

श्रीभगवानुवाच। अशोच्यानन्वशोचस्त्वं प्रज्ञावादांश्च भाषसे। गतासूनगतासूंश्च नानुशोचन्ति पण्डिताः॥ न त्वेवाहं जातु नासं न त्वं नेमे जनाधिपाः। न चैव न भविष्यामः सर्वे वयमतः परम्॥ देहि नोऽस्मिन्यथा देहे कौमारं यौवनं जरा। तथा देहान्तरप्राप्तिर्धरस्य न ह्यत्राति॥ मात्रास्पर्शास्तु कौन्तेय शीतोष्णसुखदुःखदाः। आगमापायिनोऽनित्यास्तांस्तितिक्षस्व भारत। यं त्वं न वदन्त्येते पुरुषं पुरुषर्षभ। समदुःखसुखं धीरं सोऽमृतत्वाय कल्पते॥ नासतो विद्यते भावा न भावो विद्यते सतः। उभयोरपि दृष्टोऽन्तस्त्वनयोस्तत्त्वदर्शिभिः॥ अविनाशि तु तद्विद्धि येन सर्वमिदं ततम्। विनाशमव्ययस्यास्य न कश्चित्कर्तुमर्हति॥ अन्तवन्त इमे देहा मयि यस्य तः परीरिणः। अतस्मिन्ने प्रयेयावत्सत्यं व्यस्ये॥ न ह्यसं त्वेति हन्तारं यश्चैनं मन्यते इतः॥ उभयौ तौ भविष्यती नो हति न मृत्या॥ न जायते म्रियते वा क्वचिन्नायं भूत्वा भविता वा न भूयः। अजोऽनतोऽशाश्वतोऽयं पुराणो न हन्यते हन्यमाने शरीरे॥ वेदां विनाशिनं नित्यं य एनमजमव्ययम्। कथं स पुरुषः पार्थ कं घातयति हन्ति कम्॥ वासांसि जीर्णानि यथा विहाय नवानि गृह्णाति नरोऽपराणि। तथा शरीराणि विहाय जीर्णान्यन्यानि संयाति नवानि देही॥ नैनं छिन्दन्ति शस्त्राणि नैनं दहति पावकः। न चैनं क्लेदयन्त्यापो न शोषयति मारुतः॥ अच्छेद्योऽयमदाहोऽयमक्लेद्योऽशोष्य एव च। नित्यः सर्वगतः स्थाणुरचलोऽयं परमत्तनः॥ अव्यक्तेऽयमचित्त्योऽमृताकार्योऽयमुच्यते॥ तस्मादेवं विदित्वैनं नानुशोचतु भूतस्योऽपि न चैनं निचिञ्जते॥ नित्यं वा पापं न कृत्वा तस्यापि न ह्यकारि नोऽपि पशुसि॥ जातस्य हि ध्रुवो मृत्युर्ध्रुवं जन्म मृतस्य च। तस्मादपरिहार्येऽर्थे न त्वं शोचितुमर्हसि॥ अव्यक्तादीनि भूतानि व्यक्तमध्यानि भारत। अव्यक्तनिधनान्येव तत्र का परिदेवना॥ आश्चर्यवत्पश्यति कश्चिदेनमाश्चर्यवद्ब्रूति तथैव चान्यः। आश्चर्यवच्चैनमन्यः शृणोति श्रुत्वाप्येनं वेद न चैव कश्चित्॥ देही नित्यमवध्योऽयं देहे सर्वस्य भारत। तस्मात्पुर्वाणि भूतानि न त्वं शोचितुमर्हसि॥ स्वधर्मं चाक्रीर्तित्वा श्रेयं चिन्तित्वा र्शनि। धर्म्याद्धि युद्धाच्छ्रेयं न्यक्तानि रजः न निघ्नते॥ बहूञ्छया चोपपन्नं स्वाद्भारं पावृतम्। सुखिनः क्षत्रियाः पापं लभन्ते युद्धमीदृशम्॥ अथ चेत्त्वमिमं धर्म्यं सङ्ग्रामं न करिष्यसि। ततः स्वधर्मं कीर्तिं च हित्वा पापमवाप्स्यसि॥ अकीर्तिं चापि भूतानि कथयिष्यन्ति तेऽव्ययाम्। सम्भावितस्य चाकीर्तिर्मरणादतिरिच्यते॥ भयाद्रणादुपरतं मंस्यन्ते त्वां महारथाः। येषां च त्वं बहुमतो भूत्वा यास्यसि लाघवम्॥ अवाच्यवादांश्च बहून्वदिष्यन्ति तवाहिताः। निन्दन्तस्तव सामर्थ्यं ततो दुःखतरं नु किम्॥ हतो वा प्राप्स्यसि स्वर्गं जित्वा वा भोक्ष्यसे महीम्। तस्मादुत्तिष्ठ कौन्तेय युद्धाय कृतनिश्चयः॥ *Upasana Yoga* भालाभौ जयाजयौ। ततो युद्धाय युज्यस्व नैवं पापमवाप्स्यसि॥ एषा तेऽभिहिता साङ्ख्ये बुद्धियोगे त्विमां शृणु। बुद्ध्या युक्तो यया पार्थ कर्मबन्धं प्रहास्यसि॥ नेहाभिक्रमनाशोऽस्ति प्रत्यवायो न विद्यते। स्वल्पमप्यस्य धर्मस्य त्रायते महतो भयात्॥

# The Bhagavad Gita

## Victory Over Grief And Death

by A.K. Aruna PDF version

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# THE BHAGAVAD GITA

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## Victory Over Grief And Death

Translation by A.K. Aruna

*PDF version*

Second Edition

Upasana Yoga Media

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# Invocation

नारायणं नमस्कृत्य नरं चैव नरोत्तमम्।  
देवीं सरस्वतीं चैव ततो जयमुदीरयेत्॥

*Nārāyaṇaṃ namaskṛtya naraṃ caiva narottamam.*

*Devīm sarasvatīm caiva tato jayam udīrayet.*

Bowing to Lord *Nārāyaṇa* (*Kṛṣṇa*), to *Nara*, the best of men [namely *Arjuna*], and to the Goddess [of knowledge] *Sarasvatī*, then may one commence the [lore called] *Jaya* (Victory).

*Mahābhārata* 1.1

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The Bhagavad Gita Sanskrit Key: Verse-by-Verse Grammar & Vocabulary

The Sanskrit Reading Tutor: *Read It, Click It, Hear It!*

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For the Sanskrit analysis and presentation of the *Gita*, we are all indebted to the *Bhashya* (commentary) of Sri Sankaracarya. For the concise English rendering of the import of the verses, again I fall at the feet of my teacher, Swami Dayananda Saraswati. His multi volume *Bhagavadgita Home Study Course* clearly expounds the depth and breadth of *Vyāsa*'s and *Śaṅkara*'s vision to the English speaking world of today.



# Using This Book

*The Bhagavad Gita: Victory Over Grief and Death* is a traditional translation using modern English. It follows the original understanding of these verses as being based upon the scriptures at the time of the *Bhagavad Gita*'s composition. The *Bhagavad Gītā* is easily seen as borrowing, paraphrasing, and elaborating upon the *Upaniṣad* scriptures which form the final conclusion of *Veda* scriptures, the *Vedānta*.

The *Upaniṣads* as well as the *Bhagavad Gītā* have as their topic the knowledge of the ultimate reality of this universe and thus of oneself, and also the means for preparing oneself to assimilate this subtle knowledge. This preparation involves values and spiritual disciplines to invoke a non-conflicted and composed mind which can appreciate the intelligence that informs and sustains this universe and one's life. This preparation is here called *yoga*.

The *Bhagavad Gītā* is intended for repeated reading. Its teaching is very subtle and integrates the core of oneself into the vastness of this universe of experience. Being transformative in re-envisioning oneself and the world, more depth and interconnectedness can be discovered with each repeated reading.

This English translation of the *Bhagavad Gītā* presents a way to quickly read the intended meanings of these verses. This requires more than the simple meanings of the words in the verses.

The Sanskrit language in which this text is composed allows for condensed verse formation. Verbs can be left out and need to be supplied from the context. Compounded Sanskrit words, like hyphenated words in English, require contextual expression of the relations of the words within the compound to each other. Pronouns, like adjectives, in Sanskrit have genders that need to be contextually

matched to the gendered nouns, which English cannot emulate. Sanskrit syntax allows a single inflected case ending of a word to express a wide variety of relationships to the rest of the sentence. This requires the supplying of English prepositions or other connecting expressions to convey the intended sense.

Epithets, such as “O Son of *Kuntī*,” are employed far more frequently in Sanskrit than in modern English. Most of these are not essential to the teaching and thus are replaced in the translation simply by the name of the addressed, for example, “O *Arjuna*” instead of “O Son of *Kuntī*.”

There being repetition of ideas and topics forming technical terms and concepts in a teaching such as the *Bhagavad Gītā*, single words denoting these ideas accumulate a contextual understanding that mere repetition of the literal English meaning of the words cannot convey. There is also a need to retain some of the most important of these technical terms in their original Sanskrit. This is accomplished by repeatedly supplying their meanings in English enough times so that the reader can learn a handful of these terms. An index of these words with their meanings and other concepts is provided in the back of the book to assist the reader.

Sometimes, words and concepts need to be introduced before or explained afterwards within a verse. Because of this, it is very helpful to indicate what the original verse says as opposed to the necessary introductions and explanations that have to be supplied. This is uniquely done here by employing a **bold** font to distinguish the original words of the *Bhagavad Gītā* from the embedded introductions and explanations in normal font. In this way, this unique translation supplies the contextual understanding of each verse when reading the entire translation, and just the original verse by reading only the **bold** font text.

Brief introductions are given to the entire *Bhagavad Gītā* and to each chapter.

## Using This Book

These set up the following teaching and connect the teaching to what has been said before and what will be said later.

The English translation of the *Bhagavad Gītā* here is written to remain as close as one can stay to the original Sanskrit. Those who have already been exposed to the Sanskrit of these verses should almost hear the original Sanskrit in their minds while reading *The Bhagavad Gita: Victory Over Grief and Death*.



## Pronunciation Key for Sanskrit Transliteration Characters

Char	Sounds-like	Location	Char	Sounds-like	Location
<i>a</i>	o in son	guttural	<i>ṭ</i>	t in but	cerebral
<i>ā</i>	o in bottle		<i>ṭh</i>	th in but how	
<i>i</i>	e in be	palatal	<i>ḍ</i>	d in god	
<i>ī</i>	ee in bee		<i>ḍh</i>	dh in godhead	
<i>u</i>	o in move	labial	<i>ṇ</i>	n in run	
<i>ū</i>	oo in moon		<i>t</i>	t in cat	
<i>ṛ</i>	rh in rhythm	cerebral	<i>th</i>	th in cat hair	dental
<i>ṝ</i>	rh - elongated		<i>d</i>	d in mad	
<i>ḷ</i>	le in table	dental	<i>dh</i>	dh in madhouse	
<i>e</i>	a in tape	guttural - palatal	<i>n</i>	n in numb	
<i>ai</i>	y in my		<i>p</i>	p in loop	labial
<i>o</i>	oe in toe	guttural - labial	<i>ph</i>	ph in loop-hole	
<i>au</i>	ow in now		<i>b</i>	b in rob	
<i>ḥ</i>	half of a hard h	conforms to following guttural or labial	<i>bh</i>	bh in rob him	
<i>ṁ</i>	n in French bon	conforms to preceding vowel	<i>m</i>	m in much	
<i>k</i>	ck in block	guttural	<i>y</i>	y in young	palatal
<i>kh</i>	ckh in blockhead		<i>r</i>	r in drama	cerebral
<i>g</i>	g in log		<i>l</i>	l in luck	dental
<i>gh</i>	gh in log-hut		<i>v</i>	v in avert or w in Swami	labial-dental or bi-labial
<i>ṅ</i>	ng in song		<i>ś</i>	sh in ship	palatal
<i>c</i>	ch in catch	palatal	<i>ṣ</i>	sh in bushel	cerebral
<i>ch</i>	chh in catch him		<i>s</i>	s in sit	dental
<i>j</i>	ge in hedge		<i>h</i>	soft h in hum	guttural
<i>jh</i>	geh in hedgehog		The first 13 characters ( <i>a-au</i> ) are vowels, the rest ( <i>ḥ-h</i> ) are consonants.		
<i>ñ</i>	n in cringe				





# Introduction to the *Bhagavad Gītā*

The *Bhagavad Gītā* is a report of a dialogue between *Arjuna*, the greatest warrior of his time, and *Kṛṣṇa* his friend and mentor. It is set at the start of a huge war, involving millions of soldiers, over the right of succession for a kingdom in north-central India, five thousand years ago. Two groups of cousins (all in the *Kuru* clan) laid claim to the kingdom. On one side was Prince *Arjuna* and his brothers, the five sons of the deceased King *Pāṇḍu*. On the other side was King *Duryodhana* and his brothers, the ninety-nine sons of King *Dhṛta-rāṣṭra*, the brother of King *Pāṇḍu*. The *Bhagavad Gītā* is centrally located in the much larger story, now called the *Mahā-bhārata*, attributed to the near-mythical *Vyāsa*, the greatest ever Indian writer and editor.

The antecedents that led to this war and the account of the war and its aftermath are covered in the rest of the *Mahā-bhārata*. The *Bhagavad Gītā* starts with an introduction to the scene of the dialogue. In the first chapter, *Sañjaya*, the minister to King *Dhṛta-rāṣṭra*, brings the king up to date on what had happened at the war front. *Sañjaya*'s narration forms the text of the *Bhagavad Gītā*. *Sañjaya* doesn't require war correspondents and spies. He is endowed with a magical ability to not only see and hear what is going on at the distant battlefield, but also to know the thoughts in the warriors' minds. The *Mahā-bhārata* is, as teacher Swami Dayananda Saraswati says (2004, *The Context of the Gītā* Vol. 1 pg. 59), a historical poem, an imaginative weaving of drama around certain historical events and people.

*Kṛṣṇa* was the most attractive divinity, the Lord incarnate, during *Arjuna*'s time and became the most celebrated focus of all Indian arts. *Arjuna* was *the* leader of his time. He fought against unjust aggression and is the greatest mortal martial

artist in all of Indian history and mythology. In the middle of the first chapter, *Sañjaya* finally speaks of these two main characters: *Arjuna* commands *Kṛṣṇa* to drive his chariot between the two armies so that he can get a close look at whom he would have to fight. *Kṛṣṇa* drives the chariot into position and says, “Behold these assembled *Kurus*.”

*Arjuna* does not objectively see those lined up against him as warriors, but instead only sees his relatives, teachers, and friends. He subjectively sees only “*my* people.” At this, *Arjuna* loses his ability to remain the warrior and leader of his side. He questions the previously clear justifications for the war that he and his brothers had discussed with respected counselors—and with *Kṛṣṇa* himself. A stream of emotionally grounded arguments against the war springs up in *Arjuna*. Finally, he collapses on the chariot seat, unable to proceed and wondering if the unthinkable—retreat—is the wisest course.

In the second chapter, knowing full well that the reasons for this war are sound, *Kṛṣṇa* prods *Arjuna* to regain his composure and proceed. But the crisis in *Arjuna*’s heart is not just about the war. It is deeply centered on the purpose of life itself. *Arjuna* feels a basic sorrow about the endless limitations of life—even of being a king of a huge empire or the king of heaven. He sees no purpose in a life that makes one struggle against others to gain fleeting moments of enjoyment, which are tainted by their costs. *Arjuna* begins to believe that his born duty as a prince and warrior is contrary to his goal. He wonders if he should drop everything and take to a life of renunciation. In fact, he loses sight of what his goal in life is— if it is enjoyment, then it is no longer worth it; if it is duty and justice, he doubts they are worth their cost. Still, *Arjuna* knows that *Kṛṣṇa* is more than a friend. He looks upon *Kṛṣṇa* as divine and knows that *Kṛṣṇa* has the wisdom to teach him what the ultimate good is, which *Arjuna* believes will solve his predicament. In the

## Introduction

eleventh verse of chapter 2, the teaching, the reason for the *Bhagavad Gītā*, begins with a discussion—not of war, but of reality and how to live accordingly.

This vision of reality is initially presented in chapter 2 of the *Bhagavad Gītā*, from verse 11 to verse 30, and is elaborated throughout the other chapters, especially in chapter 13. This reality is referred to by the terms *brahman*, *ātmā*, or *Bhagavān*, depending on whether the term is in reference, respectively, to itself, to oneself, or to the universe. This reality is presented in the *Bhagavad Gītā* as timeless and locationless. It is the very fabric of the warp-and-woof of time and space, and is the very center of oneself, the observer of this entire universe.

The divisions of time and space of the universe—of before and after, inside and outside, up and down—that we each know, are the result of our limited views of the universe from our tiny perspectives. From the perspective of the total, of the infinite whose center is everywhere, there is only one uniform, timeless, and locationless reality. This is the truly objective vision of the world, free of limited perspective, free of subjectivity. It is seeing reality as it is. This is the vision of the Lord, of *Bhagavān*. It is the ultimate good, the ultimate goal of everyone. The life lived toward and within this goal is without sorrow, is conflict free, meritorious, and filled with complete satisfaction with oneself and the world. It is this vision that is taught in the *Bhagavad Gītā*.

Indeed, it is upon this clear vision of reality, taught in the *Bhagavad Gītā* and in the core tradition of ancient India literature, that the culture of universal justice (*dharma*) is based. *Dharma* is the natural application of the life of one who has this clear vision of reality. How the person who has this vision of reality would behave in various situations is the guiding principle for determining what *dharma* is.

## Introduction

A life of *dharma*, which is meant for gaining this vision of reality, is given the title of *yoga*<sup>1</sup> (a means) in the *Bhagavad Gītā*. Today’s popular meaning of “*yoga*” is not the “eight limbs of *yoga*”<sup>2</sup>, defined by the teacher Patanjali over two thousand years ago in his *Patanjali Yoga Sutras* (Aruna 2012). Today’s *yoga* is narrowly confined to just one or two of the eight limbs; specifically, *āsana* (posture) and breath control (*prāṇāyāma*) (see *Patanjali Yoga Sutras* 2.46–53) now promoted by contemporary *yoga* teachers. The original meaning of “*yoga*” in the *Bhagavad Gītā* can easily be drawn from the text itself. It refers to *a way of living* that helps the mind to mature so that one can fully appreciate this vision of timeless and locationless reality. It is, then, this vision of reality that fulfills one’s

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<sup>1</sup> See the second chapter, verses 40, 48, and 50, as well as verses 55 through 72, describing the *sthita-prajña*, the one who has this clear (*sāttvika*) vision of reality.

<sup>2</sup> Patanjali technically defines *yoga* as *citta-vṛtti-nirodha*, stopping or controlling (*nirodha*) the modifications (*vṛttis*) of the mind (*citta*). If by *controlling* Patanjali meant mastering the mind by an intellect informed by self-knowledge, then every *Vedāntin* would fully agree. But Patanjali is most often interpreted as positing a *samādhi* (meditation) wherein thought modifications completely stop as the primary means for self-knowledge within *yoga*. Somehow, knowledge is created by stopping the mind! Yet, a life with a stopped or inert mind is not a welcomed lifestyle in *Kṛṣṇa*’s teaching. It is viewed as a *tāmasika* (dull) pursuit, not a *sāttvika* (alert) pursuit, which runs counter to Patanjali’s other goal of increasing *sattva* (alertness) over *rajas* (restlessness) and *tamas* (dullness) in one’s life (for more about these three *guṇas*, see *Bhagavad Gītā*, chapter 14). In contrast, *Kṛṣṇa*’s teaching of *yoga* does not leave much room for ambiguity; we understand *nirodha* in *samādhi* in terms of resolving the reality of the mind and its objects into oneself, into the pleased self, so that the mind and its objects no longer take one for a ride through *samsāra*. For a complete explanation of this and of the eight limbs of *yoga*, see *Patanjali Yoga Sutras: Translation and Commentary in the Light of Vedanta Scripture* (Aruna 2012).

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life. It is the ultimate good, the ultimate goal of everyone. That is how *yoga* is presented in the *Bhagavad Gītā* and how it has been taught for told and untold thousands of years, of which the *Bhagavad Gītā* is but a recent illumination, though it was composed well over two (or perhaps five) thousand years ago. This vision of reality has been preserved throughout the cycles of manifestation and destruction of the universe. It is a timeless vision of the timeless reality that forms the basis of this universe of time and space.

This timeless reality cannot be known as a *this* or *that*, cannot be arrived at by deduction or induction, cannot be a limited object of any mentation or meditation. You can only *be* it. To appreciate this reality, you need only remove the wrong notions you have about yourself, this reality. To do this, you need not remove the limitations, but only understand the nature of these limitations—and why they cannot limit the reality in which they shine as its glories.

This is the teaching that removes the basic, but unexamined, sorrow centered on the countless limitations of a human life and replaces it with a fulfillment centered on the limitless nature of oneself. It is a teaching that does not view itself as Indian, but as belonging to all humankind from time immemorial. It is a teaching that is faithfully preserved by the people of India, not created by them. It is the teaching of the Lord. Not a Lord amongst or against other Lords, but rather there is only this Lord. Every thing; every being; you, yourself are but this Lord—this limitless reality. All this is one—oneself.

God does not look over you. Rather, you look over your body, your mind, and your life. You look over the universe as it presents itself to your senses and your mind, which are also part of this universe. The universe is ordered by the natural laws that are also called *dharma*, the laws of cause and effect. These laws govern not only the physical but also the mental, the subtle. While you overlook all this

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before you, you remain the same (*sama*) while the entire universe continually changes. This continually changing time–space intersection of your experience, this physical and subtle universe before you, has you as its basis, as its very existence.

All this that your senses can perceive, all this that your mind can conceive or imagine, all the laws of the world and of the mind that you are able to appreciate, all that your languages can describe, and even the basic building block of everything (whatever it is currently calculated to be by science)—all are limited in time and space, including time and space itself. All this observed universe has you as its observer and as its basis in reality (*sat-cit*, reality-awareness). This observer (you) cannot be limited as an object of the senses or the mind, since it is (you are) ever the subject, alone factually free of the perceived and conceived limitations of time and space and all within time and space. This is the basis of your undoubted and unchanging self-existence throughout your life—despite your changing body, mind, and environment.

Such an unchanging basis of reality, which you are, alone can be the background, the substratum and surface, within which this ever-changing universe plays itself out. Such a basis of reality alone is the ultimate you seek. The seeker is but you, the limitless observer—the seeker seeking itself. Only ignorance can be the cause of this estrangement and subsequent seeking.

This teaching, in the *Bhagavad Gītā* in the form of a dialogue, removes that ignorance. In the *Bhagavad Gītā*, the divinity (*Kṛṣṇa*) is teaching the student in you (*Arjuna* is oneself). This is the divine teaching of your self-identity with all, with the total. It is also the teaching of independence, of freedom from all this before you. You are the being of this universe. This being is at once both the

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beloved (*priya*) and the love (*prema*) itself. It is a total turnaround in the understanding of oneself and of the universe.

I am not limited; I am limitless. And this current universe within time and space is completely within my self. My self is complete fulfillment.

As the doubts subside, the freedom and joy that is one's nature become fully appreciated. This understanding is the grandest vision, the ultimate knowledge to gain, the ultimate good. Then life truly becomes fun and sport, just as *Kṛṣṇa*'s life was lived with fun and sport—like a song (*gītā*). It is a life free of guilt, free of hurt, and free of fear.

Let us begin the *Songs of the Glorious Lord (Bhagavad Gītā)*.





# Chapter 1

## The Topic of *Arjuna*'s Sorrow

The first chapter of the *Bhagavad Gītā* introduces both the scene of the narration and the scene of the dialogue. The dialogue consists of the teaching of and by the Lord, *Kṛṣṇa*, to the student, *Arjuna*. In the first scene, the scene of the narration, the king's minister, *Saṅjaya*, is narrating for King *Dhṛta-rāṣṭra*. *Saṅjaya* tells what happened on the field of battle just prior to start of the war. He describes how the king's son approached his teacher in martial arts to whip up his teacher's desire for revenge against *Drupada* on the opposing side of the battlefield; for fear that the teacher (a *brāhmaṇa*) did not have the heart of a warrior (*kṣatriya*) in battle.

*Saṅjaya* then narrates the second scene, the scene of dialogue, which is just before the battle. In this scene, *Arjuna* commands *Kṛṣṇa* to drive his chariot between the two armies so that he can get a close look at whom he will fight. *Kṛṣṇa* drives the chariot and says, "Behold these assembled *Kurus*." *Arjuna* does not see those lined up against him as warriors, but instead only sees his relatives, teachers, and friends. He only sees "my people" (verse 31). At this, *Arjuna* loses the ability to remain the warrior and leader. A stream of emotionally grounded arguments against this war wells up in him. His mind becomes stressed and overwhelmed by pity to such an extent that he is physically incapacitated. Finally, *Arjuna* collapses on the chariot seat, unable to proceed and wondering if the unthinkable—retreat—would be the wisest course.

In this chapter, *Arjuna* argues that war based on greed and desire for power is never justified. However, such a war is not what *Arjuna* faces. Rather, this war, clearly narrated in the *Mahā-bhārata* as a war of justice (*dharma*) against injustice (*a-dharma*), is for the survival and reestablishment of justice over injustice. But,

even in a just war, an individual on either side of battle may have mixed motivations. The individual may be for or against the war and yet be overwhelmed by desire for power and pleasures. A question for the individual is whether the mind's likes and dislikes override one's own sense of justice or one's duty to uphold justice. The answer to this question may hinge on the individual's understanding of life and death. If the fear of death trumps all, or if justice is thought not worth dying for, then one may succumb to the persuasion of the mind's likes and dislikes.

We can look at *Arjuna's* struggle in this crisis as a metaphor for our own lives. Each of us is in a life-and-death struggle, having to make decisions on a daily and hourly basis that make life a series of heavens and hells—for ourselves and for others. The *Bhagavad Gītā* presents this daily struggle—not the struggle of war or the justification for war, but the struggle of what is life and what is death (metaphysically and morally)—in a deeply philosophical and personal manner. It is not a theoretical discussion, but a methodical presentation of an indisputable reality and the assimilation of this vision of reality in one's life. *Arjuna's* situational crisis mirrors each person's existential crisis regarding the meaning of life and the fear of death. *Arjuna's* crisis is the catalyst for presenting a clear vision of life and death that solves the felt crisis in every human heart, and for revealing the way to open the heart to this vision and allow it to firmly remain there.

***Dhṛta-rāṣṭra* said:**

**What indeed did my people and the *Pāṇḍavas* do, assembled at *Kuru-kṣetra*, the field of *dharma*, desiring to fight, O *Saṅjaya*? (1)**

**Sañjaya** said:

Then, seeing the army of the sons of *Pāṇḍu* in battle formation, King *Duryodhana*, approaching his teacher *Droṇa*, spoke these words. (2)

O Teacher, please look at this great army of the sons of *Pāṇḍu*, formed and led by your brilliant disciple, the son of *Drupada*. (3)

Here are the heroes, great archers, equal in battle to *Bhīma* and *Arjuna* — *Yuyudhāna* (*Sātyakī*), *Virāṭa*, the great warrior *Drupada*, *Dhr̥ṣṭa-ketu*, *Cekitāna*, the valiant king of *Kāśī*, *Purujit*, *Kunti-bhoja*, the best of men *Śaibya*, the powerful *Yudhāmanyu*, the valiant *Uttamaujas*, the son of *Subhadrā* (*Abhimanyu*), and the five sons of *Draupatī*—every one a great warrior. (4–6)

Whereas, O Best of *brāhmaṇas*, please know those leaders of my army who are distinguished among us. I mention them for your recognition. (7)

There are: Your Honor (*Droṇa*), *Bhīṣma*, *Karṇa*, the victorious in battle *Kṛpa*, *Āśvatthāman*, *Vikarṇa*, and the son of *Soma-datta*. (8)

And many other heroes who have given up their lives for me, all armed with many kinds of hand-held weapons and missiles, experts in warfare. (9)

That army of ours, protected by *Bhīṣma*, is not overwhelmed; whereas this army of theirs, protected by *Bhīma*, is overwhelmed. (10)

All of you stationed in your respective positions, in all the lanes of attack against your formations, protect *Bhīṣma*. (11)

Grandfather *Bhīṣma*, the powerful elder of the *Kurus*, loudly let out a lion's roar and blew his conch, elating him, *Duryodhana*. (12)

**Then, all at once on *Duryodhana's* side, conches, kettle drums, various small and large drums and horns were sounded. The noise was tumultuous. (13)**

**Then *Kṛṣṇa* and *Arjuna*, standing in the great chariot yoked with white horses, blew their divine conches. (14)**

***Kṛṣṇa* blew His conch called *Pāñca-janya*; *Arjuna* blew his conch called *Deva-datta*. *Bhīma*, the Wolf-Bellied, blew his huge conch called *Paṇḍra*. (15)**

**King *Yudhi-ṣṭhira*, the son of *Kuntī*, blew his conch called *An-anta-vijaya*. *Nakula* and *Saha-deva* blew their conches called *Su-ghoṣa* and *Maṇi-puṣpaka*. (16)**

**The expert archer king of *Kāśī*, the great warrior *Śikhaṇḍin*, *Dhṛṣṭa-dyumna*, *Virāṭa*, and the unsurpassed *Sātyaki*, *Drupada*, the five sons of *Draupadī*, and the mighty-armed son of *Su-bhadṛā* (*Abhimanyu*)—O King *Dhṛta-rāṣṭra*, all on the *Pāṇḍava* side blew their individual conches. (17–18)**

**Reverberating between heaven and earth, that tumultuous sound pierced the hearts of the allies of *Dhṛta-rāṣṭra*. (19)**

**O King *Dhṛta-rāṣṭra*, then as the clash of swords was about to begin, *Arjuna*, with Lord *Hanumān* as his banner, seeing the allies of *Dhṛta-rāṣṭra* assembled, raised his bow and then said these words to *Kṛṣṇa*. (20–21)**

***Arjuna* said:**

**O *Kṛṣṇa*, place my chariot between both armies so that I can examine these assembled wishing to do battle, and with whom I should fight at the outset of this war. (21–22)**

So **I** can **see** those **about to fight who have assembled here, wishing to please in war the distorted-thinking *Duryodhana*. (23)**

***Sañjaya* said:**

**O *Dhṛta-rāṣṭra*, having thus been ordered by *Arjuna*, Lord *Kṛṣṇa* placed the great chariot between both armies, right in front of *Bhīṣma* and *Droṇa* and all these kings, and then said, "*Arjuna*, behold these assembled *Kurus*." (24–25)**

**Now *Arjuna* saw stationed there—in both armies—fathers, grandfathers, teachers, uncles, brothers, sons, grandsons, comrades, fathers-in-law, and friends. That *Arjuna*, seeing all those assembled relatives and being overwhelmed with great pity, became sad and said this. (26–27, 28)**

***Arjuna* said:**

**O *Kṛṣṇa*, seeing these, my people on both sides, who have come ready to fight, my limbs are limp, my mouth is dry, my body is trembling, and my hairs are on end. (28, 29)**

**My bow *Gāṇḍīva* slips from my hand, and my skin burns. My mind seems to spin, and I am unable to stand. (30)**

**O *Kṛṣṇa*, I see bad omens such as a twitching eye, and I see no good by killing my people in this war. (31)**

**O *Kṛṣṇa*, I do not desire for myself victory, nor kingdom, nor pleasures. O *Kṛṣṇa*, what is the use of a kingdom to us? What is the use of pleasures or living? (32)**

**For whose sake we have desired kingdom, experiences, and pleasures—those same are assembled here in battle, giving up their lives and wealth: teachers, fathers, sons, grandfathers, uncles, fathers-in-law, grandsons, brothers-in-law, and other relations. (33–34)**

**O *Kṛṣṇa*, though they are about to kill me, I do not wish to kill them—even for dominion over the three worlds (earth, sky, and heaven), much less for a kingdom on this earth. (35)**

**What satisfaction would we have by killing the sons of *Dhṛta-rāṣṭra*, O *Kṛṣṇa*? By killing these felons, only sin would befall us. (36)**

**Therefore, we ought not to kill our own relatives, the sons of *Dhṛta-rāṣṭra*. By killing our own relations, how would we be happy, O *Kṛṣṇa*? (37)**

**Even if these—whose minds are overwhelmed by greed—do not see the problem wrought by destroying the family or the crime in betraying friends, how can we—who clearly see the problem wrought by destroying the family—not know to withdraw from this sin, O *Kṛṣṇa*? (38–39)**

**When the family is destroyed by this killing of the men, the protectors of the family, the ancient traditions (*dharmas*) of the family are destroyed. When tradition is destroyed, corruption (*a-dharma*) indeed overwhelms the entire family. (40)**

**O *Kṛṣṇa*, due to the family being overpowered by corruption, the women of the family are debased. O *Kṛṣṇa*, when the women are debased, there arises confusion of the social groups. (41)**

**Confusion leads to hell for the destroyers of the family, as well as for the family. Their ancestors, being deprived of the post-death rituals of offerings of rice balls, water, etcetera, indeed fall to a lower status. (42)**

**Because of these crimes of the destroyers of the family, bringing about the confusion of the social groups, the ancient community traditions—as well as the family traditions—are destroyed. (43)**

**O *Kṛṣṇa*, we have heard that the people who destroy the family tradition (*dharma*) surely have a stay in hell. (44)**

**Oh! We are fixed to perpetrate a great sin, if, out of greed for kingdom and its pleasures, we are prepared to kill our own people. (45)**

**If the armed sons of *Dhṛta-rāṣṭra* were in battle to kill me, unresisting and unarmed, that would be better for me than this sin. (46)**

***Sañjaya* said:**

**Speaking thus, *Arjuna*, giving up his bow and arrows in the middle of the battlefield, sat down on the chariot seat, his mind overcome with sorrow in the form of guilt and hurt. (47)**

***Om* (*brahman*, the witness of all) is that only reality. Thus ends the first chapter, called “The Topic of *Arjuna’s* Sorrow,” of the eighteen chapters of **Songs of the Glorious Lord**, which is looked upon as **sacred teaching (*Upaniṣad*)** and whose teaching is in the form of **a dialogue between *Śrī Kṛṣṇa* and *Arjuna***, the subject matter being **knowledge of *brahman* and *yoga***.**





# Chapter 2

## The Topic of Knowledge

In chapter 1, we witnessed a web of future fantasies stream from *Arjuna's* mind in a momentary tailspin into uncontrolled sentimentality. In chapter 2, we see that, despite this tailspin, *Arjuna* does not convince himself to quit the battle. He knows it is his duty. Because *Arjuna* retains his faith in *Kṛṣṇa*, he is able to summon his strength of character and, with faith, surrender himself as a student to *Kṛṣṇa*. *Arjuna's* upbringing in the *Veda* culture provides him the appropriate way to ask for the teaching, which he has heard is the solution to life's misery. *Arjuna* does not ask *Kṛṣṇa* for suggestions regarding the immediate situation. Rather, he asks for *śreyas*. The ancient *Upaniṣad* teachings load this word with a specific meaning. *Śreyas* conveys the ultimate good in life, rather than some pleasant, temporary benefit.

*Kṛṣṇa* is being asked to be a *guru*, a teacher. He himself has been a young student under the sage *Sāṅdīpani*, so, in addition to being the Lord incarnate, *Kṛṣṇa* clearly is equipped with the methodology of teaching presented in the *Upaniṣads*. He shows this by fluently quoting and paraphrasing verses of several *Upaniṣads* and by wholesale borrowing topics from several more to weave a complete vision.

The *Advaita Vedānta* teaching is then not new. It is completely within the ancient tradition of the *Upaniṣad* scriptures and elaborates the preparation required to assimilate the direct knowledge of the teaching. It is not a “secret” teaching for the initiated only. Rather, it is presented in the middle of the *Mahā-bhārata*, the most popular storybook in Indian literature.

In chapter 2, *Kṛṣṇa* teaches *Arjuna* that the people *Arjuna* is grieving are, in fact, the being that is timeless and unchanging, and none other than the self of *Arjuna*. So, being changeless, *Arjuna*, from the true perspective of himself, whether he knows it or not, is not the doer of action—not the slayer of these people or even of these bodies before him.

This is called *viveka*, discernment of the real from the unreal, the self from the nonself. This teaching is quite shocking (*āścaryavat*), and not easily understood when first heard. Therefore, *Kṛṣṇa* further explains. He speaks from the perspective of the relative reality of living and explains that impermanent entities obviously have an end and that their lot after their end is both unknown and unknowable to others. So, even relatively then, there is no basis for grieving, he tells *Arjuna*. Moreover, *Kṛṣṇa* says, if *Arjuna* deserts the battlefield, he is deserting his duty, and this will bring unwanted repercussions in this life and later.

*Kṛṣṇa* then proceeds to teach the prerequisite understanding that a student needs in order to assimilate this profound teaching. This understanding involves committing to doing one's duty with the intent of gaining in this life the knowledge that liberates. This preparation is presented in the *Upaniṣads* by the description of the qualifications of the student and by various *upāsanās*, meditations on life and the universe that instill a cosmic perspective to living. This preparation is here called *karma-yoga*. It is a dispassion (*vairāgya*) for material and even spiritual results that are time bound. Then, with this dispassion, doing action as a participation in the cosmic cycle simply because it is a duty-to-be-done and is the proper thing to be done that matures the mind. The mature mind then has the discipline and clarity to assimilate the self-knowledge that liberates—that brings one to an appreciation of *brahman*, the ultimate reality, as one's self.

***Sañjaya* said:**

***Kṛṣṇa* spoke these words to him, *Arjuna*, who in that way was overwhelmed by pity, with eyes stressed and full of tears and was sad. (1)**

**The Lord said:**

**In such a crisis, at the outset of this war, from where came to you this despair, unacceptable for a person of the Veda culture, not leading to heaven, and engendering dishonor, O *Arjuna*? (2)**

**Do not yield to impotency, O *Arjuna*. It does not befit you. Give up this lowly weakness of heart and get up, O *Arjuna* (Vexer of Foes)! (3)**

***Arjuna* said:**

**O *Kṛṣṇa* (Destroyer of Demons and Foes), how will I fight in battle with arrows against *Bhīṣma* and *Droṇa*, who are worthy of my worship, thus becoming a destroyer of my *gurus*? (4)**

**It would be better I not kill these highly honored *gurus* and even beg alms here in the world, become a renunciate, than kill these *gurus* seeking their own ends and then indulge here in pleasures, drenched with their blood. (5)**

**We, I, do not know which one of the two is better for us—whether by my fighting we should conquer or by my withdrawal they should conquer us. Those allies of *Dhṛta-rāṣṭra*, after slaying whom we would not want to live, stand facing us. (6)**

**With my mind overcome by miserliness, yet to be spent seeking the ultimate good (*śreyas*), and confused about *dharma*, I ask You—what is definitely *śreyas*? That, please tell me. I am Your student. Having surrendered to You, please teach me. (7)**

**Because, though gaining an unrivalled and prosperous kingdom on earth and even lordship over the heavenly deities, I do not see on my own what would remove the sorrow, the guilt and hurt, drying up my senses. (8)**

***Sañjaya* said:**

**Having thus spoken to *Kṛṣṇa*, *Arjuna*, the Vexer of Foes, told *Kṛṣṇa* “I will not fight” and became silent. (9)**

**O *Dhṛta-rāṣṭra*, with a smile at the new-found student in *Arjuna* and at the bold request to teach *Arjuna* between two armies at the outset of war, *Kṛṣṇa* said these words to him, *Arjuna*, who was sad in the midst of both armies. (10)**

**The Lord said:**

**You have grieved for those not to be grieved, yet proclaim words of wisdom. The wise do not grieve for those whose life’s breath is gone or not yet gone. (11)**

**Never was there a time that I was not, nor you, nor these kings. Nor will any of us cease to exist hereafter. (12)**

**For the one with a body (the *dehī*), like passing through childhood, maturity, and old age in this body, so too for the *dehī* who remains the same there is the gain of another body after this body dies. Concerning this, the wise person is not confused. (13)**

**O *Arjuna*, the contacts of the senses, or rather, the sense objects—from a distance or in contact, which give cold/hot and pleasure/pain, the natural pairs of opposites, have a beginning and an end and therefore are time bound. Endure them, accept them objectively as they are, O *Arjuna*. (14)**

**O *Arjuna*, the person whom these unavoidable contacts or sense objects do not afflict, who is the same in pleasure and pain, and who is discerning—that one is fit for freedom. (15)**

***A-sat* (the unreal, the time-bound form) has no being of its own, and *sat* (the real, existence) has no nonbeing. This conclusion, regarding both these, is discerned by the seers of the truth. In “this form exists,” “that form exists,” existence is constant. But the unreal, time-bound forms constantly change. (16)**

**By which *sat* (existence/reality) all this, the *a-sat* (the “this and that” time-bound world, including this body-mind complex), is pervaded, know that, the timeless and real, to be indestructible. Nothing is able to bring about the destruction of this that does not change. (17)**

**These bodies of the timeless, indestructible, non-objectifiable as the self-evident subject embodied one who obtains as the being/reality of these body-mind complexes are said to be subject to unavoidable death. Therefore fight, O *Arjuna*. (18)**

**The one who thinks this**, the embodied one, the real, the self-evident subject, **is the agent of destruction**, change, etcetera, **and the one who thinks this**, the embodied one, the real, **is the object of destruction—both do not know. This neither destroys nor is destroyed. (19)**

**This**, the embodied one, the real, **is never born, nor dies. It is not that, coming to be, it again comes not to be, nor the opposite—becoming nonexistent, it again comes to be. This—which is unborn, timeless, ever the same, and always there—is not destroyed**, not changed, **when the body is being destroyed**, changed. **(20)**

**O Arjuna**, when **one knows this**, the *dehī* (oneself, the embodied one, the real), **to be indestructible, timeless, unborn, and unchanging**, then **how does that person cause the death of whom, or kill whom? (21)**

**Just as a person discarding worn-out clothes takes other new ones; similarly, the embodied one, discarding worn-out bodies, takes on other new ones. (22)**

**Weapons** made from the element earth **do not cut it, nor** does the element **fire burn it, nor** does the element **water soak it, nor** does the element **wind wither it. (23)**

**This is uncuttable. This is unburnable, unwettable, and unwitherable. This is timeless, locationless, stable, unmoving, and always existing. (24)**

**This is said to be not manifest** to the senses, **not an object of thought** since it is the conscious being that is aware of all thoughts, **and not subject to change. Therefore**, since there is no basis for grief regarding the self, **knowing this as such, you cannot grieve. (25)**

**O Arjuna, now if you consider this, the self—as the body or as an individual soul, to continually be born and die—even in that way, you should not grieve. (26)**

**Because, for what is born, death is certain, and for what is dead, birth in another form is certain. Then you should not grieve over a situation that cannot be avoided. (27)**

**O Arjuna, all beings are unseen before their beginning, unknown as to whom or what they were before their birth; are seen in between; and are unseen after their end, unknown as to their lot after death. Regarding that, why grieve? (28)**

**As a wonder, someone sees, knows, this timeless, locationless, embodied one—the real! Similarly, as a wonder, another, the teacher, speaks of this and, as a wonder, another listens about this! Even after listening, another still does not know this which is oneself! (29)**

**O Arjuna, this embodied one in every body is ever indestructible; therefore, you should not grieve over all these beings. (30)**

**Even in regard to your own *dharma* (nature and duty), you should not waver. Because, for a warrior such as you—by nature and duty, there is no greater good than a battle on the side of *dharma*, a battle for the protection of what supports people through their maturation to wisdom. (31)**

**By happenstance an open door to heaven has come. O Arjuna, happy are warriors who get such a battle. (32)**

**Now if you will not undertake this battle on the side of *dharma*, then forfeiting your *dharma* (nature and duty) and honor, you will incur karma demerit (*pāpa*). (33)**

These **creatures**, even yesterday's recruits, **will also recount your unfading infamy. Dishonor for one who had been honored is worse than death. (34)**

**The great warriors will think you withdrew from battle out of fear. Among whom, having been highly honored, you will become insignificant. (35)**

**Moreover, your enemies, belittling your prowess, will speak many unutterable words about you. What is more painful than that? (36)**

**Killed, you will gain heaven; conquer and you will enjoy the world. Therefore, O Arjuna, resolve to fight, and get up! (37)**

**Being the same in pleasure/pain, gain/loss, or victory/defeat, thus prepare for battle, for your duty (*sva-dharma*), whatever it is, as it presents itself throughout life's changes. In this way you will incur no karma demerit (*pāpa*). (38)**

**This wisdom regarding *sāṅkhya* (the knowledge of reality), the ultimate good (*śreyas*) that you asked for, has been told to you. On the other hand, O Arjuna, listen to this wisdom regarding *yoga* (the means for preparing for this knowledge); endowed with which, you will be free from the bondage that is *karma*. (39)**

**In this, the means for complete freedom (*śreyas*), there is no loss of progress, nor adverse result. Even a little of this *yoga*, this means—which is also *dharma* (one's nature and duty, which will support one through the maturation process)—protects from great fear. (40)**

**Regarding this, the means for *śreyas*, the well-discerned knowledge is but one, O Arjuna. However, for those with no discernment of this fact, the notions regarding the means for *śreyas* are indeed many-branched and endless. (41)**



**O Arjuna, the unwise—who remain engrossed in the bulk of the words of the Vedas (scriptures) that deal with heaven-going and gaining power, wealth, and progeny; arguing that there is nothing more; who are full of desires, requirements/anticipations; and who hold heaven as primary—they spout flowery discourse full of special rituals directed toward gaining power and objects of consumption, but yield further birth as a result of their actions. (42–43)**

**For those whose minds are carried away by that flowery talk and who are attached to consumption and power, a well-discerned knowledge is not formed in their mind (*samādhī*). (44)**

**The Vedas generally deal with the three-fold universe (*traiguṇya*). O Arjuna, be free from *traiguṇya*, free from the pairs of opposites, ever established in a contemplative disposition (*sattva*), free from acquiring and protecting, and be attentive. (45)**

**For a contemplative person (a *brāhmaṇa*) who knows *sat* (the all pervading reality), there is as much usefulness in all the Vedas (rituals) as there is in a small watering hole in a once-dry river bed, when the river is in a flood everywhere. Seeing the truth everywhere, one is no longer dependent on the *Veda* rituals. (46)**

**You have control only in doing action, never in its results. Do not think yourself to be the cause of the results of action, that cause being but the Lord as embodied in the universal laws of *karma* (action and its result). Nor should you have attachment to inaction. (47)**

**O Arjuna, being free from attachment toward anticipated results, being the same (*sama*) toward success or failure, established in *yoga*, in this attitude, then perform action. Sameness of attitude (*buddhi*) toward results—whatever they are is called *yoga*. (48)**

**Action or ritual, by itself, is indeed far inferior to the means which is this attitude (*buddhi-yoga*), O Arjuna. Seek refuge in this attitude. Those whose motives are only for the results of action are misers, are yet to spend their intellect in motivation for *śreyas*. (49)**

**Endowed with this attitude, one sheds in this world both karma merit and demerit. Therefore, commit to this *yoga*. Propriety in actions, acting within *dharma* (your natural duty) where the means are as important as the end, is called *yoga*. (50)**

**Because the wise, endowed with this attitude—after discarding the pressure for result born of action, appreciating *dharma* as “to be done,” accepting the results gracefully, freed by knowledge from the bondage that is birth—they reach the attainment that is free from affliction. (51)**

**When your intellect crosses over the confusion that is delusion, then you will gain a dispassion for what has been heard and is yet to be heard from the secular and spiritual marketers. (52)**

**When your intellect—previously distracted by the *śruti*, the bulk of the *Vedas* concerned with providing means for gaining heaven, power, wealth, and progeny—becomes steady and centered on your self (*samādhī*), then you will attain *yoga*. (53)**

**Arjuna said:**

**What is the description of the one whose wisdom is firm (*sthita-prajñā*), who is established within the self (*samādhi*), O *Kṛṣṇa*? What would the one whose wisdom is firm speak? How would that one sit? How would that one walk? Would that one fight a war? (54)**

**The Lord said:**

**O *Arjuna*, when one abandons all desires, notional requirements in order to become happy, as they arise in the mind and is happy by oneself, by an informed intellect, in one's self alone, then that one is called one whose wisdom is firm (*sthita-prajñā*). (55)**

**The one whose mind is not afflicted in adversities, who has no longing in pleasures, and who is free from attraction (*rāga*), fear, and anger, that wise person is called one whose wisdom is firm. (56)**

**The one who is unattached in all situations, who neither rejoices on getting anything pleasant, nor hates getting anything unpleasant—that one's wisdom is firm. (57)**

**When, like a turtle and its limbs, one is at will able to completely withdraw the senses from their sense pursuits and again extend them out at will—that one's wisdom is firm. (58)**

**For the embodied one who does not feed, does not indulge the senses, the objects turn back, are not pursued, but the longing remains. Knowing the ultimate (*para, brahman* reality), even one's longing ceases. (59)**

**Because, O Arjuna, even though a discerning person puts forth effort, the distracting senses forcefully take away the mind. (60)**

**Mastering all those senses, the one who is disciplined should remain with Me, the Lord, reality, as the *para* (highest, the limitless). For the one whose senses are indeed under authority of an informed intellect, wisdom is firm. (61)**

**For a person who mentally dwells on objects, attachment to them arises; from attachment allowed to flame up by one's value structure arises binding desire, requirements in order to be happy and anticipations of their fruition; from thwarted anticipations arises anger; from anger is delusion, error in judgment; from delusion is lapse of memory, what has been taught; from lapse of memory is lapse of intellect, wisdom; from lapse of intellect, what distinguishes the human condition, the person is destroyed. The unique human opportunity to attain the ultimate good (*śreyas*) is wasted, and the person remains in the life of becoming (in *saṃsāra*). (62–63)**

**Whereas, moving among the objects with the senses under authority of the intellect and freed from being overpowered by attraction and repulsion (*rāga-dveṣa*—see 3.34), the one whose mind is disciplined attains clarity. (64)**

**When there is clarity, there comes the destruction of all one's sorrows in the form of guilt and hurt, because, for the one whose mind is clear, the self-knowledge which destroys the sorrow quickly becomes firm. (65)**

**For the one who is not disciplined, knowledge is not there, nor contemplation. For the noncontemplative, there is no clarity. For the nonclear, how can there be the appreciation of the *sukha* (fulfillment that is the nature of the limitless self, known as I)? (66)**

**Because, that very mind, which follows after the roaming senses, takes away one's wisdom, like a small boat on the water, which follows after the wind. (67)**

**Therefore, O *Arjuna*, the one whose senses under authority of the intellect are, or rather, are capable of being, completely withdrawn from the sense pursuits—that one has wisdom that is firm. (68)**

**What is like night for all beings—in that, the wise who is disciplined is awake. In what it is that beings are awake to, that is like night for the wise one who sees clearly. The wise are awake to reality (*sat*), and others are only awake to what they believe is reality, but is unreal (*a-sat*). (69)**

**Like the full and unmoved ocean into which the waters enter, their source being the ocean, yet its nature being unaffected by their variations, the one whom all objects of desire enter yet remains the same in nature—that one gains peace. Not so the one who requires/anticipates these objects, like a small pond requires its streams. (70)**

**Giving up all binding desires, requirements/anticipations, the person who moves about free from longing, free from the judgment "this is mine" and free from the judgment "I am only this much"—that person attains peace. (71)**

**This is being firm in/as reality (*brahman, sat*), O Arjuna. Attaining this, one is not any longer deluded. Being firm in this, even just at the moment of death, one attains liberation in/as *brahman*. (72)**

***Om (brahman, the witness of all) is that only reality (sat). Thus ends the second chapter, called "The Topic of Knowledge," of the eighteen chapters of Songs of the Glorious Lord, which is looked upon as sacred teaching (Upaniṣad) and whose teaching is in the form of a dialogue between Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna, the subject matter being knowledge of brahman and yoga.***

# Chapter 3

## The Topic of Action

In chapter 3, *Arjuna* has a doubt: The *Upaniṣad* teachings say that the self does not do action, so, even if it is *Arjuna*'s duty, why and how should he undertake the action of this battle? Isn't renunciation (*sannyāsa*) alone the lifestyle extolled in the *Upaniṣads*? *Arjuna* wonders: Even if *karma-yoga* (the means that is duty) is an alternate lifestyle, *Kṛṣṇa* has not said that it leads by itself to the ultimate good (*śreyas*). *Arjuna* questions why *Kṛṣṇa* is compelling him into gruesome action and wants to know, between the two lifestyles, which leads to *śreyas*.

*Kṛṣṇa* replies that, indeed, in the *Upaniṣads*, He taught that the two lifestyles lead to *śreyas*, absolute freedom. But simply adopting either of these two lifestyles does not give freedom (*mokṣa*). *Kṛṣṇa* will clearly explain later, in chapter 4 (4.33–39), that it is knowledge that gives *mokṣa*. In chapter 3, *Kṛṣṇa* points out that both lifestyles are conducive to gaining and assimilating this knowledge. One cannot really be said to have gained this knowledge without having also assimilated it, because this knowledge is not information about some remote object, but instead is self-knowledge. However, if one is not mentally prepared for a life of renunciation, then it may prove to be useless. *Karma-yoga* is meant for preparing the mind for a life of renunciation, as well as for gaining and assimilating the knowledge. This is the order of the four stages of life: student, householder, retiree, renunciate. *Kṛṣṇa* does not think *Arjuna*, who had to this point dedicated his life to gaining the warrior's skills and weapons needed to take back the kingdom, is prepared for the quiet life of renunciation (*sannyāsa*). So, between the two lifestyles, *Kṛṣṇa* recommends *karma-yoga* to *Arjuna*.

Even in the lifestyle of *sannyāsa*, for one who does not have self-knowledge and thinks he or she is a doer, there is action. Therefore, one needs to understand why and how one should perform action. *Kṛṣṇa* explains that the entire cosmos is interconnected. Helping one another, all beings thrive. The one who fights against this great cosmic wheel lives life in vain; whereas the one who follows this cosmic ecological system—with the goal of attaining the limitless—eventually attains the limitless. Action done with this understanding is thus converted into a spiritual act (*yajña*), which makes it *karma-yoga*. In particular for *Arjuna*, because he is looked upon as a leader, he ought to enthusiastically perform his own duty as a *yajña*, thus encouraging others to do the same—for the benefit of all. Even in renunciation (*sannyāsa*), action is done with the attitude of *karma-yoga*.

But if the self does not do action, then what sense does it make to say one should perform action? *Kṛṣṇa* answers this concern by explaining that, indeed, the self does not do physical or mental action. Rather, action is done by the body and mind. Action, along with the body and mind, belong to the sphere of nature, not to *ātmā*, the self. This body and mind is not one's personal creation. One must then renounce the ego's imagined ownership of actions, as well as the actions of the body and mind, relinquishing them to where they belong—unto the Lord's cosmic nature and order—and choose to perform duty as an offering to the whole. Such action alone will not bind one to disappointment, sorrow, and death. This is *karma-yoga*, which develops one's discernment (*viveka*) and dispassion (*vairāgya*).

**Arjuna said:**

**O *Kṛṣṇa*, if it is Your contention that knowledge is better than action, then why do You compel me into this gruesome action, O *Kṛṣṇa*? (1)**



**With apparently contradictory words, You seem to confuse my mind. Please decide on just one and tell me that one by which I may gain complete freedom (*śreyas*). (2)**

**The Lord said:**

**O Arjuna, long ago in this world I taught in the *Upaniṣads* two different lifestyles—one through the means that is knowledge (*jñāna-yoga*) for those dedicated to knowledge, and the other through the means that is duty (*karma-yoga*) for *yogīs*, those dedicated to duty as a means. (3)**

**A person does not gain actionlessness, complete freedom, by not undertaking action, nor does one gain this success, complete freedom, merely by taking the vow of renunciation (*sannyāsa*). (4)**

**Because nobody ever remains, even for a second, without performing action. Because everybody, being helpless, is made to perform action by the modifications of the three constituent principles of the universe (*guṇas*) born of nature (*prakṛti*). (5)**

**The one who sits, restraining the organs of action, yet contemplating the sense objects with the mind—that one is called one whose mind is deluded and whose conduct is useless. Such is the predicament of a renunciate not prepared for a contemplative lifestyle. (6)**

**However, O Arjuna, the one who rules the senses with the mind, is unattached, not anticipating results, who through the organs of action undertakes action as a *yajña*, means for preparing for knowledge—that one is better than the deluded of useless conduct. (7)**

**You Arjuna, personally, should do your enjoined duty** rather than do nothing or try to take to a contemplative life of *sannyāsa*, **since duty is superior to inaction and, through inaction, even the maintenance of your body would be impossible. (8)**

**A person is one whose actions bind, apart from duty/action performed as a *yajña* (act of worship). O Arjuna, free from attachment to the results of action, perform action for the sake of that *yajña*. (9)**

**In the beginning, the Lord of the universe manifested the people along with *yajña* and said through the *Vedas*, "With this *yajña* may all of you multiply. Let this *yajña* be what yields all your desired results." (10)**

**Support the deities, the Lord viewed through all the various aspects of nature, with this *yajña*. May those deities support all of you. Supporting one another, all of you will attain limitless *śreyas* (complete freedom), or heaven if this is your ultimate goal. (11)**

**Supported through *yajña*, the deities will give to all of you desired objects indeed. One who consumes the objects given by those deities, the forces of nature, without offering to these deities is but a thief. (12)**

**Those who eat the food left after first offering to the Lord are freed from all transgressions; whereas those who cook only for themselves, those sinners, eat sin, karmic demerit. (13)**

**All creatures are born from food. Food is born from rain. Rain is born from the cyclic karma results of ritual (*yajña*). That *yajña* is born from *karma* (action—ritual, prayer, duty, etcetera). (14)**

**Know that *karma* is born from the *Brahman* (the *Veda*, the scriptures), and the *Veda* comes from the imperishable Lord. Therefore, being given by the all-knowing Lord for all humankind, the *Veda* is all encompassing and is ever established in *yajña* (ritual and duty). (15)**

**O *Arjuna*, the one who does not cause oneself to follow in this life the cosmic wheel thus set in motion, whose life is thus mostly of *karma* demerit, and whose pleasure is through the senses—that one lives in vain. (16)**

**Whereas, the person who would find pleasure within the self alone, be satisfied with the self, and be contented in the self alone—that one has nothing yet to be done. (17)**

**For that one in this world, there is, indeed, no goal by doing, nor by not doing. Nor for that one is there any dependence for any-thing toward any being. (18)**

**Therefore, unattached, please always perform what is to be done, because the person who is unattached in attitude, then eventually in knowledge, while performing action attains the limitless. (19)**

**Indeed, along with performing their duties, King *Janaka* and others attained complete freedom. Even considering just the rallying of the people to the path of duty and justice (*dharma*), you ought to act. (20)**

**Whatever an important person follows, that alone the other people follow. The example which that one sets, that the people follow. (21)**

**O *Arjuna*, for me as an individual who has this knowledge there is nothing in the three worlds (earth, sky, and heaven) that must be done, nothing to be attained that has not been attained; yet I indeed engage in action. (22)**

**O Arjuna, if indeed I as Kṛṣṇa, leader of the province of Dvārakā, thus an important person, were ever to not engage in action unwearied, then the people would follow my path in every way including into lazy inaction. (23)**

**If I were not to perform action, these people would perish. I would become the author of social confusion, and I would thus destroy these people. (24)**

**O Arjuna, as dedicatedly as the unwise, who are bound to the results of action, engage in action, so the wise—unattached, not requiring/anticipating results, and desirous for rallying the people to *dharma*—would likewise engage in action. (25)**

**One should not sow dissension in the understanding of the unwise who are bound to the results of action. The wise one, who is committed to *dharma* and to performing all duties, should encourage the others. (26)**

**Actions are in all ways done by the constituent principles (*guṇas*) of nature (*prakṛti*). But one whose mind is confused—in many and various ways by a notion about “I”—thinks “I am the doer.” (27)**

**Whereas, O Arjuna, the one who knows the truth of the distinction of the *guṇas* from “I” and of their actions from “I”, thinking, “the *guṇas* (as the body and mind) engage amongst the *guṇas*, among the objects—physical and mental”—that one is not bound. (28)**

**Those who confuse themselves with the *guṇas* of nature are bound in the *guṇas* and their actions. Lacking this discernment and of incomplete knowledge, they are the ones that one who has complete knowledge should not disturb. (29)**

**With a mind centered on oneself** as the Lord, as the reality, **renouncing all action in Me**, the Lord—as *prakṛti*, nature, the cosmic order, **being free from anticipations, and free from** the judgment “**this is mine,**” and **without anguish**, O *Arjuna*, **fight. (30)**

**Those people who have trust** in My teaching, **who are not cynical and who constantly follow this, My teaching—they also**, whether *karma-yogīs* or *sannyāsīs* (who pursue this teaching while engaged in duties or as renunciates), **are freed from** the bond that is *karma*. **(31)**

**Whereas, those who are cynical, who do not follow this, My teaching, know them—who are** thus **variously confused in all** other areas of **knowledge** because they do not know who the “I” is **and lacking discernment—as lost. (32)**

**Even a wise person acts in keeping with his** or her **own nature. Creatures go** with their own **nature. What will** external behavioral **restraint accomplish? (33)**

**Attraction and repulsion (*rāga* and *dveṣa*)** are naturally **there toward the object of each of the senses. One should not come under their control, because those two are one’s enemies**, not the object, nor the resulting, natural behavior. **(34)**

**One’s own duty**, though sometimes **lacking virtue, is better than a different duty**, even though **well performed** or more enjoyable. **Death in one’s own duty is better;** as **a different duty brings fear** in the forms of conflict, regret, and retribution. **(35)**

**Arjuna said:**

**O Kṛṣṇa, now what compels a person—even though not choosing—to commit prohibited acts, as if pushed by force? (36)**

**The Lord said:**

That seeming force is **this binding desire (*kāma*—whether positive or negative, empowered attraction or repulsion)** and when thwarted **this anger. It, *kāma*, is born of the agitation principle (*rajas guṇa*), is a glutton, and accumulates a lot of karma demerit. Know it to be the enemy here. (37)**

**Like fire is covered by smoke, like a mirror covered by dirt, and like a fetus covered by the womb, similarly, by that *kāma* this knowledge is covered.** And that covering is removed by the breath of teaching, by the action of *dharma* (duty and justice), and by time, respectively. **(38)**

**O Arjuna, by this constant enemy in the form of binding desire, insatiable like fire, the knowledge of the one who is yet to be wise is covered. (39)**

**Its, *kāma*'s, abode is said to be the senses, the mind, and the intellect. Covering knowledge through misdirecting these, this *kāma* deludes the individual, the one identified with one's body. (40)**

**Therefore, O Arjuna, exercising authority over the senses at their source, please indeed destroy this sinful destroyer of knowledge and of the assimilation of that knowledge. (41)**

**They say that the senses are superior to the body and all other objects, the mind is superior to the senses, the intellect is superior to the mind; whereas the one who is superior to the intellect is that limitless self. (42)**

**O Arjuna, in this way of knowing oneself as superior to the intellect, steadying the one by the other one, steadying the senses by the mind, the mind by the intellect, and the intellect by self-knowledge, destroy the enemy in the form of *kāma*, otherwise so difficult to get a fix on. (43)**

**Om (*brahman*, the witness of all) is that only reality. Thus ends the third chapter, called "The Topic of Action," of the eighteen chapters of *Songs of the Glorious Lord*, which is looked upon as sacred teaching (*Upaniṣad*) and whose teaching is in the form of a dialogue between *Śrī Kṛṣṇa* and *Arjuna*, the subject matter being knowledge of *brahman* and *yoga*.**





# Chapter 4

## The Topic of Knowledge and the Renunciation of Action

At the end of the third chapter, the Lord discloses the secret to overcoming binding desire (*kāma*), which binds one helplessly to a life of unending need for becoming, called *saṃsāra*. The secret, an elaboration of 2.58–68, is to control the intellect by self-knowledge—this is *viveka*, discernment of the real from the unreal, the self from the nonself. With this informed intellect, one steadies the previously rudderless mind, which in turn controls the senses—this is *vairāgya*, dispassion toward the present memories of the past, the present imaginations of the future, and the appearances in the present that one calls “me,” “mine,” and “not me,” “not mine.” By *vairāgya* (dispassion), the mind becomes free of its imagined entanglement in *saṃsāra*, its imagined world of me/mine and not me/not mine, of likes and dislikes, aspirations and fears. Then the mind sees a natural world free of these projections. This relative freedom allows the mind to become clear. In this clear mind, the self-knowledge that resolves the life of unbecoming becoming (*saṃsāra*) quickly becomes firm (2.64–65).

At the beginning of chapter 4, *Kṛṣṇa* concludes by extolling the lineage of the *Vedānta* teaching, starting from Himself. But *Arjuna* does not let *Kṛṣṇa*’s teaching end there. *Arjuna* asks how *Kṛṣṇa* can say He taught this knowledge at the beginning of humankind. *Kṛṣṇa* replies that He is speaking from the standpoint of the Lord. This embodiment, seated before *Arjuna*, is a divine form acquired due to the natural need to rebalance *dharma* (tradition and justice) and *a-dharma* (disorder and injustice) in this world. *Kṛṣṇa* says that His actions do not bind Him, nor is He the doer of these actions. *Kṛṣṇa* explains that those who similarly perform action not backed by binding desire, and who know themselves as the

actionless self, attain His nature. He explains that action is to be undertaken as a *yajña* (3.9–30), a spiritual act for the benefit of the whole, as indeed *Kṛṣṇa*'s action is. *Kṛṣṇa* then lists various types of *yajñas* (spiritual acts) that have been given in the *Vedas*, saying that these actions, though considered spiritual, are produced by nature's body and mind alone. The one who knows one's self as not limited by the body and mind, which perform these actions, is thus free from their binding nature. By this knowledge, one will see all of nature's beings in Him and even in oneself (4.35). This is called being the reality of all (*sarvātma-bhāva*), appreciating oneself as the whole, free of divisions and their limitations. The Lord describes *sarvātma-bhāva* as taking refuge in Him by being Him alone, attaining His nature (4.10, 2.72). This is nonduality (*a-dvaita*).

Gaining this knowledge is the goal of performing these *yajñas* for purity of mind. Knowledge is attained by surrender to a teacher within this teaching lineage who will teach you. *Kṛṣṇa* then proceeds to praise this knowledge as the ultimate purifier. But it requires trust in this teaching as a valid means of knowledge. What blocks this teaching from blessing is not discerning the self from the nonself (a lack of *viveka*, discernment); due to a doubtful (cynical) mind that does not trust the teaching. This is important for every student to understand, so it is repeated throughout the Lord's teaching (3.31–32; 4.39–42; 5.25; 6.47; 7.1; 9.1, 9.3; 12.2, 12.20; and 18.10, 18.67, 18.71).

**The Lord said:**

**I taught this unchanging *yoga*** (both *jñāna-yoga* and *karma-yoga*) **to *Vivasvān***, the sun deity—considered the progenitor of the solar-clan<sup>3</sup> of rulers on earth. ***Vivasvān* taught** it to ***Manu***, the first human and first of the solar kings on earth in this age (*kalpa*). ***Manu* taught** it to his son, ***Ikṣvāku***. (1)

**In this way, being handed down from one to another, the kings who were sages** (or the kings and sages) **knew this *yoga***. **After a long time, here today, among these kings, that *yoga* has been lost, O *Arjuna***. (2)

**I just taught to you this very same ancient *yoga* because you are My devotee and friend. This secret teaching of *yoga* is the most profound indeed.** (3)

***Arjuna* said:**

**Your birth was not long ago; *Vivasvān*'s birth was long ago. How should I understand that You taught *Vivasvān* in the beginning?** (4)

**The Lord said:**

**Many births have passed for Me and for you, O *Arjuna*. I know them all; you do not, O *Arjuna***. (5)

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<sup>3</sup> There were two prominent, ancient ruling clans in India. The solar clan (*sūrya-vaṃśa*), tracing their royal lineage from the sun deity, included *Rāma* in the middle of its long line of kings, with its many branches. The lunar clan (*candra-vaṃśa*) traced its royal lineage from the moon deity. Two of the many branches of the lunar dynasty were the *kuru-vaṃśa* (inclusive of Prince *Arjuna*) and the *yadu-vaṃśa* (inclusive of *Kṛṣṇa*).

**Though unborn, undiminished, and the Lord of all beings, wielding My *prakṛti* (the projecting power of the Lord, which manifests as all of nature), I, as an incarnate form, am as though born by My own *māyā* (projecting power, My *prakṛti*). (6)**

**O *Arjuna*, whenever indeed there is a wane of *dharma* (tradition and justice) and an ascendancy of *a-dharma* (disorder and injustice), then I manifest Myself appropriate to the situation. In the legend (*purāṇa*) literature, for example, the Lord manifests as an aquatic being (a fish), an amphibious being (a turtle), a terrestrial being (a boar), a man of *dharma* (Lord *Rāma*). And in the *Bhagavad Gītā*, the Lord manifests as a teacher of this *yoga* (as Lord *Kṛṣṇa*). (7)**

**I appear in various *yugas* (the various ages within the cycles of the universe) for the protection of those committed to *dharma*, for the destruction of those committed to *a-dharma* (what is opposed to *dharma*), and for the re-establishment of *dharma*. (8)**

**The one who thus knows in reality My divine birth and action, knows the nature of Me and *prakṛti*—that one, upon giving up the body, is not reborn. That one attains Me, O *Arjuna*. (9)**

**Freed from longing, fear, and anger, having taken refuge in Me by being Me alone, and purified by the discipline that is knowledge—many have attained My nature, complete freedom. (10)**

**In which-ever way the people worship to Me, in that very same way I bless them. O *Arjuna*, people follow My path in every way. (11)**

**Desiring a result of action here, many worship the deities—because in the human world a result born of action comes quickly. (12)**

**I manifested the four-fold *varṇa* (grouping within society—educators, administrators, entrepreneurs, and laborers) according to the divisions of *guṇa* (mental disposition) and *karma* (duty). Though its author, know Me to be changeless and not a doer. (13)**

**Actions do not affect Me, nor do I have longing toward the result of action. The one who knows Me thus, that one is not bound by actions. (14)**

**Knowing Me in this way, even previous desirers of complete freedom performed their duty. Therefore, you also perform your duty, as the previous ones did before. (15)**

**What is action? What is inaction? Regarding this, even the so-called wise are confused. I will teach you about that action, knowing which you will be free from the unpleasant life of becoming, from *saṃsāra*. (16)**

**Because what is to be known is also about enjoined action, about prohibited action, and about inaction. The nature of action is difficult to know. (17)**

**The one who can see inaction, actionlessness, in action, and action in inaction, in not doing one's duty—that one is wise among people. That one is a *yogī* and has accomplished everything that is essential to be done. (18)**

**Whose every activity is free from *kāma* (requiring and anticipating) and its cause, *saṅkalpa* (scheming for the future), that one—whose accumulated *karmas* are burned up by the fire that is knowledge, like toasted seeds unable to sprout—the sages call wise. (19)**

**Giving up identification with actions and attachment to results, always contented, without dependence on anything, that one—though fully engaged in action—does not in reality do anything, is truly actionless. (20)**

**Free from fancies of the future, by whom the body and mind are mastered, who has disowned every possession, doing action only for sustaining the body, that one, a renunciate (*sannyāsī*), incurs no fault, no binding karma merit or demerit. (21)**

**Satisfied with whatever happens unasked, whose mind is unaffected by the natural pairs of opposites, free of repulsion on account of another's virtue or prosperity, and equanimous in success or failure, that one—though engaged in action—is not bound. (22)**

**For the one who is without attachment, who is free, whose mind is rooted in self-knowledge, and who acts for the sake of a sacred act (*yajña*), all *karma* along with its pending results dissolves. (23)**

**The instrument for offering is *brahman* (reality, the limitless self). The oblation is *brahman*, offered by *brahman* into the fire that is *brahman*. *Brahman* indeed is to be attained by the one whose vision of identity is that every aspect of action is *brahman*. (24)**

**Some *karma-yogīs* perform *yajña* only for invoking the Lord in the form of a deity. Others who are *sannyāsīs*, who have given up entitlement to ritual offer *yajña* as themselves by *yajña* as themselves into the fire, the knowledge, that is *brahman*. (25)**

**Others offer their sense organs—such as hearing, etcetera—into the fires that are the mastery over each of the senses. Others deliberately offer sense objects—such as only proper sound, etcetera—into the fires that are the senses themselves. (26)**

**Others offer all activities of the organs and activities of the vital energies into the fire, lit by knowledge, that is the discipline consisting of mastery over oneself, the body-mind complex. (27)**

**So too are those others whose distribution of wealth is the *yajña*, those for whom prayerful discipline is the *yajña*, those whose very *yoga* practices are the *yajña*, and those of firm vows and efforts who recite and/or who study the meaning of the *Veda* as a *yajña*. (28)**

**So too, others whose ultimate end is the practice of breath control—stopping the flow of exhalation and inhalation—they thus offer as a discipline the outgoing breath into the ingoing breath and the ingoing breath into the outgoing breath. (29)**

**Others, whose food consumption is regulated, offer their energies (*prāṇas*) into the digestive fires (*prāṇas*). All of those preceding who have an attitude of worship during their activities have to that extent their impurities that obstruct self-knowledge destroyed by *yajña*. (30)**

**Those who seek *brahman* and partake of the offering made immortal after *yajña* eventually attain in knowledge the ever existent *brahman* (reality). This human world is not there for the benefit of one without *yajña*, much less another world where effort is not available, O *Arjuna*. (31)**

**In this manner, there are many and various *yajñas* elaborated in the words of the *Veda*. Know all of them to be produced by *traiguṇya-karma* (by the action of nature), not by *ātmā*, oneself. With this understanding, you will be freed from their otherwise binding nature. (32)**

***Yajña* consisting of knowledge is superior to *yajña* consisting of materials and action, O Arjuna. O Arjuna, all action in its entirety is culminated in knowledge, as various means to the end—action should be undertaken for gaining a mind that can gain this knowledge. (33)**

**Understand that knowledge by surrender to the feet of the teacher, that is, with an attitude of acceptance of the teacher as a source of knowledge, by inquiry, and by service to the teacher—as traditionally no tuition is charged during the study; the wise—who have the vision of the truth—will teach you this knowledge. (34)**

**Understanding this knowledge, you will not again in this way become deluded, O Arjuna. By this knowledge you will see all beings in Me and even in yourself. (35)**

**Even if you are one who has done sins worse than any sinner, by the raft that is knowledge alone you will cross over all forms of karma demerit. (36)**

**O Arjuna, just as a well-ignited fire reduces logs to ashes, so this fire that is knowledge reduces all *karmas*, all results of *karma* waiting to fructify in the individual's (*jīva's*) karma account, to ashes. (37)**

**In this world, indeed, there is no purifier equal to knowledge. In time, the one who is prepared by *karma-yoga* and has a proper teacher gains that knowledge easily in one's prepared mind. (38)**

**One who has trust in this teaching as a valid means of knowledge, for whom that knowledge is the ultimate, and whose senses are mastered by *karma-yoga*—that one attains knowledge. Having gained knowledge, one immediately attains limitless peace. (39)**



**The nondiscerning, having no trust, whose mind is full of doubts—that one perishes, remains in the life of becoming (*saṃsāra*). For the one whose mind is full of doubts, this world is not there, nor the next, nor is there any happiness because of constant doubts. (40)**

**Actions do not bind the one who has renounced *karma* through *jñāna-yoga* (knowledge as the means) even though engaged in activity, whose doubt has been completely severed by knowledge, and who is attentive, whose vision of reality is never lost, O Arjuna. (41)**

**Therefore, severing with the sword that is knowledge this doubt about yourself, initially in regard to one's duty, later in regard to oneself (*ātmā*), rooted in the intellect and born of a lack of discernment, commit to *karma-yoga* and get up, O Arjuna! (42)**

***Om* (*brahman*, the witness of all) is that only reality. Thus ends the fourth chapter, called "The Topic of Knowledge and the Renunciation of Action," of the eighteen chapters of *Songs of the Glorious Lord*, which is looked upon as sacred teaching (*Upaniṣad*) and whose teaching is in the form of a dialogue between *Śrī Kṛṣṇa* and *Arjuna*, the subject matter being knowledge of *brahman* and *yoga*.**



# Chapter 5

## The Topic of Renunciation of Action

In chapter 5, *Arjuna* asks *Kṛṣṇa* to clarify the distinction between the *sannyāsa* (renunciation) and *karma-yoga* (seeking while living a life of duties) lifestyles and which one would be better for him. The Lord replies that an essential element of both lifestyles is renunciation. He explains that the candidate for *sannyāsa* lifestyle already has a certain mastery in renunciation; otherwise that lifestyle would be difficult—just as He said earlier, in the third chapter (3.6), that *sannyāsa* is useless for one without mental discipline. On the other hand, *karma-yoga* prepares the mind for the renunciation required in a life of *sannyāsa*. The distinction between the two lifestyles involves the qualification of the candidate regarding his or her degree of mastery in renunciation. *Kṛṣṇa*, for this reason, again recommends *karma-yoga* for *Arjuna*. The degree of renunciation required for *sannyāsa* is such that if one has to ask whether one is ready for it, then one is probably not ready for it. However, because the sole purpose of both *sannyāsa* and *karma-yoga* is the *śreyas* (the ultimate good) that is freedom (*mokṣa*), in this there is no difference between them. Because knowledge liberates and the pursuit of knowledge is in both lifestyles, both lead to *mokṣa*. Perfect renunciation is simply the assimilated knowledge that the self does not, in fact, do action. This can be realized within either lifestyle.

*Kṛṣṇa* then goes on to say that this knowledge culminates in oneself being *brahman*, the limitless reality. There is no rebirth for such a person because there is no longer a distinct individuality that owns a history burdened with yet-to-fructify *karmas*, results of action. The one with this culmination of knowledge has attained a fulfillment that does not wane. Until this assimilation of the

knowledge—with its appreciation of this fulfillment—is complete, one must make proper efforts to free the mind from requirements, anticipations, and anger. One should make effort to master the mind so that one can gain this knowledge. For this, meditation and contemplation are proper means, within both *sannyāsa* and *karma-yoga* lifestyles. At the end of this chapter, *Kṛṣṇa* introduces the topic of meditation and contemplation, which is taken up in greater detail in chapter 6.

There is a difference between meditation and contemplation. Meditation (*dhyāna*) is the employment of techniques for mastering the mind and is mental worship of the Lord, or prayer. Contemplation, also called *dhyāna* or more specifically called *nididhyāsana*, is seeing the truth of the teaching in order to remove obstacles to assimilating it. Meditation is preliminary and prepares the mind to remain in contemplation of the teaching. Meditation happens in the seat of meditation; whereas contemplation happens both in the seat of meditation and during the rest of one's time. We can meditate even before we hear this teaching. Contemplation requires that we have heard and are clear on the teaching being contemplated. Assimilation of this teaching, of this knowledge, requires contemplation—or at least a contemplative mind.

**Arjuna said:**

**O *Kṛṣṇa*, You praise the renunciation (*sannyāsa*) of action and also *karma-yoga*. Of these two, please tell me definitely that one which is better for me. (1)**

**The Lord said:**

**Both lifestyles of *sannyāsa* and *karma-yoga* lead to complete freedom. But, of the two, *karma-yoga* is better than renunciation of action for you, *Arjuna*. (2)**

**The one who neither hates nor longs** for anything **should be known as always a *sannyāsī* (renunciate)** no matter which lifestyle. **Because, O Arjuna, being free from the hold of the opposites, *rāga* and *dveṣa* (binding likes and dislikes), one is effortlessly freed from bondage. (3)**

**Children, that is, the nondiscerning, not the wise, claim that *sāñkhya*, renunciation (*sannyāsa*), and *karma-yoga* are different. One who has completely followed just one of the two lifestyles attains the result of both. (4)**

**The status, complete freedom (*mokṣa*), that is gained by those who follow renunciation is also gained by those who follow *karma-yoga*. One really sees, who sees that renunciation (*sāñkhya*) and *karma-yoga* are one. (5)**

**Whereas, O Arjuna, without first following *karma-yoga*, *sannyāsa*, as renunciation or as a lifestyle, is difficult to accomplish. The one who is contemplative (*muni*) who has been prepared through *karma-yoga* in this life and/or prior lives in no time attains *brahman* (limitless reality). (6)**

**Prepared by *karma-yoga*, thus whose character is without defect, who has discipline over the body, who has mastered the senses, and finally whose self is known as the self of all beings—though performing action, that one is not affected. (7)**

**The contemplative knower of the truth, maintaining that the organs of sense and action engage in their objects, would think “I do not do anything,” even though seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, eating, moving, sleeping, breathing, talking, releasing, grasping, or opening and closing the eyes. This is the exact meaning of renunciation of action (*karma-sannyāsa*), namely, renunciation of doership/enjoyership in action. This is the goal of *karma-yoga* and the achievement of one who would take to the lifestyle of *sannyāsa*. (8–9)**

**Giving up attachment, not anticipating results, the one who performs actions, offering them unto *brahman* (the Lord—as *prakṛti*, nature, the cosmic order)—that one is not affected by karma demerit (*pāpa*), like a lotus leaf is not soaked by water. (10)**

**Giving up attachment, the *karma-yogīs* perform action with their body, mind, intellect, and senses only, not by “I”, for *ātma-śuddhi* (transparency/clarity of character/mind). (11)**

**Giving up the notion of control (*adhikāratva*) over the result of action, the *karma-yogī* attains a peace born of the degree of commitment; whereas with no commitment to *karma-yoga*, attached to results by the pressure of requirements, that one is bound. (12)**

**The embodied one who has self-control—renouncing all actions through the mind, by knowledge, not by bodily inaction—remains happy within the negated city, the body with its nine apertures, neither doing nor causing activity. (13)**

**The master of the nine-gated city, who is *ātmā*, effects neither doership nor actions for the person, nor connection with, attainment of, the results of action; whereas the person's constitution (*sva-bhāva*), the complex of the *guṇas*, engages in action. (14)**

**The locationless self (*ātmā*) takes on neither the karma demerit nor merit of anyone, whether of a *jñānī*, a *karma-yogī* or a non-*karma-yogī*. Knowledge is covered by ignorance and, because of that, individuals are deluded, thinking, "I have merit or demerit." (15)**

**Whereas, for those whose very ignorance is destroyed by knowledge of the self, this knowledge, like the sun, reveals the fact that their self-evident self is that limitless reality (*brahman*). (16)**

**Those whose intellect, knowledge, has attained that *brahman*, whose self is recognized as that *brahman*, whose commitment is in that *brahman*, having that *brahman* as the ultimate end, and whose impurities have been shaken off by knowledge—gain no rebirth. (17)**

**These wise people see *sama* (the same one—immutable *brahman*—in all beings): in a *brāhmaṇa* person endowed with knowledge and discretion, in a cow, an elephant, a dog, and a dog-eater, that is, one who lives outside the cultural norms of *Veda* society. (18)**

**Those whose mind is rooted in what is by nature *sama* (the same) win over birth here itself. Because the defectless *brahman* is *sama* (the same), therefore they abide in *brahman* (reality). (19)**

**The one who knows *brahman*, who is established in *brahman*, whose knowledge is without doubts, and who is no longer deluded would not be elated at obtaining what is liked, nor agitated at obtaining what is disliked. (20)**

**The one whose mind is relatively or absolutely not attached to external sense objects finds relative or absolute happiness in the self. That one whose mind is endowed with clear knowledge of *brahman* attains the fulfillment (*sukha*) that does not wane, attains *mokṣa*. (21)**

**O *Arjuna*, because those experiences—which are born of sense objects, are sources of pain alone, are immeasurably less than the *sukha*, the fulfillment that does not wane, and have a beginning and end—the wise one does not revel in those experiences. (22)**

**The one who is able to withstand here itself the force born of requiring (*kāma*) and anger (*krodha*) before release from the body, before death, is a *karma-yogī*. That one is a happy person. (23)**

**Whose fulfillment is within the self, whose reveling is within the self, and whose mind is within, centered on, the self—that one alone is a *yogī* who, being *brahman*, gains liberation in/as *brahman*, gains *mokṣa*, complete freedom. (24)**

**The wise (*ṛṣis*)—whose impediments have been destroyed, whose doubts have been resolved, who have mastered themselves, their body-mind complex, who are happily engaged in the good of all beings—they gain liberation in/as *brahman*. (25)**



**For the one who makes proper effort—free from requirements/anticipations and anger, whose mind is mastered and whose self is known—there is liberation in/as *brahman* both here and hereafter, that is, before and after the death of the body. (26)**

**Keeping external the external sense objects and the vision within the eyebrows, that is, the eyes shut, keeping naturally equal the exhalation and inhalation moving within the nostrils, the one who is contemplative—whose senses, mind, and intellect are mastered enough to sit in meditation, having complete freedom (*mokṣa*) as the ultimate end, from whom are mostly or completely gone requiring/anticipating, fear and anger—that one who sits in meditation, contemplating this teaching is always liberated indeed. (27–28)**

**Knowing Me as the doer and the experiencer of sacred acts (*yajña*) and prayerful discipline, the limitless Lord of all worlds, and the natural friend of all beings, one attains the clarity called *mokṣa*. (29)**

***Om* (*brahman*, the witness of all) is that only reality. Thus ends the fifth chapter, called “The Topic of Renunciation of Action,” of the eighteen chapters of *Songs of the Glorious Lord*, which is looked upon as sacred teaching (*Upaniṣad*) and whose teaching is in the form of a dialogue between *Śrī Kṛṣṇa* and *Arjuna*, the subject matter being knowledge of *brahman* and *yoga*.**



# Chapter 6

## The Topic of Contemplation

In this chapter, *Kṛṣṇa* again states that renunciation is at the core of *karma-yoga*. Renunciation is essentially mental. It is the mind that needs to be freed from the hold of its likes and dislikes. Whether that renunciation gets translated into the renunciation of material comforts is a lifestyle choice that is secondary to mental renunciation of likes and dislikes, although it is a natural progression for the one who has the understanding necessary to be free from one's likes and dislikes. But unless one is, in fact, able to give up material comforts, then one's supposed mental power of renunciation is more an imagination. Renunciation means knowledge, not denial; it is the knowledge that the self is not a doer or an enjoyer.

The assimilation of this knowledge is assisted by the outward discipline of the lifestyles of *karma-yoga* and *jñāna-yoga* (knowledge as a means), and by the inward discipline of meditation and contemplation. These inward disciplines are available for both lifestyles, but the *sannyāsa* lifestyle and the student and retired stages of a *karma-yoga* life provide more opportunity for continual practice of these inward disciplines. *Śama* means the cessation of duties, and the *sannyāsa* lifestyle within the Indian culture best affords the opportunity for *śama*. With *śama*, one can focus on meditation and contemplation. But *śama* is just an opportunity; one has to choose inner disciplines in order to assimilate the teaching. A *sannyāsī* (renunciate) who is not in contemplation of the teaching is one who has fallen from the *yoga*.

This chapter introduces meditation and contemplation as a discipline, a *yoga*, within but not exclusive to *jñāna-yoga*. It is a solitary pursuit, once learned, meant for removing any remaining obstacles to knowledge. Meditation techniques are for

gaining a steadiness of mind with the purpose of contemplating the teaching, helping one assimilate the teaching. Some details are provided in this chapter on meditation techniques; more can be gained, if needed, from the *Upaniṣads* (for example, *Śvetāśvatara* 1.10–16, Joshi 2007) and from Patanjali's *Yoga Sūtras* (1.12–51 and 2.46–3.3).

Those meditation techniques meant for gaining *siddhis* (special powers over nature or over others) are contrary to the teaching given here by Lord *Kṛṣṇa* (see 2.41–45). Patanjali said these *siddhis* are impediments to progress in contemplative absorption (*Yoga Sūtras* 3.37). So the contemplation is only on the teaching given here by Lord *Kṛṣṇa*. The danger in focusing elsewhere is that we may become lost in pursuits outside of the teaching of the Lord and fall from the *yoga*. Many people have been waylaid in popular yoga power trips. If, instead, we follow the Lord's teaching, it will show us how to progress in contemplative absorption for gaining knowledge.

Some think that they cannot meditate because the mind wanders when they sit in meditation. Incorrect! This is exactly meditation. Meditation is continually bringing the naturally mobile mind back to its intended focus. If it does not wander away, then it is *samādhi* (absorption in the topic); in which case, the meditation has more than succeeded. As soon as the mind has gained a certain degree of steadiness, it should be turned to contemplation of the teaching. Such a steady mind can then remain with the teaching both in and out of the seat of meditation. This is the ideal pursuit of every seeker, whether one is in *karma-yoga* or *sannyāsa*.

**The Lord said:**

**One who does action to be done without depending on the result of action is a *sannyāsī* (a renunciate—at least in terms of one’s binding likes and dislikes, one’s *rāga-dveṣas*) and a *karma-yogī*, not the one who just vows he **will not do rituals or duties.** (1)**

**What they call *sannyāsa* (renunciation)—know that to be the defining core of *karma-yoga*, O Arjuna. Because anyone who has not renounced, given up, requirements/anticipations regarding the result of action is not a *karma-yogī*. (2)**

**For the relatively contemplative one who desires to attain *yoga*, the contemplation presented herein, *karma-yoga* is said to be the means. Only for that one who has attained *yoga* (contemplation), *śama* (cessation of duties, a *sannyāsa* lifestyle of *jñāna-yoga*) is said to be the means. (3)**

**When, indeed, one is attached neither to the sense objects nor to the actions themselves, then this renunciate of all fancies is said to be *yogārūḍha* (one who has attained contemplation and, hence, is qualified for *sannyāsa* lifestyle of only contemplation). (4)**

This is a solitary pursuit, because **one should lift oneself**, the body-sense-mind complex, **up by oneself**, the body-sense-mind complex. **One should not destroy oneself, because oneself alone**, not anyone else, **is the friend of oneself, and oneself alone**, not anyone else, **is the enemy of oneself.** (5)

**By whom oneself, the body-sense-mind complex, is mastered by oneself, the body-sense-mind complex—for that one, oneself is the friend of oneself; whereas, for the one who has not mastered oneself, oneself alone remains as an enemy, like an external enemy. (6)**

**In the natural situations of cold/hot, pleasure/pain, and in respect and disrespect—for the one whose body-sense-mind complex is mastered and who is clear, the mind is completely composed. (7)**

**Whose mind is content with one's knowledge and its assimilation; who remains unchanged (*kūṭa-stha*); whose senses are mastered; for whom a lump of clay, a stone, and gold are transcended as the reality, *sat*, that is the same (*sama*)—that *yogī* is called composed (*yukta*). (8)**

**That one is exalted whose vision is the same (*sama*) toward the kind-hearted, friends, enemies, acquaintances, mediators, the hateful, kin, the virtuous, and even sinners. (9)**

**Remaining in seclusion, alone, with a mind and body that is mastered, without fancies of the future, without possessions, may the *yogī*, the *sannyāsī*, constantly unite the mind, contemplate. (10)**

**Arranging one's seat in a clean place, firm, not too high nor too low, on which the cover is from top to bottom: a soft cloth, a hide for padding, and *kuśa* grass for insulation from cold and dampness, or whatever else provides the same. Then sitting upon that seat, or its equivalent—making the mind single-pointed, having just one object—may the one whose activities of the mind and senses are mastered contemplate the teaching for clarity of mind, for removing obstacles to abiding in this knowledge. (11–12)**

**Holding the body, head, and neck in line and still; being steady**, having a wide base; as though **looking at the tip of one's nose**, relaxing the shut eyes, whose open gaze otherwise would be along the tip of the nose; **not looking**, nor listening, etcetera **in all directions; being of clear mind, without fear, and firm in one's vow of seeking *brahman* (*brahma-carya*—listening to the teacher, then continually contemplating and teaching others); mastering the mind—may the *yogī* sit, thinking of Me through My teaching, having Me as the ultimate. (13–14)**

**Always uniting the mind, contemplating, in this way, having mastered the mind, the *yogī* attains the clarity (*śāntī*) whose culmination is complete freedom, centered on Me, the Lord, *Parameśvara*. (15)**

**Whereas *jñāna-yoga* (contemplation of the teaching) is not there for one who eats too much, nor for one who does not eat adequately, nor for one who habitually sleeps too much, nor for one who is habitually always awake, O *Arjuna*. (16)**

**For one whose food and activity are moderated—whose bodily movement is regulated during activities, without meaningless, wasted bodily movement, whose sleeping and waking hours are moderated—*jñāna-yoga* is the destroyer of all sorrows. (17)**

**When the mind that is mastered abides in *ātmā* (oneself) alone, then—being free from attraction toward all objects of desire—one is said to be composed (*yukta*). (18)**

**“Like the flame of an oil lamp in a windless place does not flicker.” This is the example cited for the mastered mind of the *yogī* who is uniting in *yoga*, who is in contemplation, of *ātmā*. (19)**

**When the mind—mastered by following *yoga* (contemplation)—abides in *ātmā*, and when one sees the *ātmā* (oneself) by the *ātmā* (the mind), then one is satisfied in oneself alone. (20)**

**When one knows that same limitless *sukha* (fulfillment that is the nature of *ātmā*)—which is to be grasped by the intellect, yet is not within the scope of the senses—and, abiding there in the *sukha*, never moving away from this truth, this reality, having gained that which one knows is not bettered by another gain, and abiding in which reality one would not be affected—even by great pain—know that disassociation (*vi-yoga*) from association (*saṃ-yoga*) with sorrow to be what is called *yoga*, essentially an undoing of one’s natural, but unanalyzed, attachment to/identity with the body-mind complex through inquiry into reality and continued contemplation. That *jñāna-yoga* should be pursued with firm resolve by a mind that is not indifferent since the natural identifications are very strong. (21–23)**

**Totally giving up all anticipations born of scheming (*saṅkalpa*) about one’s goals in meditation, exercising complete authority by the mind alone in meditation over all the organs of sense and action, one should slowly and gently—with the intellect endowed with resolve prior to sitting in meditation—bring the mind to abide in *ātmā*. Making the mind abide in *ātmā* (*Paramātmā*, the Lord as one’s self), may one contemplate nothing else. (24–25)**



**Bringing it, the mind, back from whichever** distracting object **the naturally mobile, unsteady mind goes to**—by understanding that object also as **within** *para*/limitless *ātmā* alone—**may one bring the mind under control. (26)**

**Limitless fulfillment** as though **reaches** since it is already the nature of **this** *jñāna-yogī* **who has a mind that is clear,** that is, **whose cloud** of delusion **has subsided; who** recognizes one's self as **free from impurities; and who has attained** *brahman*. **(27)**

**Always uniting the mind, contemplating, in this way, free from impurities, the** *jñāna-yogī* **easily gains limitless fulfillment that is** revealed by **the contact with** the knowledge of *brahman*—revealed as one's nature, upon removal of ignorance. **(28)**

**Whose mind is absorbed in this contemplation, who sees** *sama* (the same, that is, *brahman*) **everywhere—sees one's self abiding in all beings and all beings in one's self,** assimilates the knowledge of oneself as being *Paramātmā* (the Lord as one's self). **(29)**

**The one who sees Me everywhere and sees everything in Me—I am not lost, remote, to that one, nor is that one lost, remote, to Me. (30)**

**Having attained this vision/knowledge of oneness, the one who thus gains Me as abiding in all beings, that** *jñāna-yogī*, **though engaging in all types of action, abides in Me,** abides not just when in the seat of meditation—because knowledge is continuous, in and out of meditation. **(31)**

**O Arjuna, the one who sees that life is the same everywhere, whether pleasant or unpleasant, with oneself as the basis of comparison<sup>4</sup> since *ātmā* is one—that *jñāna-yogī* is regarded as the most exalted. (32)**

**Arjuna said:**

**O Kṛṣṇa, this *jñāna-yoga* that you have talked about as the vision of sameness, I do not see its steady continuance due to the very fleeting nature of the mind. (33)**

**O Kṛṣṇa, since the mind is very fleeting, distracting, strong, and well rooted, I think that its control is quite as difficult as that of the wind. (34)**

**The Lord said:**

**O Arjuna, without a doubt, the mind is fleeting and difficult to master. But, O Arjuna, with repetition in prayerful meditation and eventually in contemplation and with dispassion by objective inquiry into the distracting objects and their valuation, it is mastered. (35)**

**By one whose mind is not mastered, this *jñāna-yoga* is difficult to gain, whereas by one whose mind is mastered and who makes effort through proper means, through the contemplation presented in this teaching, it is possible to gain. This is my vision. (36)**

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<sup>4</sup> “With oneself as the basis of comparison” is grounded in the vision that the one who sees through these eyes is the same as the one who sees through other eyes.

**Arjuna said:**

**O Kṛṣṇa**, the *sannyāsī* talked about in this teaching **endowed with trust** in this Your teaching, but **who does not make adequate effort, whose mind wanders away from yoga, not gaining success in yoga—what is that one's lot? (37)**

**O Kṛṣṇa, deluded in the path**, in the means for the knowledge, **of brahman, fallen from both, karma-yoga and jñāna-yoga**, and thus **without a basis, I hope that that one does not fizzle out, like a cloudlet split off from a cloud bank? (38)**

**Now, O Kṛṣṇa, You ought to completely remove my doubt, since—other than You, the Lord (Īśvara)—there is no remover of this particular doubt. (39)**

**The Lord said:**

**O Arjuna**, neither here itself due to the positive attitude of trust (*śraddhā*) nor hereafter according to *karma* **is there loss for that one. Because, O Dear One**, to the extent **anyone performs adaptive action** in keeping with *dharma*, to that extent **that one does not get a bad lot. (40)**

**The one who has “fallen” from this yoga gains the same worlds**, heavens, of those who do adaptive actions, lives there for countless years, then **is re-born in the home of the virtuous**, following *dharma*, and fortunate family. **(41)**

**Or even better that one is born in the family of wise yogīs. Such a birth as this is indeed more difficult to attain in this world. (42)**

**There, one gains connection with**, quickly matures to, **an intellect** like the one that existed while in the previous body and then **strives further than that, toward success**, complete freedom, **O Arjuna. (43)**

**By that previous** life's **practice**, its *karma-phala* (the result of its *karma*), **alone, even without will, one is indeed swept along. Just desiring to know about this *jñāna-yoga* one quickly goes beyond the *Veda* text, its bulky heaven-going section. (44)**

**The *jñāna-yogī* who indeed strives with resolve until free from faults, accomplished by accumulated effort after many prior births wherein all obstacles to knowledge are overcome—that one thereupon gains the limitless end. (45)**

This *yogī* is superior to *tapasvīs* (who perform prayerful disciplines) and is also considered superior to *jñānīs*, that is, scholars who treat this teaching as just theory rather than as about themselves. This *yogī* is also superior to those who perform rituals. Therefore, be a *yogī*, through *karma-yoga* become a *jñāna-yogī*, **O Arjuna. (46)**

**One who has trust (*śraddhā*)—the mind absorbed in Me—seeks Me through this contemplation. That one is considered by Me the most exalted among all *yogīs*. (47)**

***Om* (*brahman*, the witness of all) is that only reality. Thus ends the sixth chapter, called "The Topic of Contemplation," of the eighteen chapters of *Songs of the Glorious Lord*, which is looked upon as sacred teaching (*Upaniṣad*) and whose teaching is in the form of a dialogue between *Śrī Kṛṣṇa* and *Arjuna*, the subject matter being knowledge of *brahman* and *yoga*.**

# Chapter 7

## The Topic of Knowledge and Its Assimilation

When this teaching uses the word *knowledge* by itself, it indicates the completion of the knowledge that yields complete freedom. When it uses the two words *knowledge* (*jñāna*) and *assimilation* (*vijñāna*), it is distinguishing simple understanding about the teaching from its fulfillment in complete freedom. It is the difference between saying “The teaching and the teacher say I am (the self is) completely free” and saying “I am completely free.” The first speaker may simply be a scholar; the later is a master. In the preceding chapter, a life of contemplation is encouraged for the assimilation of the teaching about the nature of the limitless self.

This chapter marks a shift in emphasis from the nature of the individual (and the pursuit and assimilation of the knowledge of the nature of the individual) to the nature of the Lord (and the pursuit and assimilation of the knowledge of the nature of the Lord). This shift in emphasis lasts through chapter 12. Chapter 13 then gives a marvelous presentation of the identity of the Lord and the individual—of the Lord who is both the field and the knower of the field, and the individual who is this same knower of the field. The great *Upaniṣad* statement “*Tat tvam asi* (That [Lord] you are)” is the basis for these shifts in emphasis from the individual (“you”) to the Lord (“that”) and then to their identity (“are”). Whether one fully knows the microcosm or fully knows the macrocosm, either one amounts to complete knowledge—as the truth of one is the truth of the other. That is the very nature of truth. Truth is without division and infinite. If it is limited in any way, then it is only a concept that is subject to correction and negation.

The knowledge of the Lord starts with the macrocosm. The macrocosm is all the objects of your five senses and the concepts that make up your mind. This is the entirety of the universe, the field, before you. Even what you don't know falls within the concept of what you know you do not know. We have to pause to appreciate how complete this ancient description of the macrocosm is. Even our vaunted modern-day physics is not as complete. Physics has only recently come to accept that the observer needs to be taken into account in order to correctly understand even a single event in the universe. But the knowledge of the Lord does not stop at that, as there is also the being that is aware of the observations and concepts in the mind.

When a scientist observes a person, the scientist can never observe that person's awareness. Hence, psychology and the other sciences—because of the scientific method to which they are wed—are forever shut off from arriving at an understanding of the nature of this awareness, which awareness is in fact self-evident to everyone. Psychology cannot even directly study the mind. Psychologists rely on clients' subjective responses to determine what is happening in the mind. For example, if you were the client, you would have to tell the psychologist whether stimulating a particular part of your brain evoked a particular thought in your mind. If a set of neurons firing was exactly the same as a thought, then why would a psychologist need to ask you?

Before anyone knew there were such neurons, everyone was clear what thoughts they entertained. Indeed, scientists don't even see these neurons firing in their lab; they see only spikes on a graph, once or twice removed from what they are claiming is the fact of thought. At best, scientific theories about awareness and the mind are suppositions and inferences—to be corrected and negated by the next generation. Scientists cannot directly study your mind any more than they can read

your mind. However, you alone can contemplate all this before you (including your mind) with this teaching, within self-evident awareness, and as the Lord—because the Lord is none other than yourself.

**The Lord said:**

**O Arjuna, please listen to that *jñānaṃ sa-vijñānam* (knowledge and its assimilation) by which—having your mind committed to Me, having Me as your foundation, and taking to My two-fold *yoga*—you will know Me, *Parameśvara*, *paraṃ brahma*, complete, without doubt. (1)**

**This knowledge (*jñāna*), along with its assimilation (*vijñāna*), I will tell you completely, knowing which nothing more remains here to be known. (2)**

**Among thousands of people, a rare one makes an effort for this accomplishment. Even of those who make an effort and are prepared, a rare one knows Me in reality. (3)**

**Earth, solidity; water, liquidity; fire, heat/light; wind, movement; space, dimension; mind; intellect; and the “I” notion, the universe divided into five sensible elements and the means to sense them—this is My nature, *prakṛti*, divided in eight ways. (4)**

**This is not My ultimate nature; it is a lower level of reality within Me, as *a-sat* is to *sat* (the unreal is to the real). Whereas, O Arjuna, different from this, please know My ultimate nature, ultimate *prakṛti*—being the basis of the *jīva* (individual) and by which this universe is sustained. (5)**

**Please bear in mind that all beings have these two *prakṛtis*, the universe of forms and its reality, as their source. I am the source of the entire universe, as well as its resolution. (6)**

**There is no other cause superior to Me, O *Arjuna*. Like collections of gems, so many glories, on a thread, all this is strung in Me. (7)**

**O *Arjuna*, I am to name a few the taste in, the essence of, water; the light of the moon and sun; the sound symbol *Om* in all the *Vedas*; the sound in, the essence of, space; and the humanness, the unique capacity of self-judgment, in humans. (8)**

**I am sweet fragrance in earth and the *tejas* (heat and light) in, the essence of, fire. I am the life in living beings, and the prayerful discipline in ascetics. (9)**

**O *Arjuna*, please understand the ever-existing Me as the seed of all beings. I am the intellect of all who have an intellect, and the brilliance of all that have brilliance. (10)**

**In all that have strength, I am the strength that is free from *kāma* (requirement/anticipation—toward the unattained) and *rāga* (attachment—toward the attained), and in all beings I am nonbinding desire not opposed to *dharma* (My universal order), O *Arjuna*. (11)**

**Those things born from *sattva* (clear energy) and those from *rajas* (agitation) and *tamas* (mass, dullness) *guṇas*, know them to be from Me only. They, the *a-sat*—all impermanent things, are in Me, *sat*—permanent existence, that is, their existence depends on Me, but I am not in them, that is, My existence does not depend on them. (12)**



**This entire world of humans is deluded by these things that are modifications of the three *guṇas*. This populace does not know Me, who is distinct, a separate order of reality, as the real (*sat*) from the unreal (*a-sat*), from them, from what they think they are, and is changeless, not modified into them. (13)**

**Because, this, My *māyā* (*prakṛti*, this captivating world of appearances—mere names and forms)—in the form of the three *guṇas* and coming from Me the Lord—is difficult to cross. Therefore, giving up all else in *māyā*, those who seek only Me as themselves cross this *māyā*. (14)**

**Those who do maladaptive action, who are deluded and the lowest among people, do not seek the ultimate Me. Robbed of discerning capacity by this enchanting *māyā* (this captivating world of appearances), they have resorted to the condition of an *asura* (one who fights against the Lord's order, against the cosmic cycle). (15)**

**Fourfold are the people who do adaptive action and who seek Me, O *Arjuna*. These four kinds of devotees (*bhaktas*) are the one who is seized by trouble, the one who requires security, the one who wants to know Me, and the *jñānī* (one who knows Me), O *Arjuna*. (16)**

**Among them, the *jñānī* (who knows Me)—who is always united in Me and whose worship is of the one Lord as everything—is distinguished, because I, *ātmā*, am totally beloved to that *jñānī* and that one is totally beloved to Me, as *ātmā* alone is beloved (*priya*)—see *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 2.4.5. (17)**

**All four indeed are exalted, but the *jñānī* is *ātmā* (My self) alone. That is My vision. Because that one, whose mind is absorbed in Me, has attained the goal that is but Me, beyond which there is none. (18)**

**At the end of many births, the one who finally has the knowledge that “the Lord (*Vāsu-deva*, the conscious being in which everything exists) is all,” the Lord is all this, including oneself, attains Me. That wise person is very rare. (19)**

**Those whose discrimination has been robbed by various requirements and are ruled by their own disposition worship various deities, following various stipulations per the appropriate deity to fulfill each particular requirement. (20)**

**Whoever be the devotee and to whichever limited form of Mine one wishes to worship with faith—for that one, the very same faith I make firm by giving the result of the devotee’s action. (21)**

**That one, endowed with that faith, engages in the worship of that deity, that limited form of Me and obtains from that deity those desired objects—because those are ordained by Me alone in the form of the laws of *karma*. (22)**

**But for those of limited discernment hence, of limited goals and of limited capacity for appreciation, that result is limited in time, in value, etcetera. Those who worship the deities go to the limited world of the deities, and those who worship the limitless Me go to Me as their self. (23)**

**Those who lack discernment, not knowing My limitless nature—changeless and beyond which there is none—think of Me, who is formless, as having attained a form. (24)**

**Veiled, seemingly embodied in names and forms, by *māyā*, which is the union of the three *guṇas*, I am not evident to everyone. This person, the general populace who is deluded does not properly know Me, the unborn and changeless *ātmā* (the self, their self). (25)**

**O Arjuna, I know all things past, present, and future. But no one, except the *jñānī* who knows himself or herself as Me, knows Me. (26)**

**O Arjuna, Scorcher of Foes, all beings at birth—because of the delusion occasioned by the natural pairs of opposites, which delusion is born of requiring and aversion—become completely deluded. (27)**

**But those people of adaptive action whose karma demerit and merit has come to an end—being freed from the delusion occasioned by the natural pairs of opposites—and whose commitment is firm, they worship Me as themselves. (28)**

**Those who make effort for freedom from old age and death—taking refuge in Me—they know that *brahman* (reality, Me) in entirety as *adhyātma* (centered on/existing in the body—as *pratyag-ātmā*, themselves) and they know all about *karma*. (29)**

**Those who know Me as *adhibhūta* (centered on/existing in beings) and *adhidaiva* (centered on/existing in deities) and as *adhiyajña* (centered on/existing in rituals), whose minds are absorbed in Me even at the moment of death—they know Me. (30)**

***Om* (*brahman*, the witness of all) is that only reality. Thus ends the seventh chapter, called “The Topic of Knowledge and Its Assimilation,” of the eighteen chapters of *Songs of the Glorious Lord*, which is looked upon as sacred teaching (*Upaniṣad*) and whose teaching is in the form of a dialogue between *Śrī Kṛṣṇa* and *Arjuna*, the subject matter being knowledge of *brahman* and *yoga*.**



# Chapter 8

## The Topic of the Imperishable Reality

The entirety of this universe has been presented in the previous chapter, as only the *Advaita Vedānta* teaching can present it. Modern sciences are limited in their scope and therefore can neither confirm nor disaffirm this teaching, nor are they required to confirm it. The sciences have their own relative scope in which they provide solutions pending further study. Because only you can know your own mind and because a complete teaching must include yourself (the witness of all, including the mind), self-examination is required—in the light of this teaching—to confirm the teaching. No future science or new savior (whether in the future or the past) can do that for you.

This teaching—which examines the nature of the entire universe and the very nature of you, its witness—was given, Lord *Kṛṣṇa* says, at the beginning of humankind (4.1); it comes with each manifestation of the universe. It was not first given only this century, this millennium, two- or two-thousand-five-hundred or five thousand years ago—condemning previous generations to so-called “barbaric” ignorance or to lesser realms (or even torturous realms) just because they weren’t exposed to the products of the various world religions, cults, or sciences. The *Vedānta* teaching indicates that all possible subtle heavens or hells exist for everyone, of all generations, in keeping with their will-based deeds (7.22–23)—regardless of the era, culture, or religion in which they live. The *Vedānta* teaching alone reflects the eternal, universal justice to all living beings of all generations.

This teaching also indicates that there can be a transcendence of this universe, both physical and subtle—a final release from the revolutions through universal realms of existence. This release is by knowledge alone and is available during this

lifetime—not supposedly after you die. This freedom, in fact, is already our nature, hidden from us by our ill-conceived notions of ourselves. This freedom is not some new knowledge given by a savior or liberator, but is the self-knowledge within each of us that blossoms once the ignorant notions have been removed and the heart is sufficiently purified of its guilts and hurts. Attaining this freedom is attaining the self of all, attaining the very being of the Lord, reality as-it-is. For this reason, *Kṛṣṇa* says that the greatest devotee (*bhakta*) to the All, to the Lord which is all, is the *jñānī*, the one who knows this (7.16–19, 8.22).

In chapter 8, Lord *Kṛṣṇa* again states that reality is unchanging and limitless and is the very nature of oneself. The Lord, this reality, alone is the embodied one in all bodies. The one who knows and thus remembers the Lord—without a doubt, as one’s self—attains that unchanging and limitless reality (8.3–10). But the one who is mistakenly identified with the changing and limited—whether that be as tiny as this body-mind complex or as grand as the manifestation of this universe (yet excluding one’s self)—will, upon the failure of the body to retain the subtle mind, move on to subtle realms. That is, one’s subtle mind with the identified ego reflecting within it will move to subtle realms. These realms will be in keeping with the grandeur of what one had continually identified with in this life. Then that subtle mind, with its ego, will be born again—with an appropriate material body to exhaust more of one’s accumulated store of *karmas*. Therefore, the Lord says “know Me” (13.2) and “remember Me” (8.7).

**Arjuna** said:

O *Kṛṣṇa*, what is that *brahman* (reality)? What is *adhyātma* (centered on the body)? What is *karma* (action and its result)? What is called *adhibhūta* (centered on beings)? And what is called *adhidaiva* (centered on the deities)? (1)

Here, in this body, what and how attained is *adhiyajña* (the one centered on ritual), O *Kṛṣṇa*? And, at the moment of death, how are those who have mastered the mind to know You? (2)

The Lord said:

*Brahman* (reality) is changeless and limitless. *Adhyātma* (the self—centered on the body) is said to be of its *brahman's* nature. What is called *karma* is an act of offering in what should be a sacred act (*yajña*) and its result (*phala*) that causes the arising of existence, embodiment, of beings. (3)

*Adhibhūta* (the world—centered on beings/things) is perishable existence. And *adhidaivata* (*adhidaiva*, the chief deity—centered on deities) is *puruṣa* (the cosmic person, called *Hiraṇya-garbha*). *Adhiyajña* (centered on *yajña*, ritual) here, in the body, is Me alone, O Exalted Among the Embodied Ones. (4)

Remembering Me alone at the moment of death, having given up the body, the one who as though departs, from the standpoint of the wise person's (*jñānī's*) subtle mind dissipating upon leaving the physical body—that one attains My nature, complete freedom, called *mokṣa*. In this there is no doubt. (5)

**O Arjuna, when in the end one gives up the body, whatever thing one naturally remembers—always having been made in that state of obsession through constant contemplation of whatever is ultimate to one—that alone one reaches as a positive or negative result, depending on whether one acted upon the obsessions in keeping with *dharma* or not. (6)**

**Therefore, please remember Me as presented in this teaching at all times and fight, O Arjuna. Being one whose mind and intellect are both offered unto Me, the Lord—as nature (*prakṛti*), the cosmic order, without a doubt you will reach Me as reality (*brahman*) alone. (7)**

**O Arjuna, accordingly, with My teaching, reflecting with a mind endowed with the *yoga* consisting of continued practice, study and contemplation and not inclined to go elsewhere to anything as not-Me; the one who would contemplate continuously and at the moment of death the all-knowing Lord (the *kavi*)—the one who is always there, the one who accordingly through *dharma* rules, subtler than the subtle, dimensionless, the dispenser of all results of action, whose form cannot be comprehended, whose appearance is illuminating like the sun, and is beyond darkness, ignorance—that one attains the limitless, effulgent person (*puruṣa*), Me. (8–9)**

**At the moment of death, with a steady mind endowed with devotion and, indeed, with mental strength through *yoga* (continued practice of contemplation), properly placing as a visualization the last breath between the eye-brows, one attains by being, not by movement that limitless, effulgent person (*puruṣa*), Me. (10)**



**I will briefly tell you about that end—which is imperishable, which the knowers of the *Veda* declare, which renunciates (*yatis*) who are free from longing enter, and desiring which they take to *brahma-carya* (living for only attaining *brahman*). (11)**

**Closing all the gates** (the sense organs) **and** as a visualization **withdrawing the mind into the heart; placing one's breath at the top of the head and remaining there holding the last breath by the strength of *yoga*; chanting the single syllable "Om," which is *brahman*; remembering Me accordingly through My teaching, while giving up the body—the one, *yogī* who is not yet a *sthita-prajña* (of firm wisdom), who departs by movement, as it were—that one reaches the most exalted end within *saṁsāra* (the universe of becoming), that is, reaches *Brahma-loka*, the seventh heaven, where one may be taught the knowledge of *brahman* and thus freed. (12–13)**

Whereas, the one with firm wisdom (*sthita-prajña*), **O Arjuna, the one whose mind sees no other than Me everywhere, remembering Me continually and for a long time—for that *yogī* who is always even while living united in Me, I am easily gained. (14)**

**The people who are wise (the *mahātmās*), attaining Me, do not gain another birth, do not go to another world (*loka*), which is the abode of misery and is ever changing and therefore finite. They have gained while living the limitless success called freedom (*mokṣa*). (15)**

**O Arjuna, all worlds, including Lord Brahmā's world (the highest abode in saṃsāra, the heaven called Brahma-loka), are that from which there is a return, a rebirth, unless taught the knowledge of reality (brahma-vidyā) in Brahma-loka by Lord Brahmā; whereas, O Arjuna, attaining Me, there is no rebirth. (16)**

**Those people who are knowers of day and night know that a day of Lord Brahmā is that lasting thousands of ages (yugas), four thousand yugas equal a thousand mahā-yugas which equal 4.32 billion human years; and His night is that also lasting thousands of yugas, four thousand yugas. (17)**

**At the coming of the day for Lord Brahmā, all individuals/things (vyaktas) by force of past karma manifest in due time from the unmanifest. At the coming of the night they, unless freed by knowledge, will have resolve(d) back into that called the unmanifest (a-vyakta) itself. (18)**

**O Arjuna, that very same group of beings, of individuals (jīvas)—born again and again within countless cosmic cycles without their or My will due to their karma—resolves at the coming of the night and manifests at the coming of the day. (19)**

**Whereas, different from that unmanifest, Lord Brahmā's nighttime within saṃsāra, is another unmanifest, the a-kṣaraḥ puruṣaḥ (imperishable fullness)—not manifest to the senses, being one's self, which always exists. That is not destroyed when all things are destroyed. (20)**

**This unmanifest Me is said to be imperishable (a-kṣara). That, and not Brahma-loka, they say, is the ultimate end. Gaining which, they do not return—that is My limitless abode. (21)**

**O Arjuna, that which has all beings within it and by which all this is pervaded—that *puruṣa* (the one who fills this universe) is limitless, yet can be attained by devotion in which there is no other considered apart from Me, the *a-kṣaraḥ puruṣaḥ* (imperishable fullness). (22)**

**Now, on which time, that is, route, the *yogīs* depart—where they attain either no return at least in this *kalpa*/cycle of manifestation or a return, a rebirth—that time, that route, I will tell to you, O Arjuna. (23)**

Where there are the deities **Fire, Light, Day, the Bright** fortnight of the moon, and the **Six-Month Northern Coursing** of the sun to guide—there, the people who meditate on the qualified *brahman*, on a manifestation of *brahman* in the world, having departed, eventually attain *brahman* via being taught this knowledge (*vidyā*) in *Brahma-loka*. (24)

Where there are the deities **Smoke, Night, the Dark** fortnight of the moon, and the **Six-month Southern Coursing** of the sun to guide—there, gaining a stay in a lunar, a lesser, heaven, the *yogī* returns, is reborn. (25)

**These two paths of the world, the bright and the dark, indeed are considered eternal. By one path, one gains no return** having lots of time to be taught this knowledge of reality (*brahma-vidyā*) by Lord *Brahmā*, or at least no return in this cycle (*kalpa*). **By the other path, one returns again. (26)**

**O Arjuna, knowing these two paths, a *yogī* is not deluded. Therefore, at all times, be committed to a life of seeking Me through *karma-yoga*, O Arjuna. (27)**

**Knowing this**, My answers to your seven questions, **a *yogī* goes beyond all that karma merit** spent for heaven-going **that is revealed** to accrue **in** reciting **the scriptures (*Vedas*)**, **in rituals**, **in prayerful disciplines**, and **in charity**. **And that one** immediately **attains the ultimate abode**, which is Me, **the origin. (28)**

***Om* (*brahman*, the witness of all) is that only reality. Thus ends the eighth chapter, called "The Topic of the Imperishable Reality," of the eighteen chapters of *Songs of the Glorious Lord*, which is looked upon as **sacred teaching (*Upaniṣad*)** and whose teaching is **in** the form of **a dialogue between Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna**, the subject matter being **knowledge of *brahman* and *yoga***.**

# Chapter 9

## The Topic of King of All Knowledge, King of All Secrets

Chapter 9 explains the relationship between this manifest universe and the Lord. This “relationship” is peculiar: The Lord is timeless and spaceless, yet manifests to us as time and space and as all within time and space. The Lord describes it thus: “All beings exist in Me, but I am not in them. Beings do not exist in Me... My *ātmā* (self) produces things, sustains things, but does not exist in things” (see 9.4–5). This peculiar “relationship,” like a secret (4.2–3, 9.1–2, 11.1, 15.20, and 18.63–64, 18.68, and 18.75), needs to be revealed by one who knows.

There are various analogies to understand this “relationship.” The analogy that the Lord gives in this chapter (9.6) is that of air within space. This analogy requires some understanding of *Upaniṣad* cosmogony. *Space* means dimension and *air* means movement. Movement arises from there being dimension; without dimension there is no movement. The understanding of movement must include dimension, but dimension does not require movement, nor is it changed in any way by this movement. Movement comes and goes within dimension, but, from the standpoint of movement, dimension always exists. Yet, dimension does not exist as a separate, limited entity within or outside movement.

Other analogies can also help us understand this “relationship” between this manifest universe and the Lord. The manifest within the Lord can be likened to clay pots within the world of clay. All clay pots are nothing but clay. You cannot take away clay and still have a clay pot. Before, during, and after the existence of a clay pot, there is only clay. Clay is the *material cause* (*upādāna-kāraṇa*) of a clay pot, but a clay pot is not a separate entity from clay. *Pot* is just a name we give to clay in a particular form. Being simply a name and form we attribute to clay, a pot

itself does not have within its nature clay—because it could just as well be a metal or glass pot. *Pot* or *plate* is just an adjective we give to clay. Similarly, this universe of entities is simply the various names we give to forms appearing in existence-awareness (in the Lord).

Another analogy is a dream within you, the dreamer. The dream and the entities within the dream exist in you. But as real, separate entities, they do not exist in you. The dream is you, but you are not the dream. You alone are the permanent, unaffected existence within which the dream world comes and goes, cycles in and out of manifestation. Once you wake up, the particular problems of the dream disappear; you are “freed,” as it were, from the dream problems. The dream is not a modification of you, the dreamer. Even while within the dream, you are—to the extent you identify yourself with the dream—only notionally, not actually, affected by the problems in the dream. Like the dream world in relation to you, the dreamer, this universe is a lower level of reality within the real you, like the unreal to the real (*a-sat* to *sat*).

As has already been taught, the real you is nothing but the Lord. The universe is “related” to the real you, *ātmā* (the self), in the same way as it is to the Lord. Yet, out of ignorance, we think we are born into and die from this world and that we travel to heavenly or hellish realms within this universe.

### **The Lord said:**

**Whereas** apart from that traveling to heavens, such as *Brahma-loka* (8.16), **I will tell to you, who are not cynical, this most secret knowledge—along with its assimilation—knowing which** in this life, **you will be freed from the unpleasant** life of becoming, from *saṃsāra*. **(1)**

**This knowledge is the king, final authority, of all knowledge, the king of all secrets, the greatest purifier, directly known** once ignorance is removed, **in keeping with *dharma*, very easy to attain, and imperishable** because it is one's self and so never lost. (2)

**O Arjuna, people having no trust for this *dharma*, this knowledge (*jñāna*) which is in keeping with *dharma*, do not attain Me and return, remain, on the path of *saṃsāra* (life of becoming) filled with death.** (3)

**This entire universe is pervaded by Me as a form not manifest** to the senses. **All beings exist in,** are because of, **Me, but I am not in,** because of, **them,** like clay pots subsist in/are because of clay, but the world of clay does not subsist in/is not because of pots.(4)

Yet as separate **beings,** like pots from clay, they **do not exist in Me. Look at My Lordly *yoga* (connection to/attainment in)** the world! **My *ātmā* (self, the self of all) produces** all things all names and forms, **sustains all things, but does not exist in,** is not dependent on, these **things.** (5)

**Just as the vast air, which moves everywhere, always exists within space; similarly, please understand that all beings,** all names and forms, **exist within Me,** are always within—yet are not polluting, are not separate from, are not other than Me. (6)

**O Arjuna, at the end of the *kalpa* (manifestation cycle, the start of night for Lord *Brahmā*), all beings go into My unmanifest nature (*prakṛti, māyā*); they become unmanifest. Again, at the beginning of the manifestation cycle, I project, remanifest, them, their bodies and minds, from My *māyā*.** (7)

**Having control over**, not deluded by, **My *prakṛti***, again and again each *kalpa* **I project this entire group of beings without** their or My **will, by the force**, in the form of all the *karmas* of all the *jīvas*, **of *prakṛti* (of *māyā*)**. (8)

**O *Arjuna***, these *karmas* (actions and their results) **do not bind Me**, who is **seated** here as the basis of *prakṛti*, **seemingly indifferent**, being its mere conscious witness, **and unattached toward these *karmas***. (9)

**Because of Me**, the overseer, *prakṛti* **begets all that moves and does not move** or is sentient and insentient. **For this reason**, because of Me, **O *Arjuna***, the **universe revolves** in and out of manifestation. (10)

**Not knowing My limitless nature**, as the Lord of all beings, the deluded **disregard Me**, who obtains as the self, as I, in this and every **human body**. (11)

**Those whose hopes are in vain**, are still unhappy; **whose actions are in vain**, are still incomplete; **whose knowledge is in vain**, are still ignorant of Me/reality; **and who lack discernment—they tend toward a deluding disposition that is criminal (*rākṣasī*) or barbaric (*āsuri*)**. (12)

**Whereas, O *Arjuna***, the wise, the discerning—who **tend toward a disposition that is uplifting (*daivī*)**, whose mind seeks **no other** than Me, **knowing of Me as the changeless source of beings—they seek Me**. (13)

**Always acknowledging Me and making proper effort** to gain Me, those **whose commitment is firm, surrendering to Me, always united to Me with devotion—they**, the *karma-yogīs*, **seek Me**. (14)



**And still others, *jñāna-yogīs*, *sannyāsīs*, worshipping Me through the sacred act (*yajñā*) that is knowledge, seek Me—whose face is everywhere, in many ways—as being one, “(Separate) beings do not exist in Me” (see 9.5), and as being distinct, “(All) beings exist in Me” (see 9.4). (15)**

**The Veda ritual is Me, the act of worship is Me, the food offered to the ancestors is Me, the food offered to the Lord is Me, the chant is Me, the clarified butter warmed by the sun and offered into the fire is Me, the sacrificial fire is Me, and the oblation is Me. (16)**

**The father, efficient cause; mother, material cause; My own grandfather, the uncaused cause; and the sustainer of this universe are Me. The only one to be known; the purifier; “*Om*,” My name; the *R̥g-Veda*; the *Sāma-Veda*; and the *Yajur-Veda* are Me. (17)**

**The goal, the nourisher, the Lord, the only witness of everything, the abode, the shelter, and the friend are Me. The origin, the dissolution, the continued existence, the receptacle, and the imperishable seed, the continual cause of everything, are Me. (18)**

**I heat. I hold back and give forth the rain. The immortality of the gods and also the death of mortals are Me. Both reality, the sustaining cause, and unreality, the time-bound effects, is Me, O *Arjuna*. (19)**

**Those versed in the three *Vedas*; who drink, who participate in, the *soma* ritual; and thus are relatively cleansed of karma demerit; propitiating Me with rituals—they pray for going to heaven. Attaining the world of Lord *Indra* as a result of their karma merit (*puṇya*), they enjoy heavenly experiences of the celestials in heaven. (20)**

**Having enjoyed that vast subtle world called heaven, when their *punya* is spent, they re-enter the world of mortals. In this manner, following ritual enjoined by the three scriptures (*śrutis*), the three forms of *Vedas*, those who require objects of desire take to coming and going, remain in *saṃsāra*. (21)**

**But for those people who are not separate from Me, who contemplate Me and gain Me, being always one with Me, I procure what they want to acquire and protect; I, the Lord, take care of the bodily and mental needs of these renunciates (*sannyāsīs*). (22)**

**O *Arjuna*, even those who are devoted to deities as different from Me and themselves—who, filled with faith, perform various acts of worship—they also worship only Me, but not in accordance to a valid means of knowing Me, the Lord, who is each of these deities. (23)**

**I am indeed the experiencer, recipient, of all *yajñas* (acts of worship) and the only Lord, but they do not know Me in reality. Therefore, they fall away; they lose Me out of ignorance. (24)**

**Those who have commitment to the deities reach the world of deities. Those who have commitment to the ancestors reach the world of ancestors. Those who worship spirits reach the world of spirits. And those who are disposed to worship Me reach Me. (25)**

**The one who offers to Me with devotion a leaf, a flower, a fruit, water—I receive that as offered out of the devotion of one whose mind is mastered to that extent—to the extent that one acknowledges Me, the Lord, and can act on that acknowledgment. (26)**

**O Arjuna, whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever worship you perform, whatever you give, whatever discipline you undertake—that may you do as an offering to Me as a *karma-yoga* meant for gaining a mind that can know Me, not to get some small result. (27)**

**In this manner you will be freed from the bondage that is *karma*, which has, or is in the form of, pleasant and unpleasant results. Being one whose mind is endowed with such renunciation and with *karma-yoga* and to that extent freed, you will attain Me. (28)**

**I am the same (*sama*) in all beings. For Me, no one is disfavored or favored. Rather, those who seek Me with devotion—they are in Me and I am also in them. (29)**

**Even if one whose conduct was highly maladaptive seeks Me—being one who seeks Me as not separate from oneself—that one is to be considered an accomplished person (a *sādhu*), because that one is of clear understanding. (30)**

**Quickly that person of maladaptive conduct becomes one whose mind conforms to *dharma* and gains the peace that is ever the same, being the peace that is the nature of oneself. O Arjuna, please know that My devotee is never lost. (31)**

**O Arjuna, even those whose birth would be unwanted, born into a criminal or barbaric family—also women, merchants, and laborers—they, too, because they take refuge in Me, gain the ultimate end. (32)**

**What again** to speak of *brāhmaṇas*, considered to have **virtuous** births, **who are devoted; similarly, kings who are also sages** like King *Janaka*, taught by seer/sage *Yājñā-valkya*. **Having attained this impermanent and unpleasant loka**, this human embodiment, **may you seek Me. (33)**

**May you be one whose mind** remains in Me, **devoted to Me, and who performs all actions as rituals to Me. Surrender to Me. Having prepared your mind in this way, having Me as the ultimate end, you will attain Me alone. (34)**

*Om (brahman, the witness of all)* is that only reality. Thus ends the ninth chapter, called "The Topic of the King of All Knowledge, the King of All Secrets," of the eighteen chapters of *Songs of the Glorious Lord*, which is looked upon as **sacred teaching (Upaniṣad)** and whose teaching is in the form of a **dialogue between Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna**, the subject matter being **knowledge of brahman and yoga**.

# Chapter 10

## The Topic of Glories

Literature is also part of our universe. For *Arjuna*, literature includes the mythologies (*purāṇas*) and the *Vedas*. Many of the *purāṇas* were written after the major *Upaniṣads* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* epic, but before the *Mahā-bhārata* epic, of which the *Bhagavad Gītā* is part. Prior to the *purāṇas*, the deities in the *Vedas*, including the *Upaniṣads*, were barely personified forces of nature, such as *Agni* (Fire), *Vāyu* (Wind), and *Indra* (Mind and king of the deities). The *purāṇas* introduced personified deities, such as *Viṣṇu* (Sustainer), *Śiva* (Destroyer), *Lakṣmī* (Abundance), and *Sarasvatī* (Culture). The deities of the *purāṇas* married, had families and adventures, and got in and out of trouble.

Similar to the shift in literature of natural forces to personified ones is the shift of human characters to deities. In *Vālmīki's* original *Rāmāyaṇa* epic (the story has undergone many retellings), *Rāma* is a man of virtue (*dharma*). In the later, poetic retellings of the *Rāmāyaṇa* story, *Rāma* is a deity, an incarnation of Lord *Viṣṇu*. The personification of the divine aspects of nature and the divinization of human characters have benefits—such as inspiring imaginative minds—but if we overlook the earlier literature, we may fail to appreciate the wonder and glory of the forces of nature and the majesty of life in a purely scientific spirit. We may also lose the culture-free unity inspired by nonpersonified nature deities. For example, a lack of attention to the earlier literature may contribute to one thinking that *Kṛṣṇa* is superior to *Rāma*, or *Śiva* to *Viṣṇu* (which is equivalent to a schoolyard argument that “my dad is better than your dad”). The *Advaita Vedānta* teaching has survived nonetheless, and the blend of the *purāṇas* and earlier literatures has indeed blessed us—despite the fractured appearances of Hinduism today.

The *Mahā-bhārata* epic and the *Bhagavad Gītā* present *Kṛṣṇa* as Lord *Kṛṣṇa*, an incarnation of Lord *Viṣṇu*. However, this teaching would be just as powerful and true if *Kṛṣṇa* was presented as a man of knowledge who had completely assimilated the knowledge of the identity of himself with the total. If this were the case, then we would understand that, when He talks about Himself, *Kṛṣṇa* legitimately talks from the perspective of the Lord (compare *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 3.10.5–6). This teaching, after all, unfolds the fact that we all are already free and are already the Lord, but we don't know it until we are taught. If we take *Kṛṣṇa* as a person, a genius who was born already wise, and understand that *Kṛṣṇa* would have been exposed from childhood to the wonderful literature and culture that confirms the wisdom that one is the self of all, then we would understand these statements He makes about Himself in the light of the *purāṇa* literature. *Kṛṣṇa* is a special incarnation of the Lord—not born of ignorance.

In this chapter, *Kṛṣṇa* presents Himself as all the glories (which are described in both sets of literature—the *Vedas* and the *purāṇas*), since nothing is apart from the Lord. All we see and all we hear and think are but the Lord. This is a powerful acknowledgment of the real basis of this universe and, when that clear vision includes one's self, it is the limitless freedom called *mokṣa*. The inclusion of oneself in the vision of the Lord is the difficult step indicated in the beginning and the end of *Kṛṣṇa*'s description of His glories (10.20, 10.42). This complete vision is the same as the culmination of the contemplation described earlier (6.10–26) that helps us assimilate this teaching. Meditation or prayer helps us mature into this complete vision until one's self is included inseparably in this vision of the Lord.

**The Lord said:**

**O *Arjuna*, listen again to My words revealing the limitless. To you who are pleased at this which is limitless I will, with a desire for your benefit, again expound. (1)**

**Neither the hosts of deities nor the great seers/sages know in detail My glory, since I am the cause of each and every one of the embodiments of the deities and sages. (2)**

**The one who knows Me, the limitless Lord of the universe, as unborn, not an effect, and beginningless, having no cause—that one, being no longer deluded among mortals, is freed from all *pāpas* (everything unwanted). (3)**

**From Me alone are all these different kinds of things belonging to living beings: the capacity to know; knowledge; freedom from delusion; accommodation, patience and understanding; truthfulness; mastery over ways of behavior; mastery over ways of thinking; pleasure; pain; birth, including the becoming within change; death, including the un-becoming within change; fear and also fearlessness; harmlessness; equanimity toward any result; contentment; prayerful discipline; charity; and fame and ill fame. (4–5)**

**The ancient, seven seers and four *Manus*, progenitors of the four social lineages, whose minds were resolved in Me, were born from My mind, via the total subtle body of the universe, *Hiraṇya-garbha*. Of them, all these people in the world were born. (6)**

**The one who knows in truth this glory and My Lordly (*aiśvarya*) *yoga* (connection to/attainment in) the world—that one is endowed with an unshakable *yoga* (vision of sameness). In this there is no doubt. (7)**

**I am the source of everything and because of Me everything continues. Knowing this, the wise, endowed with this *bhāva* (vision—initially an attitude giving relative freedom, then a clear knowledge giving complete freedom), thus attain Me. (8)**

**Those whose mind is centered on Me; whose powers of sensing and action are resolved in Me; teaching one another, maintaining this teaching tradition; and always telling about Me—they are satisfied, not needing anything else, and happy in Me. (9)**

**For those who are always committed and worship Me with love, I give the attainment through knowledge by which they gain Me. (10)**

**Out of compassion for them alone, I, attaining in every thought in the mind as the conscious I itself, destroy the darkness, the delusion, born of ignorance—with the shining oil lamp that is knowledge. (11)**

***Arjuna* said:**

**You are *paraṃ brahman* (limitless reality), limitless light or the ultimate abode, the most purifying. All the sages, the divine sage *Nārada*, similarly the seers *Asita*, *Devala* and *Vyāsa* call You “the timeless one who fills everything,” the “celestial, not of this ordinary world, Lord who was there at the beginning—unborn and all pervasive.” And You, Yourself, say to me the same thing. (12–13)**

**All this that You tell me, I consider true, O *Kṛṣṇa*. O Lord, indeed neither the deities nor demons know Your full manifestation. (14)**



**O Being Who Transcends, Producer of Beings, Lord of Beings, Lord of the Gods, and Lord of the Universe—You, Yourself alone, know Yourself with Your mind. (15)**

**The glories by which You remain, pervading these worlds—the extraordinary glories of *ātmā* (Yourself, the self of all)—indeed, You alone are able to describe completely. (16)**

**O *Yogī* of *yogīs*, while always contemplating You everywhere, how should I know You? And, O Lord, in which things are You to be meditated on by me? (17)**

**O *Kṛṣṇa*, please tell again in detail the connection/attainment (*yoga*) of *ātmā* (Yourself, the self of all) and of Your glory in the world, because—in listening to this immortal nectar, the words from the Lord’s mouth—I have no satiation; I cannot get enough. (18)**

**The Lord said:**

**Well now, O *Arjuna*, I will tell to you the extraordinary glories of My self, the self of all, wherever there is importance, since there is no end to My detailed description. (19)**

**O *Arjuna*, the self, yourself, the I, residing in the mind, in the seat of thoughts wherein reality is to be acknowledged, of all beings is Me; “*tat tvam asi* (that [Lord] you are)”—contemplate on that, O *Arjuna*. The source, the center, and the resolution of all beings is Me. (20)**

**I am, among the twelve sun deities** for the twelve months, the one called *Viṣṇu* (the one who pervades); among luminaries, the sun with its rays; and among the storm deities, the progenitor of the people (*Prajā-pati*) called *Marīci*. Among the nightly luminous bodies, the moon is Me. (21)

**I am** the melodious *Sāma-Veda* among the *Vedas*. I am Lord *Indra* among the deities, among the class of deities called the *vasus*. And I am the mind (*manas*) among the powers of perception and action. I am the faculty of cognition, the intellect (*buddhi*), among all created things, as the apex of evolution. (22)

**And among the deities of destruction, I am** their source called *Śaṅkara* (the one who blesses—by removing obstructions). I am, among protectors and stealers of wealth, *Kubera* (the Lord of wealth), and Lord *Agni* among the eight *vasus*. I am Mount *Meru* among peaks. (23)

**And, O Arjuna, know** Lord *Indra*'s priest *Bṛhas-pati*—the chief among priests in charge—to be Me. I am *Skanda* (the leader of the divine army, also called Lord *Subrahmaṇya*) among army commanders, and the ocean among natural bodies of water. (24)

**I am** the seer/sage and *Prajā-pati*, called *Bṛgu*, son of Lord *Varuṇa*, among divine sages; and the single syllable, *Om*, among words. I am, among *yajñas* (rituals), the *yajña* that is the simple, harmless *japa* (mental repetition of the Lord's name). And, among mountain ranges, the *Himālayas*. (25)

**The sacred fig tree** depicted as the tree of *saṃsāra* among trees; the popular, trickster sage *Nārada* among the celestial sages; *Citra-ratha*, the king among divine musicians; and the seer/sage *Kapila* among *siddhas* (a class of sages born already wise from deities) are Me. (26)

**Know among horses** Lord *Indra's* white steed called ***Uccaiḥśravas***, born from the gods and demons churning the primordial milky ocean for **the immortal nectar**; Lord *Indra's* white ***Airāvata*** among noble elephants; and, among people, the **king**—know all to be **Me. (27)**

**I am** Lord *Indra's* lightning bolt among weapons and ***Kāma-dhenu*** (the wish-fulfilling cow) among cows. **I am the deity that is desire** for immortality **who causes progeny**. **I am** the divine, poisonous king of snakes used to churn the primordial milky ocean ***Vāsuki*** among snakes. **(28)**

**And I am *An-anta*** on whom Lord *Viṣṇu* reclines among many-headed **snakes**. **I am** the Lord of water ***Varuṇa*** among creatures and deities **of water**. **I am** the king of the ancestors called ***Aryaman*** among the ancestors. **I am** the feared ***Yama*** (Lord Death) among discipliners. **(29)**

**And I am** the demon-yet-*Nārāyaṇa*-devotee called ***Prahlāda*** among the demons born of *Diti*. **I am time** itself among those who calculate time. **I am** the fearless king of beasts, **the lion**, among wild animals; and *Viṣṇu's* high-flying devotee ***Garuḍa*** among birds. **(30)**

**I am the wind** among those that purify. **I am** one of My incarnations (*avatāras*), the embodiment of *dharma*, **Lord *Rāma*** among those who wield weapons. **I am** a type of dangerous water beast called ***Makara*** among aquatic creatures. **I am the sacred river *Gaṅgā*** among rivers. **(31)**

**I am the source, the center, and the resolution of the cycles of manifestation** of the universe, **O *Arjuna***. **I am knowledge centered on the self** amounting to freedom (*mokṣa*) among all forms of **knowledge**, and the **discussion** that leads to truth among those who discuss. **(32)**

**I am the initial letter or simplest and most common sound 'a' among the letters or sounds of the alphabet; and the list compound<sup>5</sup> where importance is the same, sama, in each member among compounds. Ceaseless time is Me. The all-pervasive giver of results of action (karma-phalas) is Me. (33)**

**And I am Mr̥tyu (Lord Death) as the one who takes away everything, your life, and prosperity among what will be. Among feminine Sanskrit words, I am fame, wealth, speech, memory, the capacity to retain what is learned, resolve, and accommodation. (34)**

**Similarly I am the prominent Sāma-Veda verses sung in the Br̥hatī meter among Sāma-Veda verses, and the most famous verse called Gāyatrī among all verses of the Veda. I am the cool November/December among lunar months and the flowering spring among seasons. (35)**

**I am the royal game of dice among those that deceive. I am the brilliance of the brilliant. I am victory. I am clarity in thinking. I am the contemplative disposition (sattva) among the contemplative. (36)**

**I am, among the Vṛṣṇi clan, Mr. Kṛṣṇa; among Pāṇḍu's sons, you, the award-winning Arjuna. Among sages, also, Veda-Vyāsa, another name or title for Vyāsa, who is composing this epic; and, among seers, the seer Śukrācārya, the wise but unheeded counselor to the demons, are Me. (37)**

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<sup>5</sup> A list compound (*dvandva-samāsa*) is a Sanskrit grammatical formation where two or more words are combined together, with an understood *and/or* connection between them; for example, *space-time* (*deśa-kāla*) (see *The Aruna Sanskrit Grammar Reference* 6.40:).

**I am the rod among those that tame. I am the process of justice among those who desire victory. I am silence among secrets. I am the knowledge among those who have knowledge. (38)**

**Moreover, what is the *bija* (seed, or efficient cause—*nimitta-kāraṇa*, intelligent cause) of all things, that also I am, O *Arjuna*. There is no moveable or immovable, sentient or insentient, being that can exist without Me as both the efficient cause and material cause of the universe. (39)**

**There is no end to My divine glories, O *Arjuna*. Rather, I have told only in part this detailed description of My glory. (40)**

**Whatever entity has glory, has wealth, or is indeed powerful—that itself, may you know, is born of a fraction of My power. No one is the author of any glory, so arrogance or jealousy regarding these glories is baseless. Knowing this brings relative freedom. (41)**

**But, rather, what is gained by your knowing just this much about Me, O *Arjuna*? I remain sustaining this entire universe with just a fraction of My self. The whole, infinite Me includes everything, including you. Knowing this brings complete freedom. (42)**

***Om* (*brahman*, the witness of all) is that only reality. Thus ends the tenth chapter, called “The Topic of Glories,” of the eighteen chapters of *Songs of the Glorious Lord*, which is looked upon as sacred teaching (*Upaniṣad*) and whose teaching is in the form of a dialogue between *Śrī Kṛṣṇa* and *Arjuna*, the subject matter being knowledge of *brahman* and *yoga*.**



# Chapter 11

## The Topic of the Vision of the Cosmic Form

Now *Arjuna* makes a bold claim that is common among new students to this teaching. He says, “OK, I get it!” But what *Arjuna* “gets” is a particular concept; he has not fully assimilated the teaching. We know this because his next request is to especially experience the vision of this teaching. And the vision of this teaching is not a special experience.

The culmination of this teaching is a complete vision, a complete knowledge, of the all—including, inseparably, oneself—so every single experience, no matter how mundane, is immediately assimilated within this complete vision. This complete vision cannot be lost—because it is not an experience; it is simply knowledge. Once gained, it cannot be forgotten. Just as one cannot forget that one exists, one cannot forget—once clearly known—that one exists free of limitations.

If we think that there is some special enlightenment experience in the future to be reached, then we simply are not yet clear in this knowledge and what the complete vision is. It is often confused with a kind of *samādhi* in meditation, wherein the experiential subject/object separation disappears for a time. That is just what it is: a temporary experience that can be produced with a lot of practice. We all naturally have a very similar experience when we have a good night’s sleep. Like when we wake from sleep, when we get up from meditation we aren’t wiser. We simply get up with new information that such a nice experience happens and thus is possible. Like with sleep, we only know we had that special experience when it is over. How that experience could ever be confused with enlightenment is a wonder. A temporary *mokṣa* (liberation) is hardly a *mokṣa*. It is like a prisoner getting out of jail for a few minutes every other day. At first it is something to

look forward to, but eventually it becomes just another frustration; the person remains a prisoner.

That said; the mind is capable of such epiphanies. These are natural and may be triggered by a breakthrough at some level in understanding oneself or the world, or even mechanically by certain physical or mental practices. These epiphanies can occur, but they are not the permanent, assimilated vision—the knowledge—that is unfolded by the Lord in the *Bhagavad Gītā*. In the Lord’s teaching, the real knowledge is of what is, always has been, and always will be (2.16–25). It is knowledge of the timeless reality as one’s self right now. It is not knowledge of what will be for a certain time and remembered later. It is a vision that, once gained, is never lost. This is especially indicated in verses 6.27–31 and 9.1–2.

Yet, in chapter 11, *Arjuna* naively asks *Kṛṣṇa* for a special perception of the Lord. Lord *Kṛṣṇa* indulges him, as only *Kṛṣṇa* can—as a friend and also as a teacher—to tamp down *Arjuna*’s boastful claim. He temporarily gives *Arjuna* a special sight of the infinite Lord. But though the vision starts wonderfully, *Arjuna* soon becomes fearful—because he has not assimilated his self in his understanding of the Lord. He feels overwhelmingly limited by what he sees as “out there” in this infinite sight, and this exacerbates the already existing fear in his heart. This fear, naturally occurring in the human heart, is due to the sense of limitation that arises from our perception of all the “others.” *Arjuna*’s fear indicates that he has not yet acquired clarity, much less maturity, in the vision of oneness. Maturity in this knowledge first requires clarity, then assimilation in the heart. Habitual doubts and their connected emotions based on our prior ignorance are gradually rendered more and more impotent as we mature in this vision. So this chapter, although seeming to be simply a praise of the Lord, importantly conveys a warning that this teaching



is not meant to be additional information about God and life. Rather, it is a transformative, liberating teaching that is to be completely assimilated.

**Arjuna said:**

**This delusion of mine, lack of discernment about the nature of myself, is gone, more or less, as questions follow, because of those words, the greatest secret—called the *jñāna* (knowledge) centered on the *ātmā* (self)—which You told for my blessing. (1)**

**O Lotus-Petal Eyes, I have indeed heard from You in detail about the manifestation and dissolution of all beings, and also about Your imperishable glory. (2)**

**Just as You describe Yourself, O Lord—in that way I wish to see this, Your divine form, O Being Who Transcends. (3)**

**If You think that I am able to see that, O Lord, then—O Lord of the Pursuits of *yogīs*—please show to me Your imperishable form. (4)**

**The Lord said:**

**Behold, O *Arjuna*, My forms by the hundreds and by the thousands—effulgent, of many varieties, and of many colors and forms. (5)**

**Behold the twelve *ādityas* (sun deities), the eight *vasus* (attendant deities to Lord *Indra*), the eleven *rudras* (deities of destruction), the two *aśvins* (charioteers of the sun), and the *maruts* (storm deities). Behold My many unseen-before wonders, O *Arjuna*. (6)**

**Behold, O *Arjuna*—now, here in My body, in one place—the entire universe consisting of both the moving and the nonmoving, and whatever else you wish to see. (7)**

**But with just this, your own vision, you cannot see all of Me. I give to you an extraordinary, magical, vision, a capacity to see everything, including the entire subtle universe, and to see into the future. Behold My Lordly power. (8)**

***Saṅjaya* said:**

**O King *Dhṛta-rāṣṭra*, having spoken thus, then Lord *Hari* (Lord *Kṛṣṇa* as the destroyer of all *pāpas*), the limitless Lord of pursuits of the *yogīs*, showed to *Arjuna* the limitless form of the Lord. (9)**

**That form consisted of countless mouths and eyes; countless amazing sights; countless celestial ornaments; and countless extraordinary, upraised weapons. (10)**

**That form also wore celestial garlands and attire, was anointed with celestial, fragrant ointment, mostly all a wonder—effulgent, boundless, and in all directions. (11)**

**If the brilliance of a thousand suns were to simultaneously arise in the sky, that would be akin to the brilliance of that magnificent form. (12)**

**Then *Arjuna* saw in that body of the Lord of deities the entire universe in one place but distinctly divided in manifold ways. (13)**

**Thereupon, that *Arjuna*—overwhelmed with awe and with body hairs on end, bowing his head to the Lord, with hands folded in supplication—spoke. (14)**

**Arjuna** said:

**O Lord, I see in Your body all the deities and hosts of different types of beings, Lord *Brahmā* seated in the lotus, in *Brahma-loka* within the lotus-like universe; and all the sages and celestial serpents. (15)**

**I see You as having countless bodies with arms, bellies, mouths, and eyes—whose forms are endless in all directions. And I see not Your end, nor middle, nor beginning, O Lord of the Universe whose form is the universe. (16)**

**I see You** [that is, *Arjuna* sees the Lord as he would have imagined Him from reading the *purāṇas*, and so it was shown by the Lord] **with crown, mace, and discus**, the popular Lord *Viṣṇu* form—a mass of brilliance lit up on all sides, whose brilliance on all sides is like blazing fire or the sun, difficult to see and incomprehensible to the senses. (17)

**You are thought by me to be the imperishable, limitless *brahman* that is to be known; the ultimate basis of this universe; the imperishable protector of the perennially eternal laws (*dharma*), remanifesting during each creation cycle; and the eternal *puruṣa* (being who fills everything). (18)**

**I see You as having no beginning, middle, or end, as One whose power is limitless, whose arms are countless, for whom the moon and the sun are eyes, whose mouths are like blazing *hutāsas* (fires, literally “oblation eaters”), and heating this universe with Your radiance. (19)**

**You alone indeed pervade this space between heaven and earth, the subtle to the physical universe; and all the directions. Seeing this, Your form as separate from themselves—wondrous and violent—the beings of the three worlds are shaken with fear, O Lord. (20)**

**Those hosts of deities who have incarnated in the form of the good warriors about to do battle on the field indeed enter into You, into Death. Some, frightened, pray with hands folded in supplication. The hosts of great sages and divine sages, saying “let there be well-being,” worship You with eloquent praise. (21)**

**The eleven *rudras* and the twelve *ādityas*, the eight *vasus* and these twelve *sādhya* deities, the ten *viśvas*, the twin *aśvin* deities, the *maruts*, certain of the ancestors, and the hosts of celestial musicians, *yakṣas*, *asuras*, and *siddhas*—all are indeed struck with wonder and gaze upon You. (22)**

**O Mighty Armed, seeing Your immense form—with countless mouths and eyes; with countless arms, thighs, and feet; with countless bellies; and horrible with countless fangs—the people are shaken with fear, and so am I, not understanding my identity with You. (23)**

**Indeed, seeing You reaching the sky, blazing with countless appearances, with gaping mouths and brilliant, large eyes—my mind shaken with fear—I find no resolve or composure, O Lord *Viṣṇu*. (24)**

**Indeed, seeing Your mouths—horrible with fangs and like the fire at the end of time itself, at the end of each cycle of the universe—I know not, have lost, my bearings and have no joy. Be gracious, O Lord of the Deities, Abode of the Universe. (25)**

**Indeed, along with the host of world rulers, all those sons of *Dhṛta-rāṣṭra* enter into You. Similarly, *Bhīṣma*, *Droṇa*, and the charioteer's son *Karṇa*—along with our prominent warriors also—all enter into You, into Death. (26)**

**Hurrying, they enter into Your frightening mouths that are horrible with fangs. Some are clearly seen stuck between Your teeth, with their heads crushed. (27)**

**Like the many, converging streams of rivers flow only to the ocean, so those heroes of the world of humans enter into Your flaming mouths. (28)**

**Like moths at full speed enter a burning flame to their death, in the very same way those people also, at full speed, enter Your mouths to their death. (29)**

**Completely swallowing all the people with Your burning mouths, You repeatedly lick Your lips as if enjoying this. Filling the entire universe with Your brilliance, Your violent flames burn, O Lord *Viṣṇu*. (30)**

**Who are You with such a violent form? Please tell me. Let my salutation be unto You, O Exalted Among Deities; please be gracious. I wish to clearly know You, the cause of everything, because Your action I do not understand. (31)**

**The Lord said:**

**I am time who destroys people, expanded to fill this cosmic form. Here now, in this form, I undertake to destroy the people. Even without you, all these warriors stationed here in the opposing armies will not survive, it being their lot (*karma-phala*) to perish. (32)**

**Therefore, get up and gain fame. Conquering the enemies, may you enjoy the prosperous kingdom. By Me alone these warriors have already indeed been destroyed. May you, your actions, be merely My instrument, O Arjuna (Skilled with the Left Hand). (33)**

**Please kill Droṇa, Bhīṣma, Jayad-ratha, and Karṇa, and similarly the other leaders among the warriors also—who already have been destroyed by Me, as the giver of their result of action (*karma-phala*). Do not be afraid that what you are doing is not dharma (is *a-dharma*); it is not. In battle you will conquer the enemies. O Arjuna, fight. (34)**

**Sañjaya said:**

**Hearing these words of Kṛṣṇa, the trembling Arjuna (the Crowned One)—with hands folded, bowing, and very frightened, bowing again—spoke with a faltering voice to Kṛṣṇa. (35)**

**Arjuna said:**

**O Kṛṣṇa, it is proper that by the praise of You the world rejoices and is attracted to You, while the frightened demons run in all directions, and all the hosts of divine sages surrender to You. (36)**

**O Lord, why would they not surrender to You who are greater than Lord Brahmā, and who are the primal cause? O Limitless, Lord of the Deities, and Abode of the Universe, You are that imperishable, ultimate (*param*) reality (*brahman*), which is both reality and unreality, both cause and effect, as well as beyond both these concepts (*sat-a-sat-param*). (37)**

**You are the one existing before the beginning of the deities, the *puruṣa* (the being who fills this universe) that is always there. You are the ultimate place of resolution of this universe. You are both the only knower and what is to be known, and the ultimate abode. You pervade the universe, O You of Endless Forms. (38)**

**You are the deities and the entities **Wind; Death; Fire; Water; and Moon;** as well as **Lord of the Universe and Great-Grandfather,** the uncaused cause of the cause of the universe. **Let there be repeated salutations to You—again and again, a thousand times, repeated salutations to You. (39)****

**Salutation to You in front of me and behind me. Let there be salutation to You, indeed, in all directions, O Everything. You of infinite power and infinite prowess completely pervade all. Therefore, You are all. (40)**

**O Changeless, if, not knowing this form, Your glory—whether out of carelessness or even out of friendship—thinking You a mere “friend,” I impulsively called out “O Mr. *Kṛṣṇa*,” “O *Yādava* Clansman,” “O Buddy,” and if—while walking, lying down, sitting, or eating, alone or even there in public—You have, out of jest, been slighted, treated as if not there, then I beg the patience and understanding of You who cannot be separately known. (41–42)**

**You are the father of the mobile and immobile world, alone to be worshipped, and its venerable teacher. There is no equal to You in even the three worlds, the earth, sky, and heaven, so how could there be another who is superior, O You of Incomparable Glory? (43)**

**Therefore, bowing and properly prostrating my body, I propitiate You who are the worshipful Lord. Like a father toward his son; a friend toward his friend; and a beloved toward his lover, as my creator, comrade, and the focus of my devotion, you ought to be patient and understanding toward my mistakes, O Lord. (44)**

**Having seen what was not seen before, I am pleased—and yet my mind is shaken with fear. O Lord, please show me that form as my friend alone. Be gracious, O Lord of the Deities, the Abode of the Universe. (45)**

But first, **so too, I wish to again see You**, as before (11.17), **with crown, mace, and discus in hand** within the cosmic form. **Please be with just that same four-armed form** as Lord *Viṣṇu* that I worship as my personal deity, *iṣṭa-devatā*, **O Thousand-Armed Whose Form Is the Universe. (46)**

[*Having again taken the popular Lord Viṣṇu form*]

**The Lord said:**

**O Arjuna, being pleased, I showed to you through My power this limitless form, which—brilliant, universal, endless, and primal form of Me—has not been seen by anyone other than you. (47)**

**Not by study of the Vedas or of rituals (*yajñas*), or by charity, or by performing rituals, or by vigorous prayerful disciplines can I be seen in such a form in the world of humans by anyone other than you, O Arjuna. (48)**

**Seeing such a gruesome form as this of Mine, may you have no fear, nor may your mind be confused. Being without fear and of pleased mind again, may you see now that same form of me as your friend. (49)**



***Sañjaya* said:**

**Thus having spoken to *Arjuna*, *Kṛṣṇa* showed again his own human form. And, having become again the Lord with a pleasing form, soothed him who was frightened. (50)**

***Arjuna* said:**

**O *Kṛṣṇa*, seeing this, Your pleasing human form, now I have recovered my mind and have returned to my original disposition. (51)**

**The Lord said:**

**This form of Mine that you have seen, which is very difficult to see—even the gods are always desirous of seeing this form. (52)**

**In which way you have seen Me, in such a form, I can be seen not by study of the *Vedas*, or by prayerful discipline, or by charity, nor by ritual. (53)**

**Whereas, O *Arjuna*, Vexer of Foes, only by a devotion in which there is no other outside of Me am I—in such a form—possible, in truth, to know; to see not with a magical eye, but with the wise person's (*jñānī's*) eye that sees only Me; and to enter into, to include oneself as Me. (54)**

**The *mat-karma-kṛt* (one who performs one's duty for the sake of attaining Me), for whom the paramount achievement is Me, who is devoted to Me, free from attachment as there is only Me, and without hostility toward any being, all of them being Me—that one attains Me, O *Arjuna*. (55)**

***Om (brahman, the witness of all) is that only reality. Thus ends the eleventh chapter, called "The Topic of Vision of the Cosmic Form," of the eighteen chapters of Songs of the Glorious Lord, which is looked upon as sacred teaching (Upaniṣad) and whose teaching is in the form of a dialogue between Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna, the subject matter being knowledge of brahman and yoga.***

# Chapter 12

## The Topic of Devotion

The majesty and power of the physical and subtle universe was presented in the preceding chapter. The individual—who takes himself or herself as trapped within that universe, as a victim of the devouring jaws of time—is naturally afraid of the crushing immensity of everything “out there.” But, if one understands that this universe is a single manifestation of the reality that one calls the Lord; that one’s body-mind complex, along with its action, is naturally within the order that manifests as this universe; and that the physical and subtle laws that inform this universe are outside of one’s control but are certain and just—then one can start to objectively reconcile one’s life within the universe.

The results in life are outside of one’s control, but the results are always in keeping with one’s attitude and effort—because all results are within the cosmic order, which takes all factors into account. Every result is acceptable because every result is naturally in keeping with the entirety of the cosmic order. There is no pseudoscientific “randomness” in nature; there is only order and probability everywhere. Only possibilities exist.

The obvious intelligent design that is inherent in nature is evident as its discoverable laws. All is a manifestation of an order that only intelligence can appreciate. This is the starting point of devotion—appreciating and accepting the Lord, the reality, manifesting as the intelligent order within this cosmic wheel. In this chapter, we can understand devotion as the commitment to gaining this appreciation and acceptance. Devotion is not emotional and it is not intellectual. It is the whole person committing the body and mind to the understanding that this

universe is an expression of the Lord as the cosmic order and to living this understanding appropriately.

But the Lord is more than this universe. The universe cycles in and out of manifestation within this reality that is the Lord. This Lord is the untainted reality in which the universe appears, plays itself out, and disappears. At the unchanging core of all beings is reality, the Lord's reality. This reality can be appreciated as having all the glories we see in the universe—this is one appropriate vision. This reality can also be appreciated as being completely free of and untainted by this universe—this is the other appropriate vision.

In the first verse of chapter 12, *Arjuna* has a question as to which of these two visions is most efficacious in one's means (*sādhana*) of seeking the ultimate goal (*śreyas*). The Lord has sanctioned both lifestyles—*pravṛtti* (pursuit in) and *nivṛtti* (withdrawal from) the world, both *karma-yoga* and *sannyāsa*. *Kṛṣṇa* again explains in this chapter that both lifestyles and their respective visions given above—appreciating the glories and acting within them, and appreciating being totally free from the glorious universe—are efficacious. But if one is not prepared—if one is still highly identified with the body and mind and is full of desires—then *sannyāsa*, the lifestyle wherein one renounces duties in the world and takes only to study and contemplation of the ultimate reality, is a more difficult path. Therefore, *Kṛṣṇa* recommends *karma-yoga* as a better starting point for such a person. This is obvious, but still it has to be explained because there are many people, like *Arjuna*, who fancy taking to *sannyāsa*—not out of a mature understanding of reality, but as a way to run away from the world and their duties. This seems to have been as common a problem in *Kṛṣṇa*'s time as it is today.

**Arjuna said:**

**Between those devotees who in this same way (see 11.55) are always committed to You, those *mat-karma-kṛts*, and seek You as the the form of the universe (*viśva-rūpa*), and those who seek You as the not objectified imperishable (*a-kṣara*), formless reality (*brahman*)—who are the best knowers of *yoga*? (1)**

**The Lord said:**

**Those who, placing their mind in Me, being always committed, *karma-yogīs* who are *mat-karma-kṛt*, and being endowed with ultimate trust in My teaching and thus seek Me—they are considered by Me to be among the best knowers of *yoga* (the means to attain Me). (2)**

**Whereas those who seek, know, Me as *a-kṣara* (imperishable *brahman*)—which cannot be described, delimited by words; not objectified by the senses; is locationless; which cannot be an object of the mind; which remains true in the apparent, as the basis and witness of *māyā* (the manifestation of the Lord as the universe); is immovable and permanent in time—and those who completely master their organs of sense and action, whose vision remains the same toward everything, and who are dedicated to the welfare of all beings—they attain only Me. (3–4)**

**Among those whose mind is committed to what is not objectified, affliction is or can be greater, because an end that cannot be objectified is reached with difficulty by those who instead of being *jñānīs* (wise) are *sannyāsīs* who are still *dehavat* (identified with their body). (5)**

**Whereas, O Arjuna, those *karma-yogīs* who seek Me—giving up all action unto Me, having Me as their ultimate, and meditating on Me with undivided discipline—for them whose mind is absorbed in Me, I become before long their liberator from the ocean that is *samsāra* (a life of becoming), which is filled with death. (6–7)**

**Place your mind (the vacillating mind) only in Me, gain a steadiness contemplating Me. Place your *buddhi* (intellect/knowledge) in Me, gain clear knowledge of Me. Thereupon, you will abide in, attain, Me alone. In this there is no doubt. (8)**

**If you are not able to place your mind steadily in Me, then seek to attain Me by a *yoga* consisting of continual practice, study and contemplation—repeatedly bringing the mind back to these two, O Arjuna. (9)**

**If you are incapable in even this continual practice, then as a *karma-yogī* be one for whom action dedicated to attaining Me is paramount. Even doing actions at their outset for the sake of attaining Me, you will attain success in terms, initially, of maturity and peace of mind. (10)**

**If, being committed to My *yoga*, you are not able to do even this, then—being one whose mind is disciplined—please give up the false notion of being the author of the results of all actions (see 2.47 and 18.11). (11)**

**Than *abhyāsa* (continued practice), understanding with practice is better indeed. Than understanding, contemplation with understanding is better. Than contemplation, giving up the false notion of being the author of the results of action (*karma-phala-tyāga*) is (initially) better. Out of this renunciation, peace of mind immediately follows. (12)**

**The *jñānī* (wise person) who is not displeased toward any being; is friendly and compassionate; free from the judgment “this is mine”; free from the judgment that “I am only this body-mind”; the same in pleasure or pain, not elated nor saddened; accommodative, patient and understanding; always contented and contemplative; disciplined; of firm resolve; with mind and intellect resolved in Me; who is in this way devoted to Me—that one—is dear to Me, as dear as Myself; because that one is Myself, and that one knows this fact. (13–14)**

**Of whom the world, living beings and the environment, is not afraid or need not protect itself against and who is not afraid of the world, and the one who is freed from elation, intolerance, fear, and anxiety—that one is dear to Me. (15)**

**Without dependence on anything for happiness; clean externally and mentally; adept, wise in all situations; neutral; not shaken with fear; completely renounced all doership in activities—who is in this way devoted to Me, that one is dear to Me. (16)**

**Does not become elated, does not become displeased, does not grieve, does not require/anticipate, who naturally and completely renounces the status of being the doer and experiencer in pleasant and unpleasant activity—who thus has devotion, that one is dear to Me. (17)**

**The same toward** another who takes himself or herself as **an enemy or a friend and toward respect or disrespect; the same toward** the opposites **cold and hot, pleasure and pain; free from attachment, for whom censure and praise are alike**, addressing only this body or mind, but not one's self; **disciplined in speech; satisfied with whatever** happens; **homeless**, a *sannyāsī* or one who has no ownership toward a house he or she may own; **whose knowledge is firm—who** in this way **has devotion**, that **person is dear to Me. (18–19)**

**Those indeed who follow this, as was told, that is in keeping with *dharma* and** is an expression of and therefore leading to **complete freedom, who are endowed with trust** in My teaching, **for whom I am paramount—such devotees as those are very dear to Me. (20)**

***Om (brahman, the witness of all) is that*** only reality. **Thus ends the twelfth chapter, called “The Topic of Devotion,” of the eighteen chapters of *Songs of the Glorious Lord*, which is** looked upon as **sacred teaching (*Upaniṣad*)** and whose teaching is in the form of **a dialogue between *Śrī Kṛṣṇa* and *Arjuna***, the subject matter being **knowledge of *brahman* and *yoga***.



# Chapter 13

## The Topic of the Distinction of the Field and the Knower of the Field

Knowledge is the direct means of freeing oneself from *saṃsāra* (the life of unending need for becoming) because the bondage of *saṃsāra* is one of ignorance—ignorance of the fact that one’s self is none other than the reality of this universe and yet is free of this universe. Through ignorance alone one is bound (yoked) to “otherness,” to the limitations that appear in one’s body and mind in relation to the vast universe. Knowledge does not *create* freedom since, by one’s very nature, one is already free. Rather, knowledge removes the ignorance that veils the oneness of reality from our understanding.

The reality and freedom of the self is predominately taught in the first six chapters of the *Bhagavad Gītā*, and the reality and glories of the universe as the Lord is predominately taught in chapters 7–12. Clear statements of the identity of the self and the Lord have been given. In the next six chapters, the oneness of reality is emphasized and methodically unfolded. Through every chapter of the *Bhagavad Gītā*, the means to assimilate the teaching is continually taught. This means, called *yoga*, is essentially an enlightened attitude with appropriate values—an attitude one takes to all aspects of the relationship between oneself and the whole. This enlightened attitude is one of a devotee (*bhakta*)—one who intelligently appreciates and participates in the great cosmic wheel. The *bhakta*’s attitude yields a clarity that allows the knowledge to be completely assimilated and, hence, made firm.

This teaching of oneness—and of the way to assimilate it—is a means within *saṃsāra* to get out of *saṃsāra*. It is the key to release from limitation. In each cycle of the universe, this teaching is handed to the beings who are intelligent and

mentally mature enough to make use of it. The *yoga* (literally, “uniting,” “yoking”) taught in the *Bhagavad Gītā* is the “uniting” of oneself with this teaching of the oneness of reality. It is the *yoga*, the commitment to the teaching, that frees us from the “yoke” that otherwise keeps us seemingly limited. In chapter 13, the Lord distinguishes (or “unyokes”) *kṣetra*—the *field*, that is, the universe including one’s body-mind complex—from *kṣetra-jñā*, the *knower of the field*, who is the Lord that is oneself.

Until the reality, *brahman*—which is to be known as oneself, as the basis of the universe, and as the Lord—is known, making the effort of *yoga* and attending to the teaching is valid and required. This knowledge is not just a physical, emotional, or intellectual pursuit; nor is it an inactive or overly energetic (*tāmasa* or *rājasa*) pursuit. The whole person has to commit to this pursuit of knowledge.

There are two possible lifestyles in this pursuit—*sannyāsa* and *yoga*, or in other words *nivṛtti* and *pravṛtti mārgas* (disengaging from competitive society and engaging in competitive society)—but the means is one: Knowledge alone is the means. *Yoga*, as taught in the *Bhagavad Gītā*, is the preparation for its assimilation. It is purely cognitive (*sāttvika*)—all the way. Both the one who knows this knowledge and the one who wants to know this knowledge are devotees (*bhaktas*, see 7.16–18). The belief that there are many *yogas* (depending on one’s personality) that separately lead to the ultimate goal (*śreyas*) is not grounded in this teaching here, though elsewhere—outside the *Upaniṣads*, *Bhagavad Gītā*, and *Brahma-sūtras*—such divisions are expressed by those who don’t yet understand this teaching. *Kṛṣṇa* warned us of such distractions early on (see 2.41). Instead of creating unnecessary divisions among sincere *bhaktas*, *Kṛṣṇa* brings the traditional teaching all together in this chapter.

**Arjuna said:**

**What I wish to know, O Kṛṣṇa, is this: *prakṛti* and *puruṣa* (nature and the one who fills nature), *kṣetra* and *kṣetra-jñā* (the field and the knower of the field), and *jñāna* and *jñeya* (knowledge and what is to be known).<sup>6</sup>**

**The Lord said:**

**O Arjuna, this body, where one reaps the fruits—good and bad (*puṇya* and *pāpa*)—initially presented as this human body and later expanded to the entire body of the universe, to *prakṛti*, is called the field (*kṣetra*). Those who know both of these, the *kṣetra* and *kṣetra-jñā*, call the one who knows this *kṣetra* as the *kṣetra-jñā* (the knower of the field). (1)**

**In all the *kṣetras* (bodies), know Me who is not subject to *saṃsāra* to be the only *kṣetra-jñā* (knower), know Me, the Lord, as the only I, the only knower, O Arjuna. Knowledge which is of this *kṣetra* and *kṣetra-jñā*—that alone is considered by Me to be knowledge (*jñāna*), as it alone is final and it alone releases one from *saṃsāra*. (2)**

**What is that *kṣetra*? What is its appearance, having which modifications? From what source does it arise? And what is that source, the *kṣetra-jñā*, which is Me, and what glories is that source having? About that, in brief, listen to Me. (3)**

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<sup>6</sup> This first verse of the chapter does not appear in some manuscripts. The verse could be a later addition, but since it introduces this chapter, it is included.

Each, the *kṣetra* and its source, **has been sung as distinct from each other in many ways by the seers/sages—through various verses and through concise statements that reveal *brahman* (reality) with supporting logic and which are well ascertained**, without doubt. (4)

**The five distinct pervasive, subtle, elements; *ahaṅkāra* (the I), the universe's *ahaṅkāra* as Lord *Brahmā*, the author (*kartā*) of the universe; *buddhi* (the intellect), the universe's intellect as the *saṅkalpa* (intension) of the Lord at the time of manifestation, wherein the laws are determined by which everything is manifest; and *a-vyakta* (unmanifest cause, *Īśvara-śakti/māyā*)—all eight aforementioned constitute *prakṛti*; and then *prakṛti*'s modifications, including **the ten organs; the one mind including the intellect; the five gross sense objects as the physical universe; desire; aversion; pleasure; pain; this physical body; cognition; and resolve—all this is in brief called the *kṣetra* (field) along with its modifications.**<sup>7</sup> (5–6)**

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<sup>7</sup> The five elements, the subtle and gross objects (that is, unmanifest and manifest to the senses, respectively), are *ākāśa* (space—dimension), *vāyu* (air—movement), *agni* (fire—heat/light), *āpah* (water—fluidity), and *pṛthivī* (earth—solidity). The ten organs include the five sense organs of hearing, feeling, seeing, tasting, and smelling, and the five action organs of speech, hands (fashioning), feet (locomotion), evacuation, and generation.

What also is *jñāna* (knowledge) is **absence of conceit**, not demanding that others know one's virtues; **absence of hypocrisy**, not demanding that others recognize virtues that one does not have; **harmlessness; accommodation**, as patience and understanding; **straightforwardness; reverence for** and attendance to **the teacher; cleanliness; steadfastness; self-discipline; dispassion toward sense objects; absence of arrogance**, not presenting oneself in the reflection of some glory in one's possession; **and seeing the problem of sorrow**, which is guilt and hurt, **in birth, death, ageing, and diseases. (7–8)**

Also **absence of ownership; lack of identification toward son** (offspring), **wife** (spouse), **house, etcetera; continual equanimity of mind toward occurrences of the desirable and the undesirable; unswerving devotion in Me through a yoga (vision of identity, *samādhi*) in which there is no other; the disposition to** or a value to **repair to a quiet place**—where I do not have to fear, do not feel I have to change, and do not have to escape from; **not longing for the company of people**, not needing to escape from myself through others; **being always centered on the knowledge of the I; and seeing the goal of the knowledge of truth**, that goal being complete freedom—all **this is also called *jñāna***, an expression of knowledge and, thus, a means of gaining knowledge. **What is other than this is an obstacle to knowledge (*a-jñāna*). (9–11)**

**What is *jñeya* (to-be-known), that I will tell you. Knowing which one gains immortality** called *mokṣa* (freedom), the reason it is to be known—that *jñeya* is **beginningless and limitless *brahman* (reality, My nature), said to be neither an object that *is*, nor *is not*.(12)**

Not that *it is not*, since **that** reality to be known (*jñeyaṃ brahman*) **remains** motionless, yet **pervading all in the *loka* (universe)** as each being's reality—with all beings' **hands and feet everywhere; with their eyes, heads, and mouths everywhere; and with their ears everywhere.**(13)

Not that *it is*, since that reality to be known (*jñeyaṃ brahman*) merely **appears as the attributes**, the functioning—seeing, etcetera, **of all the organs** in these bodies, yet **is free from all the organs; is unattached** yet **sustains all; and is free from the *guṇas* (constituents of nature)** yet **is the experienter of the *guṇas*.**(14)

**It is** with reference to these bodies **outside and inside of all beings, and is whatever does and does not move** in the universe. **Since it is subtle**, innermost, as "I," **it is not knowable** as a "this or that," an object. **It is as far** as the farthest, imagined object **and as near** as "I." (15)

**That *jñeya* (the to-be-known) remains undivided**, as one only, **yet is seemingly divided** as many in all beings; this one and only **is the one who sustains** all these beings, the embodiments and objects, **and is their devourer and creator.** (16)

**It is the light of lights**, the solely self-revealing conscious-being by which even the sun is revealed, **said to be beyond darkness** or ignorance, as it reveals both. **It is *jñāna* (see 13.2 and 13.7–11), *jñeya*, and the result to be attained by *jñāna*. It abides in the center of everything** and is to be known in this intellect. (17)

**Thus the field, the knowledge, and the to-be-known (the *kṣetra*, the *jñāna*, and the *jñeya*) have been briefly told. Clearly knowing this, one who is devoted to Me, who is this *jñeya*, is fit for My nature called *mokṣa*, complete freedom.** (18)

**May you know that both nature and the person (*prakṛti* and *puruṣa*) are beginningless. And may you know that the *guṇas*, the mental dispositions—not the three unmodified *guṇas* (the constituents of *prakṛti*), and other modifications from intellects to all physical bodies are born of *prakṛti*. (19)**

***Prakṛti* (nature) is said to be the cause of the origination of the physical body and its instruments, the mind, senses, etcetera. The *puruṣa* (the knower of the field, the *kṣetra-jñā* or, in this case, the individual *jīva*/living entity) is said to be the cause of being the experiencer of pleasant and unpleasant situations. (20)**

**Because the *puruṣa* (the person), abiding in *prakṛti*, experiences the modifications of the *guṇas* born of *prakṛti*. In regard to births in virtuous and nonvirtuous wombs, in *saṃsāra*, one's, the ignorant *jīva*'s, attachment to the modifications of the *guṇas* is the cause. (21)**

**But in fact the *puruṣa*—even while in this body—is limitless, the immediate witness, the permitter, the sustainer, the unattached experiencer, the very Lord (Myself), and is indeed called the *Paramātmā* (the limitless I). (22)**

**The one who in this way knows *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* with its *guṇas*—that one, even though performing action in all ways, whether as a student, householder, retiree, or *sannyāsī*, is not born again. (23)**

**Some wise people (*jñānīs*) see the self—in the mind, by the mind—with contemplation after study to remove obstacles to assimilation of knowledge; a rare few others simply by inquiry, simply by study of the teaching; and some others by this teaching while engaged in their duties. (24)**

**Whereas others, not yet knowing this teaching, worship Me according to what they have heard from others, from *gurus* who tell them to initially do prayers (*pūjyā*), mental chanting (*japa*), etcetera. They also, being ones for whom listening to the teaching is the ultimate end, eventually cross over death. (25)**

**As long as any being, a *jīva*, continues to be re-born as immobile or mobile—know that to be due to the *saṁyoga* (association—due to a lack of *viveka*/knowing the difference) between the *kṣetra* and the *kṣetra-jñā*, O *Arjuna*. (26)**

**The one who sees the Lord Me as remaining the same in all beings and as not being destroyed among those bodies being destroyed—that one alone sees. (27)**

**Because seeing Me the Lord as remaining the same (*sama*) everywhere as the self of all, one does not by oneself, through the mind, destroy, lose sight of, the self since that self is the all-pervasive Me and, hence, attains the ultimate end, the end of *saṁsāra* (unbecoming becoming). (28)**

**And the one who sees actions being done in every way by nature (*prakṛti*) alone and, in that way, sees that the self is not a doer—that one alone correctly sees. (29)**

**When one, according to the teaching, sees that the apparent separateness of beings resolves into one and that all these apparently separate beings are a projection, a manifestation, from that one alone—then he or she attains that same *brahman* as himself or herself. (30)**



**O Arjuna, since it is beginningless, uncaused/un-effected; and since it is without attributes; this changeless *Paramātmā* (limitless I) does not do action—even though obtaining in the body—nor is it affected by the results of action. (31)**

**Just as the all-pervasive element called space is not affected by movements of objects within space—because it is subtle, it is innermost/pervasive, in and through and outside of objects, without itself moving—similarly, the self (*ātmā, puruṣa*), obtaining in each body everywhere, is not affected. (32)**

**Just as the one sun illumines this entire world yet is unaffected by it—similarly, this one obtaining in the *kṣetra* illumines, lights up, as the conscious being, all thoughts in all minds, which thoughts alone reflect the entire known and inferred *kṣetra* (field of the universe), O Arjuna. (33)**

**Those who thus know, through the eye of wisdom, the distinction between the *kṣetra* and the *kṣetra-jñā*, the object and the subject—the subject being the substance of all objects, of all names and forms, and their inherent freedom from *prakṛti* (the cause) of all beings—they attain the ultimate. (34)**

***Om* (*brahman*, the witness of all) is that only reality. Thus ends the thirteenth chapter, called “The Topic of the Distinction between the Field and the Knower of the Field,” of the eighteen chapters of *Songs of the Glorious Lord*, which is looked upon as sacred teaching (*Upaniṣad*) and whose teaching is in the form of a dialogue between *Śrī Kṛṣṇa* and *Arjuna*, the subject matter being knowledge of *brahman* and *yoga*.**



# Chapter 14

## The Topic of the Division of the Three *Guṇas*

Chapter 14 marks the start of the elaboration of the three *guṇas* (qualities in, or constituents of, nature): *sattva* (related to knowledge); *rajas* (related to activity); and *tamas* (related to inactivity). The universal categorization of the *guṇas* is used to encompass the total universe, such as the *traiguṇya* (see 2.45 and 3.27–28), or to encompass just the subtle world of thoughts (see 10.36, 13.19, and 17.2).

The elaboration of the *guṇas* that begins in this chapter distinguishes appropriate and inappropriate attitudes as they relate to *karma-yoga*—and ultimately brings us to the transcendence of these *guṇas*. Universal categorizations, such as the three *guṇas*, the five elements linked to the five human sense-organs, or the three worlds (earth/sky/heaven), are employed throughout the *Upaniṣads* to help us apply the teaching to the entire universe. The method of using universal categorization, of covering everything with a few categories, is self-acknowledged in *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 6.4.5:

Because they knew [everything] through these [three categories—the red/white/black, relating to the three visible elements fire/water/earth], they said, “None of us will speak of anything as unheard, unthought, or unknown.”

The universal categorization method is also used in the *Bhagavad Gītā* to help us understand how the three-fold structure of the universe is reflected in the mind and how the mind should then relate objectively to the universe. Just as *Kṛṣṇa* used the concept of *yoga* from *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* and elaborated on it in previous chapters, in chapter 14 He uses the universal categorization of the *guṇas*, given in *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*—which borrows

heavily from *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* and employs the terms *sāṅkhya* (knowledge) and *yoga* together (see 2.39)—to explain *karma-yoga*.

Although a predominately *sāttvika* (uplifting) attitude is the most appropriate attitude within various behaviors, the goal is to appreciate oneself as *guṇātīta*—one who transcends all three *guṇas*—as well as one who thus transcends all actions. Among all possible attitudes we can take toward life’s basic activities, the chapters that follow (chapters 14, 17, and 18) indicate that the attitudes that can be categorized as *sāttvika* are preferred and that the others are to be avoided.

Sometimes the *guṇas* are used to categorize the predilections (dispositions) toward behaviors, for example, all the categorizations in chapter 14 are of this type. Other times, they are used to categorize the behaviors themselves, for example, most of the categorizations in chapter 17 are of this type—food choices, rituals, religious disciplines, and charities are related to the *guṇas*. In these cases, predilections or inappropriate behaviors are not to be condemned in others or in one’s self. After all, the things and actions of the world and the thoughts that make up the mind are what they are. They are governed by the universal laws of the total, both physical and psychological, and are affected by the whole universe. They are not meant to be viewed in isolation or out of context. In their context, they cannot be other than what they are—and ought to be accepted as they are.

However, as doers (as long as we take ourselves to be doers), we have a choice in our current action, and the *Advaita Vedānta* teaching can inform our attitude and our choice in that action. When we make choices informed by the teaching, we live a clean life conducive to assimilating the knowledge unfolded by the teaching. And, by living such a life, we gain this knowledge, which frees us from grief and death.

**The Lord said:**

**I will again tell you the ultimate knowledge—the most profound of disciplines of knowledge—knowing which, all the sages being released by this knowledge from this body have attained the ultimate accomplishment. (1)**

**Following this knowledge, this teaching, they—having attained My same nature, identity with Me, timeless reality—do not arise even at the manifestation of a new universe, nor fall at the dissolution of this or succeeding universes. (2)**

**My womb (*prakṛti*) is not different from Me, who is reality manifesting as the vast subtle universe (*mahat brahman*, also called *Hiraṇya-garbha*). Into that *mahat brahman*, as the womb, I implant the seed—*Íśvara* is a masculine word and *prakṛti* is a feminine word; hence, the impregnation metaphor. From that is the manifestation of all beings, O Arjuna. (3)**

**O Arjuna, for those forms which arise in all wombs of gods, humans, etcetera, the original womb is *mahat brahman*, Me. And I am also the father who implants the seed, which seed, being existence and conscious being (*satyaṃ jñānam*), gives *prakṛti* (nature-womb) the capacity to create. (4)**

**O Arjuna, the *guṇas*, which exist in, constitute, *prakṛti*, are called *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas* and they, apparently, like notional ropes bind the changeless embodied one (the *jīva*, the *kṣetra-jña*) into the body. (5)**

**Among these, *sattva*—since it is free from impurity—is illuminating and free from affliction—yet binds by one’s attachment to pleasure and by one’s attachment to knowing, attachment/identity is the problem, not the pleasure or knowledge, O Arjuna. (6)**

**Know *rajas*, which is of the nature of attraction, being an impurity to the natural clarity of the *sāttvika* mind—projecting virtues on things that they don't have, as born of, increased by, longing and attachment. O *Arjuna*, it binds the embodied one by attachment to activity. (7)**

**Whereas, know *tamas*—for all those identified with their body—as delusion, as the lack of discerning the difference between oneself and objects of desire, born of, perpetuated by, ignorance. It binds by carelessness, laziness, and sleepiness, O *Arjuna*. (8)**

**O *Arjuna*, *sattva* as though binds one into pleasure and *rajas* as though binds one into activity, whereas *tamas*—covering knowledge by being an impurity to the natural clarity of the *sāttvika* mind—indeed as though binds one into carelessness. (9)**

**O *Arjuna*, *sattva* throughout the day and one's life arises by overwhelming *rajas* and *tamas*. *Rajas* arises by overwhelming *sattva* and *tamas*. Similarly, *tamas* arises by overwhelming *sattva* and *rajas*. (10)**

**When the brightness, which is knowledge, arises in all the sense organs in this body, then one should know indeed that *sattva* has increased. (11)**

**Greed, physical restlessness, *karma* (action that binds), mental restlessness, attraction—these arise when *rajas* has increased, O *Arjuna*. (12)**

**Dullness (here described as a darkness over the mind), absence of physical activity, carelessness, and delusion—these arise when *tamas* has increased, O *Arjuna*. (13)**

**But upon *sattva* being predominant, when an embodied one dies, that one goes to the virtuous worlds of those who know the most exalted, the heavens. (14)**

**Upon *rajas* being predominant, after dying, one is born among those committed to the results of actions, born among humans. Similarly, upon *tamas* being predominant, having died, one is born in wombs of those who lack discriminative faculties, born among animals, plants, etcetera. (15)**

**They say that, for virtuous action, the result—being connected to *sattva*—is free from impurity; but for *rajas*, cutting corners to get results, the result is pain; and for *tamas*, the result is ignorance, the inability to get out of ignorance—birth as an animal, etcetera. (16)**

**From *sattva* is born knowledge and from *rajas* is only greed. From *tamas* are born carelessness and delusion, and also continuance in ignorance. (17)**

**Those who live a life predominantly of *sattva* go up, get birth in heaven. Those predominantly *rajas* stay in the middle, get human birth. Those predominantly *tamas*, who are situated in the condition of this bottom *guṇa*, go down, get a lower birth. (18)**

**When the seer sees according to the teaching that there is not a doer other than the *guṇas* and knows the self as beyond the *guṇas*, then that one attains My nature called *mokṣa*. (19)**

**Transcending these three *guṇas* that give rise to the body—and freed from birth, death, ageing, and sorrow (guilt and hurt)—the embodied one attains immortality. (20)**

**Arjuna said:**

**By what indications is it known that one has transcended these three *guṇas*, O Lord? What is that one's conduct? And how does one transcend these three *guṇas*? (21)**

**The Lord said:**

**O Arjuna, brightness, attachment-based activity, and, indeed, delusion—the one who is not displeased when they wax, nor longs for them when they wane, throughout the day and one's life; who, remaining seemingly indifferent, is not disturbed by the *guṇas*; who abides—knowing indeed that the *guṇas* act—and does not waiver from this knowledge; who is the same in pleasure and pain and abides in the self; for whom a lump of clay, a stone, and gold are transcended as the same; for whom the pleasant and the unpleasant are objectively viewed the same way; who is wise; for whom censure and praise of the self are alike, addressing only the mind or body—as the *ātmā* cannot be flattered nor damaged by any misconception of it; who is the same in respect and disrespect, which express only the others' understanding and value structure, unrelated to the self; the same regarding the side of a friend or an enemy, seeing neither as friend nor enemy; and who has completely renounced doership in all activities—that one is called *guṇātīta* (beyond the *guṇas*). (22–25)**

**The one who seeks Me with unswerving devotion, commitment to attain Me through this teaching—that one transcends these *guṇas*, becomes fit for being *brahman*. (26)**



**Because I**, the “I” who is the knower (*kṣetra-jñā*) and is the Lord (*Maheśvara*), **am the basis (*pratiṣṭhā*) of knowing and, thus, of becoming that *brahman*—which is deathless, changeless, and ever the same; is *dharma* (that which supports); is fulfillment; and is unfailing**, not subject to negation. (27)

***Om* (*brahman*, the witness of all) is that only reality. Thus ends the fourteenth chapter, called “The Topic of the Distinction of the Three *Guṇas*,” of the eighteen chapters of *Songs of the Glorious Lord*, which is looked upon as sacred teaching (*Upaniṣad*) and whose teaching is in the form of a dialogue between *Śrī Kṛṣṇa* and *Arjuna*, the subject matter being knowledge of *brahman* and *yoga*.**



# Chapter 15

## The Topic of the Being Who Transcends

The fifteenth chapter of the *Bhagavad Gītā* is a marvelously complete chapter, like the second and the thirteenth. In each of these chapters, the entire *Advaita Vedānta* teaching is summarized. In chapter 15, the whole universe is presented through the *Upaniṣad* imagery of the Tree of *Saṃsāra*. In the *Bhagavad Gītā*, as in *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* (which is the source of this imagery), the Tree of *Saṃsāra* is *not* an upside-down tree. This common, but mistaken, notion is due to confusion about the meanings of the Sanskrit words “*ūrdhva*” and “*adhas*.”

In Sanskrit, *ūrdhva* can mean *up* or it can mean *superior*. Similarly, *adhas* can mean *down* or *inferior*. In *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 6.1 and in the first verse of this chapter, these two words are used in their valuation and cause-effect sense (that is, as *superior* and *inferior*), *not* in their directional sense (*up* and *down*). If the meanings are taken as *up* and *down*, then the imagery is self-contradictory—since the “downward” secondary roots (*see* 15.2), which extend from the taproot, would actually be upward if the tree were upside down. (For more about the meanings of *ūrdhva* and *adhas*, see *The Bhagavad Gita Dictionary*, Aruna 2012.)

The taproot of the Tree of *Saṃsāra* is the *a-vyakta brahman*—the unsensed, unmanifest source of the seen universe. This *a-vyakta brahman* does not mutate into the *vyakta* (manifest) universe at the beginning of each manifestation cycle. Rather, the *a-vyakta brahman* continues to be *while* the manifest universe shimmers in our perception of it, like the unseen taproot continuously supports the visible and ever-changing tree.

Quantum physics assists in understanding this imagery. The *a-vyakta* (unmanifest), the *kūṭa-stha* (what remains immutable and in the form of

deception), is like the quantum soup out of which each observer fixes what each calls “my reality” due to individual observations. This “my reality” is no more real than the perceptions and mentations that fix it. It is limited, ever-changing, and not the definitive truth. But there *is* truth; it is reality in and of itself. It is not other than the reality of oneself, the only observer—not other than the reality of the *a-vyakta*, called *a-vyakta brahman*. This unchanging reality is not in time or space, which are just ingredients in “my reality.” Identification with this shimmering “my reality”—a mutual imposing of natures between the observed and the observer, who wants and expects “my reality” to be as unchanging and real as myself (*ātmā*) yet, at the same time, perceives the observed as limiting and impinging on myself (simply because it is perceived as other than myself)—is the source of grief and death. Therefore, the first step in realizing the inherent freedom that is one’s birthright is cutting attachment to this “my reality,” this Tree of *Saṃsāra* (15.3–4).

Just as this timeless teaching has no fear of sciences, but rather embraces the sciences for what they are, so also does this teaching have no fear of religion. It embraces religion. This is why, in chapter 15, *Kṛṣṇa* describes this limitless reality as the Lord, which “in-forms” this universe and the individual—nourishing all. The term *Lord* is used because this reality is not a dead, insentient thing. It is not the insentient *pradhāna* (unevolved nature) of the later-day *Sāṅkhya* philosophy, akin to the evolutionary materialism of the immature Western sciences. Rather, it is the source of the singular intelligent energy that modern string theorists cannot hope to describe. It is the real “soup of everything.” The source of intelligent energy we call “the Lord” is infinitely more than what our minds can grasp; it is beyond all words and thoughts—because it is, indeed, none other than one’s self. The limitless being that we can appreciate is but the self—the observer of all limitations, free of all limitations. It is not theory, not belief.

**The Lord said:**

**They say of the imperishable *Aśvattha* tree (peepul tree, the fig tree *ficus religiosa*), depicting *saṃsāra* as that tree, that its taproot is *ūrdhva* (superior), grounded out of sight in the *a-vyakta brahman* (reality as the unmanifest); its branches are *adhas* (inferior), within time–space; and its leaves are the *Vedas*. The one who knows that is one who is a knower of the *Veda*. (1)**

**Its branches, the bodies, extend *adhas* (below) as humans, etcetera, and *ūrdhva* (above) as celestial beings are nourished by the *guṇas*; and their buds for new bodies are the objects in the world. The *adhas* (downward), connected with humans, secondary roots spread out from the taproot, connect to past *karma* inciting new *karma* in the world of humans. (2)**

**As described here, its essential nature is not perceived—neither its end, beginning, nor middle; all of its perceived substantiality, upon further questioning, dissolves into ephemeral, contingent forms that “exist” only in name, none of which are its essential nature. With a firm ax that is detachment, first cut attachment to this *Aśvattha* tree whose roots are well entrenched. Then that attainment is to be sought, inquired into, in which, having attained, they, the seekers, do not return again by making this commitment: “I surrender to that very *puruṣa* who is the origin from which this ancient manifestation is projected.” (3–4)**

**Free from demanding respect and from delusion, having conquered the fault of attachment, always focused on the limitless I, whose requirements have completely gone, freed from the pairs of opposites known as pleasure and pain—those who are undeluded attain that imperishable attainment. (5)**

**Neither the sun, nor moon, nor fire illumines that** because that limitless conscious being instead illumines these sources of light, **which, having gained, they,** the undeluded, **do not return. That is the limitless abode of Me. (6)**

**An aspect of Me alone, eternal and in the form of an individual (*jīva*)—within this world having many such *jīvas*—draws to itself, as the conscious-being-reflected the subtle five senses, with the mind as the sixth, all of which abide in nature (*prakṛti*). (7)**

**When the Lord in the form of a *jīva* obtains a gross body and, indeed, when that one departs, the body dies, then—gathering these, the subtle senses and mind—that one departs like the wind, having gathered the subtle fragrances from their seat, from flowers. (8)**

**Presiding over by giving conscious being (*satya-jñāna*) to the subtle functions of hearing, vision, touching, taste, and smelling—and the mind—this Lord, in the form of the individual, experiences the sense objects. (9)**

**The deluded do not see, do not understand according to the teaching, the Lord in the form of the individual who departs or even remains in the body, who is experiencing and is endowed with the *guṇas*. Those who have the vision that is this knowledge do see. (10)**

Also ***yogīs* who strive, who contemplate to remove obstacles to knowing, see this limitless one abiding in themselves, in the intellect as the I. But, though striving, those whose minds are not ready and are not discerning do not see it, the limitless I. (11)**

**The brilliance which, obtaining in the sun, illumines the entire world—which is in the moon and which is in fire—know that brilliance as Mine. (12)**

**Having entered the earth** as the brilliance from the sun, **I sustain with My strength all beings. And being the extracted juice in the form of sap** from the earth, **I nourish all plants** hence, I am the food. (13)

**Being the digestive fire, obtaining in the body of living beings, and united with,** stoked by, **exhalation and inhalation, I cook** inside the body **the four kinds of food**—drunk, chewed, licked, and sucked. (14)

**And I am present** as the conscious being **in everyone's intellect**, energized by Me as the digested food. **From Me are memory, knowledge, and forgetting**, a necessity for dropping invalid notions. **I alone am to be known through all the Vedas. I alone am the author of the Vedas** including their *Vedānta*, and the one who comes to know the *Vedas*. (15)

**Within the world, there are two *puruṣas***, two aspects of the *puruṣa*: **the perishable and the imperishable. All beings, all things, are the perishable, and *kūṭa-stha* (what remains immutable and in the form of deception), the *a-vyakta* or *māyā*, is called the imperishable.** (16)

**Whereas, there is another *uttama* (transcendent) *puruṣa***, that includes the other two, **called *Paramātmā* (the limitless self), who is the changeless Lord that, pervading the three worlds, sustains** all this which is this perishable and imperishable. (17)

**Because I am beyond the perishable *puruṣa* and also *uttama* (transcendent)—even to the imperishable *puruṣa*—therefore, among people** in popular literature and in the *Veda*, **I am renowned as *Puruṣottama* (the being who transcends).** (18)

**Being without delusion** through this teaching, **the one who thus knows** the meaning of **Me as *Puruṣottama***—that one becomes the knower of all by knowing Me, the reality of all, and thus **attains Me, because of being** identical to the Lord, to **all, O Arjuna. (19)**

**Thus, I have told this most secret**, secret in terms of sanctity, value, and by appearing to be difficult to understand, **teaching, O Sinless One. Knowing this, one becomes one who has** made best use of one's **intellect and has done what is to be done, O Arjuna. (20)**

**Om (*brahman*, the witness of all) is that only reality. Thus ends the fifteenth chapter, called "The Topic of the Being Who Transcends," of the** eighteen chapters of ***Songs of the Glorious Lord*, which is** looked upon as **sacred teaching (*Upaniṣad*)** and whose teaching is **in** the form of **a dialogue between *Śrī Kṛṣṇa* and *Arjuna***, the subject matter being **knowledge of *brahman* and *yoga*.**



# Chapter 16

## The Topic of the Distinction Between Worthy and Unworthy Dispositions

In this chapter, Lord *Kṛṣṇa* returns to distinguishing appropriate and inappropriate attitudes and behaviors, using the two terms *daiva* and *āśura* (see 9.12–13), meaning *worthy* and *unworthy*, instead of using the three *guṇas*. This change of categorization terminology brings up an important point: The teaching of *Advaita Vedānta*, unlike many philosophies and religions, has no interest in simply categorizing attitudes and behaviors, simply assigning names to various forms of thinking, behaving, or being. Rather, the ultimate purpose in categorizing is to direct us to see beyond names and forms, to appreciate the unchanging, underlying reality. If there are attitudes and behaviors that are helpful or not in bringing about this appreciation, they are indicated. It is not to praise or condemn them, but to point to their possible importance in gaining appreciation of the reality of oneself and the world. Once reality is appreciated for what it is, all these categories drop their significance. None of these categories are ultimate or absolute divisions in the final analysis.

The lack of importance in the naming and categorizing of things shows in the various ways for unfolding the vision of reality seen in *Vedānta*, in the *Upaniṣads*. For example, the creation or evolution of divisions in the world being not ultimately real, different teachers in the different *Upaniṣads* describe the apparent creation of the universe variously as coming from *sat* (reality), from *a-sat* (the unmanifest), from *brahman* (another word for *reality*, and for the Lord), from *ātmā* (oneself, the limitless self), from *prāṇa* (subtle being), etcetera. All these creation descriptions are only *as if*, temporary explanations for the student who believes the world is real to eventually reveal that these are just so many words and words, and

that the reality of the student alone is the reality of these words, of this universe of words and their apparent divisions.

This one unchanging reality is also pointed out variously using different terms: as *brahman*, *Īś* (meaning *Īśvara*, the Lord), and *ātmā* that reference this one reality in terms of itself, the universe, and oneself, respectively. Moreover, the term for reality, *brahman*, is used interchangeably with *Īśvara* and *ātmā*; the term for the Lord, *Īśvara*, with *brahman* or *ātmā* (see 15.8); and the term for the reality of oneself, *ātmā*, with *brahman*, *Īśvara*, *deva* (shining one, deity), and so on.

Similar is the various categorizations of reality in this teaching, depending on the perspective towards the one reality that one is assuming for the moment. One can temporarily assume two levels of reality: the real and the unreal (*sat* and *a-sat*); or three: the absolute, objective, and imaginary (*pāramārthika*, *vyāvahārika*, and *prātibhāsika*).

In the *Bhagavad Gītā*, *karma-yoga* is taught specifically to move the individual's identity from predominately *prātibhāsika* (too much subjectivity and self-importance) to *vyāvahārika* (more objectivity, more *Īśvara* in one's life), and, eventually, to *pāramārthika* (that one is that *Īśvara*, the only reality); whereas *sāṅkhya* (the knowledge of reality introduced in the second chapter, see 2.39) assumes the individual is already reasonably objective and attempts to move the individual's identity from *vyāvahārika* to *pāramārthika*, from the changing *a-sat* to the unchanging *sat*.

This switching of terminology and perspective is a method employed in the *Advaita Vedānta* teaching tradition to clarify one's understanding of reality from every perspective, deterring just memorization of categories. But, to be effective, the method requires a teacher who knows the whole methodology and who has fully benefited from the teaching. The teaching tradition is for passing on this

knowledge fully and faithfully to future teachers: oneself re-teaching oneself during situational backslides into habitual thinking and behaviors, as well as passing on this teaching methodology to future generations.

**The Lord said:**

**Freedom from fear; purity of mind; steadiness in, commitment to, knowledge and its contemplation; charity; mastery over the ways of behavior; performing daily *yajña* (prayers, etcetera); reciting to oneself the *Veda* texts; prayerful discipline; straightforwardness; harmlessness; truthfulness; resolution of anger; renunciation; clarity; *a-paiśuna* (not exposing defects of one person to another); compassion toward living beings; *a-loluptva* (absence of agitation of the senses in the presence of objects); gentleness; modesty; absence of meaningless physical agitation; brilliance, expressed as self-confidence; accommodation (patience and understanding); resolve; cleanliness; absence of malice; absence of demanding respect from others—these are there for one born to the wealth of a *deva* (worthy person), O *Arjuna*. (1–3)**

**O *Arjuna*, hypocrisy; arrogance, not understanding the factors responsible for what one has, thinking “I am responsible for these”; demanding respect from others; anger; harshness; and lack of discernment—these are there for one born to the wealth of an *asura* (unworthy person). (4)**

**The wealth, the disposition, of a *deva* (worthy person) is considered to lead to freedom and of an *asura* (unworthy person) to bondage. Do not worry; you are born to the wealth of a *deva*, O *Arjuna*. (5)**

**In this world, there are two manifestations of human beings—the *daiva* (the worthy, who go with *dharma*) and the *āsura* (the unworthy, who fight against *dharma*). O *Arjuna*, the worthy has been told in detail. Now listen to Me about the unworthy. (6)**

**People who are unworthy do not know adaptive pursuit or adaptive withdrawal. In them there is no inner cleanliness, no adaptive conduct nor truth. (7)**

**They say that people are untruthful because they themselves are untruthful, are without an ethical basis because they are without one, are godless because they are, and are born of mutual union of male and female due to lust, not due to their *karma-phala* (not the reward for their societal and personal duty)—nothing else. (8)**

**Having recourse to this view, where there is no personal responsibility toward others or for oneself, thus whose intellects are lost, thus whose minds are limited to sense pursuits, who are of cruel actions—these enemies are set for destroying the world. (9)**

**Taking to desire that is insatiable; filled with hypocrisy, demands for respect, and with arrogance; assuming improper understandings due to delusion; and with unworthy vows, they keep going in *saṃsāra*. (10)**

**Committed to innumerable worries** over their possessions, **which last till death; having consumption of objects of desire as the ultimate; having concluded that life is “only this much,”** having a philosophy that life is only for consumption; **bound by hundreds of fetters that are anticipations; having as their goal more and more exaggerated requirements and anger** to control others—they **engage in accumulating wealth for the enjoyment of objects of desire through inappropriate means. (11–12)**

Boasting **“Today I have gained this, and I will acquire this fanciful object tomorrow. This wealth I have now, and this other wealth also will be mine.” (13)**

**“I have destroyed this enemy, and others I will also destroy. I am the ruler. I am the enjoyer. I am successful, powerful, and happy.” (14)**

**“I am wealthy and have an exalted family. Who is there the equal of me! I will perform rituals, I will give, I will enjoy.”** Thus those boast **who are variously lacking in discernment due to ignorance** of *dharma* and *a-dharma*, much less of *ātmā*. **(15)**

**Variously deluded by many such thoughts; enveloped by a net of delusion; attached to the objects of desire,** thus compromising on the means to attain these, they accumulate *pāpa* (*karma* demerit); and so **they fall into an unworthy hell** until the next bad birth. **(16)**

**Honored only by themselves, pompous** (unable to bow to anyone), **filled with demands for respect, and arrogant because of wealth, they sacrifice with rituals that are in name only** since they are done **out of hypocrisy**, not faith (*śraddhā*), **and not in accordance to injunction. (17)**

**Those who are given to an exaggerated self-opinion, power, arrogance, desirable objects, and anger; despising Me in their own and in others' bodies; and cynical—those hateful, cruel, lowest among people, who do ugly deeds—I continually toss according to their *karma* into the many paths of existence, into births, consisting of only demonic wombs, births as frightening creatures. (18–19)**

**O *Arjuna*, those lacking discernment, falling into a demonic womb in birth after birth, of course, having not attained Me—they may go from there all the way to the lowest end. (20)**

**Desire (requiring), anger, and greed: This is the threefold gate of hell, of painful experience, which is the loss of oneself; it is the destruction of a mind able to pursue a worthy existence. Therefore, one should give up this triad by this teaching. (21)**

**O *Arjuna*, being freed from these three gates to darkness, to further lack of discernment, one follows what is good for oneself. Thereupon, that one gains a better end, even all the way to complete freedom, *mokṣa*. (22)**

**The one who, casting away the scriptural injunctions regarding what is *dharma* and *a-dharma* (appropriate and inappropriate), acts out of the pressure of requiring—that one does not attain success (maturity), nor happiness in this life, nor a better end. (23)**

**Therefore, in the determination of what is to be done and not to be done, the scripture is your *pramāṇa* (means of knowledge). Knowing what is said by the scripture as an injunction, you ought to do your duty here; as a human being capable of choice, follow *dharma*. (24)**

***Om (brahman, the witness of all) is that only reality. Thus ends the sixteenth chapter, called "The Topic of the Distinction between Worthy and Unworthy Dispositions," of the eighteen chapters of Songs of the Glorious Lord, which is looked upon as sacred teaching (Upaniṣad) and whose teaching is in the form of a dialogue between Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna, the subject matter being knowledge of brahman and yoga.***





# Chapter 17

## The Topic of the Distinction of the Three *Śraddhās*

Chapter seventeen is mostly about *śraddhā*—a positive and receptive (*sāttvika*) attitude toward learning and life. It is also about the importance of accepting particular universal concepts and facts of reality that are helpful to the development of spiritual maturity. These universal concepts (such as the existence of *karma* or of heaven) and facts (such as oneself being none other than the limitless existence, *brahman*) cannot be established by reason—but they are not against reason. Reason based on perceptions cannot prove or disprove what cannot in anyway be perceived or tested (heaven, *brahman*). However, reason *can* help us understand the concepts and facts, introduced by scripture teaching, that are outside of sense perception.

Let us assume a person has trust in the teaching that the individual can exist in some way before and after this life. Reason cannot establish this, but once accepted on trust, it can be seen as reasonable, in that it is not unlike the cycling of heavenly and hellish experiences we all have survived in this life that we know in some small or great way we deserved or could not avoid. This acceptance of a continuance of life, and its assumption based on universal *karma* (cause and effect, potentials created that can fructify much later), provides an objective basis for understanding how my and other's life is like it is, instead of basing these on sectarian morality, on simple mechanical causality, or on chaotic blind chance.

This objective, universal basis that spans this one life, as well as before and after this life, allows us to take a long-term approach to understanding and making choices in life. Such a long-term approach provides an objective and healthy

balance to our whatever-I-can-get-away-with tendencies in life choices and to the why-me responses we have toward painful episodes.

In this short life it is not possible to perceive, and hence confidently infer, *karma*, heaven, or the limitless nature of oneself. In order to be as doubtless and confident in these concepts and facts as we are doubtless and confident in our sense perceptions, we must consider that there should be a separate means for knowing these with certainty. That means of knowing is here called scripture (*śruti*). *Śraddhā* (trust) in this *śruti* allows us to yield the full benefits of its resulting understandings of life and the world—because these understandings are taken as being as valid as sense perceptions. But if we only halfway believe in *karma* and heaven, then, when in crisis, we might lack confidence and spiritual maturity in the face of these situations.

With full *śraddhā*, we can remain unshaken during the unavoidable highs and lows of life. But these beliefs, unlike the fact of one's limitless nature, must be recognized as *beliefs*, as possibly as much a myth as any other myth (for example, that there definitely are no heavens or hells, no life prior to this life, etcetera). The real value of the beliefs one accepts is in the maturity of their resulting world view that they provide you.

On one hand, we have gathered in our life opinions based on current pop culture. Yet we know they can be contradicted next week, next year, next government, next decade, next century. These opinions may have benefited some people, but on what basis does one assume that they will benefit my life? Or that they will benefit me later on in my life when I know more than I do now?

On the other hand, we have traditional teachings, perhaps as mythical as the opinions from pop culture, yet we know those teachings must have benefited people throughout their life in some way for countless generations to have

survived thousands of years. If those teachings have accumulated and developed over thousands of years and are not just an old frozen document, and if those teachings are about the common human condition and are about topics that modern science has no access, then in whom should you trust?

An intelligent seeker of truth ought not to blindly accept what any teacher says. Rather, the seeker asks questions in order to discern the validity and benefit of what is being taught. To whom should I surrender my *śraddhā* and my life? Are there half-truths, nonsense, or unintended consequences in these beliefs? These are the concerns of an intelligent seeker of truth. Our *śraddhā* should always be intelligent, always be *sāttvika*.

**Arjuna said:**

**O *Kṛṣṇa*, those who perform ritual, casting away scriptural injunction yet being endowed with *śraddhā* (trust in this teaching)—what is their disposition? *Sattva*, *rajas*, or *tamas*? (1)**

**The Lord said:**

**For embodied ones, for humans, that *śraddhā* (expressed here as **value structure and attitude toward life**)—born of one's nature, from the mind's latent tendency—is **threefold: predominately *sattva*, predominately *rajas*, and predominately *tamas*. Listen about these. (2)****

**Everyone's *śraddhā* is in keeping with their mind, with its specific, latent tendencies, O *Arjuna*. The person, one's whole life, is permeated by that *śraddhā*. Whatever is one's *śraddhā*, whatever it conforms to, that one is, lives. (3)**

**The predominately *sattva* worship the deities; the predominately *rajas* worship the *yakṣas* and *raksas*-es (protectors and stealers of wealth); and other people, who are predominately *tamas*, worship ghosts and the hosts of harmful spirits. (4)**

**Those people, predominately *rajas* or *tamas*, who are riddled with hypocrisy and an exaggerated self-opinion; filled with the pressure of requiring/anticipating and attraction; are nondiscerning; who perform gruesome, to themselves and to other creatures, *tapas* (religious disciplines) not enjoined in the scripture; who emaciate the elements, the organs, of the body and Me, also attaining in the body, in that they rub against My teaching, My laws—know them to be ones whose convictions are unworthy. (5–6)**

**Food also, for everyone, is favored threefold; similarly is ritual, religious discipline, and charity. Listen to this their difference. (7)**

**Foods that increase longevity, mental clarity, strength, health, pleasure in taste, and satisfaction visually or physically; that are *tasty, oily, long lasting* in the body, and *pleasing to the mind*—they are said to be a favorite of one predominately *sattva*. (8)**

**Foods that are too *pungent, sour, salty, spicy hot, bitter, astringent, or burning* and that give pain, sorrow, and disease are said to be a favorite of one predominately *rajas*. (9)**

**Food whose occasion to be eaten has elapsed; that is *without taste; stinking*, for example, liquor, meat, etcetera; *stale*; is *scrap* from another's plate; or *not fit to be offered* is said to be a favorite of one predominately *tamas*. (10)**

**A ritual known through, followed according to, the scripture, which is performed by those who do not require/anticipate its result and performed with the resolve that it is “simply to be done as a worship”—that *yajña* is predominately *sattva*. (11)**

**Whereas, O *Arjuna*, whatever ritual is performed having as its purpose its result or, indeed, is performed only out of hypocrisy—know that ritual to be predominately *rajas*. (12)**

**A ritual without or against scriptural injunction, in which no food is distributed, without *mantra* (*Veda* aphorism) or defective in its accent or utterance, without proper *dakṣiṇā* (wealth given as appropriate to the person’s function), and without faith—they call predominately *tamas*. (13)**

***Tapas* (religious discipline) pertaining to the body is said to be the honoring of deities (the intelligent order present in the forces of nature), of those initiated into scriptural study, and of teachers and scholars; cleanliness; straightforwardness of thought, word, and deed; a life of studentship to the *Vedas*, for the unwed, it also implies chastity; and harmlessness. (14)**

***Tapas* in the form of speech is said to be speech that is not agitating, is truthful, and both pleasant now and beneficial later for the other person, as well as reciting to oneself the *Veda* texts daily, in the prescribed manner. (15)**

***Tapas* pertaining to the mind is said to be this: mental clarity; cheerfulness; discipline over inner speech, the nonarising of—or the restraint of expressing—unhelpful thoughts; mastery in general over the mind; and clean intentions. (16)**

**That threefold *tapas* pertaining to body, speech, and mind—performed with complete *śraddhā* in this teaching by disciplined people who do not require/anticipate limited results like wealth and *punya* (*karma* merit), but instead only seek clarity of mind for knowledge—they say is predominately *sattva*. (17)**

***Tapas* that is performed in word, mind, and deed for the sake of demanding from others worship and, indeed, only out of hypocrisy—that, in keeping with its result here, being unsteady and not long-lasting, is said to be predominately *rajas*. (18)**

***Tapas* that is performed out of a deluded understanding, for inflicting pain on oneself or for destroying another—that is said to be predominately *tamas*. (19)**

**Charity that is given with the thinking “it is simply to be given,” without regard to the others’ ability to return the favor, at the proper place and time, and to a worthy person—that is held to be predominately *sattva*. (20)**

**Whereas charity that is given for the sake of a return favor or, on the other hand, with a view for a later result, for *punya*—and is fraught with pain, a sense of loss at the cost of the charity—that is held to be predominately *rajas*. (21)**

**Charity that is given at the wrong or inauspicious place or time; to those who are not worthy, such as, to fools or thieves; that is given improperly, with improper protocol, or with disrespect to the recipient—that is said to be predominately *tamas*. (22)**

**"Om tad sat"<sup>8</sup> is considered the threefold expression revealing *brahman*. By that Lord *Brahmā* (the first manifestation of the Lord as the total subtle universe) the *brāhmaṇas* (all people; hence, all creatures—since *jīvas* require various embodiments), the four *Vedas*, and *yajñas* (rituals) were formed in the beginning of each cycle. (23)**

**Therefore, for those who know the *Vedas*, activities—such as rituals, charity, and prayerful disciplines mentioned in scriptural injunctions—are always begun by first uttering "Om" (considered a purifying sound). (24)**

Uttering "***tad***" ("**that**," also purifying when it refers to *brahman* in expressions such as "*Om tat sat*"), **those who only desire complete freedom perform various activities—such as *yajña*, *tapas*, and *dāna* (gifting)—without requiring the particular activity's limited result. (25)**

**O *Arjuna*, this word "*sat*," also a purifying sound that in its various forms, from the root *as* ("to exist"), refers to existence, which is but *brahman*, is used in the sense of "being existent" and "being good." Similarly, the word "*sat*" is used in the sense of "sacred action." (26)**

**A *sthiti* (pursuit or commitment, with *śraddhā*) toward *yajña*, *tapas*, or *dāna* is also called "*sat*," a "proper" pursuit, and, indeed, any action that is for the sake of *tad* (that Lord, as in the expression, *tat tvam asi* "That [Lord] you are") is called "*sat*." (27)**

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<sup>8</sup> For more on the meaning of *Om* and *sat*, see *The Bhagavad Gita Dictionary* (Aruna 2012).

**O Arjuna, whatever offering, charity, or discipline is done without śraddhā is said to be "a-sat," as good as not done; since after death it, the action in the form of karma-phala, is not, nor is it here in this life; it only amounts to a loss of effort and cost. (28)**

**Om (brahman, the witness of all) is that only reality. Thus ends the seventeenth chapter, called "The Topic of the Distinction of the Three Śraddhās," of the eighteen chapters of Songs of the Glorious Lord, which is looked upon as sacred teaching (Upaniṣad) and whose teaching is in the form of a dialogue between Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna, the subject matter being knowledge of brahman and yoga.**



# Chapter 18

## The Topic of the Renunciation That Gives Complete Freedom

This final chapter of the *Bhagavad Gītā* answers *Arjuna's* long-lasting concern about a life of renunciation, completes the unfoldment of other open topics, and covers new ones (for example, the five causes or factors for the accomplishment of all actions in verses 13–16). Chapter eighteen closes with praise of the teaching lineage (18.67–78) and sums up (18.50–66) the *Advaita Vedānta* teaching with the essentials that *Kṛṣṇa* wishes *Arjuna*—and us—to focus on. That focus is, through *karma-yoga* and *jñāna-yoga*, to drop identification as a separate body-mind complex. We are to objectively recognize that this time-bound, limited body-mind complex and its actions are not our own but instead belong to the interconnected totality, to the natural order as a temporary manifestation of the Lord. We are to recognize our timeless identity as the limitless Lord, as existence itself.

*Kṛṣṇa* does not stop teaching until the student, *Arjuna*, is fully satisfied and acknowledges that he has understood. This is because the teaching is not only for the student, but is also for the teacher inherent in the student, as the student becomes the teacher for himself or herself throughout the rest of life. Every time the unassimilated mind strays into its old, habitual thinking, the student's now-informed intellect catches the digression and brings the mind back to clarity. The student's informed intellect is the same as the teacher's informed intellect, the same as the informed intellect of that teacher's teacher, and so on, from the beginningless beginning. That student may eventually become the teacher of others also. The *Advaita Vedānta* teaching prepares us for all this. It is complete in every way.

All of life, then, is a field for us to resolve remaining habitual thinking. Ultimately, human life is for correcting the erroneous sense of limitation we have and the resulting unacceptability of oneself. It is natural that a teaching exists that directly addresses this need in the human heart—just as the human body needs air, so air is provided; needs food, so food is provided. This teaching is universal to all humankind. *Ātmā*, the essential conscious being, is as universal as it gets. That the *ātmā* is the limitless reality of this universe is also as universal as it gets. A life of acknowledging the interconnectedness of the entire cosmos is both ancient and modern, religious and scientific. A life of dedication to one's duty, in recognition of this interconnectedness, is similarly universal and timeless. To the extent that modern cultures do not emphasize this truth, to that extent these cultures have yet to mature. This complete teaching was not created by Indians. It is the teaching of the Lord—the Lord which is everything, including oneself.

Until we become teachers unto ourselves, we stay with these words of the Lord. We listen to a teacher (4.34) who can unfold these words as they have been unfolded for millennia. This will bring us to the fulfillment of human life—a life free of grief, free of guilt, free of hurt, free of fear, and free of death.

**Arjuna said:**

**O *Kṛṣṇa*, Great Warrior and Slayer of the Demon *Keśin*, I want to know distinctly the truth of, the difference between, *sannyāsa* and *tyāga* (both terms mean “renunciation” and are used both separately and seemingly interchangeably by Lord *Kṛṣṇa* in this teaching). (1)**

**The Lord said:**

**Sages know renunciation of all *karmas* backed by desire to be *sannyāsa*, the lifestyle and, especially, the knowledge “I am not the doer.” The wise also say that renunciation of the *phala* (the result) of all actions, *karma-yoga* as also taught here, is *tyāga*. (2)**

Now, some learned people say that all *karmas* are defective and thus to be renounced; that *karma-yoga* is not accepted so *sannyāsa* lifestyle alone is for those desiring *mokṣa*. But others think that *yajña*, *dāna*, and *tapas* (ritual, gifting, and spiritual discipline) *karma* are not to be renounced; that *karma-yoga* is accepted. (3)

In regard to *tyāga*, the *karma-yoga* in the previous verse, listen to My conclusion, O Arjuna. Since the preceding two opinions are both right and wrong, more needs to be said. O Fearless amongst Men, *tyāga* (renunciation) indeed is well said to be threefold. (4)

*Yajña*, *dāna*, and *tapas karma* are not to be renounced but, indeed, to be done. *Yajña*, *dāna*, and *tapas* are indeed purifying for discerning people. For those who consider themselves doers, subject to injunction and needing purification, *karma-yoga* is a means to *mokṣa*. (5)

But, O Arjuna, even these three *karmas* are to be done having renounced attachment to actions and their limited result (*phala*), done without identification with them as “my actions” and with the attitude of *karma-yoga*. This is My decided and final vision. (6)

Whereas ***sannyāsa* (renunciation) of enjoined *karma***, the lifestyle of *sannyāsa* for one who is still deluded about the nature of oneself, **is not proper** because ***parityāga* (renunciation, that is, simply nondoing) of that *karma* out of delusion is said to be predominately *tamas*. (7)**

**If one were to renounce *karma*, take *sannyāsa*, out of fear of affliction to the body** thinking it to be **painful—after doing this predominately *rajas* renunciation—that one would indeed not gain any result of that renunciation. (8)**

**O *Arjuna*, if—renouncing both attachment to it and its result, as a *karma-yoga*—enjoined *karma* is performed as simply what is to be done, then that *tyāga* (renunciation) is considered predominately *sattva*. (9)**

**The renunciate, whether a *karma-yogī* like King *Janaka* or a *sannyāsī*, who is endowed with clarity of mind, thus who has gained knowledge, and whose doubts have been resolved is not displeased at inauspicious action, nor attached to auspicious action. (10)**

**Because one who has the judgment that one is the body is not able to completely renounce all action, then that one—who indeed renounces at least the result of actions, a beginning *karma-yogī*—is called a *tyāgī* (renunciate). (11)**

**The one who has not completely renounced *karma*, upon passing away, has the threefold results of action—undesirable hell, etcetera; desirable heaven, etcetera; and their mixture, directly regaining the human condition. But never for the *sannyāsī* (the complete renunciate). (12)**

**O Arjuna, pay heed to Me about these following five causes (factors) for the accomplishment of all actions, which factors have been well told in the teaching that brings an end to action, in Vedānta—and summarized in the second chapter onward. (13)**

**The locus, the physical body; the agent, the *ahaṅkāra*/the doer and experiencer; the various organs of action and knowledge, including the mind; the various kinds of motions, the *prāṇas* (bodily energies); and, indeed, here, the fifth being their presiding deities. (14)**

**Whatever action—proper (adaptive) or otherwise—a person undertakes with the body; speech; or mind, physical, verbal, or mental action; that action has these five instrumental factors. (15)**

**When that is so, that these five alone cause action, the one who, because of an unprepared mind, that hasn't accepted or earned this teaching, sees the I—although pure of action—as an agent, that distorted thinker does not see; this fundamental mistake distorts everything else. (16)**

**One who has no notion that “I did this,” whose mind is not affected, who has no guilt or hurt regarding action or inaction—that one, though having the duty of killing these people, does not kill, nor is that one bound by the act, just as a judge passing sentence has no guilt. (17)**

**The knowing (*jñāna*) of objects, the thought; the object known; and the knower together are the threefold instigators of action. The instrument; the object, the desired result; and the doer (*kartā*) together are the threefold constituents of, factors/requirements for, action. (18)**

**In the teaching of the *guṇas*, the *jñāna*, *karma* and *kartā* are said to be threefold according to the differences in predominance of *guṇas*. Listen accordingly about them. (19)**

**By which one sees, knows, the one changeless, undivided existence (*bhāva*) in all divided things—know that *jñāna* (knowledge) to be predominately *sattva*. There is only one undivided existence, *ātmā*, not many; here *bhāva* cannot mean *prakṛti* (unmanifest nature), as *prakṛti* is not changeless. (20)**

**Whereas the knowledge by which one understands as separate from each other the many existences of different kinds, in all things—know that knowledge, all philosophies that hold that there are many *ātmās*, including the later-day *Sāṅkhya* philosophy, to be predominately *rajas*. (21)**

**But the knowledge by which one is committed to one single effect in the universe—as if it is everything—which knowledge is without reason; without truth; and limited (the unfortunate position of history- and faith-based cults and pop cultures)—that is said to be predominately *tamas*. (22)**

***Karma* that is adaptive, in keeping with *dharma*; that is done without identification, “I did this”; is free of attraction or repulsion; and done by one without a requirement to obtain its result, done by one whose mind is predominately *sattva*—that *karma* is said to be predominately *sattva*. (23)**

**Whereas *karma* that is done with a requirement to attain an object of desire or, again, with excessive pride is said to be predominately *rajas*; it is not the action itself that is *rajas*, but the mind that motivates the action that is predominately *rajas*. (24)**

**Karma that is undertaken out of delusion—without regard to its consequence, loss to oneself or others, injury to oneself or others, or one’s personal capacity—that is said to be predominately *tamas*, the mind that motivates the action is predominately *tamas*. (25)**

**The *kartā* (doer—one with the notion of doership) striving toward being free from attachment, not requiring the result; not claiming “I did this”; endowed with resolve and effort; and being without change in success or non-success—is said to be predominately *sattva*. (26)**

**The *kartā* who has attraction toward things, who has a requirement to obtain the result of an action, who is miserly, whose nature is to hurt another or oneself, who is unclean physically/mentally and subject to elation and sorrow—is said to be predominately *rajas*. (27)**

**The *kartā* (doer) who is disturbed; immature; unable to bow, to show respect physically or mentally; who is deceptive; abusive; lazy; depressed; and procrastinating about addressing any of these and other problems—is said to be predominately *tamas*. (28)**

**Listen to what is going to be told separately and completely about the threefold difference according to predominance of *guṇas* (qualities) of the mind and of resolve, O *Arjuna*. (29)**

**O *Arjuna*, the mind that knows the nature of pursuit and renunciation, what is to be done and not to be done, what is dangerous and not dangerous, and what is bondage and complete freedom—that mind is predominately *sattva*. (30)**

**O Arjuna, the mind with which one wrongly knows what is *dharma* and *a-dharma* (appropriate and inappropriate) and, also wrongly indeed, what is to be done and not to be done—that mind is predominately *rajas*. (31)**

**O Arjuna, the mind which, covered with ignorance, considers *a-dharma* to be *dharma* and all things as contrary to what they are—that mind is predominately *tamas*. (32)**

**O Arjuna, the unswerving resolve with which one sustains activities of the mind, the physiological functions (the *prāṇas*), and the organs of action and sensing—through unswerving *yoga* (a life of discipline)—that resolve is predominately *sattva*. (33)**

**Whereas, O Arjuna, Son of *Prthā*, the resolve with which one, being desirous of results, sustains activities for religious merit, pleasure, and security, but not for *mokṣa*—according to every opportunity—that resolve is predominately *rajas*. (34)**

**O Arjuna, the resolve by which one whose thinking is distorted does not give up sleep, fear, sorrow, depression, or intoxication—that resolve to not change is predominately *tamas*. (35)**

**But now, O Arjuna, listen to Me about the threefold happiness. That in which one discovers happiness by daily repetition of listening and contemplating the teaching and gains the end of sorrow; that which in the beginning is like poison, as one is for the first time inquiring into the source of the guilt and hurt that for lifetimes have driven one to seek small gratifications in objects but; upon a change in clarity of mind, is like immortal nectar, born of clarity of self-knowledge—that happiness is said to be predominately *sattva*. (36–37)**



**That which is born from the contact of the senses with their objects, which in the beginning seems like nectar but, upon any change in the object, the capacity to acquire, the senses, or the mind, becomes like poison—that happiness is said to be predominately *rajas*. (38)**

**Happiness, lack of pain or lack of trouble of effort, that arises from sleepiness, laziness, and carelessness, which in the beginning and in the end is self-deluding—that is said to be predominately *tamas*. (39)**

**There is no existent thing on earth, in the sky, or even among the gods that can be free from these three *guṇas*, born as *prakṛti* (nature). *Brahman*/reality, the self, the eternal subject, the “I” of the Lord and of every being, is alone free of the *guṇas*; all bodies and minds are not. (40)**

**O *Arjuna*, the *karmas* of *brāhmaṇas*, *kṣatriyas*, *vaiśyas*, and of *sūdras* (educators, defenders, entrepreneurs, and workers) are divided by the predominance of *guṇas* arising from their nature. In India these titles also arise from birth within the family’s profession, as those who completely accept *karma* understand that one’s birth matches one’s nature and needs. (41)**

**The *karma*, the disposition showing through the activity, of *brāhmaṇas*—that is born of their nature—is composure, restraint, prayerful discipline, cleanliness, accommodation, straightforwardness, knowledge and its assimilation, and acceptance of the veracity of *Veda*. (42)**

**The *karma*, the disposition showing through the activity, of *kṣatriyas*—that is born of their nature—is valor; self-confidence; resolve; adroitness, ability to act without confusion in sudden situations; not turning away in a conflict; charity; and leadership. (43)**

**The *karma*, the activity, not the disposition, of *vaiśyas*—that is born of their nature—is agriculture, maintaining animals, or commerce. The *karma* of *śūdras*—that is born of their nature—is in the form of service to others, which is essential in all societies. (44)**

**A person dedicated in his or her own *karma* (duty) attains success, a satisfaction of having done happily what is to be done and not requiring a change to become happier. In this way, one gains success, being dedicated to one's duty—to this, please listen. (45)**

**From which is the origin of all beings and by which all this is pervaded—by invoking (showing as a worship) that Lord with one's duty, by converting duty into a worship through an appreciation of the Lord as the doer, the action, and the result, a person attains success. (46)**

**One's own duty—even if devoid of merit, even if it does not create *puṇya*—is better than a different duty even if well performed because inner maturity, not social climbing, leads to *śreyas* (freedom). Doing duty enjoined according to one's disposition, one incurs no fault, no conflict. (47)**

**O Arjuna, one should not give up one's natural duty—even though defective, even though it consists of the three *guṇas* and, hence, is part of *saṃsāra* (compare 18.3–4)—because all other undertakings are covered with the same fault, like all ritual fire is enveloped by irritating smoke. (48)**

**One whose mind is not attached anywhere, who has mastery over the mind, and is free from yearning (all through *karma-yoga*), then—by *sannyāsa* (renunciation), by knowledge of the self as actionless—attains the exalted accomplishment that is actionlessness. (49)**

**O Arjuna, in the way one who has attained success of *karma-yoga* attains *brahman*, which is the final conclusion of knowledge, unlike knowledge of everything else, which can have no final conclusion—in that way, in brief, pay heed to Me. (50)**

That one **endowed with a clear mind and, by resolve; gaining mastery over the body-mind complex** so it is not wasted chasing fancies; **giving up the requiring of sense objects beginning with sound, etcetera; and giving up**, being free from the hold of, **attraction and repulsion; having the disposition to repair to a quiet place; having the habit of eating lightly** to stay bright in this quiet lifestyle; **whose speech, body, and mind are mastered**; who is **always keeping contemplation and dedication**, focuses only on oneself, **as the ultimate**; who is **completely committed to objectivity**; who is **free from a notional “I,” power, arrogance, desire, anger, and possession(s)**; who is **free from the judgment “this is mine” and is clear—that one is fit for being *brahman* (reality)**, for simply being oneself, without mistaken notions of reality. **(51–53)**

**Attaining *brahman*** by the knowledge that the limitless *brahman* is—I am—all this, including oneself, and thus **with a cheerful mind, one neither grieves nor requires** anything. Thus **being the same toward all beings, one attains the ultimate devotion (*bhakti*) to Me. (54)**

**By that *bhakti*, one knows Me—who I am in extent** as everything **and in reality** as the only thing, the only reality. **Therefore, knowing Me in reality, that one** as though **enters Me immediately after that**; by knowledge alone one attains Me even while living. **(55)**

**The one who—though always performing all *karma*—has Me as the basis of all actions and results attains by this My grace, by the result (clarity of mind), which is given by the Lord as the teacher and as what is taught, the end, which is ever the same and imperishable. (56)**

**By this mind renouncing all actions in Me, having Me as the ultimate, and taking to *buddhi-yoga* (the means that is evenness of attitude), may you always be one whose mind is centered on Me, always appreciate Me as the basis of yourself, of action, and of its result. (57)**

**Being centered on Me, by My grace, you will cross over all difficulties, all the reasons for *saṃsāra*. Now if, out of an exaggerated self-opinion that you know better, you do not listen to Me, then you will perish, remain in *saṃsāra*. (58)**

**If, relying on your exaggerated self-opinion, you think “I will not fight,” this resolution of yours would be *mithyā* (false or useless). Because your natural disposition as a *kṣatriya* (warrior) will impel you to act as a warrior at some later date. (59)**

**O Arjuna, out of delusion, in this case, in the form of an impulsive decision and misplaced sympathy, what you don’t wish to do, you will do just that—even despite your will—as you are bound by your *karma*, your warrior (*kṣātram*) *karma*, born of your own disposition. (60)**

**O Arjuna, the Lord—causing all beings to spin around, as if mounted on a machine, as on a wheel revolving in *saṃsāra* (now up, now down), by *māyā* (the Lord’s power of projecting)—remains unmoved, as the self of all, in the seat of the intellect of all beings. (61)**

**With all your being, surrender to that Lord alone** who is the center of your being and is in the form of your natural disposition moving you through life, **O Arjuna. By that Lord's grace you will attain the ultimate peace, the timeless abode. (62)**

**Thus I have told to you the knowledge that is more secret than a secret,** being known only through the scripture that reveals it and, even when revealed, which remains unknown to the unprepared. **Think this over completely; then do as you wish. (63)**

**Listen once more to My paramount declaration, the most secret of all. You,** as a friend, a devotee, and a student, **are definitely beloved to Me, so I will tell you what is good** for you. **(64)**

**Become one whose mind is on Me, who is devoted to Me, and who is disposed to the worship of Me. Do salutation to Me.** Being not separate from Me, **you will reach Me alone. Yes, I promise you, as you are dear to Me. (65)**

**Giving up all *dharma* (adaptive action), and *a-dharma* (maladaptive action),** by giving up doership, **surrender to Me alone** as there is nothing other than Me. **I will completely free you from all *pāpas*,** all forms of bondage, including pleasant and unpleasant *karma-phalas* (results of action). **Do not grieve. (66)**

**This** which I have taught **to you is never to be taught to one who has no prayerful discipline, or to one who has no devotion** to the teacher or Me, **or to one not willing to listen, or to one who is cynical toward Me,** the Lord. **(67)**

**The one who will teach this paramount secret** teaching **to My devotees,** thus offering the highest devotion unto Me—that one will reach Me alone. **There is no doubt. (68)**

**Among people, there is no one dearer to Me than that teacher, and there will not be another dearer to Me on earth than that teacher. (69)**

**And the one who studies or even recites this dialogue of ours, which is in keeping with *dharma*—by that ritual, in the form of knowledge, I would be worshipped;** without the Veda forms of worship available today, this study itself suffices for worship. **This is My vision. (70)**

**Even the person who—having trust in Me, viewing Me as the Lord and not just as Mr. *Kṛṣṇa*, and not being cynical—would listen to this teaching, that one also is freed** from much *pāpa* (unwanted results) **and would attain the auspicious worlds of those who do beneficial actions. (71)**

**O *Arjuna*, have you heard this with a single-pointed mind? Has your delusion caused by ignorance been completely destroyed, O *Arjuna*? (72)**

***Arjuna* said:**

**Gone is the delusion. I have gained recognition** without error of myself **by Your grace**, by Your teaching, **O *Kṛṣṇa*. I am firm and with doubts gone. I will do what You have said—*loka-saṅgraha*** (rallying the people to *dharma*) or *karma-yoga* (to assimilate the teaching). **(73)**

***Saṅjaya* said:**

**Thus I have heard this extraordinary, thrilling dialogue between the great-minded *Kṛṣṇa* and *Arjuna*. (74)**

**I have heard—by the grace of special perception given by *Vyāsa*—this paramount, secret teaching that is *yoga (jñāna-yoga and karma-yoga)* from *Kṛṣṇa*, the Lord of *Yoga*, as the first teacher and as its subject matter, Himself directly teaching it. (75)**

**O King *Dhṛta-rāṣṭra*, remembering over and over this extraordinary, auspicious dialogue between *Kṛṣṇa* and *Arjuna*, I rejoice again and again. (76)**

**And, O King, remembering over and over that very extraordinary cosmic form of Lord *Hari* (Lord *Kṛṣṇa*) (in chapter 11), my amazement is great. Again and again I rejoice. (77)**

**Wherever is *Kṛṣṇa*, the Lord of *Yoga*, and wherever is the bow-bearing *Arjuna*, in whoever's heart is the devoted student prepared for action and also the Lord—there, in my opinion, is *śrī* (wealth and knowledge), *vijaya* (victory), prosperity, and certain justice. (78)**

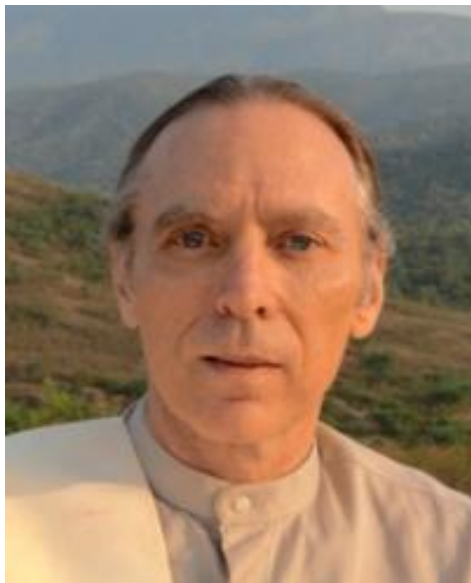
***Om* (*brahman*, the witness of all) is that only reality. Thus ends the eighteenth chapter, called "The Topic of the Renunciation That Gives Complete Freedom," of the eighteen chapters of *Songs of the Glorious Lord*, which is looked upon as sacred teaching (*Upaniṣad*) and whose teaching is in the form of a dialogue between *Śrī Kṛṣṇa* and *Arjuna*, the subject matter being knowledge of *brahman* and *yoga*.**





# About the Author

## A.K. Aruna



A.K. Aruna started his studies in Advaita Vedanta and the Sanskrit language in 1976 at an intensive three-year program in a traditional gurukulam, outside Bombay, India, under Shri Pujya Swami Dayananda Saraswati, the most renowned Sanskrit and Advaita Vedanta scholar of the past century. Stepping outside his academic background in Western philosophy, Aruna immersed himself in the deepest, oldest spiritual tradition in the world. This detailed study opened his eyes. In this ancient teaching, Aruna found a complete merging of the intellect and heart. From that point on, he dedicated his life to the inclusive vision of Vedanta.

Returning to his native United States, Aruna earned a master's degree in South Asian languages and literature from the University of Washington. Aruna later studied computer languages, becoming a programmer and manager of information technology in San Diego, California. Retiring to India in 2000, Aruna dedicated himself to studies in Advaita Vedanta and the Sanskrit Language. He created a set of tools for those students interested in a thorough study of Sanskrit to better understand the Bhagavad Gita. These tools consist of a five-book set under the title, *The Aruna Sanskrit Language Series*. They are: *The Aruna Sanskrit Grammar*

*Reference; The Aruna Sanskrit Grammar Coursebook: 64 Lessons Based on the Bhagavad Gita Chapter Two; The Bhagavad Gita Dictionary; The Bhagavad Gita Reader: Sanskrit/English Parallel Text; and The Bhagavad Gita Sanskrit Key: Verse-by-Verse Grammar & Vocabulary.* Additionally, there is now a reading and pronunciation guide, *The Sanskrit Reading Tutor: Read It, Click It, Hear It!* Using these tools, Aruna has been teaching Sanskrit at the Arsha Vidya Gurukulams in both South India and in the U.S.

Aruna has lived and studied in a traditional teaching gurukulam for over nine years in India and two years in the USA. Wishing to help yoga students ground the traditional purpose of yoga in the revered scriptures of India, Aruna released *Patanjali Yoga Sutras: Translation and Commentary in the Light of Vedanta Scripture*. This presents the yoga discipline as its practitioners in the ancient scriptures understood and practiced. All of these works are available from [www.UpasanaYoga.org](http://www.UpasanaYoga.org) website.

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