilliance... not because they have missed out on a "better deal" they could have obtained from Krishna", but because they have not outgrown the materialistic illusion.

Anyway there is no danger if one neglects the worship of the various Personalities of Godhead separately, provided s/he sincerely engages in devotional service to Vishnu, even from a platform of materialistic motivation and gross consciousness. In time, even the grossest and most contaminated materialist can become free from the old attachments and identifications, and attain the level of purity of consciousness (4.36, 9.30).

Of course there is a big difference between honoring the Devas as bodily parts of God, and worshipping only one of them as the "all in all" of Godhead - although such ignorant position is not a dangerous one: after attaining the planet/ dimension of the Personality of Godhead s/he was worshipping, a materialist will get the opportunity to be instructed properly by his/ her *ista devata*, and then return to the earthly level in a human species, to continue his/ her spiritual progress. And of course that route is different from the destination of those who have actually realized Bhagavan and attained the level of genuine and pure devotional service to him: it is all in the consciousness. It is a much faster and safer route, that takes us directly to the ultimate destination (*param gatih*) without waste of time and energy, unnecessary sufferings and anxiety.

VERSE 24

अव्यक्तं व्यक्तिमापन्नं मन्यन्ते मामबुद्धयः ।

avyaktaṁ vyaktimāpannaṁ manyante māmabuddhayaḥ ।

परं भावमजानन्तो ममाव्ययमनुत्तमम् ॥ ७-२४ ॥

paraṁ bhāvamajānanto mamāvyayamanuttamam ॥ 7-24 ॥

avyaktam: non-manifested; *vyaktim*: manifestation; *apannam*: obtained; *manyante*: they think; *mam*: me; *abuddhayaḥ*: those who have no intelligence; *param*: supreme; *bhavam*: nature/ birth/ existence; *ajānanto*: the ignorant/ unaware; *mama*: my; *avyayam*: eternal; *anuttamam*: supreme (without superiors).

"Those who are not intelligent believe that the non-manifested has evolved by becoming manifest. They do not know my supreme existence/ nature as the highest imperishable (reality)."

One of the most important words in this verse is *bhava* (with a long first *a*), which means "existence", "birth", "nature" and "purpose".

Another important concept is expressed by the words *avyaktam vyaktim* ("non-manifested manifestation") that may appear as a contradiction in terms but are meant to expand our understanding, like so many similar statements and definitions in the scriptures. When two apparently opposite terms are expressed deliberately, we should utilize the contrast to move beyond duality and see how they can be reconciled in a wider sense.

The definition *abuddhaya* ("those who have no intelligence") is a further step in the crescendo that started with *hrita-jnana* ("those whose knowledge is confused", 7.20), and moved to *alpa-medhasam* ("those who have little intelligence", 7.23) and will

culminate in *mudhah* ("fools", 7.25). It is evident here that Krishna gives great importance to the quality of intelligence and equates it to the level of evolution and realization in the individual soul.

The word *apannam* refers to an achievement, a success, a higher step in evolution, and therefore cannot be applied to the Supreme Lord, who is always eternally liberated and in full control of everything. People with a materialistic frame of mind are unable to understand the eternal and supreme existence of a reality they cannot see with their own limited eyes, and they try to superimpose their own limitations to the transcendental level of Reality.

This mentality is called *mayavada* ("following illusion"), because it entails the conclusion that illusion is more powerful than God, suggesting that Krishna, Vishnu-Narayana himself is under the control of illusion as even God takes a material body, an illusory temporary form made of ordinary material elements like any ordinary individual, subject to ignorance and sufferings. Of course such conclusion is not supported by any genuine scripture. It is rather created by a material misunderstanding about the simultaneous oneness and difference of Atman and Brahman, that remains inconceivable for the material senses, mind and intellect (*acintya-bhedabheda tattva*).

Some less informed persons incorrectly apply the definition of *mayavada* by relying on heavy prejudice, often confusing it with the concept of *advaita*, and pointing at Adi Shankara as the teacher and propagator of "mayavadism". They do not know, or they do not want to notice, that Adi Shankara begins his commentary to the *Bhagavad gita* with the unequivocal statement *narayanah paro 'vyaktat*, "Narayana (Vishnu) is supreme and transcendental", besides having written many wonderful texts in glorification of Govinda (as for example the famous *Bhaja Govindam* song) and of Krishna (as in the famous *Gita mahatmya*) and so on.

The reason of such offensive confusion is the material perception of reality, that is based on material identification and attachments: this creates a strong dualistic mentality based on partisan bias and blind allegiance to a particular camp, which in turn motivates unintelligent people to systematically vilify "the opposite camp" even with unfounded accusations. In dirty politics, all sorts of mudslinging goes on, even if politicians have to concoct and manufacture imaginative new types of mud to throw at their adversaries.

Another verse (9.11) very similar to this one repeats the same concept about the *mayavada* faulty theory: *avajananti mam mudhah manushim tanum asritah param bhavam ajananto mama bhuta-mahesvaram*, "Fools do not understand me when I manifest my human appearance, because they do not know my supreme nature, by which I control all forms of existence."

Because in their experience all the things are at first non-manifested, then become manifest and finally disappear again (2.28), materialistic people apply the same criteria to the Supreme Lord, and think that he has come to existence at a certain moment in time. In this regard, we should also clarify that the expression "incarnation" is inappropriate when referring to the manifestation of a divine *avatara*, as it derives from the Latin *carn* or *caro*, meaning "flesh" and indicates an ordinary earthly form.

Mainstream contemporary academia tends to consider the "historical existence" of a religious teacher as an essential validation of the authority of his teachings, but there is no logical sense in that idea: the validity of a system of knowledge should be in its actual contents and merit, and not in the exhibition of archaeological relics that might be connected to an objective time and place and person. There have always been - and there are still - many individuals whose position in time and space can be fully demonstrated, but who have never contributed to the patrimony of

knowledge and wisdom of the world, or even have spread dangerous misconceptions or defective theories.

Hinduism or Sanatana dharma is different from the so-called "historical religions" because it did not begin at a certain point in time, but it constitutes the eternal and universal principles of ethics and spirituality, the verifiable scientific knowledge of reality both objective and subjective, and the fundamental consciousness that is sometimes called "conscience", "logic" or "common sense" - but that we call *buddhi yoga*, or "utilization of intelligence". We could say that Sanatana dharma is the *natural* religion for all human beings, that can accommodate comfortably all categories and types of mentalities, gradually engaging them towards the direction of progressive understanding, awareness, happiness and harmony.

From time to time, the fundamental principles of Sanatana dharma are presented anew according to various perspectives, especially considering time, place, circumstances and audience, but such presentations are to be studied and understood in the light of a direct personal realization by each and every individual. It is in such light that we must understand the transcendental Personality of Krishna.

Earlier (4.6-9), Krishna has explained that he appears periodically to re-establish the eternal principles of *dharma* (generally translated as "religion"), but he is not subject to the oblivion that limits the individual souls. Why? Because Krishna is not an individual soul.

In this chapter, he has clearly stated that he is the essence of all existence - the taste of water, the strength of those who are strong, the light of the sun and the moon, and the eternal origin of everything that exists. How can this Transcendental Existence have a beginning and an end in the material dimension? It is not logical.

It is true that Krishna manifests (*srijami*, 4.7) particular forms as *avatars* that are specifically suited for a mission, but such forms are actually eternal or independently existing, and they only become visible and non-visible cyclically, appearing to take birth and to disappear not unlike ordinary individual souls, but with an important difference: all these forms are made of pure spiritual energy, perfectly controlled by the consciousness - in fact, they are consisting of consciousness only.

The discoveries offered by one of the most recent fields of research in western science - particle physics - can help us to understand this mystery. Sub-atomic physicists have found that all matter actually consists of energy organized according to specific vibrational frequencies arranged in a very precise plan, that are sensitive to various factors, including magnetic fields, heat, etc. This principle of a vibrational energy matrix for the material universe explains the functioning of the Vedic science of *yoga*, based on the control of subtle sound and the biomagnetic energy fields created by the subtle nervous system of the *nadis*, *marmas* and *chakras*. It also explains all the so-called "paranormal" phenomena and many other things that conventional science is still unable to account for.

It is the consciousness - as Atman/ Brahman - that controls the vibrational frequencies of matter. The more powerful, vast and deep is the consciousness, the greater is the control over matter, and there is no doubt that Krishna is the most powerful, vast and deep consciousness, being the origin of Brahman and Paramatma as explicitly stated in *Bhagavad gita* (*brahmano hi pratistha aham* 14.27, *sarvasya caham hridi sannivistho* 13.28).

The individual living entities - that are transcendental in nature just like the Supreme Lord, but limited in quantity if not in quality - also have a certain amount of controlling power, in a measure that is directly proportional to the evolution of their consciousness,

characterized in ascending order by the material *gunas* of *tamas* (darkness), *rajas* (passion), *sattva* (goodness), *visuddha sattva* (pure goodness) and the spiritual qualities of *sat-cit-ananda vigraha*.

The manifestations controlled by the spiritual principle (*purusha*) are accordingly the bodies of less evolved creatures such as plants and less conscious animals (*tamas*), human beings at various levels of evolution (*rajas*), the subordinate Devas (*sattva*), and the five main Personalities of Godhead known as *pancha devata* - Vishnu, Shiva, Devi, Brahma, Surya and Ganesha (that are situated in *visuddha sattva*).

All these forms appearing in the universe are sometimes manifested and sometimes non-manifested: even the first Vishnu *avatars* such as Kshirodakasayi Vishnu and Garbhodakasayi Vishnu appear and disappear with the cycles of creation and dissolution, while the original Supreme Personality of Godhead is not a particular form, but the non-manifested essence of all existence (*sat-cit-ananda vigraha*) and thus exists eternally without any change.

VERSE 25

नाहं प्रकाशः सर्वस्य योगमायासमावृतः ।

nāhaṁ prakāśaḥ sarvasya yogamāyāsamāvṛtaḥ ।

मूढोऽयं नाभिजानाति लोको मामजमव्ययम् ॥ ७-२५ ॥

mūḍho'yaṁ nābhijanāti loko māmajamavyayam ॥ 7-25 ॥

na: not; *aham*: I; *prakasah*: make myself known; *sarvasya*: for everyone; *yoga*: connection; *maya*: illusion; *samavritah*: covered by; *mudhah*: the fools; *ayam*: this; *na*: not; *abhijanati*: can

understand; *lokaḥ*: a person; *mam*: me; *ajam*: un-born; *avyayam*: imperishable.

"I do not show myself to everyone, but I remain veiled by my own *yoga-maya*. Foolish people remain unable to understand that I am unborn and eternal."

Krishna does not show any "special mercy", concern or preference towards the most fallen and stupid living beings. Some people believe that excessive generosity in this regard is praiseworthy and bound to conquer the hearts of the idiots, but in the reality of facts we see that it just encourages laziness and callousness, even to the point of rewarding cynicism and open exploitation. Again here Krishna is speaking disparagingly about the *mudha*, the idiots, demonstrating that he gives paramount importance to intelligence and its proper use in *buddhi yoga*, while he has absolutely no sympathy for stupid people. Other occasions in which he used the definition are 3.6, 3.27, 3.29, 7.15, 9.11, 10.3, 11.49, 14.15, 15.5, 15.10, 16.20, 17.19.

It is interesting to note that in this verse Krishna is speaking of *Yogamaya* and not of *Mahamaya* when he refers to the covering of his transcendental and supreme nature to the eyes of people during his manifestation in this world. Some commentators hypothesize that here *yogamaya* indicates the "the three *gunas* when considered all together or united", but that meaning is not applicable.

Yogamaya is the modality of *Shakti* that enables the development of a favorable relationship that *unites* the devotee to God within the devotional sentiments and service, while *Mahamaya* is that the modality of *Shakti* that prevents ordinary and ignorant conditioned people from realizing the transcendental reality. In other words, *Yogamaya* covers the Supreme Personality of Godhead and influences the spiritual perception, while *Mahamaya* covers the materialistic knowledge of the individual soul.

Yogamaya is qualified by the various *rasas* or sentiments of attachment to the Supreme, while Mahamaya is qualified by the three *gunas* or qualities of material goodness, passion and ignorance. The material *gunas* can never cover the Personality of Godhead, while the spiritual *gunas* that inspire the *rasas* definitely cover the Personality of Godhead and his intimate devotees - to make a crude example, the two coverings can be compared respectively to a layer of smelly filth and to beautiful resplendent ornaments. This same idea is expressed in *Isa Upanishad* (15): *hiranmayena patrena satyasya apihitam mukham, tat tvam pushan apavrinu, satya dharmaya dristaye*, "O radiant sustainer of everyone, the face of the True Reality is covered by a sheet of golden *maya*. Please remove this veil, so that the true Personification of *dharma* can be seen." The expression *hiranmayena patrena* means "the sheet of golden *maya*".

We should wonder why Krishna is saying in this verse, "I do not show myself to everyone". Anyone who has read the previous chapters of the *Mahabharata* have seen that Krishna was very much visible to everyone during his appearance as *avatara*: he was there present on the planet, speaking to Arjuna, and could be clearly seen by all the people assembled on the battlefield at Kurukshetra and by a great variety of people in previous occurrences.

To mention one example for all, we can think about the appearance of Krishna and Balarama in the arena of the Dhanus yajna organized by Kamsa at Mathura: the *Bhagavata Purana* and other similar texts clearly say that different people could definitely see the two brothers attending the festivities and wrestling against Kamsa's champions, but that their perception was different according to their particular level of consciousness. In verse 10.43.17 it is said that human beings (*nara*) simply saw Krishna as *nara varah*, "the best of human beings", and those who were

devoid of knowledge (*avidusam*) saw him as a material manifestation (*virat*). But they did see him, otherwise the wrestlers would have been unable to do their gig, or some of the people in the audience would have been surprised to see the wrestlers fighting against some invisible opponent.

The meaning of Krishna's statement in this verse is that he does not reveal his true nature to those who are unable to perceive it; Yogamaya however makes him appear as an ordinary human being - the people of Vrindavana saw him as their relative, and Devaki and Vasudeva saw him as their child - so that ignorant people will ignore him and pure devotees will interact intimately with him according to their loving propensities. Both these approaches can be considered relationships or connections (*yoga*).

What is veiled is the supreme nature of Krishna's Personality, that is pure and immensely powerful consciousness. The human-like body that Krishna manifests in his adventures is fundamentally different from the material bodies of ordinary individuals (actually composed by the 3 *gunas*), because it can take any form and intrinsically possesses all the qualities of mystic perfections (*siddhis*).

Even *jivatmas* can develop this power in a limited measure through the perfect practice of the *yoga* science, and can therefore manifest their forms as extremely small (*anima siddhi*), extremely large (*mahima siddhi*), extremely light (*laghima siddhi*), reconfiguring the patterns of material atoms (*vasitva siddhi*), materializing things by attracting atoms from other places (*prapti siddhi*), creating new things altogether (*isitva siddhi*), assuming any shape or form (*kamavasayitva siddhi*), and manifesting all kinds of powers (*prakamya siddhi*). There is nothing really miraculous or supernatural in such feats: anyone can do that, with the proper training and practice - it's all a matter of the appropriate level of consciousness.

VERSE 26

वेदाहं समतीतानि वर्तमानानि चार्जुन ।

vedāhaṁ samatītāni vartamānāni cārjuna ।

भविष्याणि च भूतानि मां तु वेद न कश्चन ॥ ७-२६ ॥

bhaviṣyāṇi ca bhūtāni mām tu veda na kaścana ।। 7-26 ।।

veda: know; *aham*: I; *samatitani*: past; *vartamanani*: present; *ca*: and; *arjuna*: o Arjuna; *bhavishyani*: future; *ca*: and; *bhutani*: beings; *mam*: me; *tu*: but; *veda*: knows; *na*: not; *kascana*: anyone.

"O Arjuna, I have full knowledge of the past, the present and the future. I also know all existences/ living beings, but nobody knows me."

To confirm the meaning of the previous verse, Krishna is reiterating here that his supreme nature is nothing by supreme consciousness - Krishna consciousness. Being supreme, there is obviously no higher level of consciousness or knowledge than Krishna's.

Anyone can attain that supreme level of consciousness by simply "connecting" (*yoga*) with Krishna, just like any ordinary computer can instantly manifest much higher functions when directly connected with a more powerful computer database. As with computers, however, the smaller ordinary computers can only share a limited quantity of such data, although there is no difference in the quality of the data shared. This is why the *jivatman* and the *paramatman* are described as "inconceivably one and different". Any *jivatma* can function on the supreme level of Krishna consciousness, provided it remains strongly connected (no loose connections) and humbly devoted to the supreme Program - for example, not trying to change the parameters of the software or

too perform too many functions at the same time, or expecting a very high speed of processing data. For anything else, a truly connected unit is by no means different from the supreme unit: one can feed data to the Supreme Unit through any terminal, and the data will be instantly received by the central data base.

Problems can only occur when the peripheral terminal - the individual *jivatma* - becomes convinced that it can function independently or drive the entire show by inserting contrasting instructions in the global data base. The Supreme Unit will not be damaged by such infringement, but the individual system will become confused and stop functioning properly.

The words *samatitani* ("past"), *vartamani* ("present") and *bhavisyani* ("future") clearly state that time is a continuum, not a linear evolution. The Supreme Consciousness is fully aware of all such time dimensions, and this knowledge is also possible to the individual consciousness, albeit in a limited form.

The knowledge of the past is the easiest function, as each and every event is recorded indefinitely in the akashic structure of the universe (which we could call etheric space) and can be accessed by those who have developed the proper skills. Besides, all the memories of one's previous lifetimes are contained within the corresponding subtle body of the individual (made of *akasha*, or "etheric space" and accessible through the subtle functions of the mind, the intelligence and the ego).

Knowledge of the present events is tricky, because things are happening in the "here and now" of which most people remain totally unaware.

The actual consciousness of the present moment requires a very intense exercise of will power, focusing one's attention on each and every fraction of second, and most people find difficult to maintain

that perception already when it is limited to the events that are happening in their immediate vicinities, what to speak of what is happening in other parts of one's house, neighborhood, geographical region or planet.

The future is even trickier, because it is constantly changing under the effect of the actions being performed in the present. We can compare the perception of the future to the scintillating reflection of the sun over the swift current of a powerful river: to truly know the future one must be simultaneously aware of the present and the past, too. Not an easy exercise.

Furthermore, the perception of the future expressed within a linear projection of time will externally appear to be different from the perception of the future expressed in another particular moment of time called "present" in a parallel line of development, or in what contemporary cutting edge science calls "parallel universes". These are not different separate universes, but just various projections of the same universe, that are intricately woven together like the threads of a rope to express the version of reality that our gross material senses can perceive from one moment to the next.

Just trying to imagine this level of awareness will give a bad headache to the majority of ordinary people, who use only 15% to 20% of their brain substance - what to speak of also remaining constantly aware of all levels of consciousness in the various conditions of life and all living beings in all the three dimensions of time. And that's only the beginning, because the material manifestation (*eka-pada vibhuti*) is merely one fourth of the sum total of reality, whereas the non-manifested spiritual world is described as being three fourths (*tri-pada vibhuti*) of the entire existence.

Who can top that? Genuine Krishna consciousness is unquestionably supreme.

The power (*shakti*) that manifests such consciousness (*cit*) is called respectively *bahiranga shakti* ("external power") and *antaranga shakti* ("internal power"), not on geographical considerations but rather in connection to the attitude of the *jivatmas*.

The *bahiranga shakti* covers the perception of those *jivas* who are "outsiders" because they position themselves "outside" Krishna consciousness (*bahirmukha*, or "turned towards the exterior"), while the *antaranga shakti* covers the perception of those who position themselves "within" Krishna consciousness (*antaratmana*, "in the innermost soul" as in *Gita*, 6.47). This same *antaratmana* consciousness is expressed in *Bhagavata Purana* (1.11.32) to describe the *rasa* feelings of the queens of Krishna in Dvaraka.

VERSE 27

इच्छाद्वेषसमुत्थेन द्वन्द्वमोहेन भारत ।

icchādvēṣasamutthena dvandvamohena bhārata ।

सर्वभूतानि सम्मोहं सर्गे यान्ति परन्तप ॥ ७-२७ ॥

sarvabhūtāni sammohaṁ sarge yānti parantapa ॥ 7-27 ॥

iccha: desire; *dvesa*: hatred; *samutthena*: arisen from; *dvandva*: duality; *mohena*: by illusion; *bharata*: o descendent of Bharata; *sarva*: all; *bhutani*: beings; *sammoham*: confused; *sarge*: at creation/ into the creation; *yanti*: (they) go; *parantapa*: o Arjuna ("who burns the opponents").

"O Parantapa, descendant of Bharata (Arjuna), all living beings come to existence/ take birth totally confused, deluded by the duality created from likes and dislikes."

The expression *iccha-dvesa* clearly shows that both attraction and repulsion are the root cause of the material imprisonment. Some people "renounce the world" in disgust and frustration, but they continue to contemplate the objects they renounced, still considering them as legitimate targets for their personal sense gratification. This misunderstanding will cause them to take another birth where their rejection/ repulsion will turn into attachment/ attraction, and so on. The only way out of the trap consists in observing all existences/ beings/ objects as worshipable parts of the Divine Reality and properly engaging one's senses in the service of the Lord of the senses (*hrishikena hrisiksha sevanam bhaktir ucyate*, "bhakti is defined as serving God through the use of one's senses", *Narada Pancharatra*).

What is the origin of the confusion (*sammoham*) that binds the conditioned soul to a material birth? The equal and opposing forces of attraction and repulsion (*raga* and *dvesha*, or *iccha* and *dvesha*) disturb the balance of the consciousness, creating tension and confusion. It is like being pulled in different directions simultaneously: it becomes very difficult to hold one's balance and make deliberate and conscious choices. Already in 2.67, Krishna had explained that the pull of the senses victimizes the mind and destroys one's wisdom, like the wind sweeps a boat on the water.

The solution to the problem is repeated by Krishna several times: to overcome the idea of *dvandva*, duality (4.22, 5.2, 7.27, 7.28, 15.5) by applying the equanimity, *samata*, born from knowledge and detachment (2.14, 2.38, 2.48, 4.22, 5.18, 5.19, 5.27, 6.3, 6.7, 6.8, 6.9, 6.29, 6.32, 9.29, 10.4, 10.5, 12.4, 12.13, 12.18, 13.10, 13.28, 13.29, 14.24, 18.10, 18.42, 18.54), also defined as *tulya*, "balance" (12.19, 14.24, 14.25).

Some people may be perplexed about this need of "equal vision" as they fear the concept of oneness (*advaita*) and its faulty application demonstrated by a class of confused philosophers in the course of

time. We need to properly understand the concept of duality, in order to be able to overcome it successfully. Duality is not an "evil" to be defeated and destroyed (as the so-called monotheistic abrahamic ideologies imply at several levels) but rather a veil that we need to recognize as such and overcome in our quest to get a direct vision of Reality.

Duality - as a fundamental expression of form - is both Mahamaya and Yogamaya, and as such it is worthy of all our respect. We just need to recognize it and work in harmony with her higher vibrational frequencies rather than become victimized by her lower vibrational frequencies: it is a tiger, and we have a choice whether we want to be affectionate tiger cubs or a rabbit-based lunch.

The illusion of duality (*dvandva moha*) is inherent in the cosmic manifestation from the very beginning, where the One Transcendental Reality splits into Two, appearing as the Divine Couple. Actually these Two cannot be divided as they are always united, but they appear to be separate in order to create the Supreme Dance of the variegated perceptions of Consciousness.

This profound concept is at the foundation of the various representations of Krishna engaging in the *rasa lila*, or the mystic dance, with his many *shaktis*. Actually Shakti is one only, but she manifests in innumerable forms in order to create an infinite variety of enjoyment (*hladini shakti*) starting from the transcendental level and then manifesting also on the material level of the cosmic manifestation.

It is actually this apparent separation (*vipralambha*) between the Two halves of the Supreme Couple that manifests the most powerful energy of attraction and moves the consciousness in the strongest way, therefore its attending sentiment of *parakiya sringara rasa* is considered the most intense and intimate relationship with Bhagavan.

Those who fail to understand this ontological and universal truth will remain superficially deluded by the materialistic and dualistic concept of an ordinary human couple relationship between a naughty young man who likes to play around with other women while his true lover is neglected and left alone to suffer because she is a silly village girl - young, ignorant and simple-minded.

We should never take Krishna cheaply and think that he is merely a cowherd boy having fun with some girls of his village who were "his devotees". Of course when an *avatara* descends into this world there is a visible symbolic re-enactment of the profound concepts, that is compared to a theatrical drama performance - a captivating story that aims at focusing the attention of people at whatever level their minds are able to perceive it.

This verse says, *yanti sarge*, "they enter the creation".

The locative grammatical case of the word *sarge* ("creation") can indicate either time or place, or both. So according to the different shades of meanings, we can understand that the living entities are confused at the time of their creation and/or at the time of the creation of the material universe, when they enter into it. This is the central subject of the lively and sometimes controversial discussion about the origin of the *jivas*.

Some people believe that the *jivatmas* originally were in the personal company of Krishna in what *Gita* calls "the supreme abode from which one never falls into the material world" (*yam prapya na nivartante tad dhama paramam mama*, 8.21, *yad gatva na nivartante tad dhama paramam mama*, 15.6), but this idea is obviously against Krishna's teachings. This mistaken theory comes from an ignorant speculative elaboration starting from incomplete data, and is compounded by the lack of study of the genuine Vedic scriptures and the de-contestualization of the teachings of some *vaishnava acharyas*.

By carefully analyzing Krishna's statements in *Bhagavad gita* we can bring some more light to the subject.

The word *bhuta* refers to the living beings or conditions of beings, indicating only the ordinary conditioned *jivatmas* that are sometimes called *nitya baddhas*. It is important to properly understand this definition as relative to its context and not in an absolute sense. This *nitya* ("eternal") does not apply to a supposed ontological eternal bondage as some are led to believe, but to the immortality of the *jiva*, as highlighted in *Bhagavad gita (nityah sarva-gatah sthanur acalo 'yam sanatanah, 2.24, jiva bhuta sanatanah, 15.7)*.

The adjective *baddha* ("conditioned") is an independent addition to the attribute *nitya* ("eternal") and not its qualifying explanation. This meaning is demonstrated by the fact that a *jiva* can (and should) evolve from the *baddha* position to the *mukta* position, even in this life itself (*jivan mukta*): this is actually one of the main four *purusha arthas*, or purposes in human life.

It would be very illogical to propose *mukti* (liberation) as a normal goal for conditioned souls, if the conditioned souls were intrinsically and ontologically destined to remain conditioned eternally (the improper explanation of *nitya baddha*). Therefore all the innumerable Vedic instructions about the attainment of *mukti* as the most important goal for all conditioned souls would be meaningless, and there would be no point whatsoever in any religious activity or teaching. Any intelligent person will understand this simple point. Those who remain unable to understand it must be confused by Mahamaya because of their offensive attitude and behavior, especially towards the Supreme Guru, Mahadeva.

The fact of the matter is that the *jivatmas* are *paramatma vaibhava*, or the emanations of the radiance of the Supreme Soul,

just like in our bodies the various cells composing the tissues and the organs are manifested by the energy emanating from the soul. They start as *anu-atmas* ("atomic souls") and they gradually grow through the evolution of consciousness to the point of developing a transcendently spiritual *siddha deha* ("body of perfection") fully manifesting the qualities of *sat*, *cit*, *ananda* and *vigraha* - like Bhagavan, but only smaller and therefore dependent on his consciousness.

All *nitya baddhas* are confused from the beginning, but their confusion can and should have an end through the attainment of the spiritual perfection of *siddha deha*, developed gradually through *sadhana* (*sadhana siddha*) and as a result of sincere devotion (*kripa siddha*). It is important to understand that success through special blessing (*kripa*) can shorten the long path of personal practice (*sadhana*) only when there is sufficient sincerity and pure desire and devotion in the heart of the aspirant. This is clearly explained in Patanjali's *Yoga sutras: tatra sthita yatno 'bhyasah*, "It is the practice (*abhyasa*) (consisting of) being firmly established in one's own effort" (1.13), and *ishvara pranidhanad va*, "Otherwise, (*samadhi* can be attained by surrendering to) God." (1.23).

So the *anu atmas* are born in an immature and confused seed form from the *brahmajyoti* (spiritual radiant light) of the *param atman*, and enter (*yanti*) into creation like any child is born to the world with the purpose of developing a useful body for the human mission of life. This birth, this "entering creation" does not really have a beginning, because it happens at every cycle of creation of the universe, while during the non-manifested state of the universe all the *anu atmas* remain within the body of Mahavishnu in a happily oblivious sleep. Those *anu atmas* who had already experienced the material universe retain their subtle mental bodies containing the seeds of their *karmas*, like the deciduous trees in the

winter just lose their leaves and remain apparently lifeless, only to sprout and blossom again at the arrival of spring. Others, that are just beginning their journey into the cycle of life, are comparable to seeds that are sprouting for the first time as seedlings and later will grow and produce leaves, flowers and fruits, as the consequence of their good and bad actions in this world. But their original existence as seeds has no beginning and is as eternal as Vishnu.

The other category of living entities, called *nitya muktas* as opposed to the *nitya baddhas*, are only direct expansions of divine Personalities as their *vibhinnamsas*, or "separated parts", as exemplified by the main *gopis* and *gopas* in the Vrindavana lila, and they never enter creation in a confused state of mind. However, once a *nitya baddha jivatman* has attained *mukti*, it is not substantially different from a *nitya mukta*.

VERSE 28

येषां त्वन्तगतं पापं जनानां पुण्यकर्मणाम् ।

yeṣāṃ tvantagataṃ pāpaṃ janānāṃ puṇyakarmaṇām ।

ते द्वन्द्वमोहनिर्मुक्ता भजन्ते मां दृढव्रताः ॥ ७-२८ ॥

te dvandvamohanirmuktā bhajante mām dṛḍhavrataḥ ॥ 7-28 ॥

yesam: those who; *tu*: but; *anta*: the end; *gatam*: reached; *papam*: of the wrongful actions; *jananam*: the persons; *punya*: virtuous; *karmanam*: actions; *te*: them; *dvandva*: duality; *moha*: illusion/confusion; *nirmuktah*: completely free from; *bhajante*: (they) worship; *mam*: me; *dridha*: firmly; *vratah*: (engaged) in vows.

"Those who have put an end to all bad activities/ sins, perform /have (accumulated) pious/ virtuous activities, and are completely liberated from the delusion of duality and firm in their determination, worship me."

It is not possible to truly worship the Supreme Personality of Godhead and continue to commit negative activities at the same time. Those who try to do that are simply deluding themselves. Sometimes cynical exploiters quote verses 4.36 (*api ced asi papebhyah sarvebhyah papa-krit-tamah*) and 9.30 (*api cet suduracaro*) to defend their material attachments and bad habits, but Krishna's instruction is never meant for that purpose.

Others even claim to be "transcendental" and "dovetailing" their criminal activities to what they consider "devotional service to Krishna", but they are dangerously delusional, and the object of their worship cannot possibly be Krishna - it will most likely be their own mental projection, and the fact that they are calling it "Krishna" does not make it any better, or more divine or spiritual.

Another tricky verse (*sarva dharman parityajya*, 18.66) should be properly understood in its context. The plural form of the word *dharma* indicates a dualistic perception of social duties as material identifications and attachments, and the verb *parityajya* refers to a quality of detachment, just like in the other famous verse (*subha asubha parityagi*, 12.17) recommending that we should be balanced in front of the various auspicious and inauspicious situations, without being overwhelmed by either elation or depression.

True, *bhakti* is independent from *karma*, *dharma* and *jnana*, but Krishna repeats many times throughout *Bhagavad gita* that a devotee must continue to behave in a proper way, even just to give the good example to the general population (3.25).

Neglect towards one's duties, bad behavior and ignorance are never conducive to genuine *bhakti*. This message has already been presented in various verses, including 7.15 (*na mam duskritinah bhajante*) and will be repeated many times in the course of *Bhagavad gita*.

So for those who are beginners on the path of spiritual realization, it is important to first become trained in *dharma*, then in *karma* (as in duties and active service) and *jnana* (as in study of the scriptures). Later on, when the devotee will be firmly established in the proper consciousness, it will be possible to rely on a higher level of understanding, and give less importance to rules. We can make the example of mathematics: a beginner in the study of arithmetics will be taught that it is not possible to subtract a larger number from a smaller number (for example, 7 from 5), but after successfully assimilating the fundamental lessons, the student will be told that in fact one can subtract 7 from 5, and the result is -2. If such information had been given to a student on the first day of school, it would have caused only confusion.

Similarly, trying to function on the purely transcendental *raganuga bhakti* in the higher *rasas* and depending exclusively on the direct instructions of *paramatman* can be disastrous for someone who has not properly assimilated *dharma*, *karma* and *jnana*, and is still materially identified and attached, more or less unconsciously.

In this process, the safest choice is to follow the personalized instructions given by an expert spiritual teacher (4.34), that is able to actually see the level of progress of the student and apply the proper lessons and tests from time to time. Krishna outlines the process in this verse: first of all, one must understand and practice *dharma*, by abstaining from negative actions (*papa*) and removing bad habits and defects (*anarthas*) as well as wrong conceptions and ignorance (*avidya*).

We also need to engage in positive actions (*punya karmana*) that culminate in the practical activities of *bhakti yoga - sravanam kirtanam vishnu smaranam, pada sevanam, archanam, vandanam*, etc. All these are called *punya karmani*. Even simply listening to *krishna katha* is called *punya sravana kirtana* (*Bhagavata Purana* 1.2.17). The practical knowledge of how to offer a pleasing service to the Lord is called *vidvat pratiti*. Collectively, this stage of development in devotional consciousness is called *yama* and *niyama*, or regulated *vaidhi sadhana bhakti*. These practices include *svadhyaya, isvara pranidhana, dharana* and *dhyana* as per the *yoga* system. The genuine spiritual realization obtained through this process will develop a sincere attachment (*asakti*) to God, and already at that point the devotee is situated on the platform of *dvandva moha nirmukta*, because s/he is not confused any more by personal likings and dislikings, but is ready to selflessly serve God and accept whatever God sends him/her. There is no more question of personal gain or loss, pleasure or pain, victory or defeat, heat or cold, fame or infamy, rich or poor, male or female, or any other duality. At that point, it becomes possible to engage in firm vows (*vrata*) of genuine worship to God (*bhajana*), and with time and sincere efforts the devotee will become situated on the levels of *raganuga bhakti, prema* and *bhava*.

VERSE 29

जरामरणमोक्षाय मामाश्रित्य यतन्ति ये ।

jarāmaraṇamokṣāya māmāśritya yatanti ye ।

ते ब्रह्म तद्विदुः कृत्स्नमध्यात्मं कर्म चाखिलम् ॥ ७-२९ ॥

te brahma tadviduḥ kṛtsnamadhyātmaṁ karma cākḥilam ॥ 7-29 ॥

jara: (from) old age; *marana*: (from) death; *mokshaya*: liberation; *mam*: me; *asritya*: taking shelter; *yatanti*: (they) go; *ye*: those who; *te*: they; *brahma*: Brahman; *tat*: that; *viduh*: (they) know; *kritsnam*: everything; *adhyatmam*: transcendence; *karma*: dutiful actions; *ca*: and; *akhilam*: completely.

"They take shelter in me, endeavoring to attain liberation from (the cycle of) birth and death, and they come to know that Brahman is the sum total of all transcendence. (Therefore) they completely understand/ know the science of action/ know everything about transcendence, as well about the social/religious duties to be performed."

The concept of reincarnation was common knowledge in all human societies until the Christian church took over the power in the ancient Roman Empire and banned the idea as illegal heresy, actively persecuting with very cruel punishments anyone who dared to talk about it. The purpose of this asuric law was to control the people through fear and despair, as one brief lifetime of total submission to the religious and political tyranny was the only way to avoid a sentence of eternal torture in hell and win paradise, and the whimsical cruelty and injustice of differences in the birth circumstances made people believe that God was really as bad as those who claimed to be his representatives on earth.

Not surprisingly, intelligent people became cynical about religion and the existence of a soul, also because the Christian dogma imposed by the government taught that the individual is the body and has a soul (rather than the contrary). Of course such an idea of soul is totally impossible to demonstrate, and irrelevant for any intelligent person. This situation created a great confusion in the minds of people in general, and led to the idea that life in this world is the only real thing that matters, and we should do everything possible to prolong it in spite of old age and disease, and even in a totally disabled condition.

Death became the most terrifying thing, and even speaking about it came to be considered bad taste, therefore when the general people is told about reincarnation, they consider it as a special miraculous occurrence, an extraordinary "second chance" that is only possible for some very special people - like the Tibetan Lamas or other great sages.

The Vedic view is radically different. Krishna has already explained, especially in chapter 2, that the Atman is eternal and independent from the material body, and that in any case the body is temporary and afflicted by various types of sufferings. Death - like birth, disease and old age - is an inevitable passage of life and a confusing moment only because of the natural survival instinct, and the accompanying unpleasing feelings. But the problem is neither with birth nor with death: it is the entire cycle of reincarnation under the bondage of conditioned life (*samsara*) from which we can and should become free in order to attain real happiness.

In verse 13.9 Krishna will state that real knowledge consists in the perception that this cycle of birth-death-old age-disease (*janma-mrityu-jara-vyadhi*) is a problem because of its inherent sufferings and impermanence (*duhkha-doshanudarsanam*). Therefore the ultimate success to be achieved by a human being (*purusha-artha*) in this life is *moksha*, liberation from the cycle of births and deaths.

The only way to achieve such success consists in taking shelter in the transcendental spiritual consciousness that is Krishna, the Brahman that is also *adhyatma* or the principle of Atman, the true original identity of the soul. Acquisition of knowledge through the *Vedas* (indicated here by the word *viduh*, "they know") and a consistent sincere effort (*yatanti*) on this path of Self-realization are the essential requisites for success, because they support the complete renunciation to material identifications and attachments (*sarva parityaga vrata*) that enables us to direct all our attention

and energies to the spiritual platform. It is important to understand that taking shelter in Krishna (*mam asritya*) does not refer to the mechanical prayers, the sectarian affiliations, or the blind belief in some supreme person that dispenses rewards or punishments to those who obey or disobey him. Rather, it indicates the level of consciousness or awareness of the transcendental reality (*adhyatma*) and its realization or application in daily life and in the sense of identity and belonging.

All the necessary branches of knowledge are contained in *Bhagavad gita*: the proper understanding of Atman/ Brahman, the science of action and duty (*karma*), and the structure and functions of the universe (*akhilam* or *jagat*) which will be specifically explained in the subsequent chapters.

Since Sanskrit terms usually have various layers of meanings, the second part of this verse could be translated as "Therefore they completely understand the Atman, the world and the science of action" or "Therefore they know everything about transcendence as well about the material universe, and the social and religious duties to be performed".

VERSE 30

साधिभूताधिदैवं मां साधियज्ञं च ये विदुः ।

sādhibhūtādhidaivam mām sādhiyajñam ca ye viduḥ ।

प्रयाणकालेऽपि च मां ते विदुर्युक्तचेतसः ॥ ७-३० ॥

prayāṇakāle'pi ca mām te viduryuktacetasaḥ ।। 7-30 ।।

sa: with; *adhibhuta*: the principle of material elements; *adhidaivam*: the principle of divinity; *mam*: me; *sa*: with; *adhiyajnam*: the principle of sacred action; *ca*: and; *me*: me; *viduh*: they know; *prayana-kale*: at the time of death; *api*: even/ certainly; *ca*: also/ as well; *mam*: me; *te*: they; *vidur*: they know; *yukta-cetasah*: those who engage their consciousness.

"They know me and simultaneously they know the principle of material manifestation, the principle of the archetypes governing it, and the principle of sacred action. Thus they will also know me at the time of (their) death, because their consciousness is connected (with me)."

In these last two verses of the chapter, Krishna mentions the fundamental concepts of Brahman, Adhyatma, Karma, Adhibhuta, Adhidaiva, Adhiyajna, and the consciousness at the time of death. At the beginning of the next chapter, Arjuna will ask him for more clarifications specifically on these subjects. The principles called Adhyatma, Adhibhuta, Adhidaiva and Adhiyajna are the foundations of the realities called respectively Atman, material elements, Devas and Yajna, that together with Karma and time constitute the sum total of existence.

Chapter 2 spoke extensively about Adhyatma, the principle of Atman, that we could also call the nature of the soul. This is the most important science, because it studies directly the subject of knowledge, without which there would be no knowledge and no cognition. By understanding the actual nature of the Self, one can achieve complete success in this life and in the next.

The sum total of Atman is called Brahman. Each and every individual Jiva Atman emanates from the Param Atman, or "Supreme Soul", Vishnu. Some commentators translate Param Atman as "Supersoul", but such definition may not be easily understandable for most people, as it could give the idea of a

merely bigger and more powerful individual soul, something like a Superman in comparison to ordinary men.

To really understand the principle of Param Atman, we should consider for example the expression *param guru*, that indicates the "guru of the guru". Thus the Param Atman is the "self of the self" or the "soul of the soul". Just like the individual soul - the Jiva Atman - produces a great number of living cells that constitute his/her material body, so the Supreme Soul - the Param Atman - produces a great number of living spiritual cells that constitute his spiritual body within the material manifestation.

From this, we can understand how and why the individual Jiva Atman cannot exist separately from the Param Atman, and in fact its consciousness is only a spark of the sum total of the individual consciousness of the Param Atman. We know that each and every cell of our own material bodies is conscious and possesses a complex genetic code that constitutes a great amount of knowledge or information, yet when it is separated from the entire body and from its "higher central consciousness", it inevitably perishes.

The principle of Adhibhuta (that indicates the "conditions of life") is more than the material elements in themselves, that include the *pancha maha bhuta* ("five gross elements") such as earth, water, fire, air and space, and the three subtle material elements known as *manas*, *buddhi* and *ahankara* (mind, intelligence and identification).

When considered all together, the sum total of all these material element is called *pradhana* or *maha tattva*, or material nature. Unlike her manifestations, *pradhana* is eternal and always existing, and therefore is also called Brahman - specifically, she is the feminine component of the Undivided One, while the masculine component is called *purusha*.

The Undivided One is called *avyakta*, "non manifested", and *param*, "supreme", and is presented by Adi Shankara Acharya in the first verse of his commentary to *Bhagavad gita* as *narayanah paro avyaktat*, "Narayana (Vishnu) (who) is supreme and non-manifested". This Narayana or Vishnu is also called Sadashiva, "the eternal Shiva", while the "non-eternal" Shiva is his manifestation in the material world for the purpose of renovation - the action of dissolution that establishes the pre-conditions for a new creation.

Vishnu is thus the origin of the Adhyatma and the Adhibhuta (7.6).

The concept of Adhidaiva, like the concept of Param Atman, should be understood properly. Just like the Param Atman lives within the heart of each living entity, all the Devas also live within the body of the individual Jivatman, because they are the controlling principles of the Virat rupa, the universal material form of the Purusha.

The budding science of psychology in western academia was considerably developed by Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961), a great admirer and student of Vedic knowledge. Considered the founder of Analytical Psychology, he gave summer lectures on Yoga philosophy and Kundalini in Zurich for a few years. He wrote, "We do not yet realize that while we are turning upside down the material world of the East with our technical proficiency, the East with its psychic proficiency, is throwing our spiritual world into confusion."

Jung is famous for having expounded the concept of Archetypes, or collective, universal and eternal "personality principles" that are found in the subconscious mind of all human beings, irrespective of their education or cultural background, and even unknown to the conscious mind. These archetypes are expressions of the universal symbolic language of the spirit; they are the original model

template or ideal representation from which all things of the same nature are copied. He mentioned the Persona, the Shadow, the Anima, the Animus, the Great Mother, the Wise Old man, the Hero, and the Self. Of course Jung expressed this idea in his particular way, that is not the original knowledge, but simply his perception of the reality, and his research has been continued by other scientists, that have developed for example the Constellations technique, or the Dialogue between a person's "sub-personalities", also utilizing instruments such as role playing, and so on.

The most important Archetypes are the Mother, the Father, the King, the Child, the Warrior, the King, the Lover, the Architect, the Magician, the Jester (or Madman), the Hermit, the Teacher, and so on. Other "minor" universal Archetypes are symbolic objects such as a forest, a lake, the ocean, a house, a vase, a wall, etc, or animals such as a bear, a cat, an eagle, a lion and so on. There are several exercises for the exploration of the subconscious programming that are based on the visualization of these particular archetypes.

Traditionally, the best and deepest application of these Archetypes is the study of mythology, or the ancient sacred figures of all cultures - whose memory is still lingering at the edges of the contemporary mind, for example in the figures of the Tarots from which the game of cards originally derived.

The Vedic or Hindu tradition contains the greatest wealth of such symbolical descriptions and depictions still surviving in spite of the onslaught of the abrahamic iconoclasm that has been continuously going on for over 2000 years.