

BHAGAVAD GITA

**The Global Dharma
for the Third Millennium**

Chapter Eight

Translations and commentaries
compiled by Parama Karuna Devi

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Chapter 8: Taraka brahma yoga

The Yoga of transcendental liberation

The 8th chapter of *Bhagavad gita*, entitled "The Yoga of liberating spiritual consciousness" takes us further into the central part of the discussion, focused on the development of *bhakti* - love and devotion for God.

The topic of devotion is difficult to analyze because it deals with emotions rather than intellect and logic. However, devotion is particularly popular and powerful in changing people's lives, specifically because it works on people's feelings. Feelings and emotions fill up the life of a living being even on the material level and constitute the greatest source of joy and sorrow. All the forms of physical joys and sufferings depend on emotional joy and suffering: a different emotion in the awareness transforms hell into heaven, and heaven into hell.

Attraction and attachment (*raga*) as well as repulsion and aversion (*dvesa*) are created by emotions, and these two polarities constitute the entire universe of material action and identification. It is impossible for a conditioned soul to ignore feelings or emotions, or to get rid of them. Usually, those who try to deny sentiments and emotions simply repress them, and we know that repressed sentiments and emotions become stronger and take deeper roots, consciously or unconsciously branching into a number of obsessive behaviors causing immense sufferings to the individual and to the people around him/her.

This chapter, however, is not entitled after sentiments, emotions or love, but after the liberating awareness of Brahman, the

transcendental Reality that is consciousness, intelligence, eternity and happiness. The proper knowledge of Brahman is the key to actually becoming established on the level of genuine *bhakti* (devotion) instead of falling into some sentimental delusion built on fantasy and cultural superimpositions.

The realization of Brahman is not antagonistic to the realization of Paramatma and Bhagavan - quite the contrary, it constitutes the preliminary step toward subsequent and more complete realizations that become increasingly personal in our relationship with God. Meditation on the transcendental reality of Brahman enables the *yogi* to realize the greatness of God and develop a genuine relationship in full awareness and dedication. The knowledge of Brahman liberates the *yogi* from the material identifications and attachments that cause a continued imprisonment in the cycle of repeated births and deaths.

VERSE 1

अर्जुन उवाच ।

arjuna uvāca ।

किं तद् ब्रह्म किमध्यात्मं किं कर्म पुरुषोत्तम ।

kiṁ tad brahma kimadhyātmaṁ kiṁ karma puruṣottama ।

अधिभूतं च किं प्रोक्तमधिदैवं किमुच्यते ॥ ८-१ ॥

adhibhūtaṁ ca kiṁ proktamadhidaivam kimucyate ॥ 8-1 ॥

arjunah : Arjuna; *uvaca*: said; *kim*: what; *tad*: that (is); *brahma*: Brahman; *kim*: what; *adhyatmam*: Adhyatma; *kim*: what; *karma*: Karma (action/ duty); *purusha*: Person; *uttama*: Supreme; *adhibhutam*: Adhibhutam; *ca*: and; *kim*: what; *proktam*: called/ defined; *adhidaivam*: Adhidaivam; *kim*: what; *ucyate*: it is said.

Arjuna said:

"O Purushottama (Krishna, Supreme Person), what is Brahman, what (is) Adhyatma, what (is) Karma? And what are (the realities) called Adhibhuta and Adhidaiva?"

This verse summarizes the main topics of *Gita*: Brahman (the transcendental unchangeable Reality of the entire sum total of Consciousness), Adhyatman (the living entities), Karma (action), Adhibhutam (the material world) and Adhidaivam (the controlling principle, incarnated by the archetypal Devas).

Adhiyajna is the sum total of all the sacred actions, the relationship that connects all these principles and makes it all worthwhile, supporting everything in the universe and creating the harmony and progressive movement we call Dharma and Ritu. In fact, these topics are all that there is to know in the world, and the subject of all the Vedic scriptures. A genuine devotee of Krishna cannot disregard them, because they are right in the heart center of the three most important chapters of the *Bhagavad gita*, that speak about pure devotional service or Bhakti Yoga.

Purushottama means "supreme person", the highest among all the *purushas*, or persons. The concept of "person" appears fundamental in the correct understanding of all the realities described above. Without it, the six fundamental principles of the entire material and spiritual existence lose all their meaning.

1. Brahman is ultimately personal in nature as Bhagavan or Isvara.

Those who believe that Brahman is simply "impersonal" fail to understand that Brahman is consciousness and spirit, and this is precisely what defines "personality". Actually, Brahman is the sum total of all personalities. How can consciousness and awareness not be conscious and aware of itself? And when it is conscious and aware of itself, how can it not be a subject of cognizance, a

personality? Therefore, the definitions *nirviseśa* ("without variety") and *nirguṇa* ("without qualities") that are generally applied to Brahman simply refer to the manifestation of variety (implying change and "not being" of something that was "being" before) and quality (as the *guṇa* implying the absence of one quality when another opposite quality is present). Krishna will elaborate more on this point in later chapters.

2. Adhyatma is sum total of the the individual *jivas* or subordinate *puruṣhas*.

This stage of manifestation has already "separated" itself from the Adhibhuta principle, as a couple represented by Shiva and Shakti. Both these principles were already present within the non-manifested Vishnu (*narayanah paro avyaktat*), and when they manifest as a couple appearing as male-female, the principle of variety and relationship is manifested.

3. Karma or activity/ duty requires a *karta* or person that carries on the action. Without a subject of the action, no action can be performed, although of course the consciousness of the *karta* does not have to be materially identified (4.24).

4. The world of Adhibhuta is filled with personalities, albeit temporary.

The characteristic of the immense variety of material manifestations is specifically built on the various hues of *ahankara*, the sense of identification that is generally considered the basis of a personality, and that constitutes the first material element (*bhuta*) and the origin of all the others. Again, as in the concept of *karma*, the subject of the action can choose to interact with the material elements (*bhuta*) with a material consciousness of selfish exploitation, or with a spiritual consciousness of service. In any case, without a subject (personality) that manipulates and

supports (*dharyate*, 7.5) the material elements of the universe, there would be no meaning to the cosmic manifestation.

5) Adhidaiva, the controlling principle, is incarnated in millions of forms or personalities of the Devas, parts of the universal body (*virat purusha*) described in the *Purusha sukta*.

6) Adhiyajna, that will be mentioned in the next verse, is the principle of religious/ spiritual activity, that is different from Karma and in a sense constitutes its purpose. This concept is summarized in verse 3.9: *yajnarthat karmano 'nyatra loko 'yam karma-bandhanah*, "actions must be performed with a religious consciousness, otherwise they will bind to material consequences". In a deeper sense, this definition refers to the Param Atman, the Supreme Self, that resides in the bodies of all the beings, and is the ultimate enjoyer of all their actions.

The word *proktam* (*pra + uktam*) means "defined", "called", "explained", and expresses the concept of universal agreement on the supreme science of *Bhagavad gita*. Some foolish people believe that any opinion should be considered equally valid, and that any person is entitled to give a whimsical meaning and explanation to definitions and concepts, and even to reality.

Now, while it is a fact that there can be many apparently different perspectives of the same reality, and many languages in which we can legitimately and truly describe it, it is also a fact that we must always remain aware of the general context of the perspective and utilize a language that can be interfaced with other languages in an official way. If we fail to do so, our opinions will have no value and will even become an unnecessary disturbance to society.

Any language needs a dictionary, where each and every expression is defined in a clear, consistent and universally recognized way. We cannot use words by giving them whimsical meanings that are

not recognizable by others, because such a behavior will create confusion and unnecessary hostility. When we want to give a different meaning to a word, we need to record it in some way, so that others can use the reference to understand what we are talking about.

VERSE 2

अधियज्ञः कथं कोऽत्र देहेऽस्मिन्मधुसूदन ।

adhiyajñah katham ko'tra dehe'sminmadhusūdana ।

प्रयाणकाले च कथं ज्ञेयोऽसि नियतात्मभिः ॥ ८-२ ॥

prayāṇakāle ca katham jñeyo'si niyatātmaभिः ॥ 8-2 ॥

adhiyajnah : Adhiyajna; *katham*: how; *kah*: who; *atra*: here; *dehe*: in the body; *asmin*: this; *madhusudana*: o Krishna; *prayana*: of death; *kale*: at the time; *ca*: and; *katham*: how; *jneyah*: known; *asi*: you are; *niyata*: that strive; *atmabhih*: to those souls.

"O Madhusudana (Krishna), how is the Adhiyajna (residing) in this body? And how you will be known at the time of death by those who are engaged in Yoga?"

The name Madhusudana refers to Krishna killing the *asura* Madhu, that represents ignorance and illusion, so Arjuna appeals to this power to vanquish confusion and lack of knowledge.

As we have already mentioned, the main subjects of *Bhagavad gita* are as follows:

1. what is Brahman?
2. what is Adhyatma?
3. what is Karma?
4. what is Adhibhuta?

5. what is Adhidaiva?

6. how is the Adhiyajna residing in the body?

7. how will Krishna be known at the time of death by those who are engaged in Yoga?

We have already explained five of these all-important concepts at the end of the previous chapter, when Krishna mentioned them, and now in the subsequent verses Krishna will elaborate more.

The concept of Adhiyajna is just as deep and intriguing as the concept of Adhyatma. At a first glance, it indicates Param Atman, that resides in the body together with the Jiva Atman, as described in *Mundaka* (3.1.2) and *Svetasvatara* (4.7) *Upanishads* (*samane vrikshhe purusho nimagno anisaya socati muhyamanah, justam yada pasyati anyam isam asya mahimanam iti vita-sokah; dva suparna sayujya sakhaya samanam vriksham parisasvajate*). The two *purushas*, like two birds of the same nature, are sitting on the same tree.(the body). One of the two is engrossed in contemplating and eating the fruits of the tree, while the other is simply watching him and waiting for him to realize his glories, which will put an end to all worries.

But why is it called Adhiyajna here? Because the *param atman* is the origin and purpose of all *yajnas*, the spiritual and religious activities. Again, materialistic people with a short supply of intelligence will think that a *yajna*, or religious activity, is just a ritual ceremony, a specific set of verbal formulas and ritual gestures that is performed by a caste of priests, but that is not a fact.

The concept of *yajna* as religious activity encompasses all the five categories of dutiful action (*pancha maha yajnas*) expressing gratitude and reciprocating the benefits we all received from God and the Devas (*agnihotra, sandhya vandana, upasana*), the Vedic knowledge compiled by the great Rishis (*svadhyaya, sadhana*), the ancestors of the family (*tarpana, sraddha, garbhadana*), the other

human beings (*varna karma, atithi seva, dana seva*) and even animals and other creatures (*bali, ahimsa*).

Such *yajnas* can be performed externally as rituals, or just internally as a sacrifice of consciousness and the activities of the senses and the mind in daily life (4.25, 4.26, 4.27, 4.28, 4.29, 4.30), and in many different ways (*bahu vidha yajna*, 4.32) to cover all types of activities on the human level. In fact, each and every action should be transformed into *yajna* by the power of consciousness, as Krishna will clearly say at the conclusion of the central three "purely devotional" chapters of *Bhagavad gita*, in 9.27: *yat karosi, yad asnasi, yaj juhosi dadasi yat*, "whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you sacrifice and you give away", *kurusva mad arpanam*, "do everything as a sacred offering to me".

This "me" mentioned by Krishna is the Adhiyajna, who lives in the heart of each and every soul, and therefore it is not limited by the form of the Deity in the temple, and does not need to be endorsed by any religious organization or specific process. Bhakti is the most natural function of the self, and it cannot be limited or stopped by any external circumstance.

For those who have established themselves in this consciousness, death becomes irrelevant, as it was already stated by Krishna at the very beginning of his instructions in *Bhagavad gita: dehantara praptir dhiras tatra na muhyati* (2.13), a person who is balanced does not become confused by the end of the body.

Anyone can achieve this level of perfect consciousness: it is just a matter of effort. The *niyata atmas* are those *jivatmas* that sincerely and seriously engage in the practice of the development of consciousness according to the system of *yoga*, that starts with *yama* and *niyama*.

VERSE 3

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।

śrībhagavānuvāca ।

अक्षरं ब्रह्म परमं स्वभावोऽध्यात्ममुच्यते ।

akṣaram brahma paramam svabhāvo'dhyātmamucyate ।

भूतभावोद्भवकरो विसर्गः कर्मसंज्ञितः ॥ ८-३ ॥

bhūtabhāvodbhavakaro visargaḥ karmasañjñitaḥ ।। 8-3 ।।

sri-bhagavan: the perfect Lord; *uvaca*: said; *aksaram*: eternal/ syllable; *brahma*: Brahman; *paramam*: supreme; *sva*: own; *bhavah*: nature; *adhyatmam*: Adhyatma; *ucyate*: is said; *bhuta*: of the living entities/ the conditions of life; *bhava*: the existence; *udbhava*: manifestation; *karah*: that makes; *visargah*: the production/ creation; *karma*: Karma; *samjnitah*: is known as.

The Lord said:

"Brahman is the transcendental/ supreme unchanging (existence). The intrinsic nature (of the being) is called Adhyatma. And Karma is described as the creative action that causes the states of existence/ the bodies/ the nature and the birth of the embodied beings."

Krishna is giving here the following definitions:

1. Brahman is the supreme existence that never changes
2. Adhyatma is what manifests the existence of the living entities
3. Karma is creation or manifestation

The definition of Brahman as *akshara* is specifically mentioned also in *Brihad aranyaka Upanishad* (3.89) as "unchanging" is

expressed as *na ksharati*, where *kshara* is a synonym of *bhava*, "becoming".

The other meaning refers to the the supreme syllable (*akshara*), the *pranava omkara*, that was mentioned in verse 7.8 and will be mentioned again in 9.17, and 17.23 and 17.24 as the sound form of the Brahman.

This science is also explained in detail in many *Upanishads* - *Chandogya*, *Prasna*, *Brahma*, *Para Brahma*, *Turiyatita*, *Amrita nada*, *Darshana*, *Dhyana bindu*, *Hamsa*, *Mandala brahmana*, *Nada bindu*, *Sandilya*, *Yoga tattva*, *Kausitaki*, *Maha*, *Narayana*, *Savitri*, *Rahasya*, *Svetasvatara*, *Dattatreya*, *Hayagriva*, *Mahanarayana*, *Nrisimha tapani*, *Rama rahasya*, *Vasudeva*, *Atharva siksha*, *Bhasma*, *Rudra hridaya*, *Brahma vidya*, *Akshi*, *Garbha*, *Gopala tapani*, *Tara sara*, *Akshamalika*, and especially *Paramahamsa parivrajaka*, *Sannyasa*, *Satyayani*, *Yoga chudamani*, and *Narada parivrajaka*.

The word *karah*, "the maker" may be applied to the definition of Adhyatma and/ or to the definition of Karma, which is strictly connected by the same verbal root. It is not difficult to see that the word *karma* comes from *karah*. However, the position of the words in the verse can also refer to the Adhyatma, the principle of manifestation of the *bhutas*, the "beings", a definition that is applicable both to the individual living entities and to the various conditions of existence. These two explanations are not contradictory, but rather meant to expand our understanding on more levels and make it deeper.

The concept of Adhyatma has been explained as the *svabhava* (with a long *a*), that is the inherent and original nature of the Atman, that is the specific mode of consciousness. Such mode of consciousness can be spiritual or material, and as a consequence, a suitable body is manifested through action. The spiritual body is

developed through *bhava* or transcendental emotion in the devotional service to the Lord through the agency of Yogamaya, while the material body is developed through the birth into the material universe through the agency of Mahamaya.

It is said, *jivatmanah sambandha yo bhavo*: through the connection or from the relationship, the *jivatman* experiences the feeling of identification (either as part of the Supreme or as a separate enjoyer) and this in turn makes him choose to engage in action (*adi kṛitya*), which creates his body. It is then said, *svam bhavayati*: he transforms himself through perception, through emotion or feeling he develops a condition of being.

We will here repeat that with a long first *a*, the word *bhava* means "emotion, feeling", while with a short first *a* it means "existence, birth, becoming, manifestation". Although the two meanings are obviously connected to each other, they do not have the same significance, as the former is the cause of the latter. In this sense, it is what causes the manifestation of the conditions of the beings, the original reason for coming into being of all the positions of a living entity. While the Prakṛiti is the cause of action, the Puruṣa is the cause of perception and consciousness: this is symbolized by the image of Mother Kali standing on the body of Shiva - as Shiva without Shakti is *sava* ("corpse") and cannot act. However, the perception (pleasure, aspiration, desire, feeling, etc) of the *puruṣa* stimulates the *prakṛiti*, and the *karma* (action) is generated.

Karma is probably the most successful and popular word leaked from the corpus of Vedic knowledge into the daily life vocabulary of western countries, even more than *yoga*. However, its meaning is often distorted due to cultural superimpositions and lack of proper information. It is generally used with the meaning of destiny, and sometimes retribution or punishment. In abrahamic ideologies, this destiny is the "lot in life" incomprehensibly assigned by a tyrannical God to each individual at birth, and that

must be accepted without discussion and without attempting to improve one's situation.

To this fatalistic interpretation of Destiny, the additional concept of reincarnation mixes the idea that the good or bad actions we performed in previous lifetimes come back to us in the form of reward or punishment, in a sort of "tit for tat" reaction that was also described in some versions of hells (for example, in Dante Alighieri's *Divina Commedia*).

However, Karma is not just an inevitable jail sentence we simply need to storm out in a passive and fatalistic way. Karma is constantly changing with each action (or inaction) of ours, and can even be neutralized or overcome completely by new and suitable actions; people usually want to get rid of the "bad *karma*" (and don't mind having some "good *karma*"). Actually, the law of Karma is much more complex and deep than that, and is explained precisely, clearly and consistently in *Bhagavad gita*.

The word *visarga*, that can be translated as "creation" or "completion of the sacrifice or activity offered to the Devas", "sending forth", "discharging", is also the name of a particular item in the Sanskrit alphabet, indicating the "end" of sound - an echoing end, as opposed to the nasal end provided by its companion and counterpart *anusvara*. The third companion, the *virama*, provides an abrupt end to the sound.

A symbolic interpretation of these three items in the Sanskrit alphabet is also directly connected with *karma* and the law of cause and effect: when an action is done (mentally, verbally or physically), the result is instantly created, although it may become manifest only after a period of time. The *visarga* or creation proper is the echo of previous tendencies, and perpetuates the repetition of the choices and actions in this life into the future by creating the seeds for future actions and lifetimes. The *anusvara*, that is

crowning the transcendental syllable AUM, is the sacred action that neutralizes action and creates *moksha*, the cessation of the cycle of births and death and the attainment of the transcendental level of consciousness. The *virama* is the end of the manifestation.

In the cycle of the moon and the earth, *visarga* is the waxing and waning moon, and the pleasant seasons of spring and autumn, *anusvara* is the full moon (symbolized by the dot into the moon sickle, a very recurrent sacred image in all ancient cultures) also called *prana bindu* or *sasa bindu*, and connected to the rainy season. This also connects Chandra, Indra and Soma, and the addition of the name *chandra* to the names of Krishna and Rama. *Virama* is the dark moon (*amavasya*), sleep, death and the barren season where everything seems to be dead and non-manifested: summer in the hot climates and winter in the cold climates.

The word *visarga* is related to *visarjaniya*, and to the "dis-installation" of the Deity at the end of the worship rituals. As a component of the *yajna* or sacred action, the *visarga* or completion is the moment when the desired result of the activity is created and the action or vow is therefore completed.

VERSE 4

अधिभूतं क्षरो भावः पुरुषश्चाधिदैवतम् ।

adhibhūtaṁ kṣaro bhāvaḥ puruṣaścādhidaivatam ।

अधियज्ञोऽहमेवात्र देहे देहभृतां वर ॥ ८-४ ॥

adhiyajño'hamevātra dehe dehabhṛtāṁ vara ॥ 8-4 ॥

adhibhutam: the physical manifestation of the universe; *kshara*: impermanent; *bhavah*: nature; *purushah*: the principle of Consciousness; *ca*: and; *adhidaivatam*: the controlling archetypes;

adhiyajnah: the Divine principle; *aham*: I; *eva*: certainly; *atra*: in this; *dehe*: body; *deha-bhritam*: of those who have/ carry a body; *vara*: o best.

"O best among those who have a body, the *adhibhutam* is the physical manifestation of the universe and is undergoing constant transformation. The *adhidaivatam* is the principle of Consciousness manifested as the controlling archetypes in the universe, and I am the *adhiyajna*, the Divine principle that resides in each body as the Param Atman."

Krishna is answering Arjuna's questions: in the previous verse he explained about Brahman, Adhyatma and Karma, and here he explains about Adhibhuta, Adhidaiva and Adhiyajna. This should be contemplated in preparation for death, so that it will be easier to leave the body without being confused by identifications and attachments, just like a bird leaves the nest in the tree to soar freely in the sky.

The expression *deha bhritam vara*, "o best among those who are embodied", indicates that the topics of this verse refer to the human body and to the material universe, microcosm and macrocosm, or in other words, they are present *atra dehe*, "in this body".

The *adhibhuta* manifestation is also called material nature, although it is merely a production of the original supreme Shakti. She is also eternal in existence, but the manifestations she produces are in constant transformation, revolving in cycles of creation, preservation and dissolution: therefore the *adhibhuta* principle is called *akshara*, or "non-eternal".

The various stages of the material bodies are also detailed as birth, growth, maturity, reproduction, deterioration and death. This is also highlighted by the definition *bhavah*, "nature" or

"manifestation", as something that comes into existence; we remember that *bhuta*, "being", is the result of *bhava*, "manifestation". The word *bhava* also means "condition, nature as manifestation of life circumstances".

Whatever exists on the physical level is constantly changing due to the action of the *adhyatman* and the *karma*; such action can be direct as in the case of the body or indirect as in the case of those things related to the body, such as buildings, utensils, etc.

The definition of *adhibhuta* includes the 5 gross elements and the 3 subtle elements, but the gross elements are more easily visible, as they form the tangible objects like clay and pots. All the forms of *adhibhuta* depend, for their existence, on the support (*dharyate* 7.5) of the *jivatman* (individually) or *adhyatma* (collectively), and they are originated from the Brahman, that is also the origin of the *adhyatma*.

The definition of *adhidaiva* or *adhidaivata* is the controlling principle, the plan or the system of natural laws and regulations according to which the *adhibhuta* (the material objects) are functioning and directed with intelligence for the proper maintenance and progress of all beings. We can also identify it with the *visva rupa* or the *virat rupa*, the "universal form" of the Lord, that includes all Devas and planets, the principle of order and management that constitutes the authority of the Devas, beginning with Surya. This Purusha or principle of Consciousness resides in the Sun and sustains the organs and senses of all creatures; he is also called Hiranyagarbha, "the golden embryo".

All the Devas are parts of the body of the Lord, and as such each particular Deva has the power to perform some activity or function in the universe, and to regulate those *jivatmas* and those material elements that are under their control.

The definition of *adhiyajna* is the last - but not least - factor in Krishna's explanation, and is given special importance by the expression *aham eva*, "that is myself", or "it is I only".

The *adhiyajna* is the sacred principle, the principle of the sacred action or sacrifice (*yajna*), the act of sacred consciousness that brings the purpose of the universe and life to a higher level. This Supreme Consciousness or Supreme Lord called Yajna or Adhiyajna also resides within the body, but while the *atman* is a separated part or *vibhinnamsa*, the *param atman* is directly the One Reality or *svamsa*.

The *Bhagavata Purana* (2.2.8) states, *kecit sva-dehantar hridayavakase pradesa mantram purusam vasantam*, "The Supreme Purusha that resides in the heart within the body, is as big as a thumb". This measure is also confirmed by the *Katha Upanishad* (2.1.12): *angustha-matrah purusho madhya atmani tisthati*. This *pradesha matra* or *angustha matra* is explained as the measure of the distance from thumb to tip of index. Of course the body of the Param Atman is a subtle spiritual presence, that can only be contemplated by the vision of the mind and the intelligence.

The meditation practiced by the *yogis* has the only purpose of actually contemplating this Param Atman, and with sufficient practice and purification of the mind and intelligence, through the precise and ample instructions of the *shastra* and the *guru*, the *sadhaka* ultimately becomes able to see the Lord. Those who have attained this vision confirm that it is a beautiful form, radiant with a soft transcendental light. The Lord appears to be in the prime of youth, with a smiling and kind face, four attractive arms holding the symbols of divinity, and decorated with wonderful ornaments and clothing.

Several other verses of *Bhagavad gita* confirm this presence of the Adhiyajna within the body of the *jivatman*: 15.15 (*sarvasya caham*

hridi sannivisto, "I reside in the hearts of all beings"), 18.61 (*isvarah sarva bhutanam hrd dese 'rjuna tisthati*, "O Arjuna, the Lord of all beings resides in the heart"), 13.23 (*upadrasta anumanta ca bharta bhokta mahesvarah paramatmeti capy ukto dehe 'smin purusah parah*, "It is said that the Supreme Lord, the Supreme Person, resides in this body as Paramatma together with the Atman, as the witness, the sanctioning authority, the sustainer and the enjoyer of all actions"), 13.3 (*kshetra jnam capi mam viddhi sarva kshetresu bharata*, "O Bharata, know that besides the Atman, there is another Consciousness, that is me, and such Consciousness is aware of all the bodies").

Yajna inspires the acts of sacrifice from within the heart of the human being, and resides in the body because sacrifice is performed through *karma* or the actions or work of the body (*Gita*, 3.5, *brahma nityam yajne pratisthitam*, "Brahman eternally resides in sacred action").

This position of the Param Atman or Yajna as the actual enjoyer (5.28, *bhoktaram yajna tapasam*) of all the sacred activities should be properly understood on the transcendental level; to help us in this effort, the *shastras* offer a different and apparently opposite perspective with the example of the two birds sitting on the same tree. The *Bhagavata Purana* (11.11.6) says: *suparnav etau sadrisau sakhayau yadricchayaitau krita-nidau ca vrikshe, ekas tayoh khadati pippalannam anyo niranno 'pi balena bhuyan*, "Two birds of similar nature, and related by friendship, by their own choice have made a nest in a tree; one is eating the food from the banyan tree, the other is not eating but he is more powerful."

The same image is found in *Mundaka Upanishad* (3.1.1): *dva suparna sayuja sakhaya samanam vriksham parisasvajate, tayor anyah pippalam svadv atty anasnann anyo 'bhicakasiti*, "Two birds are sitting on the same tree as friends; one bird is eating the fruits of the tree, and the other is simply observing, without eating."

This exact verse is repeated in *Svetasvatara Upanishad* 4.6, and another verse is added (4.7): *samane vrikshe purusho nimagno 'nisaya socati muhyamanah, justam yada pasyaty anyam isam asya mahimanam iti vita-sokah*, "Although the two *purushas* are in the same tree, one is experiencing deep anxiety and confusion, but if he turns towards the Lord and becomes aware of his glories, immediately he becomes free from all worries."

The example of the tree as the body is also repeated in *Bhagavata Purana* with different symbolic meanings and references: *ekayano 'sau dvi-phalas tri-mulas catu-rasah pancha-vidhah sad-atma, sapta-tvag asta-vitapo navaksho dasa-cchadi dvi-khago hy adi-vrikshah*, "The one body called the original tree has 2 types of fruits (joy and pain), 3 roots (the *gunas*), 4 tastes (or *rasas* - *dharma artha kama moksha*), 5 ways to acquire knowledge (5 senses), 6 states (lamentation, illusion, old age, death, hunger, thirst), 7 coverings (skin, blood, muscle, fat, bone, marrow, semen), 8 branches (the material elements), 9 holes (or openings), and 10 leaves (the life airs)" (10.2.27), and *dve asya bije sata-mulas tri-nalah pancha-skandhah panca-rasa-prasutih, dasaika-sakho dvi-suparna-nidas tri-valkalo dvi-phalo 'rkam pravistah / adanti caikam phalam asya grdhra grame-cara ekam aranya-vasah, hamsa ya ekam bahu-rupam iyyair maya-mayam veda sa veda vedam*, "This tree has 2 seeds (good action and bad action), hundreds of roots (the previous impressions or *vasanas*), 3 lower trunks (the subtle elements), 5 upper trunks (the gross elements), producing 5 types of sap (sense perceptions or sense pleasures), 101 branches, 2 birds nests, 3 types of bark (*valkala*, coverings), 2 fruits (*pravritti* and *nivritti*, or *bhoga* and *tyaga*), and it grows as high as the sun. Those who eat one of the 2 fruits are lusty for sense gratification (*grdhrah*) and live in urban areas (*grame carah*), while the *hamsas* who live in forests eat the other fruit. One who understands that this tree is the illusory potency (*maya-mayam*) of the One that appears in many forms, by those who are

worthy to be worshiped (the Personalities of Godhead, or the Gurus), he actually knows the *Vedas*." (11.12.22-23).

VERSE 5

अन्तकाले च मामेव स्मरन्मुक्त्वा कलेवरम् ।

antakāle ca māmeva smaranmuktvā kalevaram ।

यः प्रयाति स मद्भावं याति नास्त्यत्र संशयः ॥ ८-५ ॥

yaḥ prayāti sa madbhāvaṁ yāti nāstyatra saṁśayaḥ ॥ 8-5 ॥

anta: end; *kale*: at the time of; *ca*: and/ also; *mam*: me; *eva*: certainly; *smaran*: remembering; *muktva*: being liberated from; *kalevaram*: the material body; *yaḥ*: s/he; *prayati*: goes; *sah*: s/he; *mad-bhavam*: my nature; *yati*: attains; *na*: not; *asti*: there is; *atra*: here; *samsayah*: doubt.

"One who, at the end of time (of this life), remembers me while leaving his/ her body attains my nature. There is no doubt in this."

The expression *sa mad-bhavam yati* means "attains my nature/ state of existence", but could also be translated as "attains the conception/ idea/ consciousness of me". The word *bhava* also refers to the highest stage of pure *bhakti*, which extends the meaning of the expression "*mad-bhavam*" to an extremely personal level of happiness and realization. We may recall here that the *siddha deha*, the perfect spiritual body developed by the devotee in the progressive cultivation of *vaidhi* and *raganuga bhakti*, is nothing but the sentiment - *rasa* or *bhava* - in relationship with God.

The same meanings of *bhava* can be applied in the following verse to the expression *sada tad-bhava-bhavitah*, that refers to always

thinking of something, or we could say, developing the same vibration frequency.

In Vedic culture, nature or state of existence is synonymous with level of consciousness.

Anta kale literally means "at the end of time" and can apply both to the end of the time allotted within a particular body, or to the time of the death of the universe, when all the bodies are withdrawn inside the *pradhana* and then inside the body of Karanodakasayi Vishnu, the "Spirit floating on the waters". When all the bodies and the planets are destroyed, the *jivatmans* that still have karmic seeds to develop, temporarily re-enter the body of Vishnu, to be manifested again at the beginning of the next cycle. In both cases, the *jivatmans* that had attained the level of *jivanmukta* return to the supreme Dhama, and the others get a little rest from the fatigue of living in the material world.

The time of death is a crucial moment for the embodied being, because it opens a door that facilitates the free movement out of a set of material circumstances and into a new path - something like getting off from one train and boarding a new one. We could really say that death is like a railway station, and the more conscious and informed we are at the time of death, the better we can choose our next destination.

In order to have a strong and focused consciousness at the time of death, when the body is struggling with its survival instinct and the senses and mind are failing - and sometimes the awareness is hurt by offensive actions, words and thoughts especially in case of a violent death - we need to have made a lot of practice during our entire lifetime.

Probably the greatest danger is to be unable of detaching one's consciousness from thinking negatively about the immediate

material cause of our death - in other words, the people we blame for that or for any other failure in our life - because this will push us towards a new incarnation precisely among that type of people. For that, we do not need to be thinking of that form in a positive way, with attraction and desire: a negative meditation, with repulsion and hatred, will have the exact same effect.

For example, let's consider two opposite and hostile factions that keep fighting each other for some ideological or even "religious" reason.

People from the group A kill people from the group B (and vice versa), with obsessive determination in a feud that never ends, even coming to the point of suicide terrorism, by which one is glad to blow himself up only to cause the death of more enemies, including people who are not engaged in any hostile activity.

What do you think will happen to the suicide bomber? If he is lucky, he will find himself in the womb of some woman of the opposite faction, and after birth he will be trained to hate and kill the people that were previously his kin, but are now his enemies.

But still, that would be a great fortune, because he does not really deserve a second opportunity for a human life after wasting it with a hateful immolation of one's own body to bring about the death of other innocent and unaware people, who had no chance to defend themselves. Usually such a cowardly and cruel action drags the individual down into the lower realms of ghosts or inferior animals, where he cannot do too much damage any more.

The purpose of this cycle of deaths and births is to help the individual to understand the futility of the identification with the material body and its affiliations and designations.

Foolish people entertain the strange belief that at the time of death some "savior" will come to reward them of their political or

institutional loyalty, and modify their consciousness from the outside, or even take them to "the spiritual world" without any need of modifying their consciousness.

Therefore during their lifetime they do not bother to make sufficient efforts to improve their own realization and consciousness, becoming lazy and complacent about their position they call in "good standing" or "among the saved" because they have made some public statement of allegiance to the particular sect to which they belong, and they have managed to avoid getting into some fight with a priest. Reality is quite different. If we have not developed a higher level of consciousness during our allotted time in this body, we will simply have to take another birth, and another, and another, until we qualify for liberation.

At death, usually the *jivatman* has a window of time in which s/he can gather his/her concentration and direct it towards the proper destination to be attained. The maximum extent of this period is 40 days, after which the *jivatman* that has not been able to cut free from the previous material identifications and attachments remains as a ghost between the gross and the subtle dimension.

In ancient times, several civilizations had developed rituals to help the recently deceased find their way towards a better incarnation: the most famous are the *Bardo Thodol* (also called the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*) and the *Egyptian Book of the Dead*, that was often inscribed in the frescoes within the tombs of pharaohs and very important or wealthy people. In the Vedic field we have the *Garuda purana*, that was traditionally recited for this purpose. However, such practice is meant to be supported by a lifetime of proper meditation and awareness development.

In the previous verse, Krishna clearly stated that one who remembers him at the time of death, will attain him. However, we need to properly understand how to remember Krishna. Arjuna

himself asks this important question directly to Krishna, and Krishna answers in the core chapters of *Bhagavad gita*.

VERSE 6

यं यं वापि स्मरन्भावं त्यजत्यन्ते कलेवरम् ।

yaṁ yaṁ vāpi smaranbhāvaṁ tyajatyante kalevaram ।

तं तमेवैति कौन्तेय सदा तद्भावभावितः ॥ ८-६ ॥

taṁ tamevaiti kaunteya sadā tadbhāvabhāvitaḥ ।। 8-6।।

yam yam: whatever; *va*: or; *api*: also; *smaran*: remembering; *bhavam*: feeling/ situation/ nature; *tyajati*: leaves; *ante*: at the end; *kalevaram*: of the body; *tam tam*: that same; *eva*: certainly; *iti*: thus; *kaunteya*: o son of Kunti; *sada*: always; *tad*: that; *bhava*: nature/ sentiment; *bhavitah*: immersed/ absorbed.

"O son of Kunti (Arjuna), whatever state of existence/ nature one remembers at the time of leaving the body, s/he attains (precisely) that state of being/ condition, (because) of always contemplating that existence."

A true *yogi* knows first of all that s/he is not the material body, which is simply a vehicle or a dress to be used temporarily. This is the first step in spiritual progress and the ABC of Vedic knowledge, without which there can be no advancement or further realization possible.

Krishna already explained this point extensively in the second chapter of *Bhagavad gita*, illustrating the mechanism of reincarnation as a perfectly natural and scientific fact that is caused by the habits and tendencies of each living entity. When the body is no more suitable for our work, we simply leave it and take a new

one: "Just like a man abandons clothes that have become torn or worn out and acquires other and new clothes, in the same way one leaves the damaged body and accepts another new body" (2.22).

At each moment in the course of our lifetime, we shed old and damaged cells and we add new fresh cells to our bodies, and when old age or disease make this process too slow or difficult, we drop the entire gross body and we move on to find the most suitable circumstances to develop a new one. Although these passages are perfectly natural, they involve a certain amount of suffering and anxiety because of the perception of non-existence, loss of consciousness and pain, that are contrary to our fundamental need of permanence, knowledge and happiness - the three basic qualities of spiritual reality.

The method of *yoga* is meant for the emancipation from this suffering and ultimately for the attainment of the supreme happiness, that leads to permanent liberation from the cycle of births and deaths. This is possible through the control of one's own mind and the constant meditation on Transcendence, because the deepest happiness of the Atman will automatically detach us from the inferior material pleasures, attachments and identifications even while still living in this material body, as confirmed in the second chapter: "The embodied soul may keep the sense objects at a distance and reject them, but he can give up the taste (for such objects) when he sees/ finds the Supreme/ something that has a higher/ better taste." (2.59)

Chapter 5 also discussed this topic in the following verses:

"Those who, in this very body, have vanquished rebirth, have a mind that is established in equanimity. This equal vision is certainly pure/ free from all defects, because the same (pure) Brahman is (in all that exists). Thus they are (firmly) established in Brahman." (5.19)

"One who here (in this life/body), before dying, is capable of withstanding the onslaughts of lust and anger, is a *yogi* and a happy human being." (5.23)

"One who is happy within (the self), who finds pleasure within (the self), who finds enlightenment/ the light within (the self) is a *yogi* who attains the Brahma nirvana and the existence/ realization of Brahman." (5.25)

"The (wise) seers (of Reality) attain the Brahma nirvana (because) have been purified from (all) sins/ faults and have cut off (all) doubts (dualistic illusions), engaging themselves in (working for) the benefit of all living beings." (5.25)

"The saintly persons who are completely free from lust and anger and have their consciousness steadily fixed (in Brahman), and who have realized the Self: (for them) there is Brahma nirvana very soon/ in whatever way." (5.26)

However, death is not always an easy passage, and those who are unable to keep their mind fixed on the Supreme Transcendental Reality will have to incarnate again, in the form that is closest to the level of consciousness they had during their life. This will be determined by the positive or negative attachments that we have cultivated in this lifetime, making them too strong to be left behind peacefully.

The *Bhagavata Purana* (canto 5, chapter 8) tells the instructive story of King Bharata, who renounced everything to remain alone in the forest and engage in austerity and meditation to prepare himself for death, but developed a strong attachment for a young deer that had befriended him. One night, during a terrible storm, the deer became scared and ran away from the *ashrama*, so Bharata left his spiritual meditation to go after him, but while engaged in this rescue mission, Bharata himself fell down a slope

and died, thinking about his beloved pet animal. Naturally he took a new birth as a deer, but as his previous spiritual realizations were not lost, he became conscious of what had happened and maintained his spiritual consciousness while living in that body.

VERSE 7

तस्मात्सर्वेषु कालेषु मामनुस्मर युध्य च ।

tasmātsarveṣu kāleṣu māmanusmara yudhya ca ।

मय्यर्पितमनोबुद्धिमामिवैष्यस्यसंशयः ॥ ८-७ ॥

mayyarpitamano buddhimāmevaiṣyasyasamśayaḥ ॥ 8-7 ॥

tasmat: therefore; *sarvesu*: in all; *kalesu*: moments of time; *mam*: me; *anusmara*: remembering constantly; *yudhya*: (you should) fight/ in the battle; *ca*: and/ at the same time; *mayi*: to me; *arpita*: offering; *manah*: with the mind; *buddhih*: with the intelligence; *mam*: me; *eva*: certainly; *esyasi*: will come; *asamsayah*: without doubt.

"Therefore at all times (you should) always remember me, even while fighting (this battle), dedicating to me your mind and your intelligence: in this way you will certainly come to me."

To always remember Krishna and to engage at the same time in a battle in an effective way, one has to be a *mahatma*, a great soul, whose consciousness has expanded at least to the sattvic level.

It is important to understand what Krishna means by "always remember me".

He is not suggesting that we should do so exclusively by reciting his adventures, contemplating the meaning of his many spiritual

names, or meditating about offering some elaborate worship to the Deity through the mind while we are engaged in our other duties, because that would distract us from our practical service.

When a few chapters later in the *Mahabharata*, Krishna and Arjuna will be actually engaged in the battle, there will be no more talking about Krishna's transcendental glories and forms, and especially not even one word will be said about Krishna's adventures in Vrindavana and his loving relationships with the *gopis* and the other people there.

The subject of Krishna's discussion will be how to defeat Drona and Karna, and how to get through the battle to secure the protection of the kingdom, so that Arjuna will be able to perform his duty in the best possible way.

Of course, Arjuna will continue to appreciate Krishna's presence and friendship *rasa*, but his attention will be mainly focused on his task. The *bhakti* literature offers the example of a woman who is secretly in love: she makes a great effort to perform her regular duties with the utmost care and attention, so that nobody will notice that she is thinking about her lover.

We could modify the example into the attitude of a loving wife and mother, who makes equally great efforts to cook and take care of the house and provisions because she wants to please her husband and children with excellent food, a beautiful clean living environment and an inspiring atmosphere.

She does not need to picture her family members vividly in her mind all the time, but there is certainly a purpose to her activities that pervades her consciousness even when she is totally focused on some difficult recipe or some other practical work.

The expression *arpita manah buddhiih*, "offering one's mind and intelligence", refers precisely to this act of good will, by which we

engage willingly and lovingly in the service to the Supreme by performing our duties to the best of our ability. Then, when the mind and the intelligence have fully absorbed the higher meaning of our activities, the senses and the bodily organs engaged in our work will naturally follow with a good performance.

This powerful concentration in active devotional service has two aspects: *sankalpa* or motivation, and *vyavasa* as concentration. It is easy to see that the proper motivation and concentration always bring huge improvement to any kind of work, and certainly this devotion to a higher purpose in performing practical activities does not detract anything from the good result of the job - in fact, it is a powerful factor for success and excellence in one's work.

Controlling one's mind by channeling one's thinking, feeling and willing into the proper direction is the key to this superior level of awareness and effectiveness. Already in 2.41, Krishna had clearly stated that one should strive to concentrate the mind and focus the attention properly in order to achieve the goal, and in 6.35 he has recommended to train the mind with practice and detachment in order to improve its effectiveness.

VERSE 8

अभ्यासयोगयुक्तेन चेतसा नान्यगामिना ।

abhyāsayogayuktena cetasā nānyagāminā ।

परमं पुरुषं दिव्यं याति पार्थानुचिन्तयन् ॥ ८-८ ॥

paramaṁ puruṣaṁ divyaṁ yāti pārthānucintayan ॥ 8-8 ॥

abhyasa: by practice; *yoga*: by engagement; *yuktena*: by remaining connected; *cetasa*: in the consciousness; *na*: not; *anya*: other; *gamina*: going; *paramam*: supreme; *purusam*: person; *divyam*:

divine/ resplendent; *yati*: goes; *partha*: o son of Pritha (Arjuna); *anucintayan*: always keeping in mind/ through the proper process of meditation.

"O son of Pritha (Arjuna), by engaging in the practice of *yoga* with a focused consciousness (that does not deviate from the object of meditation), one attains that supreme Being on whom s/he has been meditating."

The three main factors of success are mentioned as *abhyasa* (practice), *tyaga* (detachment from other pursuits) and *jnana* (knowledge). These are required for any enterprise to achieve any success, and the method of *yoga* and Self realization also include them as priorities.

Practice (*abhyasa*) requires patience (*dhairya*), enthusiasm (*utsaha*) and determination (*niscaya*) to continue over a long period of time with the necessary strength and effectiveness. No success can be attained without sufficient effort over a period of time.

Krishna highlights the importance of *abhyasa* in verses 6.35 (*abhyasena vairagyena*, by practice and detachment it will be possible to control the mind even if it is very restless) and 12.9 (*abhyasa yogena mam icchaptum*, by practice and effort you will obtain your desired result). Good practice goes never lost even from one lifetime to the other: in verse 6.44 Krishna clearly says that thanks to one's previous practice it is easy to resume *yoga* in a next lifetime. The same concept is expressed in *Bhagavata Purana*, for example in verses 3.32.30 (*yogabhyasena nityasah samahita atma nihsangah*) and 11.20.18 (*abhyasanena atmano yogi dharayed acalam manah*).

A mind that is trained in the practice of concentration and consciousness should not be allowed to wander too much. We

know that the mind is restless (6.34, 35), but every time that it runs into a wrong direction, we must bring it back, with patience (*dhairya*) and determination (*niscaya*), and knowledge (*jnana*) - by remaining conscious of the reason why we are engaging in the practice of controlling our own mind. This is indicated by the expression *na anya gamine*, "not going astray".

Several other verses in *Bhagavad gita* use the exact same definition in connection to the practice of meditation: 8.12 (*ananya cetah*, "without thinking about others things"), 8.22 (*bhaktya ananyaya*, "by exclusive devotion"), 9.13 (*ananya manaso*, "by focusing the mind intensely"), 9.22 (*ananyas cintayanto mam*, "thinking about me only"), 9.30 (*bhajate mam ananya bhak*, "serving me exclusively"), 11.54 (*bhaktya tv ananyaya*, "with exclusive devotion"), 13.11 (*mayi ca ananya yogena bhakti*, "by a devotional relationship that is exclusively to me").

The concept of *ista deva* is central to the method of *bhakti yoga*. The devotee naturally feels a spontaneous attraction towards one particular form or Personality of Godhead, and s/he is encouraged to worship that specific form and meditate on it in a concentrated way, without dispersing the attention on too many forms: this is called *ananya bhakti*, "exclusive devotion", or also *aikantika bhakti* to such divine Personalities. Generally in the *bhakti yoga* method the *guru* gives one specific *mantra* that is directly connected to the *ista deva* of the devotee; the devotee should then practice that particular *mantra* with the greatest concentration and determination, taking the vow to repeat the *mantra* as *japa* practice for a minimum number of times daily or over a fixed period of time. There is no need to chant the *japa mantras* of many different Personalities of Godhead simultaneously, because that would tend to dilute the concentration: this exclusive concentration in meditation is called *ananya bhakti*, and gives good results in a very short time.

However, we need to clarify a common misconception, because of which many people feel they are expected to disrespect and neglect the other Personalities of Godhead in order to show their exclusive devotion to the *ista deva* they have chosen. This is not a good idea, and should be corrected as quickly as possible to avoid serious damage to one's spiritual progress.

Whether one has chosen a particular *ista deva* (for whatever reason) or is still trying to figure out which Personality of Godhead s/he should worship as *ista deva*, the best course of action consists in offering respect to all the Personalities of Godhead when the occasion arises - for example on the occasion of their festivals (such as Durga puja, Ganesh puja, etc) and to study carefully all the parts of the scriptures, including those passages that glorify a Personality of Godhead that is not our specific *ista devata*.

For example, the *Bhagavata Purana* is dedicated mostly to the glories of Krishna, but there are many passages glorifying the various *avataras* of Vishnu, as well as Shiva, etc. At the very least, a devotee of Krishna should carefully and respectfully read also those passages and sincerely offer homage and worship. This thread of thought leads us to another important word in this verse: *anucintayan*, where *anu* means "according to the genuine method", "by following the proper instructions". Inventing new methods of meditation and worship is always a very risky business, because we cannot be sure of the results of such practice. It is much better to abide by the principles established by the great realized souls and by the genuine scriptures, that must be studied very attentively and sincerely before we attempt to present some new perspective on spiritual life. In the famous *Bhakti rasamrita sindhu*, compiled by Rupa Gosvami, we find this illuminating verse: *sruti smriti puranadi pancaratra vidhim vina aikantiki harer bhaktir utpatayaiva kalpate* (1.2.101), "So-called exclusive *bhakti* to Hari (Vishnu/ Krishna) that is not in accordance to the *sruti* and the

smriti, including the *Puranas* and all the other Vedic scriptures, and does not respect the rules of the *Pancaratra*, is nothing more than a fantasy creating unnecessary problems to society".

VERSE 9

कविं पुराणमनुशासितारं

kaviṁ purāṇamanuśāsītāraṁ

अणोरणीयंसमनुस्मरेद्यः ।

aṇoraṇīyaṁsamanusmaredyah ।

सर्वस्य धातारमचिन्त्यरूपं

sarvasya dhātāramacintyarūpaṁ

आदित्यवर्णं तमसः परस्तात् ॥ ८-९ ॥

ādityavarṇaṁ tamaśaḥ parastāt ॥ 8-9 ॥

kaviṁ: the poet/ the scholar; *purānam*: ancient; *anusasitaram*: he who controls everything; *anoh*: than the atom; *aniyamsam*: smaller; *anusmaret*: one should remember/ meditate on; *yah*: s/he (the devotee); *sarvasya*: of all; *dhataram*: the one who sustains; *acintya*: inconceivable; *rupam*: form; *aditya*: the sun; *varnam*: the color; *tamaśah*: the darkness; *parastat*: that transcends/ overcomes.

"One should remember (the Lord) as the omniscient, the primeval, who controls everything, so small that is contained inside the atom. He maintains everyone/ everything, and his form is inconceivable, as bright as the sun, transcendental to darkness (of ignorance)."

The word *kavi* means "all-knowing", or "very expert", and has passed into ordinary use to describe a poet or an Ayurvedic doctor, indicating that such positions should be occupied only by extremely knowledgeable persons. Of course the sum total of all consciousness must be the repository of all scholarly knowledge and be omniscient by definition, so the Supreme Personality of Godhead includes all the consciousness of Brahman and Paramatma and all beings.

Meditation on the Personality of Godhead should always be respectful and loving, aware of his supreme position. This means that one should not meditate on those fake and so-called artistic images of Krishna and other divine Personalities that show imaginative negative qualities or limitations or defects - such as eyeglasses for a weak eyesight, or similar nonsense. Even depictions of actual *lila* episodes where the Lord shows perplexity or sorrow or similar difficult situations - for example in his early childhood - should be considered only within the context of the consciousness of the unlimited glories of Bhagavan, and this means that the discussion of such episode or the contemplation of the connected images should be done only among very advanced devotees, who will not be confused by the apparent limitations shown by the Lord, and therefore will not be led to offensive ideas or behaviors.

The word *purana* means "ancient", "primeval", and reminds us that the Supreme Personality of Godhead is not a mere historical personality, a human being that started to exist at a particular time in a particular place, and is limited by those circumstances. The consciousness and knowledge of the Supreme Lord extend back into the beginning of time and beyond it, into the eternal unlimited non-manifested transcendental existence.

The word *anusasitaram* is also very important, because it expresses the unlimited power of the supreme conscious

intelligence that controls and sustains (*dhataram*) everything in the universe. Bhagavan is never poor or suffering, or lacking in anything. The supreme consciousness has a precise plan, and directs the entire play with great intelligence and artistry, as the best *kavi* (poet) would do.

The inconceivable form of the Lord is so subtle (*aniya*) that it even penetrates the atoms and at the same time sustains the entire cosmic manifestation, and pervades the heart of the soul of a microscopic unicellular organism and controls the immense body of a whale or elephant. The Lord is certainly not an ordinary cowherd boy who works at keeping the cows for his father or plays with the village girls: when Krishna manifests these activities, we should never take them cheaply, but we should always keep in mind these glories of Krishna described in the three central chapters of *Bhagavad gita*, universally considered the expression of the purest *bhakti*.

The word *dhata* means "maintainer", just like *dhara* means "holder" and *dharma* means "that by which (the world) is supported". Another connected word is *vidhata*, referring to the concept of God as destiny/ providence.

The poetic expression *aditya varnam tamasah parastat* offers a wonderful example for the existence of God: the sun is always gloriously existing beyond the darkness of the night, and similarly ignorance is nothing but absence of knowledge. Actually darkness and ignorance do not have an existence of their own - they are just due to our lack of proper perception. *Aditya varna* is literally "the color of the sun", and has nothing to do with ordinary limited perception and the darkness of the night, when the sun remains non-visible.

Darkness (*tamasah*) is nothing but the inability to see the sun, that continues to exist in the sky independently from the movements of

the earth and the relative position of the observers on the earth, who see the sun setting and disappearing into the night. Even the clouds that sometimes appear to cover the sun owe their very existence to the radiance of the sun, that evaporates water from the earth. Similarly, this world is created and functions on the power of Brahman, and although temporary in nature, affords the embodied beings the enlivening experience of spiritual evolution, that can be compared to the blessing of rain and the nourishment created by rains in the form of food grains.

The word *varna* means "color" and applies to the transcendental radiance of the Lord. Some confused people, who are still victims of the damages of the Aryan race theory, remain unable to explain why great Aryas such as Krishna and Arjuna are described in *Mahabharata* as black in complexion, because they would like to think that the best specimen of the Aryan race are blond, white complexioned and with blue eyes like the German nazis said.

So they imaginatively state that Krishna's and Vishnu's black complexion, described in many scriptures besides *Mahabharata*, "symbolizes the non-manifested". Too bad that everybody on the battlefield was perfectly able to see Krishna in his black-complexioned body. Others - usually Indians - "solve the problem" by painting Krishna and Arjuna, and Vishnu, too, with a white complexion and distribute such images as genuine for commercial and devotional purposes.

The fact is that such people have a materialistic mind, focused on material bodily identification, and as long as they remain attached to such ignorance, they will never be able to understand the wonderful and radiant form of the Lord, that is black in complexion but resplendent of light like the sun. The example of the sun is also meant to remind us that the mere presence of the Lord is source of immense purification. There is another extremely famous verse from *Garuda purana*, regularly used in all the daily

rituals of purification and sacrifice, that re-cites: *om apavitrah pavitro va sarvavasthan gato 'pi va yah smaret pundarikaksam sa bahyabhyantarāh suciḥ*, "Anyone who remembers the lotus-eyed Lord (Vishnu) is immediately and completely purified, both internally and externally, irrespectively of the conditions he has gone through."

VERSE 10

प्रयाणकाले मनसाऽचलेन

prayāṇakāle manasā'calena

भक्त्या युक्तो योगबलेन चैव ।

bhaktiā yukto yogabalena caiva ।

भ्रुवोर्मध्ये प्राणमावेश्य सम्यक्

bhruvormadhye prāṇamāveśya samyak

स तं परं पुरुषमुपैति दिव्यम् ॥ ८-१० ॥

sa taṁ paraṁ puruṣamupaiti divyam ॥ 8-10 ॥

prayana: of the end/ dissolution (of the body); *kale*: at the time of; *manasa*: with the mind; *acalena*: that is not distracted by moving in different directions; *bhaktiā*: with devotion; *yuktah*: united/ connected; *yoga-balena*: by the intense power of union/ *yoga*; *ca*: and; *iva*: certainly; *bhruvoh*: of the eyebrows; *madhye*: in the middle; *pranam*: the *prana*; *avesya*: keeping; *samyag*: fully/ completely controlled; *sah*: s/he; *tam*: that; *param*: supreme; *purusam*: person; *upaiti*: attains; *divyam*: divine.

"One who, at the time of death, (remembers the Lord) without any distraction of the mind, with devotion and powerfully connected through *yoga*, and perfectly keeping the *prana*

between one's eyebrows, attains that divine/ radiant supreme Person."

It is interesting to note that the words *deva*, *divya*, etc, derive from the root *div*, that means "resplendent", and also gave origin to the word *diva*, "day", as the time when there is sunlight, and *dyauh*, "space", or "sky", from where the light comes. From this linguistic family we have the English words *divinity*, *deity*, *divine*, *divination*, *day*, the Latin word *deus* and *divinus*, and probably also the Greek word *Zeus*.

The attribute *divya*, "divine" is clearly referred here to the *tam param purusham*, "that supreme Person", indicating the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Krishna was previously talking of the Supreme Lord as himself, and now he is making a subtle distinction, to highlight the need to maintain the meditation on the awareness of the immense power and majesty (*aisvarya*) of the Lord, and prevent all possibility of confusion with ordinary personalities in this world.

Those who do not like the *aisvarya* aspect of the Lord and prefer to meditate on his *madhurya* aspect, as in the most intimate *rasas* where Krishna is seen as a peer or even a subordinate to the devotee, should be extremely careful to avoid the disastrous danger of *prakrita sahajyism* - that is the tendency to see Krishna cheaply and simply imitate *rasas* instead of actually developing a solid spiritual consciousness.

Such *prakrtita sahajyas* can be recognized because they are lusty - not only and not necessarily about pursuing the pleasures of the flesh, but especially for recognition, followers, honors, fame, name, power, control of resources and people, or even just for the pleasure they derive from their contemplation of what they see as Krishna's activities in the most intimate *rasas* with his greatest devotees. Because these people have been confused by the

superficial external labeling of "spiritual" to anything that supports or concerns their political allegiance to some materialistic religious organization, they fall into the trap of believing that the thrill and pleasure they feel while reading and discussing such intimate activities is "spiritual" or "transcendental".

They mistake the meaning of the power of the *hladini shakti* ("pleasure potency") as intended to give pleasure to the "devotee" rather than to Krishna, so they are unwittingly taking the position of the *asuras*, who are envious of God and constantly try to take his place as the enjoyer. Such delusion is deeply rooted in the ignorant identification with the gross material body, so it's very easy to recognize *prakrita sahajyas*: that is anyone "relishes the ecstasy of Krishna's pastimes" but still has a material vision of bodily identification (regarding him/herself and/or others) and remains attached to labels, affiliations and allegiances to anything else that is not transcendental consciousness - in other words, the *ahankara* and *mamatva* that Krishna ordered us to drop already at the very beginning of his instructions.

The *shastras* and the genuine *acharyas* recommend that one should carefully avoid associating with *prakrita sahajyas* and hearing their discussions about Krishna, because it is easy to remain contaminated by their materialistic mentality, especially for neophytes who have not had sufficient access to the preliminary teachings of the *shastra*. It is not by mistake or chance that Krishna's most intimate activities have been "sealed" within the heart of the *Puranas*, surrounded by the effective protection of many chapters of solid spiritual instructions about *sadhana* and the science of the glories of God as they are explained in *Bhagavad gita*.

Therefore responsible devotees are always very careful about talking about intimate activities and subjects in the presence of non-qualified persons. Even the teachings of the *Gita*, that are

extremely safe in this regard, should not be presented to the wrong people (18.67) with the wrong motivations. They should always be accompanied by sufficient explanations so that uninterested or offensive people will automatically be kept at a distance.

We should also make an effort not to neglect the reference to entering (*avesya*) into the *prana* and controlling the vital airs by concentrating them between the eyebrows, in the *ajna chakra*, because it offers another rail of protection against the fall into the abyss of *prakrita sahajyism*.

It is true that the practice of *astanga yoga* as a mere physical and mental exercise, without a real connection to its original purpose - Self realization - is just insufficient and may even become an obstacle on the true path of perfection, but as with everything, we have the responsibility to make it work properly and utilize it in the way it was always meant to. It is not that the *prana* stops flowing and acting in the body of a pure *bhakta*, or that his/her mind and attention become independent from the *prana*. The science of *yoga* is held in the greatest esteem by Krishna, who keeps using the terms *yoga* and *yogi* to refer to the bona fide devotee and spiritualist.

It is true that the supreme *bhakti* is free from attachment to all personal pursuits of scholarship and social position (*anyabhilasita sunyam jnana-karmady anavritam anukulyena krisnanusilanam bhaktir uttama*, from *Bhakti rasamrita sindhu*, 1.1.11), but in our enthusiasm to embrace "the most exclusive and supreme method" we should not choose ignorance, complacency and arrogance as better substitutes of the knowledge, austerity and detachment offered by *jnana*, *karma* and *yoga*, that still remain very valuable instruments in devotional service.

VERSE 11

यदक्षरं वेदविदो वदन्ति

yadakṣaram vedavidō vadanti

विशन्ति यद्यतयो वीतरागाः ।

viśanti yadyatayo vītarāgāḥ ।

यदिच्छन्तो ब्रह्मचर्यं चरन्ति

yadicchanto brahmacaryam caranti

तत्ते पदं संग्रहेण प्रवक्ष्ये ॥ ८-११ ॥

tatte padam saṅgrahena pravakṣye || 8-11||

yad: that; *aksaram*: imperishable (Brahman/ the syllable Om/ Transcendence/ the spiritual world); *veda-vidah*: those who know the *Vedas*; *vadanti*: they explain; *visanti*: enter; *yad*: that; *yatayah*: the *sannyasis*/ the *yogis*/ those who make effort on the spiritual path; *vita-ragah*: having abandoned all attachments and identifications; *yad*: that; *icchantah*: they desire; *brahmacaryam*: the behavior of Brahman; *caranti*: move around; *tat*: that; *te*: them; *padam*: position/ destination/ stand; *sangrahena*: in summary; *pravyakṣye*: I will tell.

"(Now) I will tell you in summary about that imperishable (goal/ destination) described by those who know the *Veda*. (That destination) is entered by the great sages/ *sannyasis* who have become fully detached (from material illusion), and who practice *brahmacharya* with the purpose of attaining that destination."

As we have already seen previously, the word *aksharam* means "imperishable" and is applied to the Brahman or eternal transcendental principle of universal consciousness, expressed in this material manifestation with the primeval sound AUM or OM, called the *pranava omkara*. Why the *pranava omkara* ("the syllable *om* that is the energy of life") is the Brahman? Because it constitutes the subtle sound vibration of all energy.

Start a powerful electrical machinery or go near a heavy duty high tension electrical line wire, and hear the mechanical equivalent of the *pranava omkara*. The life in our body, too, has a bio-electrical nature, and all living organisms create a bio-magnetic field that is measurable through various devices, from the electro-encephalogram machine to the Kirlian camera, and so on.

All these mechanical devices record the presence of life in a body merely through the registration of its bio-magnetic field and currents, so we can safely say that even mainstream conventional science recognizes the connection between life and electricity. Besides the gross and goofy machines used by mainstream contemporary technology, there are natural devices in-built in our own body that are capable of detecting, controlling, manipulating and strengthening these bio-electrical/magnetic field and currents.

The nature of such physical devices is too subtle to be observed by the contemporary machineries, but it is explained clearly and precisely in the *yoga* literature, and it should be considered as the new frontier of science, where Vedic knowledge can help western mainstream academia to take a giant step into a deeper awareness of the universe.

Conventional scientists are baffled when examining the functions of the human brain, because they find that about 75% of the brain mass does not have any visible function. Through their lab experiments (some of which have been truly horrible and asuric)

they have labeled about 15% of the areas of the brain in ordinary people, engaging them in different bodily and mental activities, but nobody among their subjects seemed to be able to use the rest of the cerebral mass. Of course such considerable amount of "unknown brain territory" is not without a purpose, and it seems to fit with the huge uncharted regions of so-called "paranormal activities", that conventional science tends to ridicule and dismiss blindly because it cannot explain them.

What if these two huge ignorance pools within the academic scientism territory were one and the same? Vedic literature clearly says so, and it would be wise for contemporary academics to show some true scientific spirit and investigate the matter without being tied up and blinded by biased attitudes and prejudice and by the fear of having to rebuild a different and more realistic picture of the universe than the one they have come to cherish.

Already physicists have broken several walls of academic prejudice, at least in their own small circles, and in the process they have come to develop a great respect for Vedic knowledge regarding the structure of the universe. What about actually understanding the structure of the spirit and life itself? Is this science less important?

Those who know the *Vedas* (*veda-vidah*) directly enter (*visanti*) this subtle dimension of Brahman to experience it, and anyone else can do the same by following the proper process (*anucintayan*, 8.8, "according to the genuine method", "by following the proper instructions").

This is the greatest obstacle in the pursuance of the Vedic knowledge in mainstream conventional academia (of the "western" type): the students and the teachers do not give any importance to the basic requirement of "following the genuine method" as it is clearly, precisely and consistently presented in the Vedic texts

themselves. It is not possible to understand the subtle science of Brahman without modifying one's personal attitude, life style and choices, because the wrong attitudes and habits will obscure the subtle perception that the Brahman scientist needs to utilize.

This body of requirements for the Brahman scientist is called *brahmacharya*, "the behavior of Brahman". Influenced by the abrahamic ideologies, many people consider *brahmacharya* to be the exact equivalent of "chastity" or "sexual abstinence" vows observed by some priests or monks/ nuns, but that would be misleading.

Like the other *yama* and *niyama* requirements in the study and verification of the transcendental science, *brahmacharya* is much more than the superficial and mechanical control of the sense organs, that could even cause serious damage when it is done in the wrong way, without the proper knowledge and techniques.

What people call sexual energy is the fundamental energy/ power that sustains the body, and it is "sexual" only when it expresses itself through the lowest *chakras* in the body, i.e. the *muladhara* and *svadhisthana*, specifically positioned around the genital area. When this same energy, technically called *kundalini* in the *yoga* texts, is raised, channeled and sublimated through the proper *yoga* techniques, it expresses itself in very different forms: in the third *chakra* (from the bottom) called *manipura*. This power then emanates from the solar plexus, at the mouth of the stomach, and is expressed as will power, determination, courage in battle, enterprising spirit, control over one's mind and body and environment, and so on. In the fourth *chakra*, called *anahata*, located in the heart region, it is expressed as unconditional love, compassion, self-sacrifice, empathy, sensitivity etc.

In the fifth *chakra*, called *visuddha* and located in the throat, the same energy becomes manifest as the power of sound, another

immense and largely uncharted territory that conventional science should explore, especially in connection with bio-electricity and bio-magnetism, to understand how the ancient Vedic *mantras* applied by qualified persons were able to bring about such dramatic effects on the mental and material environment.

In the sixth *chakra*, called *ajna* and located in the forehead, in the area between the two eyebrows, it is expressed as cognition, understanding, vision, illumination, intuition and so on. In the seventh *chakra*, called *sahasrara* and located at the top of the head or the crown, it produces subtle spiritual manifestations of power that are observed as *tejas* (radiance) as depicted in the aura of divine personalities.

The word *brahmacharya* literally means "behaving as Brahman" and points to the need of dropping all identifications and attachments with the gross material body.

Obviously, this has a dramatic effect also on one's sexual behavior, because an individual that has overcome the gross material bodily identification leaves the platform where s/he sees bodies and evaluates them in terms of the sexual pleasure they could provide, and rises to the platform where s/he sees persons and evaluates them in terms of their level of consciousness, behavior, aspirations and ultimately transcendental nature. That's a big change of perspective, and without effecting it, nobody will be able to enter Brahman (*aksaram visanti*), which is the purpose of Vedic knowledge.

Of course this method requires a serious effort (*yatahay, yatanti*, etc) and the renunciation to attachments and identifications (*vita ragah*), but it works in such a way that the armchair philosophers and academic professors will never be able to even imagine.

VERSE 12

सर्वद्वाराणि संयम्य मनो हृदि निरुध्य च ।

sarvadvārāṇi saṁyamya mano hṛdi nirudhya ca ।

मूर्धन्याधायात्मनः प्राणमास्थितो योगधारणाम् ॥ ८-१२ ॥

mūrdhnyārdhāyātmanah prāṇamāsthito yogadhāraṇām ॥ 8-12 ॥

sarva: all; *dvarani*: the doors; *samyamya*: controlling; *manah*: the mind; *hridi*: in the heart; *nirudhya*: fixing; *ca*: and; *murdhni*: in the head; *adhaya*: carrying; *atmanah*: the Atman; *pranam*: the *prana*; *asthitah*: firmly established; *yoga-dharanam*: the *dharana* of *yoga*.

"Controlling all the doors (of the body), keeping the mind within the heart and fixing the *prana* (carrying) the self to the top of the head, one is situated in the *yoga* meditation."

In this verse, Krishna continues to give instructions on how to prepare oneself for the time of death, so that the mind will be properly controlled and able to focus on the Transcendental Reality.

The expression *sarva dvarani samyamya* indicates the need to control the nine gates of the body, that correspond to the sense organs - two ears, two eyes, two nostrils, one mouth, one genital opening and one anus. Through these "doors of perception", the mind gathers impressions and feelings, and creates the seeds for action, therefore it is imperative to control them through the appropriate practice of *yoga*.

The *hatha* or *kriya yoga* teaches several techniques to build such power of control, including the *bandhas* or "blockages" that are

meant to show the difference of sensations between an opened "door" and a closed one.

However, controlling something means we are able to stop the function or apply the function precisely in the way we intend to. It does not necessarily mean keeping the function blocked or eliminating the function.

In *bhakti yoga*, the method of controlling the senses is performed by the deliberate choice of following the *yama* and *niyama* rules and regulations as per instructions of the *guru*, and by the active engagement in devotional service through its 64 specific practices, from *guru pada asraya* (accepting a teacher and guide), *diksha* (initiation), *guru seva* (service to the *guru*), *sat dharma siksa* (learning about *dharma* and transcendence), *prccha* (asking questions), *sadhu sanga* (keeping company of the *sadhus*), *bhoga tyaga* (accepting what is favorable to the process and rejecting what is unfavorable), *tirtha vasa* (residing in a holy place), *yavat nirvaha pratigraha* (accepting and consuming only what is basically required), *upavasa* (fasting and observing vows), *dhatri asvattha go vipra vaisnava pujana* (offering respect to the Mother or *amalaki* and banyan trees, the cows, the *brahmanas* and the *vaishnavas*), *aparadha adi dure visarjana* (carefully avoiding to commit any offense), *asat sanga tyaga* (abandoning the company of bad people), *bahu sisya griha grantha kala-abhyasa vyakhyana visarjana* (avoiding to accept many students, construct large and expensive temples or *ashramas*, get tied by academic scholarship and/ or study selectively only what seems convenient), *samatva* (being balanced in joys and sorrows, or gains and loss, and being straightforward in one's dealings), *soka vasa* (controlling the tendency to worry and complain), *deva sastra ninda visarjana* (abstaining from disrespect towards other Personalities of Godhead and genuine *shastras*), *visnu vaisnava ninda visarjana* (abstaining from disrespect towards Vishnu and genuine devotees of Vishnu),

gramya katha visarjana (avoiding superficial discussions or mundane stories), *ahimsa* (abstaining from causing anxiety or pain to any living entity, directly or indirectly), *sravana* (listening to discussions about God), *kirtana* (discussing about God), *smarana* (remembering God), *arcana* (engaging in worshiping God), *vandana* (offering one's homage to God), *pada sevana* (following God's instructions), *dasya* (considering oneself God's servant), *sakhya* (considering God as one's friend), *atma nivedana* (dedicating oneself completely to God), *agre nrtya* (dancing for the Deity), *gita* (singing), *vijnapti* (keeping one's mind open to change and new understanding), *dandavat nati* (offering prostrations), *abhyutthana* (standing up as a sign of respect), *anuvrajya* (following a sacred procession), *tirtha gati* (going to the places of pilgrimage), *parikrama* (walking around a sacred object in sign of respect), *stava patha* (reciting famous prayers composed by self-realized souls), *japa* (chanting a *mantra* softly or mentally), *sankirtana* (chanting or singing loudly in the company of others), *dhupa malya gandhadi mahaprasada bhोजना* (consuming or enjoying the incense, garlands, perfumes etc and food that have been first offered to God), *aratrika mahotsava darsana* (attending the *arati* ritual ceremonies and the religious festivals), *sri-murti darsana* (seeing the Deity), *nija priya dana* (offering God things that we like), *dhyana* (meditating or contemplating), *tadiya sevana* (serving those persons or things that are connected to God, such as the tulasi *plant* and its leaves, the devotees, Mathura-Vrindavana and the *Bhagavata Purana*), *krsna arthe akhila cesta* (trying to do everything as Krishna wants), *tat krpa avalokana* (seeking his mercy), *janma dina adi mahotsava* (observing the specific celebrations connected to the Lord), *saranagati* (complete surrender, that consists in praying for spontaneous attraction, offering glorification and desiring to improve in devotional service), *kartika adi vrata* (observing the religious vows such as Kartika vrata), *vaisnava laksana* (wearing the symbols of *vaishnavas*, ie. *tilaka* and *tulasi kanthi mala*) and so on.

The expression *mano hridi nirudhya*, "keeping the mind within the heart", means that one should concentrate on the Self. In the heart both the individual soul and the supreme soul reside, and the proper seat of the mind is the heart as well.

The expression *adhaya atmanah pranam*, "the *prana* carrying the self" refers to the *prana kosha*, the covering/ wrapping of the self that consists of vital energy. *Yoga* teaches that the individual self is covered by five layers of body - two of which are precisely the mind and the *prana*. These five *koshas* are:

1. *annamaya* (gross physical body made of *anna*, "food"),
2. *pranamaya* (etheric or energetic body made of life "airs"),
3. *manomaya* (astral or subtle body made of mind),
4. *jnanamaya* (identification or rationalization, made of cognitive substance or intelligence), and
5. *anandamaya* (spiritual magnetic field made of happiness, that can be distorted by the *ahankara*).

The expression *yoga dharana* specifically refers to the *anga* of *yoga* consisting in keeping one's attention powerfully focused on the object of one's meditation. After attaining this ability, *dharana* is further developed into *dhyana* or dynamic meditation, and finally in *samadhi*, constant consciousness of the object of meditation.

VERSE 13

ओमित्येकाक्षरं ब्रह्म व्याहरन्मामनुस्मरन् ।

omityekākṣaram brahma vyāharanmāmanusmaran ।

यः प्रयाति त्यजन्देहं स याति परमां गतिम् ॥ ८-१३ ॥

yaḥ prayāti tyajandeham sa yāti paramām gatim ॥ 8-13 ॥

om: om; *iti*: like this *eka*: one; *aksaram*: syllable/ imperishable; *brahma*: Brahman; *vyaharan*: vibrating; *mam*: me; *anusmaran*: remembering; *yah*: s/he; *prayati*: leaves/ departs; *tyajan*: leaving; *deham*: the body; *sah*: s/he; *yati*: attains; *paramam*: the supreme; *gatim*: destination.

"Vibrating the Om, this one transcendental syllable/ the syllable form of the One Brahman, and remembering me, s/he who departs leaving the body attains the supreme destination."

The expression *om brahma aksharam* indicates that the transcendental primordial vibration "AUM" is Brahman itself, as we have seen in the previous verses and commentaries.

Among the various quotes, the *Upanishads* clearly mention this meditation: "O Satyakama, this Brahman is Om... one who meditates on the *parama purusha* as the syllable Om is lifted to the world of Brahman" (*Prasna Upanishad*, 5.1-2, 5), "I will tell you of that goal described by all *Vedas*, the purpose of all austerities and *brahmacharya*: it is Om" (*Katha Upanishad*, 1.2.14-15). *Bhagavata Purana* also confirms it: *abhyasena manasa suddham trivrid brahma aksaram param*, "One should practice meditation on the pure and supreme syllable composed by three letters" (2.1.17).

The supreme destination is the liberated level of consciousness we call Brahman, Paramatma and Bhagavan: these three are aspects of the same *tattva*, as confirmed in *Bhagavata Purana* (1.2.11): *vadanti tat tattva-vidas tattvam yaj jnanam advayam, brahmeti paramatmeti bhagavan iti sabdyate*, "Those who know Reality explain that it is One undivided Consciousness/ Knowledge, called Brahman, Paramatma and Bhagavan."

Attaining this level of consciousness can happen suddenly, in a strike of realization or illumination, defined as *sadyo mukti*, perfect

instant liberation or *prakasa*. It can also happen through a gradual program for liberation called *krama mukti*, or *sadhana* - in *bhakti yoga* this is called *sadhana bhakti* or *vaidhi bhakti*.

The word *vyaharan*, "vibrating", does not necessarily imply a verbalization, as the *pranava omkara* is a subtle vibration that also exists at the level of the mind and the causal body. Some people believe that chanting the *pranava omkara* is an "impersonalist practice" that should be discarded, in favor of the exclusive chanting of the Hare Krishna *mantra* - *hare krsna, hare krsna, krsna krsna, hare hare, hare rama, hare rama, rama rama, hare hare*. However, we do not find any such instruction in *Bhagavad gita*, *Bhagavata Purana* or in the instructions of the *acharyas*, therefore we must warn the uninformed people against such mental speculations.

Krishna in *Bhagavad gita* very clearly gives the instruction about the immense value of the *omkara* consciousness, and there is no reason why a devotee of Krishna should disregard or even worse, ridicule or oppose such direct order of Krishna. Of course, this does not mean that one should or could not chant the Hare Krishna *mantra*, too.

Some argue that the *pranava omkara* is already contained in the Hare Krishna *mantra*, and therefore it does not need to be chanted separately: in this case, too, there is also no need to disrespect, ridicule or oppose the separate chanting of the *pranava omkara* in those who practice it, or the genuine scriptures that present it. Such offensive behavior has no basis in Vedic tradition and is due to the abrahamic mentality that strives to destroy and insult whatever is perceived as "different" from whatever practice one is following.

The chanting of the *pranava omkara* and any other genuine *mantra* should be done as attentively as possible, and with an effort to understand its import and meaning - it should not be a

mechanical repetition, although even a mechanical repetition will eventually lead to a breakthrough in penetrating its meaning (Patanjali's *Yoga sutras*, 1.27, 28, 29).

As it is said, "no quantity, no quality"... The *japa* practice is helped by the conscious counting of the repetitions of the *mantras* to fulfill a *vrata*, or vow: this is very effective to better control the mind and support one's determination and habit-forming. The specific *mantra* and the number of repetitions, and the window of time to perform them, are all variables that should be discussed from time to time with one's *guru* according to the individual situation and possibilities of the *sadhaka*. The *guru* is personally responsible for the progress of his/her disciple, and has the duty to adjust the *sadhana* to make it easy enough to maintain it happily for a long time (9.2 *susukham kartum avyayam*), and difficult enough to stimulate a healthy effort for improvement.

This obviously mean that there can be no "one size fits all" *sadhana* method, especially in regard to the *mantra* and the number of repetitions during a specific period of time; believing and teaching that the same precise *sadhana* is equally good for everyone, and excluding the personal responsibility of the *guru* by replacing it with an impersonal loyalty and affiliation to an organization, in which the *sadhaka* only has duties and no rights, is a very dangerous situation, to be accepted only in emergencies, where there is no other option, and in any case there will be negative consequences in the course of time.

Religious organizations quickly become impersonal and materialistic, more interested in their own survival, aggrandizement, propagation and power than in the original purpose for which they were started. Therefore the *bhakti* literature clearly recommends that one should not accept too many disciples or build great temples.

VERSE 14

अनन्यचेताः सततं यो मां स्मरति नित्यशः ।

ananyacetāḥ satataṁ yo mām smarati nityaśaḥ ।

तस्याहं सुलभः पार्थ नित्ययुक्तस्य योगिनः ॥ ८-१४ ॥

tasyāhaṁ sulabhaḥ pārtha nityayuktasya yoginaḥ ॥ 8-14 ॥

ananya: nothing else; *cetaḥ*: thinking of; *satatam*: always/ constantly; *yah*: s/he; *mam*: me; *smarati*: remembers; *nityasah*: always/ regularly/ consistently; *tasya*: of him/ her; *aham*: I; *sulabhaḥ*: easy to attain; *partha*: o son of Pritha (Arjuna); *nitya*: always; *yuktasya*: who is engaged; *yoginah*: a devotee.

"O son of Pritha (Arjuna), for one who always constantly/ regularly remembers me without thinking of anything else, I am very easy to reach, because s/he is a yogi constantly connected (with me)."

The synonyms *satatam*, *nityasah*, *nitya* all indicate "always", "regularly", "consistently", and since the concept is repeated for three times in the same verse, we understand that it is extremely important - a *tri satya*, "three times true". Other synonyms are *sanatana*, *sasvata*, *dhruva*, and *sadatana*.

Krishna has been repeating many times, also in previous verses and in subsequent verses, that spiritual realization, the attainment of the supreme abode and transcendental liberation, requires a lot of work. The spiritual path is never a hobby, to be enjoyed in leisure time as a trendy activity to impress one's circle of friends or to de-stress after a busy week fighting for one's career and indulging in excesses of sense gratification. It is not a part-time job that we can pick up and drop and keep on the back burner while we

are giving priority to other concerns, identifications and attachments.

Of course we do not need to give up our family, job and social duties, but we must direct our entire life purpose towards the development of a transcendental consciousness in all circumstances - including our family relationships, our professional choices, and life style.

In all our activities, in all our concerns, in all our choices, we must always remember the Transcendental Reality, that gives a real meaning to our life. It is not so difficult: *yat karosi yad asnasi yaj juhoshi dadasi yat, yat tapasyasi kaunteya tat kurushva mad-arpanam*, "O Arjuna, whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you sacrifice, whatever you give as gift, whatever difficulty you face voluntarily, you should perform these (actions) as an offering to me" (9.27)

And also, *tesam satata-yuktanam bhajatam priti-purvakam, dadami buddhi-yogam tam yena mam upayanti te*, "To those who are always connected to me by serving me with love and devotion, I give the *buddhi yoga*, the engagement in intelligence, by which they will come to me." (10.10).

Another beautiful description of this union with the Supreme is found in Adi Shankara's *Soundarya Lahari*, specifically in this verse: *japo jalpah, silpam sakalam api mudra vicarana, gati pradaksinya kramanam, asanady ahuti vidhih, pranamah samvesah sukham akhila atmarpana drsa, saparyaparyayas tava bhavatu yan me vilasitam*, "Let every word of mine be a prayer to you, every movement of my hands be a ritual gesture to you, every step I take be a mark of respect for your image, every morsel of food I eat be a ritual sacrifice to you, every time I lay down be a prostration at your feet, and every act I perform be an act of worship to you." (27)

There is no need of changing one's legitimate position in regards to family, professional occupation, society, and so on: we can simply perform our regular activities with a higher consciousness, a spirit of divine service, and remember what is the purpose of life. On the other hand, those who take *sannyasa* artificially, dumping their responsibilities simply to live at the expenses of others, should not think that they are automatically on a transcendental position because they have "given up everything". That would be simply cheating themselves and the public in general. It is much better to continue to work sincerely to honor one's responsibilities, but with a *niskama* ("selfless") attitude.

Some may try to divide the path of *Bhagavad gita* in *karma misra bhakti*, *yoga misra bhakti*, *jnana misra bhakti* and *kevala bhakti* as if they were separate and independent methods chosen by different people, but this idea can be misleading, especially when presented to candidates who are still affected by materialistic desires for position, fame, name and distinction. The fact is that *karma* and *jnana* are the necessary preliminary steps that everyone must go through in order to ultimately attain the *kevala bhakti* platform. Irresponsibility and ignorance are not compatible with pure devotional service, and if they are not eliminated, they will inevitably cause the downfall of anyone, even of those who may pose as great devotees of Krishna. Why should a great devotee disregard and disobey Krishna's direct instructions? Who can run, without bothering to practice simple walking? It would be foolish, for someone who cannot even walk, to say that he prefers to run, and he does not walk because that is "below his standards".

In these three central chapters about pure devotion, after saying that one should properly qualify through *abhyasa* (practice) in the preliminary steps of *karma* and *jnana* (verses 7.17 to 7.29), Krishna continues in verses 8.5 to 8.10 by speaking about the *yogi's* attitude towards birth and death, and about *moksha*, that is

the position just before attaining perfection - a level that can be attained through proper *karma* and *jnana*. From verse 8.11 to 8.28, Krishna explains how the practice of *yoga*, the control of one's own mind, can take us to the supreme destination, called *kevala bhakti*, the attainment of perfection. It is a natural and safe process, that is expected to begin after several lifetimes of relative selfishness (7.19) and is a rare attainment (7.3).

The expression *su-labha* means "easy to attain", but also refers to a good aspiration and to a beneficial goal to be attained: apart from the basic *dharma* principles, we should only embrace the rules that are favorable to genuine progress, without trying to demonstrate our greatness to the public by the observance of rigid rules and regulations, strict austerities and vows. We should also avoid the tendency to impress others with the "*prema bhava bhakti* ecstasy" displays and the boasting about our sublime position in the hierarchy of *rasas*, because Krishna is easy to attain but not cheap.

VERSE 15

मामुपेत्य पुनर्जन्म दुःखालयमशाश्वतम् ।

māmupetya punarjanma duḥkhālayamaśāśvatam ।

नाप्नुवन्ति महात्मानः संसिद्धिं परमां गताः ॥ ८-१५ ॥

nāpnuvanti mahātmānaḥ saṁsiddhiṁ paramāṁ gatāḥ ॥ 8-15 ॥

mam: me; *upetya*: having attained; *punah*: again; *janma*: birth; *dukhhalayam*: full of misery; *asasvatam*: impermanent; *na*: not; *apnuvanti*: return; *maha-atmanah*: the great souls; *samsiddhim*: completely perfect; *paramam*: supreme; *gatah*: arrived.

"Having attained me, they do not (have to) take another birth, that is the cause of sufferings and impermanence. Such great souls have (already) reached the highest level of perfection."

After summarizing the various phases of the progress on the spiritual realization journey, Krishna declares that the supreme destination is a permanent position, where all aspirations are fulfilled, and there is no more reason to take another birth. The material world, and the material body in which we are born, are here called *duhkhalayam asasvatam*, an impermanent position, seat of all sufferings. This characteristic applies to all the planets of the universe and to all states of embodied life, from the position of Brahma (the creator of the universe) down to the lowest level of life, as all such bodies contain in themselves the seeds for rebirth in the cycle of *samsara*, as we will see in the next verse (*abrahma-bhuvanal lokah punar avartino 'rjuna*, 8.16).

The word *asasvatam* is the opposite of "eternal", that we have seen repeated three times in the previous verse, and highlights the difference between the material and the spiritual level.

VERSE 16

आब्रह्मभुवनल्लोकाः पुनरावर्तिनोऽर्जुन ।

ābrahmabhuvanāllokāḥ punarāvartino'rjuna ।

मामुपेत्य तु कौन्तेय पुनर्जन्म न विद्यते ॥ ८-१६ ॥

māmupetya tu kaunteya punarjanma na vidyate || 8-16 ||

abrahma: Brahmaloaka; *bhuvanat*: from the world; *lokah*: the planetary systems; *punah*: again; *avartinah*: those who return;

arjuna: o Arjuna; *mam*: me; *upetya*: having attained; *tu*: but; *kaunteya*: o Arjuna (son of Kunti); *punah*: again; *janma*: birth; *na*: not; *vidyate*: experiences.

"O Arjuna, (all these) worlds, from the planet of Brahma (downwards) (are places from which) one returns, but for one who has attained me, o son of Kunti (Arjuna), there is no more rebirth."

The highest planetary system is called Brahmaloaka, and is the abode of Brahma, the first created being in the universe.

Sometimes there is a confusion between *brahma* (with the long final *a*) and *brahman*, that is also sometimes written as *brahma* (without long final *a*); the former refers to the Personality of Godhead that manifests the variety of the universe in the secondary creation, and the latter refers to the unchangeable eternal and omnipresent Brahman, the transcendental reality of the spirit.

The first creation consists in the emanation of all the *brahmandas* ("eggs of Brahman") from the body of Mahavishnu while he is lying on the Karanodaka (*karana udaka*, "the ocean of causes"), like small bubbles of air from the pores of his skin. At the end of each breathing cycle of Mahavishnu, each and every universe is re-absorbed into the sleeping body of the Purusha Avatara, and at the beginning of the next cycle of breathing there is another emanation of *brahmandas*.

Within each of these innumerable *brahmandas*, that are radiant like the sun and are therefore called Hiranya ("golden"), Vishnu manifests in a direct emanation known as Garbhodakasayi (*garbha udaka sayi*, "lying on the ocean of the embryo") and from his navel a lake is formed, with an immense sprouting lotus flower.

Inside the lotus bud grows the *garbha* ("embryo") of Hiranya Vishnu, also called Hiranyagarbha or Brahma ("coming from

Brahman"). This Brahma begins the secondary creation of the universe. Each of the innumerable universes emanated by Mahavishnu (or Karanodakasayi Vishnu) has its own Garbhodakasayi Vishnu and Brahma.

In this stage, the various elements are manifested, then the planets, and the bodies of all living entities. All the species of all the living entities are created simultaneously, although some are manifested in a particular period of time and some disappear or appear again. The evolutionary theory expressed by Darwin does not contradict the simultaneous creation of all the species at the beginning of the cycle, because in fact the different species appear and disappear according to the particular environmental circumstances along history - it is indeed the "survival of the fittest".

Inside the *brahmanda*, the expanse of the universe is measured by the length of the stem of the lotus on which Brahma is born. Of course this is no ordinary lotus flower, just like the "umbilical lake" of Garbhodakasayi Vishnu has nothing to do with regular lakes - it is more like an immense amniotic bag made of subtle energy, the "higher waters" that are different from the ordinary waters we find in the earthly dimension. It is an ocean of space, filled with matter so subtle that it cannot even be considered gas yet, but nevertheless there is matter everywhere, and energy everywhere - a sort of subtle blueprint of the universal manifestation. Sometimes this stem is measured as 16 times the length of Brahma's arm, which gives the total expanse length of Brahma's body, from the lowest *chakra* to the highest *chakra*. Usually *yoga* practitioners are told there are 7 *chakras* (*sahasrara*, *ajna*, *visuddha*, *anahata*, *manipura*, *svadhisthana*, *muladhara*) along the human body, respectively at the top of the head, between the eyebrows, at the base of the throat, in the region of the heart, at the solar plexus, a little above the genitals and at the base of the spinal column.

These are considered the 7 earthly planetary systems, where it is calculated that 400,000 human species normally live, plus 8 million other animal and vegetal species.

However, there are also 7 *chakras* above the top of the head and 7 *chakras* below the base of the spinal column: their names are the same used to describe the various planetary systems of the universe. Above the head there are the *chakras* that constitute the worlds of the *upadevas* (including *yakshas*, *rakshasas*, *pisachas*, *nagas*, *uragas*, *kinnaras* or *pakshis*, *kimpurushas*, *vanaras*, *suparnas*, *charanas*, etc), the world of the *gandharvas* and *apsaras*, the world of the *siddhas* and *vidyadhara*s, and the worlds called *maharloka* or *pitri-loka* (with *Dhruvaloka* etc), *janaloka* (where the sons of Brahma like the Kumaras live), *tapoloka* (inhabited by mystic beings called *Vaibhraj*as) and *satyaloka* (the top of the lotus where Brahma himself resides). Below the root *chakra*, *atala* is located around the hips, *vitata* in the thighs, *sutata* in the knees, *talata* in the calves, *rasata* in the ankles, *mahata* in the feet, *patala* at the soles of the feet. Other minor *chakras* are in the palms of the hands, at the elbows, at the clavicles, at the shoulders and at the ears; these should correspond to minor worlds. This description in its entirety is called *tri-loka*, or the three divisions of planetary systems mentioned in many scriptures: the 3 groups of 7 *chakras* each.

Above *Satyaloka* we find the divine planets (*viraja*, *kailasa* and *vaikuntha*) that do not belong to the material universe and from which one does not return to the cycle of births and deaths, while from *Satyaloka* downwards we find the material planets, and the lower we go, the most dense and dark are the regions. The base of the lotus flower is the bottom of the universe, originated from the navel of *Garbhodakasayi Vishnu*, who in turn is lying on *Garbhodaka* ocean that fills half the *brahmanda*. This ocean, too, is certainly not made of the water as we know it on this planet.

Similarly, the bodies of the living entities who reside on the various planetary systems can be very different, although they are all composed by a combination of the material elements that are found all over the universe - *ahankara* (sense of identity), *buddhi* (intelligence), *manas* (mind), *akasa* (space), *vayu* (air, and also *prana* energy), *agni* (fire, and also light and heat), *apah* (water, and also all liquid substances) and *bhumi* (earth, and all all solid substances). Also, some living entities are so powerful that their mind can modify and re-arrange the configuration of material atoms and energy vibration frequencies, so it is very difficult to understand or describe what their bodies are really made of.

Because of the *tejas* (radiance) of the atomic rearrangement of their form - if this description can give the idea of the actual facts - these powerful beings are called *devas*, that literally means "luminous", "radiant". These *devas* who live on the highest planetary systems have a duration of life that is measured by the movements or orbits of their abodes, up to the very long duration of the life of Brahma, then at the end of the cycle all those who have developed a sufficiently evolved level of awareness are directly promoted to the transcendental existence.

VERSE 17

सहस्रयुगपर्यन्तमहर्षद् ब्रह्मणो विदुः ।

sahasrayugaparyantamaharyad brahmaṇo viduḥ ।

रात्रिं युगसहस्रान्तां तेऽहोरात्रविदो जनाः ॥ ८-१७ ॥

rātriṁ yugasahasrāntāṁ te'horātravidō janāḥ ॥ 8-17 ॥

sahasra-yuga one thousand *yugas*; *pari-antam*: after the full completion; *ahah*: one day; *yat*: of Brahma (the creator of this

universe); *brahmanah*: of Brahma; *viduh*: they know; *ratrim*: the night; *yuga-sahasra-antam*: at the end of 1000 *yugas*; *te*: they; *ahah-ratrah*: one full cycle composed by day and night; *vidah*: those who know; *janah*: the people.

"Those who have knowledge about the cycle of day and night know that one day of Brahma comprises 1,000 (cycles of) *yugas*, and the night also comprises 1,000 (cycles of) *yugas*."

According to the *Surya siddhanta* the calculation of the four ages is based on the "cycles of the Gods": Satya/ Krita yuga 4,800 years, Treta 3,600 years, Dvapara 2,400 years, Kali 1,200 years, for a total of 12,000 years. The "cycle" mentioned in this verse as a "year of the *devas*" composed by 365 earth years, calculating that one of our years is just one day for the *devas*, and therefore it gives the duration of the *yugas* respectively in Satya 1,728,000 years (or 80 cycles of 21,600 years), Treta 1,296,000 years (60 cycles of 21,600 years), Dvapara 864,000 years (40 cycles of 21,600 years), Kali 432,000 years (20 cycles of 21,600 years).

If, on the other hand, we consider a "cycle of the gods" as the passage of the Sun within the Great Zodiac (12 x 2,160), we find that the Kali yuga would be lasting 25,920 years, which is too similar to the astronomical cycle of the alignment of the solar system with the center of the galaxy.

One day of Brahma corresponds to 2000 cycles of the Great Zodiac, each 21,600 earth years, for a total of 4 billion 320 million years - a time window that, according to geologists, is very likely the actual age of Earth and the solar system. Why 2000 and not 1000? Because Brahma's day includes the same duration of day and night, as *Gita* clearly states. During Brahma's night (half of that time) the solar system remains unsuitable for the activities of life.

The number 4,320 is also found in other important astronomical references, as for example the cycle of Jupiter (that represented Amon Ra the Father God for the Egyptians, Zeus the King of Gods for the Greek, and Brihaspati the Guru of the Gods for the Indians) that goes around the entire zodiac in 12 years: multiplied into the 360 degrees of the circle, we get 4,320.

As we know, the ancient peoples gave great symbolic importance to mathematics, and not always to the decimal system. Sumerians, for example, had a numeric system based on 60: still today there is some trace of this system in the calculation of time - where one hour is 60 minutes and one minute is 60 seconds - and in the "dozen" measurement.

According to Plato, 6 is considered the "perfect number" because it is the sum of its divisors (1+2+3). It is easy to count to 12 on hand fingers, if we use the finger joints instead of the finger tips (as it is still done in India): each of the 4 main fingers has 3 joints, that can be counted by using the thumb of the same hand. By using the other hand and counting a finger every 12 cycle, we can easily count $12 \times 5 = 60$. By dividing the entire cycle of the precession of the equinoxes (25,920) into 6, we get 4,320.

Saturn is the Lord of Time both in the Greek (and Roman) symbolism and in India it is identified as Sani, the "Black Lord", an emanation of Shiva in his destructive aspect. In Egypt Saturn (Ptah) was known as "the Lord of the 30-year cycle", which multiplied for the 360 degrees of the circle, gives the duration of Heraclitus' Great Year: 10,800 years. Which, curiously, is also the number of the bricks in the Vedic altar, that multiplied into 40 (the number of the syllables in each verse) gives the total of the verses in *Rig Veda*: 432,000.

In other traditions, the "warriors of the end of the world" are 432,000, and 4,320 are the Einhrjarr warriors coming out from the

Valhalla on the day of Ragnarok for the final battle against Loki (800 warriors x 540 doors). The measurements of the Great Pyramid of Giza are based on the number 4,320: its height is 147.1 meters and is obtained by dividing the Earth's polar radius into 43,200, while its perimeter is obtained by dividing the Earth's equatorial radius for the same number (43,200). The measurements of the Angkor Vat temple, too, are based on the same number.

On the other hand, Sri Yuktesvar and David Frawley believe that the total of 12 "divine cycles" does not refer to the Kali yuga but to a Maha yuga, a complete cycle of 4 ages, of which Kali yuga would be only a fraction. To be precise, according to their calculation the ascending cycle of the Kali yuga started in 700 BCE with the imperialist age of Alexander of Macedonia and the foundation of Rome, while the descending cycle started in 500 CE with the beginning of the middle ages and ended in 1700 with the age of lights and the rediscovery of electricity.

Sri Yuktesvara also speaks of another important alignment of planets, with a cycle of about 12,000 years: its effect produces strong gravitational and magnetic effects, with both cosmic and solar and meteorological storms on Earth. As we will see later on, this cycle has been confirmed by modern research: every 12,000 to 13,000 years the spiral that is at the center of the galaxy enters an explosive phase lasting 1,000 years and characterized by the emission of gamma rays and particles of matter.

From the geological point of view, the last of these periods coincided with 10,600 BCE - the explosion of supernova Vela X, and the arrival into our solar system of its shock-wave of magnetized cosmic particles. This shock-wave modified the orbit of the Encke comet, that shattered against some other asteroid; one of the fragments fell on the Earth, more specifically in the Atlantic ocean, destroying Atlantis, causing the Flood remembered by the Sumerian culture (quoted in the Bible). This also caused the

inclination of the Earth's axis (that until then had been perpendicular to the ecliptic) and the sudden shifting of the earth crust, which radically changed the shape and position of the continents. This corresponds to the passage of the solar system into the cardinal sign of Leo, that had a great importance in the history of mankind, in Egypt but also in south America and in Asia.

Alchemist Fulcanelli connects the description of the Flood with the effect of the inversion of the poles, where Uranus, previously "constantly conjoint with Gaia", became distant. This movement shifted the south pole to Antarctica, a continent that had been lush green and a cradle of civilization, as shown by the famous map of Piri Reis. In the northern hemisphere, in what is today the arctic polar circle, there was the disappearance of another great civilization described by some Indian scholars - and recently surfaced thanks to the archaeological discoveries of Canadian Jenness and Danish Rasmussen Therkle and Birker Smith (the civilization of Thule or Tulla), described by Plato as originated by the hyperborean Apollo (the Sun).

In *Rig-Veda* (10, 89, 4) we find this verse: "With your power, you keep Heaven and Earth separated like the two wheels of a chariot are held by its axis". The verse refers to Svetadvipa Dhruvaloka, the polar star, the axis on which the "seven Rishis" of the Ursa Maior revolve in the movement symbolized by the *svastika*, and that according to another verse of *Rig Veda* (1, 24, 10) are "high above". Such an observation is possible only for someone who is standing at the north pole.

Anaximenes repeats this image, comparing the movement of the skies in the early times to the "rotation of a man's hat on his head". Irish astronomer Sir Robert Ball described the cycle of the year in northern Europe before the disaster, as a summer of 229 days, with a mild winter of 136 days. This refers to the shifting of the poles, not to the complete reversal, that is much rarer. According to

geological studies, a complete reversal happened 171 times in the last 76 million years, of which 14 times in the last 4,5 million years, the last time about 780,000 years (*Science*, 1969).

The movement itself can happen in very short periods, with an exponential increase in speed - 30 days could be enough to cover all the 180 degrees of the complete reversal - but the effects remain felt even for a thousand years, like it happened in the last episode, when the strata of geological material belonging to the 1,000 years after the shifting are magnetized towards various directions (that is, not aligned) before they return to the north-south alignment.

At present, the magnetic poles are already moving, through north Canada and Antarctica, at the speed of about 30 km/year, but as we have seen this speed could increase exponentially even without any warning. The seriousness of the situation is demonstrated by the fact that from 1970 to date, the Earth's magnetic field has already dropped 38% and is still dropping. The largest crack in the magnetic field, called south Atlantic Anomaly, is about 250,000 sq km and goes from south Africa to Brazil. Many satellites have already been damaged while crossing space above this region.

The most sensational correspondence discussed at present is between the beginning of the third Mayan calendar and the date offered by the Indian *Surya siddhanta* as the beginning of the Kali yuga, 3,102 BCE (3,113 BCE for the Mayans).

We know that in this period there was the sudden rise of the dynastic civilization in Egypt and the Sumerian civilization in present Irak, while the green plains of Sahara suddenly turned into a desert. In India, the catastrophe of those years has submerged the city of Dvaraka, the capital of the Yadu kingdom, Krishna's dynasty. It was a global event. Lonnie Thompson, glaciologist (ice researcher) at Ohio University, has collected a huge quantity of data analyzing the oxygen isotopes in the ice layers, as well as the

tree growth rings, the bone sediments in human skeletons, and the plant pollen deposits. Everything shows that about 3,100 BCE Earth suffered a climate disaster also connected to a peak of solar activity.

VERSE 18

अव्यक्ताद् व्यक्तयः सर्वाः प्रभवन्त्यहरागमे ।

avyaktād vyaktayaḥ sarvāḥ prabhavantyaharāgame ।

रात्र्यागमे प्रलीयन्ते तत्रैवाव्यक्तसंज्ञके ॥ ८-१८ ॥

rātryāgame praliyante tatraivāvyaktasañjñake ॥ 8-18 ॥

avyaktat: from the non-manifested state; *vyaktayah*: the manifestations; *sarvah*: all; *prabhavanti*: become emanated; *ahah*: of the day; *agame*: at the beginning; *ratri-agame*: at the beginning of the night; *praliyante*: they are dissolved; *tatra*: there/ in that; *eva*: certainly; *avyakta*: non-manifested; *samjnake*: is known.

"At the beginning of the day all manifestations/ beings rise from the (state of) non manifestation; at the beginning of the night they are dissolved into that same non-manifestation."

Here, *vyakta* and *avyakta* are utilized in a relative sense, just like sometimes the *devas* are called *amartya*, "immortals". From our human point of view, especially in Kali yuga, a duration of life that is calculated in millions of years can legitimately call for the definition of "immortality", and similarly the partial destruction of many planetary systems in our universe every 4 billion 320 million years can easily be considered a withdrawal of the creation, even if several planets remain still untouched.

As we have seen, there is a greater cycle of the entire lifetime of Brahma that covers a period of time that is even greater: 157,680,000 millions of years (4,320 millions x 365 x 100), where it becomes really difficult for our mind to conceive a beginning and an end. Yet, this greater cycle, too, is just the time of one breath for Mahavishnu.

The words *prabhavanti* and *praliyante* refer to the shorter cycle constituted by the day and night of Brahma. At the end of this cycle not all the planets are destroyed, so the state of non-manifestation mentioned in this verse is not the original *pradhana*. Only Bhur, Bhuvah and Svar are destroyed; the residents of the other planets (from Mahar to Tapas) move to Satya, where they take rest along with Brahma himself. On the other hand, at the end of the longer cycle constituted by the life of Brahma all the planets are destroyed and the universe is re-absorbed into Mahavishnu.

From the descriptions of the Vedic scriptures we understand that time is eternal, and there is no "end of the world", just end of cycles. We can become liberated from this cycle by attaining the full spiritual realization, or continue to incarnate in various species of life and on various planets, experiencing the immense range of pleasures and sufferings afforded by the various bodies of *devas*, human beings, animals and vegetal beings. Beyond all this, there is the unlimited expanse of the spiritual world, the eternal and unchanging existence of Brahman.

The correspondence between the macrocosm and the microcosm continues: at the level of Brahma, who is the universal creature, the day and the night correspond to very long cycles of activity and rest in the entire universe, while at the level of the ordinary human beings, the day and night are marked by the appearance and disappearance of the sun and bring cycles of activity and rest for the earthly creatures.

This concept of the parallel between the macrocosm and the microcosm is exquisitely Vedic in origin, but along the history leaked into other cultures, where it created strong mystic and alchemic movements awakened by this astonishing realization about the nature of the universe.

"As above, so below" is a very famous saying, extremely popular among the practitioners of what is called today wicca, witchcraft, magic or natural religion. It is the main foundation of all religious rituals, by which the adept calls the macrocosmic Deity into the microcosm of his/ her own heart, offers worship and obedience, and propitiates the attainment of something that s/he desires, through the practice of prayer and symbolic presentations.

Some commentators explain that the 7 *chakras* within the human body should be identified as Bhur, Bhuvah, Svar, Mahar, Jana, Tapa and Satya respectively from the base of the spine to the crown on the head. According to this perspective, below Bhur there are the 7 lower *chakras* of sub-human life, and above Satya there are no more planetary systems: this gives the calculation of the 14 planetary systems or 14 worlds that we often find in the *shastras*.

So, Bhur represents the planet earth, Bhuvah is the intermediate dimensions where the *upadevas* live, and Svar is the higher planetary system of the *devas*, where Indra and the Adityas live.

This interpretation is not necessarily at odds with the version we have described in the commentary to verse 8.16 (where the 7 *chakras* normally considered in the human body, along the spine, all represent the earthly level) because the total number of planets remains the same - they are only classified in a different number of categories. In regard to the subdivision of the centers of energy in the human body, this calculation could also be applied to the physical structure of the energy body, made of vortexes (physical

chakras), meridians (*nadis*) and nodes (*marmas*) from which the the subtle or causal forms of the structure are projected into the aura, that can expand for several feet outside the limits of the gross physical body.

VERSE 19

भूतग्रामः स एवायं भूत्वा भूत्वा प्रलीयते ।

bhūtagrāmaḥ sa evāyaṁ bhūtvā bhūtvā praliyate ।

रात्र्यागमेऽवशः पार्थ प्रभवत्यहरागमे ॥ ८-१९ ॥

rātryāgame'vaśaḥ pārtha prabhavatyaharāgame ॥ 8-19 ॥

bhuta-gramah: the aggregate of beings; *sah*: it; *eva*: certainly; *ayam*: this same; *bhutva bhutva*: coming to existence again and again; *praliyate*: is destroyed; *ratri-agame*: at the beginning of the night; *avasah*: automatically, controlled by higher laws; *partha*: o Arjuna (son of Pritha); *prabhavati*: it becomes manifest; *ahar-agame*: at the beginning of the day.

"O son of Pritha (Arjuna), all these beings certainly continue to appear and are dissolved again automatically at the beginning of the night, and manifest again when the day arrives."

In the second chapter, from verse 12 to 30, Krishna had already explained how the Atman goes through cycles of incarnations, that we could call manifestation and non-manifestation, corresponding to the birth and the death of the body, but is never destroyed.

Here, responding to Arjuna's question about the consciousness of the devotee at the time of death, Krishna repeats the concept of the cyclic manifestation and non-manifestation of the body, from the

macrocosmic to the microcosmic. Therefore we understand that there is no reason for anxiety or distress regarding death, just like we should not worry about "the end of the world". Nothing really ends: it just becomes invisible for some time.

The word *ayam* in this verse indicates that at the new manifestation at the beginning of the day of Brahma, it is those very same living beings of previous manifestation that are recycled, and obtain a new opportunity for action and development. So at the end of a body, or even at the end of a cycle of the universal manifestation, nothing is really lost. The conditioned souls simply "go to sleep" for some time, and then they "wake up" again to resume their activities, just like at any new day in one's regular lifetime. However, the conditioned beings cannot freely choose the type of body they are going to receive.

The word *avasah* in this verse means "without control", to indicate that they are transported up and down by the mighty tides or waves of the material world, that is often compared to an ocean. We should not think that such movements are casual and simply governed by chance, because there are natural laws in the world that act very subtly outside the limits of the knowledge of ordinary persons: the ignorant conclude that things happen "by chance", or "by coincidence" when they are unable to see the subtle laws of cause and effects that created the circumstances they are facing. Nothing happens by chance.

This higher law, or higher control authority that governs the movements of the conditioned beings and their new incarnation and condition of life (*bhuta*), is an impartial conscious power based on the two major factors of *karma* and *smarana*.

Karma ("actions") refers to the activities performed in previous lifetimes and their consequences, that create *samskaras* or *vasanas*, deep impressions in the causal body that give it a precise shape as

the blueprint of the future gross body. *Smarana* ("remembrance") is the conscious act by which we choose what we want to contemplate in our consciousness. The two factors are closely connected, because by repeating a particular type of action or set of actions - physically, verbally and mentally - the impression is created, and the habit makes it much easier to perform the action, almost spontaneously.

The constant or regular choice of remembering and enacting a particular activity creates a strong attraction towards the particular vibrational frequency (or mode, called *guna*), like a diapason tuning, and this organizes the matter to form the new body. It is an automatic process, governed by natural laws; although the Atman has a certain amount of free will, the stronger its conditionings are, the less freedom it will have in the choice of its next body. According to the level of consciousness that one has developed, the *ahankara* that is the foundation of the causal or astral body responds to the attraction of the thought-forms (*yam yam vapi smaran bhavam* 8.6).

When we speak of an impartial conscious power that governs the manifestation of the bodies in the universe, we imply that besides the "mechanics" or "dynamics" of the *guna*, *karma* and *smarana*, there is some *deva*, some divine Personality, in charge of the process. Yama ("the regulator"), also called Dharma, is the personification of this natural law and oversees the process, even intervening directly or indirectly to modify it in case of necessity. Usually his intervention is indirect, as he sends his *yamadutas* ("servants of Yama") to capture those souls that are not ready for an immediate reincarnation and need a particular type of debriefing before proceeding into their next stages

At the time of death there can be several different scenarios. In the best situation, the *yogi* has a very clear mind and a high level of consciousness and therefore s/he can freely proceed to the

destination s/he had chosen, sometimes with the help of benevolent guides who have a subtle body made of mental energy.

As the substance of the bodies of these guides is subject to the laws of the mind and expressed in the forms of symbols, each individual will see them through the filters of cultural expectations: as angels with wide swan-like wings and immaculate white tunics, or as radiant *vishnudutas* having a form similar to Vishnu's, or as one's loved relatives and friends who died before us, or any other form that the mind accepts as positive, benevolent and friendly.

If the deceased person is confused and still has material identifications and attachments connected to the previous body and circumstances, his/ her mind will play several tricks, bringing up various memories and visions of the past, present and future, sometimes all mixed together, and even visions of alternate realities according to his/ her unfulfilled desires and aspirations. Depending on his/ her good *karma*, *guna* and *smarana*, the deceased will be attracted by different colors of lights and other sensory perceptions that appear in this period between lives, and that attraction will lead to the circumstances where the next body will be developed.

Sometimes the deceased is visited by visions of guides that may appear benevolent or angry, but these simply have the function of stimulating a response that will decide the direction of the new incarnation.

In some cases, when the deceased is sincere and inquisitive, and humbly asks for help, these guides hold a consultation with him/her, not unlike university professors discussing a new curriculum and exams with a student, and there can be a thorough analysis of the karmic journey of the individual over a number of lifetimes.

The consultation of the akasic records, guarded by an assistant of Yama called Chitragupta, is generally a very important factor in this process.

It is very interesting to note that this particular exploration of the "between lifetimes" situation and the analysis of the various lifetimes can be performed also while one is still in the body, during the period of the current lifetime, through specific techniques that are called astral traveling.

With or without a guidance in this gross physical dimension, the "explorer" can enter the subtle dimensions of the afterlife (that are always existing within our minds and all around us in the subtle dimension) and even meet those same guides that s/he would meet after death and before the next incarnation.

This experience could be compared to a dream, but it is much more vivid than a dream, and gives very good and useful realizations; sometimes it is called "conscious dream" or "shamanic journey".

The same facilities are available at the end of the day of Brahma, when most of the planets and the bodies of the conditioned souls are withdrawn into the cosmic sleep.

VERSE 20

परस्तस्मात्तु भावोऽन्योऽव्यक्तोऽव्यक्तात्सनातनः ।

parastasmāttu bhāvo'nyo'vyakto'vyaktātsanātanaḥ ।

यः स सर्वेषु भूतेषु नश्यत्सु न विनश्यति ॥ ८-२० ॥

yaḥ sa sarveṣu bhūteṣu naśyatsu na vinaśyati ॥ 8-20 ॥

parah: supreme, transcendental; *tasmat*: that; *tu*: but; *bhavah*: nature; *anyo*: other; *avyaktah*: non-manifested; *avyaktat*: from the

non-manifested; *sanatah*: eternal; *yah*: s/he; *sah*: s/he; *sarvesu*: in all; *bhutesu*: beings/ conditions of life; *nasyatsu*: while being destroyed; *na*: not; *vinasyati*: is destroyed.

"But there is another nature, different from this non-manifested (state), a non-manifested (nature) that is eternal and is not dissolved when all the beings are dissolved."

Previously (2.28), Krishna had already mentioned that the beings (*bhutani*) regularly go through a cycle of non-manifested, manifested, and non-manifested again. This applies to the individual bodies, and in a wider sense also to the varieties of species that appear and disappear cyclically in the various planets according to the different circumstances.

Sometimes an animal species that had been considered extinct is seen to appear again, and sometimes entire sets of species - like the dinosaurs - disappear completely: this fact does not contradict the creation system explained in Vedic scriptures, because the genetic blueprint of the various species is always existing, either in the manifested or non-manifested state.

When Krishna spoke of manifestation and non-manifestation in the cycle of creation and dissolution of the universe, either partial (at the end of Brahma's day) or complete (at the end of Brahma's life), he was talking about the bodies, physical and mental, that are made of material substance inevitably destined to change and transformation. However, Krishna had already clearly stated that there are two natures or *prakritis* (7.5), one called material or *adhibhuta*, and the other called spiritual or *adhyatma*. Their respective products are the material bodies and the *jivatmans* or the individual souls.

It is important to understand that the temporary non-manifested state (*avyakta*) described in the previous verses (8.18, 8.19) is

different from the unchangeable and eternal original state of the soul. Therefore the expression *anyo avyakto avyaktat sanatanah* makes a clear distinction between the non-manifested state of matter (that is not eternal and is subject to change) and the non-manifested state of the Atman/ Brahman (that is eternal and is not subject to change).

To make a practical example, we can compare the former to the darkness of the night and the latter to the darkness of the unlimited space in the universe. Night is a temporary situation, where our vision is limited by the absence of the sunlight and other similar factors, while the apparent darkness of the unlimited space is in fact full of the sun's energy and light, but due to the perspective of the distance there is a feeling of space and darkness of the background. However, a photovoltaic device, like the solar sails used in some spaceships, is not limited by this apparent darkness and easily perceives and absorbs the solar radiations and energy. To the materialist, transcendental reality seems not to exist because he is unable to see it with his physical eyes, but that does not mean that transcendental reality does not exist at all. We just need to develop the suitable vision and perception.

It is important to understand the meaning of *jivabhuta* as compared to *jivatman*. They are similar definitions, but there is an important difference: the *jivabhuta* is a "condition of being" in which the *jiva* finds itself, and it is always a material condition, a material body, a material situation. On the other hand, the *jivatman* is the individual soul itself, that as a *jivabhuta* is experiencing the material condition by falsely identifying with it.

This verse explains this difference, saying that the position of the *para prakriti* or *para bhava* is different from the position of the *apara prakriti*, in the sense that the souls are never non-manifested, even when they appear to have no body.

Later (15.17), Krishna will again confirm this fact, by saying that the *jivabhutas* are actually his eternal *amsas* ("parts", "limbs" or "cells") who appear in the material world of *prakriti*, and struggle with the six senses, starting from the mind (*mamaivamso jiva-loke jiva-bhutah sanatanah manah-shashtanindriyani prakriti-sthani karshati*). Does it mean that during the night of Brahma the conditioned living entities do not lose their self-consciousness, but remain somehow conscious, while their bodies are sleeping in the non-differentiated non-manifested state? Of course. Just like in our daily microcosm we have the night, when we experience deep sleep and the dreaming state, during the night of Brahma the conditioned living entities are suspended in a happy sleep in which they do not lose themselves.

Even during the time of the complete dissolution of the universe, the conditioned living entities, the *jivabhutas* are absorbed in the blissful radiance of the *brahmajyoti*, the non-differentiated white light of the pure consciousness, from which they will again emerge refreshed and ready for a new cycle of creation.

This *brahmajyoti* can also be attained at any time during the manifestation phase of the cycle of the universe, provided one has attained the Brahman realization and has abandoned all material identifications and attachments, even without developing an actual *siddha deha* or *siddha svarupa* (spiritual body). The *jivatman* remains in the radiant bliss of Brahman (*brahmananda*) in its *anu-atma* (atomic soul) form until s/he is ready to incarnate again and continue its development.

However, this temporary liberation is only a brief taste of the actual, permanent, fully cognizant and perfectly blissful state of liberation (the real *moksha*) that comes from the genuine development of the *svarupa-siddhi*; that highest perfection is called *param dhama* (supreme abode, supreme position).

VERSE 21

अव्यक्तोऽक्षर इत्युक्तस्तमाहुः परमां गतिम् ।

avyakto'kṣara ityuktastamāhuḥ paramāṁ gatim ।

यं प्राप्य न निवर्तन्ते तद्धाम परमं मम ॥ ८-२१ ॥

yaṁ prāpya na nivartante taddhāma paramaṁ mama ॥ 8-21 ॥

avyaktah: non-manifested (materially); *aksharah*: eternal - the Brahman or the Omkara; *iti*: like this; *uktah*: it is described; *tam*: that; *ahuh*: it is expressed/ called; *paramam*: supreme; *gatim*: destination; *yam*: which; *prapya*: by reaching; *na*: not; *nivartante*: returns; *tat*: that; *dhama*: abode/ position/ nature; *paramam*: supreme; *mama*: my.

"That eternal non-manifested (Brahman) is the highest destination/ goal. After attaining it, one does not fall back. That is my supreme abode."

While the previous verse was speaking about the *jivatmans*, the products of the *para prakriti* that are never dissolved even at the cyclic destruction of the entire universe, this verse is speaking about the *siddha vastu*, the eternal perfect spiritual world, that is the abode of the *siddha svarupas*, the eternal perfect spirit souls that have fully developed a transcendental body made of eternity, awareness and happiness.

Many people, who have an eminently materialistic vision - based on material body identification and affiliations - envision liberation (*moksha*) simply as a negative condition, in which there are no material ties, no identifications, to attachments, etc.

However, *moksha* is not an end, but just a beginning. Verse 18.54 clearly says that on the level of Brahman (*brahma-bhuta*), that is another definition for the liberated state, true devotional service (*mad bhaktim labhate param*) starts. Without personal relationships, there can be no *bhakti*, and without personalities there cannot be any personal relationships.

So there are personalities, and relationships, and activities on the liberated platform. Who can say that Krishna's nature or existence is void, or impersonal? It's full of *lilas* and *rasas*, activities and relationships: it is certainly not impersonal.

Also, all along the *Gita*, Krishna has been saying that those who are perfectly liberated attain him - his nature, his abode, etc - and then they do not return to the materially conditioned level again. Yet, we see Krishna descending into this world not only once (as he is evidently there talking to Arjuna), but regularly, from age to age (4.7).

There is not one single statement by which we can assume that Krishna takes on a material conditioned form when he descends, but rather there are several very clear and very incisive statements on the opposite: see 2.12 (we all exist eternally as distinct persons, including Krishna who is obviously not a conditioned soul), 3.22 (Krishna is not conditioned to act, still he is engaging in the proper activities to give the good example to people), 4.6 (Krishna manifests his form and activities out of his own *yogamaya* and not as a material condition of life), 4.9 (Krishna's birth and activities are not material), 7.6 (Krishna as the person - *aham* - is the origin of the entire universe), 7.7 to 7.12 (Krishna as the person - *aham* - is the essence and existence of everything), 7.24 (only the fools - *abuddhayah* - believe that Krishna has taken a temporary material personality), 7.25 (only the idiots - *mudhah* - are unable to understand that Krishna is eternal and unborn).

Again in later chapters we see 9.9-10 (Krishna manifests the creation of the universe, but he is always neutral and detached), 9.11 (only fools - *mudhah* - believe that Krishna takes a temporary material personality when he descends into this world), 10.2 (Krishna as the person - *aham* - is the source of all *devas* and *rishis*), 10.3 (one who understands this transcendental nature of the Personality of Godhead is on the liberated platform), 10.8 (Krishna as the person - *aham* - is the source of everything), from 10.19 to the end of the chapter (10.42) the transcendental nature and position of Krishna will be further elaborated, much like we had seen from 7.7 to 7.12, only in a more extensive way. In the 11th chapter, Arjuna penetrates this universal consciousness and existence personified by Krishna when he contemplates the universal form, the *Visva rupa*, that includes all the *devas* and all the planets and their inhabitants, that is presented as a mere partial emanation from Krishna the person.

From chapter 12 the statements become even clearer as the declared topic is *bhakti*, or personal devotion to God, which obviously implies a personal relationship, and not as a "second choice" for the simple minded unable to grasp the philosophical truths.

In 14.27, Krishna clearly states that he as the person - *aham* - is the foundation of the Brahman, the eternal existence of happiness, and 15.6 will speak about the *siddha vastu*, the *dhama param*, the supreme position, saying that the spiritual world is self-radiant and needs no sun or moon or fire.

Some commentators argue that Krishna speaks of himself - *aham* - as the impersonal principle of Brahman, but that is ridiculous. How can a statement based on a personal subject ("I") indicate an impersonal principle? And if this was the case, why is Krishna clearly saying that he is the foundation and origin (*pratistha*) of the eternal Brahman (14.27)?

The fact is that the liberated state, both while still living in a body (*jivanmukta*) and after leaving this body, is full of consciousness and happiness, and a void by definition is non-existent: therefore, it is *asat*, and cannot have any consciousness or any happiness. There could only be a cessation of suffering, as in the idea of *nirvana* among some Buddhists, but that's certainly not the *brahma nirvana* described in *Bhagavad gita*.

Suka rahasya Upanishad (40-42), *Bahuricha Upanishad* (5), *Nrisimha tapani Upanishad* (uttara, 4, 7), *Rudra hridaya Upanishad* (conclusion) explicitly describe the *param padam*, the supreme position, as *sat cit ananda*. The word *sat* expresses one of the most important concepts in Vedic knowledge, and by understanding its various levels of meanings, we can attain Self realization and liberation.

Sat means "existence, reality", and hence "essence, ontological being", "eternity, permanence" but also "spiritual, transcendental", "good, positive, virtuous", because whatever is good is supporting the existence of the universe for the progress of all the beings. This also means that only good exists positively - what we perceive as "bad" is merely the apparent absence of "good". So when the *shastra* describe Krishna consciousness as *sat*, it cannot be a non-existent void, as it has already been explained in 2.16, 17, 18.

The second attribute of the Supreme Existence is awareness, called *cit*, and sometimes describes as knowledge, cognizance, or consciousness. We have already seen that the essence of all existence is its knowledge, or its blueprint on the subtle level, so *sat* and *cit* cannot be separated, because they are one and the same. And if consciousness is the very nature of existence in the spiritual world, it means that such existence contains the knowledge and consciousness of everything that can exist - its pure ideal form, from which the material manifestation can subsequently take place in cycles of creation. This is the greatest possible variety, as it

contains all the original perfect forms of all the varieties that can ever exist in the past, present and future.

Finally, the third attribute of Transcendence is happiness, *ananda*. The personal transcendental level expressed by Krishna as "my nature" is characterized by the supreme happiness, and just as Krishna as the person is the foundation of the Brahman, the happiness of the *siddha vastu*, *siddha svarupa*, *cintamani dhama* and *param bhakti* is the foundation of the *brahmananda*, the happiness that is found in Brahman. To find this transcendental world one does not need to move physically or geographically: this *siddha vastu*, like the *siddha svarupa*, is contained within the *atman*, even within this body.

Where? Within the origin of the *prana* in the body, the *pranava* ("of the *prana*") *omkara*, the supreme vibration that is the source of everything. The *avyakta akshara* is not a material sound, but a subtle vibration frequency of energy that organizes and supports the existence of matter as we see it: therefore, being the origin of everything, it is described as the supreme level or supreme position, *parama gati* or *parama dhama*, but in fact it cannot be described fully by words.

In this verse, *ahuh* means "calling, expressing", and it also refers to consciously vibrating the *pranava omkara* as a practice of meditation on the subtle reality; *uktah* also means "pronounced", which reinforces the idea by repetition. In Patanjali's *Yoga sutras* (1.27, 28, 29) it is clearly said that the *pranava omkara* is the "description" of Isvara (God), and that by repeating this subtle sound, one comes to realize its meaning.

This practice automatically turns the consciousness towards the inner Reality and all obstacles disappear (*tasya vacakah pranavah, taj-japas tad-artha-bhavanam, tatah pratyak-cetanadhigamo'py antarayabhavash ca*).

VERSE 22

पुरुषः स परः पार्थ भक्त्या लभ्यस्त्वनन्यया ।

puruṣaḥ sa paraḥ pārtha bhaktyā labhyastvananyayā ।

यस्यान्तःस्थानि भूतानि येन सर्वमिदं ततम् ॥ ८-२२ ॥

yasyāntaḥsthāni bhūtāni yena sarvamidaṁ tatam ॥ 8-22 ॥

purushah: the principle of consciousness; *sah*: he; *parah*: superior, supreme; *partha*: o Arjuna (son of Pritha); *bhaktya*: through devotion; *labhyah*: can be obtained; *tu*: but; *ananyaya*: undivided; *yasya*: of him; *antah-sthani*: that are staying within; *bhutani*: all the beings/ conditions; *yena*: by him; *sarvam*: all; *idam*: this; *tatam*: pervaded.

"O Partha, this supreme Person can be attained by undivided devotion. Within him exist all these beings, and he pervades everything."

In this verse we find the definition *purushah parah*, "the Supreme Person". The *purusha* is the principle of consciousness, while *prakriti* is the principle of activity, therefore the Supreme Purusha is the sum total of all the consciousness. No single individual can be the sum total of all the consciousness: s/he can only connect to this supreme *purusha*, or "enter" into this supreme *purusha* (*visate tad anantaram*, 18.55) like one enters a great ocean or a great forest and becomes a part of it.

As we have already elaborated in the previous commentary, devotion or *bhakti* can never be applied to an impersonal object, what to speak of a "non-existence" or void.

The expression *bhaktya labhya*, "to be obtained through devotion" is a clear reference to the other instructions focusing on *bhakti*, devotion as the development of a loving service attitude through the dedication of all one's activities to God.

Some people interpret this devotion and worship as meant to be directed towards one's self, and apply Krishna's statements on *aham* ("I") and *mam* ("me") as referring to their own self or Atman. By following the discourse of Krishna about the Atman and its non-difference in quality with Brahman, they conclude that all the subsequent descriptions of the glories of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, the origin of all existences, should be understood as applying to the ordinary *jivatman*. This is a serious mistake, and because these confused people cannot understand the concept of *paramatman*, they end up worshipping their own material personality (*ahangrahopasana*). Some commentators confuse this idea with the concept of *advaita*, or "monism", but it is a mistake. Thinking oneself qualitatively one with God is not wrong, because the Atman is actually of the same nature of the Brahman: the difference is the "*aham*" in *ahangrahopasana*, that cannot refer to the Brahman in this meditation, simply because it is the "wrong" *aham* - it is the individual soul's ego, and not Krishna.

Along the *Bhagavad gita*, Krishna speaks of the Supreme Personality of Godhead sometimes in the first person as "I" and "me" (*aham, mam*) and sometimes in the third person as "he" and "him" (*yasya, yena, tam purusham*). However, he never applies the concept "you", because there is always a very clear distinction between the *jivatman* and the *paramatman*.

Atman and Brahman are qualitatively one, or "of the same nature" as Krishna says, but one (the Atman) depends on the other (Brahman, or Param Atman). It is true that the Parama Purusha (the Supreme Person) is within all living beings (18.61, *isvarah sarva-bhutanam hrid-dese tishthati*), but "residing in the heart of

all beings" does not mean "being the individual *atman*", because the individual *atman* is only in the heart of one body. Here the verse clearly says, *bhutani sthani*, "all the beings/ the multitude of beings exist in him".

If one wants to worship oneself, s/he should start by having the full knowledge of the past, present of future of all beings (7.26) and everywhere in the universe: it is easy to understand that such a consciousness cannot be an individual consciousness, by definition. Even the *paramatman* that is present in the heart of the individual as the soul of the soul, or the *atman* of the *atman*, is not the sum total of the Transcendental Reality (9.4, 9.5)

After attaining the level of perfect realization, one *enters* into the Supreme (18.55), which implies a differentiation that is present at least in the initial stage of the process: therefore the *ahangraha upasana* as a preliminary practice is totally useless. One could say that at least the neophyte moves his/ her attention away from the constant search of objects of enjoyment in the material world and focuses it towards the inner reality of Atman - but that was already done brilliantly in chapter 2 of *Gita* by simply explaining that the *atman* is the actual identity or self.

After understanding that simple point, it is better to direct one's devotion towards the Paramatman, rather than towards the Atman.

The word *ananya* means "not other", in the sense of "exclusive, complete, full, dedicated, concentrated, focused, uninterrupted, constant, consistent". Once again, Krishna is emphasizing that spiritual realization should not be a side dish in our life, a social opportunity, a hobby or a method to become more fit and healthy to better enjoy our senses: it is the only purpose of life, and we need to become fully dedicated into it, every single moment of our time, with every single act and thought.

VERSE 23

यत्र काले त्वनावृत्तिमावृत्तिं चैव योगिनः ।

yatra kāle tvanāvṛttimāvṛttim caiva yoginah ।

प्रयाता यान्ति तं कालं वक्ष्यामि भरतर्षभ ॥ ८-२३ ॥

prayātā yānti taṁ kālaṁ vakṣyāmi bharatarṣabha ॥ 8-23 ॥

yatra: there; *kale*: at that time; *tu*: but; *anavrittim*: no return; *avrittim*: return; *ca*: and; *eva*: certainly; *yoginah*: the *yogis*; *prayatah*: having left; *yanti*: they go; *taṁ*: that; *kalam*: moment/time; *vakshyami*: I will tell; *bharatarshabha*: o best of the Bharatas (Arjuna).

"O best of the Bharata dynasty (Arjuna), I will tell you at which time the *yogis* leave (the body) not to return or to return, and the time when they can attain (the supreme destination)."

We have seen in the commentary to verse 8.19 that at the time of death, the deceased can find various situations and circumstances, that will lead to rebirth on this planet or to the attainment of other levels of life.

Nothing happens by chance, not even the particular time and place of death: everything is created by a combination of *karma*, *guna* and *smarana* - past actions, the qualities or tendencies developed, and the concentration of the mind to remember a particular level of consciousness. The moment of death is important in regard to one lifetime just like the moment of the final exams is important for an entire course of studies, or the moment we choose to board a train for a very long journey, so intelligent people will do their best to arrange the appropriate circumstances to keep very focused and

attentive, so that there will be no mistakes caused by confusion or emotional imbalances.

A person who knows the Vedic science of the Self is not afraid of death in itself, but is concerned about the level of consciousness at the time of death, so s/he will give more importance to dignified and peaceful circumstances and environment than to the artificial and messy prolongation of life, as it happens too often in contemporary medical procedures. Resuscitation attempts, prolonged external life support, and unnecessary surgeries will simply confuse the dying person and cause fear, anger and resentment to develop in his/ her mind, and this in turn will most likely lead to a lower condition in the next lifetime.

Two serious legal and moral issues are connected to this topic: euthanasia and organ harvesting. These are very controversial issues, because mainstream culture and public opinion are conditioned to fear death it itself and to blindly accept the decisions of the medical establishment that are built on total disregard for the dignity and the personal choices and proper information of the patients. Also, there is a lot of deliberate misinformation about both issues, caused by partisan interests and biased beliefs.

Euthanasia (a Greek word literally meaning "good dying") is the legal definition for medically assisted suicide, which means intentionally ending a life on the request of the patient in order to relieve pain and suffering in a terminal medical condition where there is no hope for recovery - to allow the patient the blessing of a dignified and orderly death at the time of his/her choice. This may be done actively, as by administering a medication that will painlessly stop the heart or cause similar effects on the body, or passively, as by simply switching off the artificial life support on which the patient depends for heart stimulation and breathing. Active euthanasia is used when the mere suspension of artificial

life support would cause death only over a relatively prolonged period of time and entail a certain amount of sufferings.

The abrahamic ideologies put a blanket condemnation on all forms of suicide as a very serious sin because it gives the human being the power to decide on him or her own life and death, while in the Vedic system suicide is considered a very personal choice on which nobody else should have any say, except for the person who wants to die. A hot debate on the legal legitimacy of euthanasia is going on in several countries, and usually in the regions where Christian churches have more power, there is more persistence in prosecuting the patients who want to die peacefully and the doctors who are willing to help them.

But the really bad reputation of euthanasia is due to the arbitrary (and incorrect) application of the definition to the organized killing of people that the German Nazi regime did not consider "genetically fit" enough, especially based on racial considerations. There was nothing "good" about such deaths because those people were killed against their will, and without allowing them any dignity or peaceful or uplifting environment at all, so the term was misused and its distortion still causes similar fears in the minds of the general public opinion.

On the opposite side of the spectrum, organ donors are made to believe they are making a very good ethical and moral choice when they sign their legal declaration. Even when organs are harvested without the consent of the source patient, generally the public opinion tends to think that it is all for the best, because the receiving patient will get a new lease on life - and in any case the source patient was already dead. Or so they think.

Actually organs must be harvested when they are still functional, and if they are not implanted immediately, they need to be kept strictly under refrigeration at a very low temperature, because

death naturally brings about the decay of the body tissues, and in normal environmental conditions the organs become useless after mere minutes from death. So here the interests of the medical establishment intervene on the legislation to define the moment of death as the moment when the legally certified physician declares the source patient dead based on direct observation, usually focused on the absence of heart beat or brain waves. This means that the anxiety to harvest the organs of a patient and use them in their best shape possible could easily lead the doctor to speed up the procedure to the detriment of the source patient.

Also, the doctors do not give any consideration to the fact that the passage of death takes a longer time for the subtle body as compared to the reactions of the gross body, and this is precisely the crucial period when the level of the consciousness of the dying person should remain stable and peaceful, focused on the transcendental reality. Even after several minutes and sometimes even after hours from the moment when the heart stopped beating and the brain stopped showing signs of activity, the soul encased in the subtle body is still attached to the gross body, inside it or immediately around it, as it has been reported by many patients who had what are called NDEs or "near death experiences".

Sometimes a patient that has been declared dead returned to life spontaneously and unexpectedly, and the descriptions given by these patients consistently report that they were perfectly conscious of everything that was done on and around their bodies, even if they were observing the events from a point outside the body itself. The most impressive part of these stories is that such patients are able to describe exactly what happened, what the doctors said etc, even if their body was apparently dead or completely unconscious.

In the Vedic system, death normally occurs in a very quiet and peaceful way, and the ideal circumstances are those characterized by silence and solitude, just like when one sits for meditation in the

course of his/ her normal *yoga* practice. Of course the best scenario for a person who is dying consists in the loving support of evolved persons who encourage the departing soul to leave the body peacefully and happily and to continue in her/his journey, knowing that those who are left behind are not "bereaved" or "mourning" but simply remembering him/ her with affection and good wishes.

Dying peacefully during the night is always better than dying surrounded by callous medical professionals or even crying family members, and although in the next verse we will see that the night is less auspicious than the day, still it offers a greater amount of protection from the distraction and distress caused by emotional people who do not have sufficient realization and wisdom to see death in a positive way.

Sannyasis live alone and take distance from other people specifically because they are preparing for the passage of death, therefore even during the daytime they are unlikely to be disturbed by emotional people who will create negative feelings about their demise.

VERSE 24

अग्निर्जोतिरहः शुक्लः षण्मासा उत्तरायणम् ।

agnirjotirahaḥ śuklaḥ ṣaṅmāsā uttarāyaṇam ।

तत्र प्रयाता गच्छन्ति ब्रह्म ब्रह्मविदो जनाः ॥ ८-२४ ॥

tatra prayātā gacchanti brahma brahmavidō janāḥ ॥ 8-24 ॥

agnih: in the fire; *jyotih:* in the light; *ahah:* during daytime; *suklah:* during the bright fortnight of the waxing moon; *sat-masah:* during the six months; *uttarayanam:* of the northern journey of the sun;

tatra: there; *prayata*: by leaving; *gacchanti*: they go; *brahma*: to the Brahman; *brahma-vidah*: those who know Brahman; *janah*: the persons.

"In the fire, in the light, in the day, in the waxing moon, and in the six months of the *uttarayanam*: those who know Brahman attain Brahman departing at those times."

The most important part of this verse is the conclusion: *brahma vidah janah*, "those who know Brahman".

We should not delude ourselves into thinking that merely catching the proper time for our death will automatically take us to the spiritual world or to liberation, if we have not realized the Brahman - the Transcendental Reality of the Universal Consciousness - during our lifetime. So it is essential to understand that whatever dissertation we may conduct about the various auspicious or inauspicious moments for dying becomes irrelevant for those who are still conditioned by material identifications and attachments: for such people, there is no auspiciousness and no chance of attaining the supreme abode.

For those who have actually attained the level of liberation and realization, there are moments that are considered more auspicious or favorable, merely because they inspire happiness and enlightenment in the soul that is leaving for his/ her next journey after this lifetime. Such times have nothing particularly transcendental or magical about them, but they can certainly help, just like it is better to choose a sattvic place and time for our regular meditation, as per Krishna's instructions in *Gita* (6.10 to 6.13).

Of course, the circumstances mentioned in this verse apply to a society where people respect the dignity and privacy of others, live according to the natural rhythms of the universe, are free from bad

habits, have a keen sense of the purpose of life and the Vedic values and are not exposed to extensive pollution of the environment (including the sound and magnetic pollution).

Also, exceptions to this verse are other external factors that are considered even more inauspicious, such as war, natural disasters, any type of violent death, negative emotions expressed or cultivated or caused by the people around the dying person, or any other cause of fear or anger that would lower the level of consciousness of the dying person.

In the ideal circumstances taken for granted by the Vedic civilization, a human being enjoys not only a high quality of life, but even more importantly a high quality of death.

Fire (*agni*) refers both to illumination and cremation. The meaning of illumination is offered as an alternative to the daylight, because obviously during the day time there is no need for fire except for the cremation, but that is a subsequent factor that applies to a moment that comes after the precise time of death itself.

The most important window of time for the proper orientation of the consciousness consists in the minutes before and after the gross material body becomes lifeless.

Another important role of fire is the sacred flame of the sacrifice, that is carefully kept in every Vedic home, and transferred to the worship room or the kitchen when required. On the other hand, fire as a house heating facility does not have a central role in Vedic life, because of the mild climate characteristic of the places where people are situated in a sattvic mode.

Light is always given a great importance in Vedic culture and lifestyle, because it represents the radiance of the Brahman and has a positive effect on the mind, enlivening, enlightening and inspiring good feelings, therefore according to tradition there

should always be some lamp burning in the rooms even during the night when everyone is asleep. To avoid the dangers connected with live flames, Vedic homes had built-in niches for lamps and special safe lamps - ideally transparent ones - positioned high on the walls, and equipped with long wicks and a good store of oil or clarified butter to last for several hours.

Still today, in some temples, there is the tradition of the *akhanda dipa* ("eternal lamp") that is kept burning constantly day and night by adding clarified butter or special types of vegetal oils. Also other ordinary types of lamps are regularly offered by the visitors of all temples as a mark of respect and devotion to the Deity, and the most famous popular festival in India is still Divali or Dipavali, a name that literally means "many lamps", as people in every household and neighborhood light as many lamps as possible on the new moon night in the month of Kartika, in October-November each year.

The sun (*arci*) is undoubtedly the greatest and most powerful source of light in the universe, and therefore its visible presence is very auspicious, inspiring and enlightening. A sunny day gives happiness to the heart and lightens and comforts the mind, and therefore it can ease the crucial passage of death.

The other great influence on our planet is the moon, whose power creates the tides and controls the growth of plants. Ancient peoples also knew that the gravitational attraction of the moon, with its monthly cycles, had a deep influence on the mind, as well as on the menstrual periods of women, on the fermentation of brews and the preparation of medicines. The waxing moon brings a rising energy and an increasing amount of light during the night time, therefore it is considered auspicious. The two fortnights of the lunar cycle are called *sukla* ("white") and *krishna* ("black") to indicate the increasing and decreasing amount of moonlight.

Uttarayana is the definition given to the six months that go from the winter solstice to the summer solstice, and the days progressively become longer and brighter. It is said that on the highest planets of this universe, one day of the *devas* is equal to one entire earthly year, and therefore our six months from winter to summer constitute the daytime for them, and they can be approached more easily.

However, we must be very careful not to judge anybody's death circumstances, because it is always difficult to know exactly what level of consciousness an individual is able to maintain at each moment, and the reason why something had to happen. Sometimes an advanced soul just needs to burn a little bit more of *karma* that is still attached to that body, so death may occur in stressful or violent circumstances. On the other hand, sometimes a person has organized everything to have a very peaceful and dignified death, and still the consciousness remains disturbed from within, and s/he is attracted to a lower birth or worse.

We should never take anything for granted, and we should remember that self-complacency and self-righteousness are the first symptoms of pride and arrogance, which reinforce the material identifications and attachments... so by the very fact of remaining humble about our actual position and capabilities, we protect ourselves from falling down from such position. The following verses constitute a map of the subtle paths of the universe, by which a *yogi* can travel everywhere and choose to leave the material sphere or to remain in the higher levels of material enjoyment.

The archetypes of light, fire, waxing moon and increasing radiance of the sun dispose the mind towards enlightenment, while the opposite archetypes tend to weigh it down to fall back into material vibrations.

Similarly, the various purification rituals and pious activities are meant to elevate the vibrational frequency of the mind so that it can carry the soul to the highest levels of the material universe, up to the limits of liberation. These are also considered as valid as the auspicious environmental circumstances, if not more effective.

However, a true *yogi* transcends both paths - the light and the darkness - by constantly meditating on the Adhiyajna within the heart, therefore s/he can never be confused and s/he does not need to worry about external circumstances or ritualistic proceedings.

VERSE 25

धूमो रात्रिस्तथा कृष्णः षणमासा दक्षिणायनम् ।

dhūmo rātristathā kṛṣṇaḥ ṣaṅmāsā dakṣiṇāyanam ।

तत्र चान्द्रमसं ज्योतिर्योगी प्राप्य निवर्तते ॥ ८-२५ ॥

tatra cāndramasaṁ jyotiryogī prāpya nivartate ॥ 8-25 ॥

dhumah: in the smoke; *ratrih*: in the night; *tatha*: also; *krisnah*: the dark fortnight of the waning moon; *sat-masa*: the six months; *daksinayanam*: of the south-bound journey of the sun; *tatra*: there; *candramasam*: the moon sphere; *jyotih*: the light; *yogi*: the spiritual seeker; *prapya*: attaining; *nivartate*: comes back.

"In the smoke, in the night, in the waning moon and in the six months of the *dakshinayana*, the *yogi* reaches the lunar light and then comes back."

Those who have attained liberation, the supreme consciousness of the Transcendental Reality of Brahman, are free from all material identifications and attachments, and do not have any selfish independent desire to be pursued in the material world.

However, the moment of leaving one's material body is always critical, because the *yogi* might be attracted by the sattvic opportunity to engage in a devotional service to the Lord of the universe, by joining the *devas* in the administration of the cosmic affairs. The *uttarayana* path described in the previous verse as connected to the sun's journey in the sky is also called *devayana*, or "the path of the *devas*" because it opens the way to a beautiful tour of the higher planets, where one is welcome to stay until the time of the dissolution of the universe, in the company of great Personalities such as Brahma, Indra, and others, under the sphere of influence of the sun, Surya.

The *dakshinayana* path described in this verse gives the tour in the opposite direction, that is governed by Chandramasa, the sphere of the moon, and it is also known as the *pitri ayana*, the "path of the *pitris*", the dharmic departed souls, generally called "the ancestors".

Within the sphere of influence of the moon we find Pitriloka or Yamaloka, the dimension where Yamaraja or Dharmaraja lives, and where all the ordinary souls (not the liberated *yogis*) arrive after death for a consultation about their next incarnation program. The "bad people" are escorted here by the *yamadutas*, "the servants of Yamaraja", who serve as a sort of police officers in the after-death dimension. Good people either arrive there spontaneously or guided by the same *yamadutas*, who in this case are perceived as gentle, caring and luminous angels, as the mind of the deceased remains neutral and free from fear.

To understand how it is possible that the same beings can be perceived as brutal and scary law enforcers - even looking like some depictions of devils in the abrahamic tradition - or as a beautiful sort of social services workers - even looking like the angels or saints of the abrahamic tradition - we can make the example of a man who is in a rather dark room, where eyesight

cannot help much, and bumps into a mannequin wearing some bulky clothing.

Depending on the state of mind of the man, he will perceive the dummy either as an enemy or a friend, possibly mistaking it for a thief or a murderer if he is really scared, or as a dear friend who came to help him: it is all in the mind, like the perception of the snake in the rope. In the subtle dimension between lifetimes, all perceptions remain on the subtle level of the mind, therefore the shape we project on things becomes real for our own mind.

When they reach this sphere, the *yogis* that know Brahman (*brahma-vido janah*) and are free from material identifications and attachments are not directed to take another material body because they do not need to play out any more *karma*. However, they are welcome to stay as guests of Yamaraja and members of his household and court: these are the *pitris* to whom the *sraddha* rituals are offered.

The descendants of the great *brahmanas* and *rishis* know that their ancestors were pure, liberated souls who knew Brahman very well and had no material identification and attachment, so they offer the *sraddha* confidently that the presentations - *tarpana*, *homa* etc - will reach them. After all, the *pitris* are allowed to stay in Yama's house for a period of 10,000 years, in which they enjoy a very high level of quality of life, comparable to the most luxurious holiday resorts on this planet.

The *pitris* drink the *soma rasa* with the *devas*, help the confused departed souls and even astral travelers and shamans by giving counseling and guidance, and gather in assembly to discuss the events of the universe and how they can influence the people on earth in a positive way. They also have the power to visit earth in various shapes - as birds, as human beings etc - to test human beings and offer them blessings or curses, but they never engage

directly in any conflict, either between human beings or between *devas* and *asuras*.

At the end of their 10,000 years, they return to this earthly dimension to take a new material body and complete their service to the Lord and mankind by spreading their wisdom and knowledge, then they get another opportunity to leave the material dimension and attain Brahman.

In any case the *sraddha* rituals, the *tarpana* and the *svadha* oblations for the ancestors are always beneficial, even if those ancestors we are thinking about have not been able to attain Pitriloka, due to their lack of knowledge of Brahman, purity of heart and luggage of bad karmic reactions. Any action performed for their benefit will reach them wherever they are and will help them in their progress.

Another interesting point about this verse is the definition of day and night, and its application to the level of consciousness to be pursued at the time of death.

In verse 2.69, Krishna declared, "For a wise person, what is night for all creatures becomes the opportunity for regulated awakening, and the time when the creatures remain awake is night for him." In the commentary to that verse, we gave various levels of meanings, from the most literal (the most sattvic time is the *brahma muhurta*, the quiet hours of very early morning, about 2 hours before sunrise, when everybody else is sleeping - most people would call it "night") to the deepest, that refers to the day and night of consciousness itself as the light of knowledge and the darkness of ignorance respectively.

This deep and symbolic interpretation adds many layers of meaning to these two specific verses (8.24-25) because they elaborate on the various archetypal components of our mind, from

the sun of the conscious level to the moon of the emotional level, to the fire of dedication and the smoke of confusion, and the greater orbit of the *samsara* cycle based on the *guna* and *karma* that each individual cultivates in his/ her own human life and leads upwards (*uttarayana*) or downwards (*dakshinayana*) in the wheel of evolution-involution of the species.

We should remind our readers here that a man or woman who has misused the valuable opportunity of the human birth may very well be pushed to take birth in some animal or vegetal species, at least for some time.

Some commentators have called the *uttarayana* and the *dakshinayana* as *anavritti* and *avritti* respectively, indicating that the recommendations on the different moments of time simply apply to the level of consciousness and the motivation. According to this interpretation the *devayana* refers to the Supreme Personality of Godhead (the supreme *deva* by definition).

This means that the *yogis* who take this road do not stop at the higher planetary systems but go directly into the *siddha vastu*, the eternal spiritual world that is also called Vaikunthaloka.

VERSE 26

शुक्लकृष्णे गती ह्येते जगतः शाश्वते मते ।

śuklakṛṣṇe gatī hyete jagataḥ śāśvate mate ।

एकया यात्यनावृत्तिमन्ययावर्तते पुनः ॥ ८-२६ ॥

ekayā yātyanāvṛttimanyayāvartate punaḥ ॥ 8-26 ॥

sukla: in the white; *kṛṣṇe*: in the black; *gati*: destination; *hi*: certainly; *ete*: these; *jagataḥ*: of the universe; *sasvate*: eternal/

permanent; *mate*: are considered; *ekaya*: by one (only); *yati*: goes; *anavrittim*: without return; *anyaya*: by the other; *varate*: one returns; *punah*: again.

"These two paths of the world, the white and the black, are considered eternal. One takes to the non-return, and the other winds back."

Several times along the text of the *Bhagavad gita* (2.45, 4.22, 5.3, 7.27, 7.28, 15.5), Krishna says that we need to overcome the idea of duality, but some people get confused and conclude that we must eliminate all sense of discrimination and distinction, and that we must believe that everything is the same - all is "one".

While it is true that everything is connected, and coming from the same origin and the same great universal plan, it is nonsensical to think that everything is the same, and that every choice will bring the same results. We cannot say that *sat* and *asat* are on the same level, that *dharma* and *adharma* are equally valid, or that knowledge and ignorance will give the same benefits.

The illusion of duality (*dvandva moha*) consists in believing that one's existence is separated and independent, that we can hurt others to get whatever we want, and that there is an absolute value and importance in material differences such as pleasure and pain, gain and loss, success and failure, etc. All these things are relative and temporary, and they do not have a real permanent existence of their own - they are simply material conditions meant to keep us moving on in our pursuit of the permanent meaning of life. When we overcome this illusion, we realize what is important and what is not, what should be done and what should not be done (16.7 *pravrittim ca nivrittim ca*). This perception could be mistaken for duality, but it is not. It is intelligence, *viveka*, the power of proper discrimination that guides us along the right path, to obtain the desired results.

If there was really no difference or distinction, all the purpose of the Vedic knowledge would be lost, because whatever people would do, they would obtain the same result - enlightenment or conditioning: this idea is preposterous. There would be no meaning to the instructions of the *Vedas* and the missions of the *avatars*, the preaching of the *acharyas* and *rishis*, and the idea of *sadhana* would be ridiculous. Persons who are intelligent and sincere will be able to understand this point, while the foolish and materially motivated will remain confused and object that we are inconsistent.

Some people foolishly claim that all paths are equally good and should be equally considered valid and respectable, simply because there are those that have chosen to follow them as their affiliation. They call this "freedom of religion", but it is a mistaken definition. Freedom of religion, or freedom of thought, consists in having the legitimate right to think and believe whatever one wants, whether such beliefs are right or wrong, founded or unfounded. Nothing more.

The right to the freedom of religion does not make all opinions equally valid.

It does not authorize people to commit criminal actions simply because they believe such actions are legitimate according to their opinion. It does not invalidate the others' right to question or criticize an opinion or belief that is obviously illogical, contradictory, unethical or based on false data, or even advocating or supporting ignorance, cruelty, violence, selfishness (individual or collective), dishonesty, injustice, intolerance, oppression, greed, insensitivity, and other similar asuric characteristics.

Opinions should be allowed to exist as opinions, but they should never be allowed to materialize in actual aggressive or oppressive behaviors in society - simply because at that point they are not "opinions" any more. Acting out on wrong opinions becomes

wrongful action, another definition of crime, and criminals must be stopped.

The famous saying *sarva dharma samo bhava*, "all the manifestations of *dharma* are of the same nature", is often used by uninformed people to claim that "all religions are the same", so no ideology can be criticized (usually this means abrahamic ideologies cannot be criticized).

There are some Hindus who feel such statement to be fundamentally wrong, but because their ideas are not very clear, they respond by trying to deny that Hinduism is a religion to begin with - with the only result of losing their legally recognized rights and discouraging those who want a valid and healthy religious affiliation. Others react by resorting to racism or casteism, trying to establish that Hindus (as those who were born in the Indian race and from "high caste" families) are always right, because their birth makes them genetically different from the rest of the human beings. This weird idea is totally unsupported by any scientific evidence, but its fascination is so strong that its proponents do not even want to see that a growing number of individuals born in the Indian race and from "high caste" families easily become opposed to the Vedic knowledge and ideals, turning into cynical materialists, naxalites, criminals, or converting to Christianity or Islam or some other non-dharmic ideology. Nothing has changed in their physical genetic composition, but they hate the very idea of being somehow connected with Hinduism or Vedic culture.

The fact is that the quote says *sarva dharma samo bhava*, not *sarva mata samo bhava* ("all opinions are of the same nature"). The key word is *dharma*.

The meaning of *dharma* is always accompanied by a set of positive principles, of an eternal and universal nature (*sanatana dharma*) that promotes progress and happiness of everyone, therefore when

we translate the term as "religion", we are surmising that all the ideologies presently defined as "religions" are also based on the same positive principles. Yet, this is an illusory idea, that is not substantiated by facts, ideology, scriptural evidence or history of the behavior of those who claimed to be acting in the name of their religion (and were universally accepted as such).

Clever manipulators of debates will try to reply that bad people are found in all religious communities, but they will not be able to explain why an abrahamic who preaches killing people in the name of his religion should not be immediately stopped - unless they admit that abrahamic scriptures actually approve and recommend the action of killing people in the name of religion (or mindlessly destroying resources, enslaving, raping, lying, looting, etc), and that again, is certainly not within the category of "opinion".

Materialistic people, who identify with the gross body and birth, will propose the vision of *sva-dharma* or "specific duty" within society, saying that *dharma* is the duty connected to the inherent quality and tendency (*guna* and *karma*) of the individual, therefore since one is born to be good or bad, he will not be able to change that situation and therefore he should embrace it as his duty (*dharma*). But this is a fallacy, because there is no such thing as criminal *dharma*. It is true that *dharma* is the specific duty of each being, determined by *guna* and *karma*, but its meaning cannot be separated from its root, *dhr*, that means "to support". *Dharma* is what supports, not what damages. *Dharma* is about good qualities, not defects.

The purpose of the existence in this world is to evolve: *asato ma sad gamaya, tamaso ma jyotir gamaya, mrityor ma amritam gamaya* (*Brihad aranyaka Upanishad* 1.3.28), "from ignorance lead me to truth, from darkness lead me to light, from death lead me to immortality". Evolution means moving from bad to good, from defects to qualities.

But even if we want to state that a *sudra* - for example - should not directly study the *Vedas* or make an effort to improve his life in a sattvic direction, because he does not have the *guna* and *karma* to actually succeed in that effort, still we should remember that such a condition is simply temporary and relative, and they should be abandoned as much as possible.

Krisna will clearly state later in *Bhagavad gita* (18.66 *sarva dharman parityajya*) that we must abandon the pluralistic and dualistic vision of "many" different *dharmas* as rules for different levels of human evolution, because such divisions are simply referred to the temporary variety of bodies, that belongs to the category of the illusory dualities to be overcome. Of course *dharma*, as the universal and eternal ethical principles, must never be abandoned.

Vedic society and culture have always demonstrated immense tolerance and accommodating attitude towards freedom of opinion, freedom of expression and even freedom of lifestyle, but within the limits of non-aggression towards innocent and good members of the society - technically called *prajas*, "children" in the family of the sattvic king.

As soon as any individual tried to perform an act of aggression, he would immediately be stopped, either by the individual that was being attacked, or by the *kshatriya*, "the protector" of the *prajas*. The protection of the *prajas* is the only real duty of the *kshatriya*, because the Government has no business controlling what people think and believe.

The demonstration of this point is that in ancient times Vedic *kshatriyas* always showed perfect tolerance towards all religious traditions - Shaivas, Shaktas, Vaishnavas etc - and sometimes even directly funded and promoted all of them. The best example of this ideology is found in the tradition of Jagannatha ("the Lord of all")

in Puri, that reunites all the main Vedic *ista devata* in the same *tattva* without any contradiction; this was and is still considered the best approach for the choice of an *ista deva* for the king, so much that the king of Puri traditionally considers himself as the "younger brother" and "first servant" of Jagannatha.

Vedic rulers even had no problems with the proponents of antagonistic theories called *nastika darshanas* ("faithless perspectives") such as because the teachings of Charvaka (materialistic atheism), Buddha (Buddhism) and Jina (Jainism).

The word *nastika* refers to the denial of the authority of the genuine scriptures and the existence of a Supreme Godhead, a position that is totally at odds with the Vedic tradition. Yet neither materialistic atheism, materialistic agnosticism, Buddhism, Jainism have ever been persecuted in Vedic India. Even in more recent times (up to about 50 years ago) the refugees of various faiths - such as Hebrews, Christians and Lamaists - have always found a peaceful and friendly welcome from Hindus of all groups and denominations, especially when such refugees and settlers maintained an equally respectful attitude towards other faiths and especially towards *dharma*.

VERSE 27

नैते सृती पार्थ जानन्योगी मुह्यति कश्चन ।

naite sṛtī pārtha jānanyogī muhyati kaścana ।

तस्मात्सर्वेषु कालेषु योगयुक्तो भवार्जुन ॥ ८-२७ ॥

tasmātsarveṣu kāleṣu yogayukto bhavāṛjuna ॥ 8-27 ॥

na: not/ never; *ete*: these (two); *sriti*: different paths/ courses; *partha*: o Arjuna (son of Pritha); *janam*: knowing; *yogi*: a *yogi*;

muhyati: is confused; *kascana*: ever/ in any circumstance; *tasmat*: therefore; *sarvesu*: in all; *kalesu*: moments; *yoga-yuktah*: connected through *yoga*; *bhava*: become; *arjuna*: o Arjuna.

"O Partha, a *yogi* who knows these paths is never confused, therefore (you should) be engaged in *yoga* always."

The definitions of *yogi* and *yoga* indicated in this verse obviously refer to the *buddhi yoga*, that is the intelligent application of knowledge (*jnana yoga*) and performance of one's duty (*karma yoga*) in a spirit of devotion (*bhakti yoga*) regulated by a scientific method of activities (*kriya yoga*).

The progress in this *yoga* is clearly traced from the initial questioning about the purpose of life (*visada yoga*), the understanding of the difference between body and soul (*sankhya yoga*), the renunciation to material identifications and attachments (*sannyasa yoga*), the focusing of one's mind in meditation (*dhyana yoga*) that liberates from material ignorance (*taraka brahma yoga*). Each of these passages corresponds to a chapter in *Bhagavad gita*.

The exact center of the *Gita* is the next chapter, 9, that bears the title *raja guhya yoga*: the *yoga* of the supreme secret.

We should never fall in the trap of those commercial exploiters who teach that *yoga* is a physical and mental system of exercises meant to help in de-stressing and improving one's body shape so that it will be easier to engage in *artha* and *kama* - wealth acquisition and sense gratification.

It is true that *artha* and *kama* are legitimate *purusha arthas* ("purposes of human life") and there is nothing wrong with them, but they are not the purpose of *yoga*. A *yogi* may continue to give some space for *artha* and *kama* in his/ her life, but the real purpose of *yoga* is *moksha* (as declared by the name of the 18th and last chapter of *Gita*), but those energies and time invested in *artha* and

kama will be subtracted from the pursuit of *moksha*, and this will delay success in the ultimate purpose. Therefore Krishna clearly says that one should be very focused and not pursue any other concern (8.14, *ananya cetah*): this will make success very easy to attain (*su-labhah*). This is confirmed in Patanjali's *Yoga sutras* (1.21, 1.22) with the expressions *tivra-samveganam asannah*, "those who make a stronger effort attain a quicker result" and *mridu-madhyadhimatratvat tato 'pi visesah*, "going from mild to medium to intense" .

Some commentators express the belief that *Bhagavad gita* teaches that one should leave everything and take *sannyasa* in order to attain the supreme Consciousness, but this is not confirmed anywhere. Rather Krishna clearly says at the beginning of the chapter on *sannyasa yoga* (6.1) that real *sannyasa* is not about formal renunciation to occupational and family engagements, but simply about the dutiful performance of the activities within their circle of responsibilities but without being attached to enjoying its results (2.47, *ma phalesu kadacana*).

The most important factor is the knowledge or awareness of the spiritual reality, that gives a clear vision and dissipates confusion (2.13, 2.72, 4.35, 18.72). This knowledge is based on the *viveka*, the "intelligent discrimination" between *sat* and *asat* - what is eternal and spiritual on one side, and what is temporary and material on the other side. Here is precisely the meaning of the previous verses as applied to the *sukla* and the *krishna*, the white path and the black path.

The word *kascana* ("ever", "in any circumstance") suggests that a person who is situated in *buddhi yoga* can make the perfect choice in all circumstances, either favorable or unfavorable, because a journey is about the direction in which one is traveling, not about the position that one may have achieved at any given time along the road.

Similarly, Krishna instruction *sarvesu kalesu yoga-yukta bhava*, "always be a *yogi* at all times", refers to the level of consciousness in different situations, not to a particular position or moment in life, such as the time we dedicate to our regulated *sadhana* exercises or the stage in which we renounce all other responsibilities to simply lead "a spiritual life".

In fact, the danger of this reductive vision according to which one can practice *yoga* only in certain circumstances and at certain times is that that one can easily miss the entire point of *yoga* and become mechanical, egotistic, self-righteous, arrogant, and totally confused about which is the white path and which is the black path.

The evidence of such downfall is given by those so-called *sannyasis* that are engaged in activities and behaviors that are explicitly forbidden for *sannyasis*, and demonstrate a very strong tendency to material identification and affiliation, attachments and belonging, and materially based duality.

The worst and most serious symptoms or examples of such behaviors are illicit sexual relationships and power-mongering politics; where by "illicit" we intend any sexual relationship that is contrary to the fundamental principles of *dharma* and by politics we intend a dishonest game of selfishness and duality that is contrary to truthfulness.

At another and more physical and superficial level of meaning, that applies to the material structure of the universe, the proper knowledge and practice of *yoga* towards the two paths called *deva yana* and *pitri yana*, enables the *yogi* to utilize both or either in a conscious and progressive way, without becoming confused by the external circumstances and by the particular position that one might find him/herself in at the time of death.

VERSE 28

वेदेषु यज्ञेषु तपःसु चैव

vedeṣu yajñeṣu tapaḥsu caiva

दानेषु यत्पुण्यफलं प्रदिष्टम् ।

dāneṣu yatpuṇyaphalaṁ pradīṣṭam ।

अत्येति तत्सर्वमिदं विदित्वा

atyeti tatsarvamidaṁ viditvā

योगी परं स्थानमुपैति चाद्यम् ॥ ८-२८ ॥

yogī paraṁ sthānamupaiti cādyam ॥ 8-28 ॥

vedesu: in the study of Vedic scriptures/ in the pursuit of knowledge; *yajnesu*: in sacrifices/ sacred activities/ ritual performances/ sacred duties; *tapahsu*: in austerities; *ca*: and; *eva*: certainly; *danesu*: in charity; *yat*: that; *punya*: virtuous/ sattvic/ pure; *phalam*: fruit/ result; *pradistam*: indicated/ assigned/ declared by the scriptures; *atyeti*: surpasses/ exceeds/ is greater; *tat*: that; *sarvam*: all; *idam*: this; *viditva*: by knowing; *yogi*: the *yogi*; *param*: supreme; *sthanam*: position; *upaiti*: attains; *ca*: and; *adyam*: original/ primeval/ most important.

"(A *yogi*) obtains greater benefits than those acquired by the prescribed virtuous acts (*punya*) such as reciting the *Vedas*, performing *yajnas*, engaging in austerities and distributing charity. Knowing all this, a *yogi* attains the supreme and original position."

Both levels of meaning are confirmed here in this verse by Krishna: provided one knows (*viditva*) how things should be used in the proper way, both the white and the black paths can be used beneficially (*punya phalam*, "bring good results") "as indicated by

the Vedic scriptures" (*pradistam*). The factors of *veda*, *yajna*, *tapas* and *dana* are found in both genuine dharmic paths - the *anavritti* and the *avritti*, leading respectively to *devaloka* and to *pitriloka*. The white path is faster and the black path is slower, but they are not antagonistic to each other, because contrarily to the abrahamic idea of the "only one true path" that disproves or destroys other paths, the Vedic vision offers the intelligence to utilize all resources in a positive way.

Another similar verse to this one is found in 9.27: *yat karosi yad asnasi yaj juhosi dadasi yat, yat tapasyasi kaunteya tat kurushva mad-arpanam*, mentioning specifically *juhosi* as representing *yajna*, *dadasi* representing charity, and *tapasyasi* representing *tapas*.

There *karosi* ("you do") summarizes all other activities and behaviors that in this verse are regulated by the prescriptions of Vedic texts and/ or by the proper knowledge (*veda*).

We can therefore add another layer of meaning to the discussion about *sat* and *asat* as "proper" and "improper" and about *viveka* and *dvandva* as "choosing with intelligence" as compared to "choosing whimsically".

Some say that the recitation of the *Vedas* and the practice of *yajnas*, *tapas* and charity belong to the *karma kanda* section or the scriptures and are followed by the *smarta* Hindus (*smarta* meaning "those who follow the *smriti* scriptures"), and *therefore* they belong to the black path of the *pitris*, and *therefore* they are to be abandoned in favor of complete renunciation and dedication to the path of God (*deva ayana*). Realistically, in their opinion this idea is equated to the formal acceptance of the order of *sannyasa* in their particular religious organization, the purely theoretical of philosophical contemplation on the Supreme Consciousness as the union of Atman with Brahman, or the contemplation of the

activities of the Supreme Personality of Godhead in a superficial devotional attitude not supported by *jnana* or *karma*. Krishna does not advocate any of these, so those who claim to consider *Bhagavad gita* as their authority should carefully examine their views, and make sure they have not misinterpreted other texts, too.

The expression *sarvam viditva* indicates that in the Vedic vision, a *yogi* should know everything, both the material (*apara*) and the spiritual (*para*) knowledge, because he needs a sufficient understanding of both in order to work within this body, within this universe, and render a useful and favorable service to God, as stated in the *bhakti* literature (*Bhakti rasamrita sindhu*.1.1.11) as *anukulyena krishna-anusilanam bhaktir uttama*, "supreme *bhakti* consists of the activities that are favorable to the service to Krishna".

The adjective *anukula* ("favorable") balances the other affirmation in the same verse according to which pure *bhakti* should be from selfish/ dualistic (*anya*, "other") personal desires (*anya-abhilasita sunyam*) and not overpowered or covered by *jnana* and *karma*. This statement could confuse some materialistic minds into thinking that a pure devotee can, or should, be ignorant or stupid and lazy or irresponsible.

In the verse quoted above, *jnana-karmady anavritam* means "not covered (overwhelmed, obstructed) by *jnana* and *karma*". Of course we must be careful to avoid arid/ theoretical academic attitude and attachment to social expectations within one's religious community, because these may become obstacles to sincere devotion. But if you totally remove *jnana* and *karma* (knowledge and sense of responsibility in honoring one's duties) you do not get *uttama bhakti* ("supreme devotion") consisting in *anukulyena krishnanusilanam* ("a behavior that is properly in accordance with the favorable service to Krishna"). We will instead get the foolish and irresponsible behavior of the *prakrita*

sahajyas ("materialistic simpletons"), the kind of people that Rupa Gosvami described in his *Bhakti rasamrita sindhu* as "unnecessary disturbance to society".

We should never forget that the original statement of this logical thread (8.24) subordinated the description of the two paths (the *sukla* and the *krishna*) to the preliminary realization of Brahman, which requires sufficient *jnana* and *vairagya* to destroy all material delusions to begin with.

The knowledge of Brahman (that is the same *tattva* also called Paramatma and Bhagavan) is also the pre-requisite mentioned in verse 2.46 with the expression *brahmanasya vijanatah*, "a person who really knows Brahman". That verse, too, expressed a sense of greater scope and inclusion in the direct knowledge of Brahman as compared to the various branches of knowledge contained in the different Vedic scriptures (*sarvesu vedesu*). Here in this verse the same idea is expressed by the word *atyeti*, that means "surpasses" but also "includes", as a greater number automatically includes the smaller numbers. Again, this does not mean that we should discard the smaller numbers and throw them away, thinking they are opponents, rivals, or obstacles to the existence or glory of the greater number.

Thus, as long as the *yogi* remains properly situated in the *buddhi* or *viveka* - the ability to distinguish *sat* from *asat*, *dharma* from *adharma*, there is no need of rejecting the knowledge of the structure and functions of the universe, especially since we still are in this universe and we need to work with it.

Precisely for this reason, in later chapters of *Bhagavad gita* Krishna will dedicate much time and energy in detailing about the three *gunas* and similar subjects that would appear to be "material".